

EI-387

MARY BOCZANY (BOCON) CHATY

BIRTH DATE: MARCH 17, 1904

INTERVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 14, 1993

RUNNING TIME: 1:26:12

INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

RECORDING ENGINEER: PETER HOM

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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 4/1998

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: CHARLES MITCHELL, 6/2009

HUNGARY, 1921

AGE 17

PASSAGE ON A CUNARD LINE SHIP

PORT OF EMBARCATION IN GERMANY

RESIDENCES: HARDICSA, ZEMPLEN MEGZE
TRENTON, NJ

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Tuesday, September 14, 1993. I'm at the Ellis Island Recording Studio with Mary Chaty. Mrs. Chaty came from Hungary in 1921 when she was seventeen.

CHATY: Yes.

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. It's a pleasure to have you here.

CHATY: Good afternoon.

SIGRIST: Can we begin, Mrs. Chaty, by you giving me your birth date?

CHATY: It's, what they tell me, it's March 17, 1904.

SIGRIST: 1904. And can you also tell me your maiden name, please?

CHATY: Boczany. Well, you see, in English they say Boczany, but in Hungarian it's Bocan.

SIGRIST: Oh, my. Can we spell those, if I give you some paper?

CHATY: Uh, I have it right here.

SIGRIST: Oh, okay.

CHATY: I have it . . .

SIGRIST: Mrs. Chaty's looking in her purse right now.

CHATY: I wrote it down before I came.

SIGRIST: Oh, good. All right. Can you spell how it is in Hungarian first. This is in Hungarian?

CHATY: Yes.

SIGRIST: That's B-O-C-A-N, with accents over the o and the a, and in English it was . . .

CHATY: Boczany. B-O-C-Z-A-N-Y.

SIGRIST: I see. Thank you.

CHATY: You're welcome.

SIGRIST: Let's begin by me asking you where you were born in Hungary.

CHATY: I born in Zemplen Megze, Hardicsa.

SIGRIST: Oh, dear. (he laughs) Can you spell any of that if I write it down?

CHATY: Yes. I don't know if I have it over here written down.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Chaty's looking in her purse again.

CHATY: I have to have my cheaters.

SIGRIST: Yes, your glasses. (they laugh)

CHATY: Yes, that's right here. H-A, see, on the bottom.

SIGRIST: Okay. And this is the town that you were born in.

CHATY: Yes.

SIGRIST: H-A-R-D-I-C-S-A. Hardicsa.

CHATY: Yeah. Hardicsa. And it's Zemplen Megze. That's the state.

SIGRIST: That's Zemp . . .

CHATY: Zemplen Megze. That's, like New Jersey.

SIGRIST: The region of Hungary.

CHATY: Yeah. (she pauses)

SIGRIST: Mrs. Chaty is spelling that for us.

CHATY: It's E.

SIGRIST: Okay. So that's Z-E-M-P . . .

CHATY: P.

SIGRIST: P-L-E-N.

CHATY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Zemp . . .

CHATY: Zemp . . .

SIGRIST: Plen. And M-E-G-R, no, G-Z-E.

CHATY: Yeah, E, yeah.

SIGRIST: At the end.

CHATY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: That's two words?

CHATY: Yes.

SIGRIST: Two words. Can you tell me where in Hungary that is, where in the country that is?

CHATY: Oh, that's, uh, not too close to Budapest, and it's between Uhel[ph] and Budapest, the Zemplen Megze. It was a little village when I born. And then, and naturally as they, uh, the children born and they made more homes, they say, the people who went home, they told me that I wouldn't recognize the city. I was living right by the end, we had water well that everybody went there to get water to drink, because we had on the premises the water, but it wasn't drinkable. It was only for the cows and all that. And that was a Catholic church there, and the priest over there. On the corner was Jewish people. And as you come from the highway, you turn on the, by the church and, see, I could, I could just picture it, that the streets and the homes. So I was, like, end of the, uh, or the beginning from the highway, the beginning of the city.

SIGRIST: And you lived right in town?

CHATY: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: At the end of the road?

CHATY: Yes, yeah. We had nice place over there, and they, my grandfather, he was a footman for the baron, and you have to be very tall and handsome and polite and smart, and he must have been one of them. So he worked over there, and then he was home, and he knew the Bible, he had a big one, from inside out.

SIGRIST: Is this your mother's father or your father's father?

CHATY: Mother's.

SIGRIST: Mother's father.

CHATY: Yes. And the priest and the ministers and the rabbis even came and asked my grandfather, and he knew it without looking at the book.

SIGRIST: What was your grandfather's name?

CHATY: Andrew.

SIGRIST: And, um, what was his, let's see, it would be your mother's maiden name. What was that?

CHATY: Well, see, whatever it was, I was baptized my mother's name, because there was religion. See, the Catholic people, and the various powers in that time, it was impossible to get married. And if you had one acre or a half acre more, then you can marry me. So . . .

SIGRIST: So there were very strict rules about this sort of thing.

CHATY: Oh, very, very.

SIGRIST: So am I to believe that your father was one faith and your mother was another faith?

CHATY: Yeah. But they didn't marry, so that's why my grandfather, I took my grandfather and my mother's name.

SIGRIST: And what faith were you raised?

CHATY: Protestant.

SIGRIST: What denomination of Protestant? Just Protestant?

CHATY: Yeah, just Protestant. Because we didn't have like over here they have different kinds. We had one, Protestant, and that was it.

SIGRIST: That's interesting . . .

CHATY: And Catholic, that was it.

SIGRIST: I don't think I've ever spoken to a Hungarian Protestant before. That's very interesting.

CHATY: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: In this town . . .

CHATY: We had church.

SIGRIST: Was there a large Protestant community in this town?

CHATY: Yes, yes. Yes.

SIGRIST: Of the three groups, of the Protestants, the Catholics and the Jews, which group was the smallest in town?

CHATY: The, uh, they had, uh, but they didn't have it in a city, baptist.

SIGRIST: Baptists?

CHATY: Yes. But they went with another city. The, uh, Catholics was a lot more.

SIGRIST: So it was predominantly Catholic in this town.

CHATY: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me something about maybe your birth, something your mother might have told you about . . .

CHATY: Yes. I remember, I don't remember my mother's face. They said, who knew them, the neighbors. She was a very pretty lady. She wasn't tall. My grandfather was, but not my mother. And not the, uh, sons either, because my mother had two brothers, my grandfather had three children. So, uh, they said, "She's very pretty," so she had to go to work, she had to get up early, so I stayed with my grandfather. My grandfather must have been eighty-nine. And, uh, the people, when they went to the field, they passed our house, and my grandfather was well-known. So, uh, they always stopped in. So this one time, when they'd stopped in, I was sleeping with my grandfather, naturally, because we didn't have no separate room, and he was dead, but I didn't know. I was about three years old, or not even three. So they came in, and then the lady told me to, I should get out of the bed, so they took me away. And my grandfather, before he died, but, see, I didn't know, he says to me, "Look at, child, there is a pigeon in the window, and

they're calling me." So, like a child, I went to the window. I said, "Grandpa, I don't see anything." He said, "A very pretty white pigeon." And then we had a stove, and we had big baskets, and then we had wood in there, and we had to put it in a stove. So he says, "They are in the basket, the white doves." And that's how, then he must have died. But I didn't know. So they say it was a very nice death, and he didn't, he didn't make no noise or nothing after that.

SIGRIST: Do you have any recollections of the funeral?

CHATY: And my mother, I remembered one thing. The poor thing that she came home, we had this supper, and then the two, to, uh, give me something to do, so we had straw for the mattress. So she broke a piece off and put it in her hands and said, "Which hand is it?" That's all I remember. And one, another thing, I had wavy hair, and my mother used to comb it, and then she pulled my hair a little bit, so I run away. And she says to me, "You just wait. You're gonna cry when nobody see you." And that's how true it is.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's personality like?

CHATY: Personality?

SIGRIST: Yes. Tell me a little bit about your mother, and what she was like as a person.

CHATY: Very nice, they say. Very nice. And she, uh, she couldn't read or write because at that time you, you have to work, and that's all. And if you're poor, they take you away from you if you have children. They don't ask you, "Can I, or I pay you for it, or no." What I call it now is a slave. I worked so hard, I never seen money.

SIGRIST: Well, so you were taken away from your mother.

CHATY: Yeah. So that's why I don't know much about my mother.

SIGRIST: How old were you when that happened?

CHATY: Oh, I went three years to school. I must have been about seven, seven or eight years old, they took me. And they took me to a different city, a different state.

SIGRIST: Who is "they?" Who took you?

CHATY: The, uh, Jewish people who married from my village to the other state. See, they knew my family, so they

took me. So what they give me, a couple dresses a year or so, and I had to work awful hard all my life.

SIGRIST: Were you put into a home when you were taken away, or . . .

CHATY: No, no. They just take you, like a slave.

SIGRIST: But where did they bring you to?

CHATY: They took me, when they came to see their mother, and I was, but, as I say, about eight years old, so they took me to that different state.

SIGRIST: And then where did you stay when you were there?

CHATY: In there, in their house.

SIGRIST: In their house.

CHATY: Yes.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things were you expected to do?

CHATY: They expected me to feed the chicken and see if they're going to lay an egg, then I have to leave it in there, and then I have to go to the field, and I had to cut, I don't know how they call it in English. It was green, like basil leaves. And it was so, it

was pinching me all over my hands. Oh, it was so bad, I didn't feel my hands, but I had to do it. And then I had to chop it up and mix it up with other food, and then give it to the geese and the ducks. And then they made me, see, the Jewish people, they have holidays coming, and then you have to stuff the chicken, not the chicken, the duck, or the geese. So you had to take the, uh, corn, and open their mouth, and you had to press it in so, to eat. And then I did the dishes, and I helped with the, I did everything.

SIGRIST: And you weren't, was your mother allowed to visit you during this time?

CHATY: No. No, because that was too far, and we didn't have no horse and wagon, and it was far. So I never seen my mother after that.

SIGRIST: You never saw her again after that. Did your mother die while you were gone?

CHATY: Yes, when the war was on. There was a lot of people who were, they give messages. And they, uh, must have gone someplace where they send them. So what happened to her, I don't know if they shoot her or they killed her or what they did, I don't know.

SIGRIST: But she died during World War One?

CHATY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can we backtrack a little bit to before you were sent away, when you were living with your mom and your grandfather.

CHATY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you describe your house for me?

CHATY: The house. We had two rooms, a room, a window here and a window over here, and a small window here on the back, because our house was this way to the street. And then we had, um, like I would say a kitchen where we had the stove, and the oven where we baked the bread and cake, and then the chimney where you, when you killed the pig or, uh, well, we didn't, I don't remember that, they put the ham there to smoke it. And then we had, like, a spice room. And they put, for the winter, the potatoes, the, uh, wheat, and the bread, what we had, they kept it over there because it was cold over there. And the potatoes, we had to dig a hole and make it like this here, a pig, and then we put the potatoes there and the carrots and the parsley

and the celery in there, so we, whenever we wanted, we had to go there and get it.

SIGRIST: So you grew your own vegetables?

CHATY: Yes, yes. Oh, yes. We had a yard where we had, and then we had one pear tree. I remember my grandfather putting it there. That was, oh, it was so big, the pear. And it was, it was like reddish inside and white on the outside. Oh, it was really very, very tasty. I could remember that.

SIGRIST: What other kinds of foods did you eat, remembering those early years. What did you eat as a child?

CHATY: Potatoes.

SIGRIST: How would they be prepared?

CHATY: They prepared is, uh, when they first start to get the potatoes, it was that red potatoes. So they made me go out and dig it out, you know, on the side, and leave the inside to grow, and then we cooked that, with the skin, wash it and cooked that in the skin. And then we had butter, because when my mother was working, so she didn't get money, she got food. And then she melted the butter and parsley, and then she

poured it on the potatoes, and that was our supper.

SIGRIST: Did, um, what kind of job did your mother have? Was she . . .

CHATY: On the field.

SIGRIST: And is this, was this common for women at that time?

CHATY: Yes, oh, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: What kind of field work, specifically, would she be doing?

CHATY: Beans.

SIGRIST: Picking beans?

CHATY: Yes. And they have, uh, it's not carrots. It's about this big, and we had in the city on the other side a big, it's a big home, and there was a baron there, and he had a lot of ground, and then people went and worked for him. Then those people was getting money, so they bought, uh, salt, and, uh, pepper, and, uh, something like red pepper and black pepper, so that what we couldn't get it from the ground. So they had a couple of pennies, so bought, for the winter, so that they have it for the winter.

SIGRIST: Things like spices and . . .

CHATY: Yes. And then they had that, uh, sunflower. And they ground it somehow to make the oil. Oh, I could remember it was like gold, the yellow, beautiful. I remember they put it on bread because we didn't have anything else.

SIGRIST: If your mother wanted to make something special, what's a holiday dish?

CHATY: The holiday, uh, only on Christmas, or something like that, we had. Otherwise we didn't have. We had, maybe, a chicken or a rabbit. But, you know, when you cook that rabbit or that chicken, even over here in America when I cooked it, you could smell it a couple of blocks. Oh, it smells delicious. That's what we had when it was special. But holidays we made that, she made the dough, and then she made, like a pretzel, but thick, and then she cut it about this big. Everybody had that. And then they cook it a little bit, just to moist, and then they put honey, and we had bees, and we put the honey on it, and that was, and then they had, Christmas, walnuts, and apple, and we had an attic, like. And, uh, we had, uh, straw

there, and the, uh, pears or, uh, whatever fruit you had, walnuts, too, and put it up there for the winter, and then you get a couple, and they're all, see, because we didn't have much. It was delicious.

SIGRIST: Now you mentioned chicken and rabbit would be meat dishes for holiday time. Did you eat much meat at home?

CHATY: No, no.

SIGRIST: Did you raise animals?

CHATY: Well, my mother, after, the house burned down.

SIGRIST: Was that after you were taken away?

CHATY: Yes. And when I came back to visit my mother, but she wasn't there. (she sighs) So the house was built, it was one room, and the kitchen, like, where you baked the bread. And that was it, two rooms.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the furniture in your house?

CHATY: Yes. I, we had a bed on this side, and a potbellied stove on this side, and the bed over here. And on this side they, uh, not closet, but, uh, like this here, bureau, like. But you opened the top.

SIGRIST: Like a chest, like a big chest.

CHATY: Yes, yes. And then we had one chair. That's all it was in there.

SIGRIST: And was this homemade furniture?

CHATY: Yes.

SIGRIST: It was all very simple

CHATY: Yes, very simple.

SIGRIST: I meant to ask you before, you talk about your grandfather. Was there a grandmother?

CHATY: I didn't see my grandmother. She passed away before I could remember her. But they said the very, very nice person she was. And this man here said to me that our house was so clean that you could eat from the floor. Now, that man didn't have to tell me if that wasn't true, because he didn't get paid for it. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Do you remember what kind of floor you had in the house?

CHATY: Yeah, sure. A dirt floor.

SIGRIST: And how did your mother take care of the dirt floor?

CHATY: Well, once a week she went out to get that yellow sand, like, or gravel, or whatever it is, so we had, they had horses and wagon, and when the horse went through the dirt, they picked it up and they mixed it with the dirt. And so when they, they had the wheat, and they had the big machine, and the wheat was coming in the bags, homemade bags, and then they had that real fine after when they, uh, the wheat came down, and then the straw. So that dirt, they used to pick it up and then mix it with the, uh, dirt, and then they mixed it all over one floor, and then they put that yellow. That's what we had. And on the outside, too, like a patio, or what do you call, dirt.

SIGRIST: Would you say that the house that you were a child in was similar to many houses in that part of Hungary?

CHATY: Yes.

SIGRIST: That was a typical kind of house for that . . .

CHATY: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about, about, uh, religious life

when you were that young with your mother and your grandfather? What do you remember about going to church?

CHATY: Yes.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you remember.

CHATY: Yes. They always dressed me up the best they know how, because we didn't have much, and then we went to church. And we sat there, and then we prayed. It was very nice. You was at ease when you went to church. Of course, the other people, the higher up people who had grounds, they looked you down. You was dirt for them.

SIGRIST: And, as you say, there was a baron who owned a lot of land.

CHATY: Yes.

SIGRIST: Were there several wealthy people who owned a lot of the town?

CHATY: Yes.

SIGRIST: And it was common for, for . . .

CHATY: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: . . . the peasants to work for these people?

CHATY: Right, right. And then the people who had ground didn't have any horses, so I went and worked for you for a day, and then you came with the horse, and then you plowed for me. That's how they exchanged. And then you feed them.

SIGRIST: So the two groups of people really needed each other.

CHATY: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Were there ways that you practiced your religion at home?

CHATY: Yes.

SIGRIST: How, what did you do at home to practice your religion?

CHATY: Well, my grandfather used to read from the Bible to me. He used to.

SIGRIST: Do you remember maybe, was one part of the Bible his favorite, or something that you remember being . . .

CHATY: Adam and Eve, and he told me, he says, uh, "Child," he

says, "one of these days," he says, "you might not see it, and you might see it, they're going to have horses running up in the air. That's the plane." He says, "You might see it, and you might not." I remember that very well, what he told me. And he knew, a lot of other people knew, when it was shining so hot in summertime, and they said, "You better go from the field, go in, because it's going to be a very big storm," and it was. And they know, could tell from the star if there's going to be a war. My grandfather used to show me how it is, it had a tail and all. It's, and it was.

SIGRIST: By looking up at the sky.

CHATY: Yeah, the sky.

SIGRIST: Would you say that most people, like your grandfather, were very close to nature?

CHATY: Yes.

SIGRIST: And they really lived off the land, to a certain extent.

CHATY: Yes, definitely, yes.

SIGRIST: Although your grandfather had a slightly different kind of job.

CHATY: Oh, yes, he did. Oh, that was something. Even a shoemaker has a title. Oh. That's one thing I didn't like. I don't know why, but I did not like. Just because you were younger and you're older, and then you're richer, so you have to have, each one has a title.

SIGRIST: It sounds like a very structured kind of community, not only who has the most money but, as you say, very rigidly organized by religion and by whom you can marry.

CHATY: Right.

SIGRIST: Did you ever have any contact with your natural father?

CHATY: No.

SIGRIST: None at all?

CHATY: No. His mother used to go to church. They had to pass our house. And, uh, they said, "That is your granddaughter." And, uh, oh, she was, she was so mad.

She was so mad. I remember that.

SIGRIST: So this must have been a very difficult thing for your mother, to have a child out of wedlock.

CHATY: (she whispers) Yes.

SIGRIST: Did she have any other children?

CHATY: No.

SIGRIST: So you're an only child.

CHATY: Yes.

SIGRIST: Um, can you, you mentioned the shoemaker before.

CHATY: Yes.

SIGRIST: Can you describe what your clothes looked like when you were a kid?

CHATY: My clothes, well, at that time, when I was a little girl, I had, like, a homemade blouse that we made from the seed, grew, and then they cut it, and they made it into a ball, tied it, and then they had to put it in a swamp for a couple, about a week, to, uh, get soft, and then they had a long four-legged, like a horse that carpenters have, and in the middle it was a

stick, like, and then you get, when you wash it out, and then you dry it out, you spread it out, and then you go and hit it, and then all that, uh, from that, uh, like straw comes off, and then you make the clothes out of it. (she rustles papers)

SIGRIST: Well, that's all right, we can look at the pictures afterwards. That was the blouse, then what . . .

CHATY: And then I had a skirt. I had two skirts, because they, at that time they had a lot of skirts on, but we couldn't afford it. So I had two, two skirts.

SIGRIST: And you wore these on top of each other?

CHATY: Yes.

SIGRIST: And were they, what color, were they brightly colored, or dark colored?

CHATY: Darkest color, because they didn't have then bright. Now, just like in America now, they have everything now.

SIGRIST: Well, of course, it's different now than it was.

CHATY: Altogether different.

SIGRIST: We're going to pause now, and Peter's going to flip the tapes over, and then we'll continue talking in a moment.

CHATY: Okay.

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

SIGRIST: Okay. We're continuing with Mary Chaty. Mrs. Chaty, let me ask you what you did for fun as a little girl growing up. What games did you play?

CHATY: Well, I didn't have much of a child life at all, because since I could remember I always had to do something. And I, when I went to school I had to have a piece of wood each day when I went to school to keep the room warm, so everybody had to take it. So when, and that teacher had five, six grades.

SIGRIST: And this is before you were taken away, right?

CHATY: Yes.

SIGRIST: You went to school for three years before.

CHATY: Yes. I went for three years, and then I just, they took me away because I was able to go and work. So I

really didn't have fun.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the school for me, what the building looked like?

CHATY: The building, it was, it was like a curve, and then from here another street went that way, so the school was over here, and a little lake was over here, and then the, uh, walk through that. So that school was here. The room was one big room, and then to go out to play, they had a yard, but that teacher, he says to me, and his wife was there, too, and he says, "You could be a well-educated girl if you would be rich." Because anything he told me, I thought of it, or I worked with it, I knew. And he says, "You pick up just like that." The language, I pick up. I didn't go to college. I was talking Jewish. That's how I came out, that's why they let me out. The man, when I came to Ellis Island here, he talked to me right away, because I had just a piece of paper to come here. Nobody come with me.

SIGRIST: So the teacher thought that you were very smart.

CHATY: Yeah. So she said that's a shame that I don't have rich people, that my parents is not rich.

SIGRIST: Did all religions go to this school? Were there Catholics and Protestants and Jews all in this school?

CHATY: Yes. They didn't had, I don't remember they have Catholic school. They all went to school. And then we all hold hands, one closer to each other's house. And then if that person was a year older than you, you had to greet them nicely.

SIGRIST: Again, all part of this kind of etiquette in the town. Um, was your mother educated? Could she read and write?

CHATY: No.

SIGRIST: What about your grandfather?

CHATY: Oh, yeah, he was, yes.

SIGRIST: Do you think that women of your mother's generation were not given educational opportunities?

CHATY: No. No, they don't.

SIGRIST: But of your generation, girls went to school.

CHATY: Well, because I was able, after three years I was able to go to work. But I couldn't go to the school. And,

oh, boy, they was pulling my hair in the back, and then I just turned my head, I said, "Don't do that!" And then the teacher saw me, and I didn't do anything, just tell him. I had to hold my hands out like this here, and he had the stick, and bang! And he did hit, and I was innocent, but I got hell for it.

SIGRIST: That's how they disciplined in those days.

CHATY: Yeah, oh, yeah. Well, six grade, one teacher.

SIGRIST: Yeah. He had his hands full. Where you lived in Hungary, did it snow there?

CHATY: Yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember a big snowstorm or anything?

CHATY: Oh, yes, I do. And I didn't have shoes either.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me about that.

CHATY: I had rags, and I put the rags all over, and then I tied it, and I walked with that. And in a mud, too. Oh, my feet were so cold that I didn't feel it. I had to go.

SIGRIST: Did you own shoes, but you only used them

occasionally?

CHATY: Not when I was a little girl. Only when I was older, so they bought me shoes that was cardboard. So when I went to church, I carried it, and I carried a piece of rag with me. So before I went in church or school, I had to wipe my feet off and put my shoes on.

SIGRIST: While you were in the church, and then you would take them off?

CHATY: Take them off again, and walk home.

SIGRIST: Shoes were expensive. You had to buy shoes in your town.

CHATY: Yes. Well, you see, you don't have money, because when you work you work for the winter supply. So, uh, very seldom when you have, like, uh, the Jewish people, they, uh, on a Friday they, from Friday on they don't light their match in the stove. So my mother used to go and light it, and she got, they had a store, those Jewish people, so they give her a little red paprika or black pepper and all that.

SIGRIST: Again it's this barter system that everybody . . .

CHATY: Yes.

SIGRIST: All right. Well, let's get back to when you were taken away. You were about eight years old, and you were placed in a Jewish home to work, basically.

CHATY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: How long did you stay there?

CHATY: Oh, I stayed there the first time about a year. And, uh, I didn't know what state I was in. And they must have treated me bad, because their, they had a building, and they had like a restaurant, and then they had a stable right on the corner, and the people must have seen, I had to milk the cow, and I didn't have that strength to milk him, so they was beating me. I either do it or I get beaten again, so they must have seen it, these Catholic nuns, they must have saw that, because one day she approached me and said, "Would you like to go back where you came from?" I says, "I can't go because I don't have money. I can't." So they bought me the ticket, the train ticket, and I had to change trains, too, and I was a kid. So, uh, they ask me, she says, "Would you like to go back?" I says, "I don't have the money." So

they said to me, "Now, on Thursday," she says to me, "you go to bed like you usually go, and don't make anything so that they wouldn't be suspicious, those people." So I did. "And get your belongings," what I had, a dress and a kerchief. And I tied it together. And she says, "Twelve o'clock," she says, "you come out." And they waited for me outside, back of the barn, and then they took me to the train. So they, one nun was under the bridge with me. The other one got the ticket. So when the train came in, we went under the bridge to the train, and then she said to the conductor, "You leave her off in, uh, Uhel[ph]. So I had to change the train. So he says if anybody comes in they should not let them to touch me. So I went and I get off. As I get off, the sister of these people where I was, she was going to visit them in this, where I was coming from, and she saw me. She says, "You go and see my mother." So I went to see her mother when I got off, and then when the train came, so I got off on the same, in the other place. And I, she had a bar.

SIGRIST: A bar?

CHATY: Yes. This bar.

SIGRIST: Oh, she owned, like a tavern, like a bar. Okay. (he laughs)

CHATY: Yes.

SIGRIST: I understand now. Okay.

CHATY: And, uh, she, uh, I went there. And then, uh, this woman had, who was going to visit, she had a dry goods store, and close by. Her husband was in the service. So she says to me, she knew my parents. She says, "You stay with me." Because I had no place to go, I didn't have anybody. I had an uncle, but he wouldn't take me nowhere, no way. No way. He was mean. So I stayed there. And then people, and before that, I'm ahead of myself. I went to work, to a another, they called it (Hungarian). That was Gisella. That's another Jewish woman married over there, so she took me. She says, "I'm taking her." Okay, I went. So I was over there quite a few years, and her husband, this Jewish Gisella, she was, he was in America before, and he told me, as I was getting older, he says, "You know what?" He says, "You should go to America." He says, "That's, you're going to do good over there." He said, "You deserve it." Because she

was mean to me, and he knew it.

SIGRIST: What did you know about America?

CHATY: Nothing.

SIGRIST: When you were a kid?

CHATY: But when I was in a school, do you know I put my finger where is America? Because they said to go on a map and who knows where is America. And I pointed out, I was in school for that three years. So, anyway, I, uh, then I, I went home.

SIGRIST: The nuns got you home. They, so you saw your mother again. Oh, this is when you went back and the house was . . .

CHATY: Oh, that was way before. No. She wasn't there. I saw the house, but that's it.

SIGRIST: Right.

CHATY: So, uh, who took the house and the ground what we had, I don't know.

SIGRIST: Had the war started yet?

CHATY: They had that, uh, Bolshevik, or whatever they call

them. They came in, and then Czechoslovakia came in, they fight the city, and if they won then they chased the other out. So they stayed, and the Roumanian chased this one out. I must have been in the middle there. Oh, it was terrible. It was terrible. You couldn't go. And the Tisa[ph] was right there, Danube and the Tisa[ph]. I was by the Tisa[ph].

SIGRIST: Where were you living during World War One? Where were you living at that time?

CHATY: In Essen[ph], in Soboch[ph], when the men was in America.

SIGRIST: Oh, so you were with a family at that time, too?

CHATY: Yes, yeah. So, uh, we couldn't go even down to get water. So, like a kid, you know, we went down, a couple of them. And, uh, our own Hungarian from across was shooting at us kids. And if I wouldn't have fall in the hole, something, but shhhh, on top of my head, but I fell. I heard that shhhh. That was the bullet. And I have, on my foot, when they started coming on the, uh, on the train, and the train was, like, they carried the cows and the horses, so we didn't know that was soldiers in there. So they're

shooting at us. So I was on the top because there was a lake there, and then they have that up high so if it's raised, the water, so I won't come in a city. So I was running over there, and the bullet went right through here, just like a needle goes through.

SIGRIST: Right through your hand, the top of your hand.

CHATY: And it never gets dirty. Uh . . .

SIGRIST: What other recollections do you have about World War One? What else do you remember about the war going on at that time?

CHATY: Oh, everything what I, everything.

SIGRIST: Do you remember food shortages at that time?

CHATY: Oh, yes. I was going on my stomach, going to the barn, and they had, uh, what they call it, uh, on a wagon that they, you shoot, that they, oh, I knew how they call it. It was, on two wheels, and it has a gun in the middle.

SIGRIST: Like a machine gun?

CHATY: A machine gun, or whatever it is. So that was in our property there. And they was watching. But, somehow,

I went in, I got a potato, I was so hungry, and I ate that raw potato. But I had to go on my stomach to get to the barn. And then they had their, from Russia, the prisoners, they was working for the men where I was working. And I knew when that man gonna get sick.

He had the fits. And I was afraid that he's going to fall into the well there. So when I knew he gonna get it, I could see it in his face, I put the stick in his mouth. And then they took him away, because he was, he was really a sick man.

SIGRIST: Was he an epileptic?

CHATY: Yes.

SIGRIST: He had an epileptic seizure.

CHATY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Now, you're living with, you're living with, this is the second Jewish family that you're living with?

CHATY: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: And the husband is in America.

CHATY: Yes.

SIGRIST: And the wife was cruel to you?

CHATY: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Was nasty to you.

CHATY: Yes, she was, she was. And then when, when they, uh, they had the Roumanians there, and they was always asking who was the head one, like the Czechoslovakia was here, and the Roumanian took over, they fight it. So you had to know who was the man ahead in the Roumanian, or Czechoslovakia. Well, I didn't know, but I knew one doctor who used to come to this Jewish woman when her husband wasn't home. So, uh, she, they told me always, "Don't remember name, don't remember name." And, you know, up to nowadays, I can't remember good names. I can't. I have to write it down for myself, then I'll remember. Because, see, it was in my head that, "Don't remember, don't remember." And they was, they was, so they didn't believe this man, and I saw, they had that whip, and they, they said they're going to get twenty-five whip if you don't say the name of that officer. Oh, he was like dead. They beat him more than twenty-five times. They saw, oh, they was cruel, cruel.

SIGRIST: It was a very difficult time.

CHATY: Very difficult, very. And at night the bullets was going like flies, like birds flying, because you could see the shine. Very difficult.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me, tell me when it was that you wanted to go to America, or when you decided . . .

CHATY: Well, then when I was so long in this, the man was in America . . .

SIGRIST: Several years, right, you were there?

CHATY: Yes, oh, yes, yes. So, uh, he told me to go home and, uh, he says to me, he says, "I'm not, I'm not throwing you out." He says, "That's for your own good." He was nice to me. So I went home. And then when I went to the (?), and then the people was coming from America to that city, and they was talking about America. They had money. And, uh, the woman who I was staying with, she wrote to my uncle in America.

SIGRIST: Is this your mother's brother?

CHATY: No. It's a Jewish people, where I was, Jewish people. So she was very nice to me, this one, the second one.

And, uh, she described me, I have blondish golden brownish hair, and I'm very good. Well, they left me with the money, and they left me with the wine, with the liquor, with everything, the jewelry, everything. They gave me the key, and they went in the city.

SIGRIST: Is this, when you say you went home, are you talking about the town you were born in that you went back to?

CHATY: No, the second.

SIGRIST: Okay.

CHATY: Before my, my, uh, where I born.

SIGRIST: And when you, and when you went back there, you then lived with yet another Jewish family.

CHATY: Yes, another Jewish family.

SIGRIST: And they were nice to you, this Jewish family.

CHATY: Yes, they was, they was nice, she was very nice and so was he. He was older people, but very nice to me.

SIGRIST: And when you went to live with them, did you go to live with them as help in the house, or to just board with them?

CHATY: Just . . .

SIGRIST: To live.

CHATY: I just worked for nothing, I just worked for nothing. And I slept in the same room where they were sleeping, a narrow room. And the bar was over here, and the big room where the two girls and the boy was sleeping, they had three rooms, and then they had, uh, like a pantry, where they had the, uh, wine, and the, uh, beer, and everything else. And they had a cellar, and they taught me, the old man taught me how to make the, uh, wine, not the wine, the, uh, liquor, like the peach brandy, or, he showed me, because, see, they knew my uncle had a bar here, whatever they call it, because I don't go in there. So, uh, they said that I'm gonna help them out. But over here you can't, because you're not, you're underage, you can't. But in Europe that Jewish woman, she said I'm born to be a businesswoman. I know how to give them the liquor. I know who to, what kind, and how much, and they bought some potatoes or beans or something, under the old ladies, under the apron. I knew how much to give them, and what kind. And if they cried, I cry with them. If they left, I left with them. And they said

I just, the Jewish people, that I'm just born to be a businesswoman.

SIGRIST: And it was, it was a relative of these Jewish people who was in America that you said was your uncle, he's actually a relative of them?

CHATY: No.

SIGRIST: No. Well, who is the uncle in America. I'm confused.

CHATY: My uncle.

SIGRIST: Your uncle.

CHATY: Yes. My mother's brother.

SIGRIST: Oh, okay, it is your mother's brother then.

CHATY: Yes.

SIGRIST: I see. What was he doing in America?

CHATY: He had a saloon, or a bar, or whatever they call it.

SIGRIST: In New York?

CHATY: In Trenton, yeah.

SIGRIST: When did he go to America?

CHATY: Oh, I don't know, because he came before, I don't remember that.

SIGRIST: You don't remember him in Hungary at all?

CHATY: No, no. Neither my, uh, my nephew, I don't remember. Because they came out before I even born. I don't know.

SIGRIST: I see.

CHATY: So when I came to America, I didn't know none of them.

SIGRIST: So you don't know this man at all.

CHATY: No.

SIGRIST: But you started to want to come to America?

CHATY: Oh, I wanted to. And before I came here, as I said, that woman was taking care of me, and she did something wrong. She did something wrong. So, uh, they took her back, and I was in Prague, because I couldn't go in Budapest because I was in the Czechoslovakia territory.

SIGRIST: Well, now are you talking about when you were leaving to come here?

CHATY: Yes, here.

SIGRIST: So she was traveling with you? The woman who couldn't come, you said.

CHATY: Yes, yes. She was coming the same place, and they said, they should take care of me, because I was seventeen, so I couldn't come. I was in a quota. But nowadays you don't have to have quota. Anyway, I had twenty-five dollar check.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what else you took with you when you packed?

CHATY: When I packed?

SIGRIST: Yes. What did you pack to take with you to America?

CHATY: Well, you know what I, I didn't have nothing. So I had to come with my, from my uncle's place, what I said that he's so mean. Because, uh, you have to have the paper, the birth certificate, and whatnot. So, uh, it was the second, second, uh, village from his. So I got the paper and all, and then the, uh, they had, excuse me. They had to examine your eyes and whatnot. So they said I have pimples in the eyes. So I had to go and work, uh, it's like, like, uh, not

carrots, not carrots. What they, sugar, sugar,
uh . . .

SIGRIST: Beets? Sugar beets?

CHATY: Yeah. So I had, for the growth. So I had to take so many, uh, lines, so I worked, so I got paid for it, and then I went to the eye again, and then they, he says I'm okay.

SIGRIST: This is all before you leave, then?

CHATY: Yes. So my aunt, without my uncle knowing it, she gave me the bag, and then she put some bread in it, and she put some bacon in it, and that's how I came. And, uh, I had a couple of dollars with me, because, when I was working, so I didn't pay much for the doctor. So I was going for a whole week to the, uh, office to let me go to America, and they wouldn't let me go. They says, "You're a pretty girl," and then, "We're going to give you work over here. You're going to make money." And that, they just didn't want to give it to me. I went in that mud every single day, every single day, because that was wintertime. And I cried and I cried and I cried, so they let me go. Because, "Give me a piece of paper," that I'm talking

Jewish and German and Slavish and Polish. So, uh, they, I came by myself.

SIGRIST: Did you have, um, bad feelings about leaving Hungary, or were you glad to leave it?

CHATY: No, no, no. I was so at ease when I came here and I seen that Statue of Liberty. Oh, my God.

SIGRIST: But before you got that far, I mean, when you were just getting ready to leave, was that sad for you?

CHATY: No.

SIGRIST: You'd been through so much.

CHATY: No, no, no. It was not sad at all.

SIGRIST: You were happy.

CHATY: I was happy to come. I just, because they ask me, "Why do you want to go to America? You're going to have America here. We're going to give you money. You're going to have a good job." I says, "No." "Why you want to go to America?" "I want to go to America." And that's all.

SIGRIST: Did, um, where did you, you went to Prague. Did you

say you went to Prague.

CHATY: Prague. That's the capital city of . . .

SIGRIST: And then from Prague, where did you go?

CHATY: Uh, we went on a train to the, uh, boat.

SIGRIST: And where did you get the boat?

CHATY: I think it was, it must be Germany, because it was the, uh, a lot of German people was going on.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the name of the boat?

CHATY: Yeah, I remember, but I can't now think of it.
Uh . . .

SIGRIST: Now, are you traveling alone, or is someone with you?

CHATY: Alone, no, because they took the woman, so I was alone.

SIGRIST: So you did have, was that the first time you'd ever gone to Germany?

CHATY: Yeah. Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: But you said you spoke German.

CHATY: Yes, yes. Yes. I spoke Hebrew, too. And I knew the
(?), I knew a lot about. I was raised . . .

SIGRIST: You lived a lot of time in Jewish houses.

CHATY: Yes, yeah, yeah. They all thought that I'm Jewish. I
says, "No, I'm shiksela[ph]. I'm not Jewish." (she
laughs)

SIGRIST: So, now, how long in Germany did you have to stay
before the boat left?

CHATY: Uh, the one day.

SIGRIST: Oh, so you didn't have to wait long at all.

CHATY: No, no.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what time of year this is?

CHATY: What?

SIGRIST: What time of the year is it?

CHATY: It was in, uh, October.

SIGRIST: You left in October.

CHATY: Yeah. October the 11th, I was here.

SIGRIST: You were here in America by then.

CHATY: Yes. I was about seven days on the ocean.

SIGRIST: Did, um, uh, had you ever seen a big boat before?

CHATY: No.

SIGRIST: What did you think when you saw this big boat that you had to get on?

CHATY: Oh, I opened my eyes. (she laughs) I says, "My!" No, no, you see, you're so down, that I didn't know nothing. I seen the people from the field coming home with the baby in their apron, and then I figured when I get married I'm going to go to the orphanage and get baby. I didn't know nothing. I never heard anything, nobody said anything. I didn't, anybody. I was dummy.

SIGRIST: So this is all very new for you.

CHATY: Yes, indeed, it was, and how.

SIGRIST: Well, um, I think that this is a good place for us to just pause for a moment so that Peter can put some more tape on, and now we'll get you to America. So we'll be breaking now for about five minutes, and then

we'll continue and get you on your way to America.

CHATY: (she laughs) Okay.

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist at the Ellis Island recording studio and it is Tuesday, September 14, 1993, and we are beginning tape two with Mary Chaty, who came from Hungary in 1921 when she was seventeen. We just got you on the boat at the end of tape one. You mentioned to me that it was a Cunard Line ship, and that you thought it had two smokestacks.

CHATY: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Let's talk a little bit about what you remember about the boat ride. Do you remember where you slept on the boat?

CHATY: Yes, I was in third class, and I was down there, and they had two women. They, uh, they went out, and I stayed there. I said, "Ah, I'm going to stay a little longer before I go up." And the, uh, steward, or whoever, came to clean, or what they call them. And, uh, he was telling me, in English, to move, to get

out, we're going to clean. But I didn't know what he wanted. He was talking, and I just talked to him in all languages, and he just looked at me. So to make me go out, I've never seen false teeth in my life. So he takes his false teeth out. Oh, did I run! (she laughs) I ran out. And any time I saw him, wow, I went the other way. So that's how I went out of the room. That's what I remember.

SIGRIST: Well, that's quite a story. (they laugh)

CHATY: Oh, I'm telling you, that was something.

SIGRIST: Was the boat rocky?

CHATY: Yes. When it was in the middle it was rmmmmm. And I saw a big whale, it was.

SIGRIST: A whale?

CHATY: Wow, it was so big, alongside of the boat. I said, "My goodness, what is it?" I'd never seen anything like it. The back, you know, it was, wow, so big. I was going to knock it over.

SIGRIST: When you first got on the boat, were you frightened by the boat?

CHATY: No, no. I wasn't afraid or frightened. I just wanted to come here.

SIGRIST: Just get out of Europe and get to America.

CHATY: That's all I wanted.

SIGRIST: Did you get sick on the boat?

CHATY: No. No, I didn't.

SIGRIST: Did other people get sick?

CHATY: Oh, yes, indeed, oh, yes. Yeah. They hanging over. Before they got over there, oh, yes, I've seen a lot bad.

SIGRIST: Now, do you remember where you ate on the boat?

CHATY: Yes. There was a big room where we went to eat.

SIGRIST: And do you remember what they fed you?

CHATY: No. I was, I didn't see anything. I just wanted to get there, in America, that's it.

SIGRIST: So you said the boat ride lasted about seven days.

CHATY: Yeah, about seven days, yes.

SIGRIST: And, uh, it was fairly uneventful, it sounds like.

CHATY: Yes.

SIGRIST: Nothing too exciting happened.

CHATY: No, no. No, there was a lot of people talking German and, you know, back and forth, and that's all. But nothing unusual, because somehow that's all I wanted, and that's all I wished is to get to America, and that's all. And never, never thinking of anything wrong that could anything happen to the ship or anything. Nothing at all.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me about coming into New York Harbor, and what that was like.

CHATY: Well, when we got here, I look around, water, water, water, all these seven days, water. And I look up, and I seen the Statue of Liberty. "Oh," I says, "thank God! Young lady," I says, "I'm here."

SIGRIST: What about when you saw New York? I mean, New York is a big city, you know, when you saw it from the deck of the boat. Did it make any kind of impression on you?

CHATY: Well, you see, no. Because when I got off from the

ship, we went to the Ellis Island there, and then they, we went to the room, and, as I say, they separated us. These people went there, that they're going to ship them back. I don't know what they had, sickness, or whatever. And another group that they're going to ship them back. And then me, he told me, oh, he was a tall man, and he talked to me Jewish right away. And he says, "You could go now," he says. "You could go on a train." He said, "You don't have to stay." I says, "Oh, it's very nice." And I thank him, and then they put me on the other side. And then they, uh, they said now we went to the boat, and then to New York to the train. And then they were selling bread and bananas. I never saw bananas in my life, never saw it. I didn't know what it was. And salami. So I paid a dollar. I remember that. I paid a dollar to him. And when I got to the place where I was going, I showed them what I got. And I says, "Do you peel it and eat it?" I thought that the skin is what you eat. (she laughs) I didn't know, so they was laughing. She says, "No, you throw that out, and you eat the middle one." (she laughs) So when I, uh, went on a train, and they hollered, "Trenton, Trenton," so I know Trenton, that's where I go, so I

get off on Clinton, South Clinton station, and my uncle wasn't waiting for me because I sent a telegram from the ship that I'm arriving on Thursday. But as it was a holiday, they didn't thought, my uncle didn't think that they're going to leave me off.

SIGRIST: And what holiday was it?

CHATY: The, uh, Armistice Day. But they did, so I came, so they wasn't waiting for me. So I see the taxi, and I told him that I want to go, German, I talked to him in my language, and he's just looking at me. I says to him in Hungarian, I says, (Hungarian). "What you waiting for?" So I said where I want to go. I says, he don't understand me what I'm going to do. It was before, about five thirty, six thirty. I says, it's getting dark, you know, then, in October. I said, "Oh, I'll take my address out." So I looked for my, for the address where I was going, and I showed him. "Oh," he says, "yeah, yeah, yeah," he says. So I went in there, and I paid him, I remember, fifty cents for the taxi. And I went to (?). He was the judge in the city. And he's kind of relation, but that I didn't know. And so his mother had a store, a grocery store, on Broad Street. So I went there, and my uncle was

living in the back, so they was all surprised. This is, to me, we didn't wait for you, only tomorrow. They wanted to go, he says, to get you tomorrow. I says, "Well, I'm here today." So they went right away to my uncle, and I didn't know him, he didn't know me.

SIGRIST: Right, you had never met him before.

CHATY: So that's how I got here.

SIGRIST: Let me back up just a little bit.

CHATY: Yes.

SIGRIST: Back to Ellis Island, can you just describe for me what it looked like?

CHATY: How it looked?

SIGRIST: What Ellis Island looked like?

CHATY: Oh, oh, that was, uh, trees around, and it was a gate, and then they had going, and the other side going down, and then you go to the boat.

SIGRIST: And were there a lot of people here?

CHATY: Oh, yes, it was a lot of people.

SIGRIST: And do you remember what, what you had to do when you were here? Did you have examinations, or what did they do to you?

CHATY: When I got here, oh, well, they examined you before you go on a boat. You, and they give you the, uh . . .

SIGRIST: The vaccination.

CHATY: Yeah. But they always told me, the other people, to wipe it off, wipe it off. So I didn't know, I always wiped it off. So, anyway, uh, we was . . .

SIGRIST: I asked you if it was crowded, and . . .

CHATY: Well, see, when I went there, so he, he says to me, "Put your hands out."

SIGRIST: This is the inspector who was talking to you?

CHATY: Yes. And, uh, he looked at me, well, he looked down, I looked up, because he was so tall, and he says, "All right." In German, you know? So, uh, he says, "You go over here, and you wait over here, and they're going to come, and they're going to take you to the boat."

SIGRIST: So you were lucky. You got off.

CHATY: Yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you were wearing when you arrived, what your outfit was?

CHATY: I says, "Gee, it's freedom. It's so at ease." I says, "This gonna be living. This is freedom." I never was excited, I never was nervous. I was just at ease. I can't explain how good it felt. And I never been here.

SIGRIST: Or met your uncle before. Do you remember what you were wearing when you got off the boat, what clothing did you have on?

CHATY: Oh, before I come on a boat, the lady, she had a dressmaker, and I was dressed like I am now. I didn't have no skirt. I had dressed. I had blue sash dress with at, uh, scalloped collar and Georgette sleeve. And then I had another dress with sky blue, uh, a design in it the same color, it's long, too. I had three dresses. And another one that's like a summer one with the puff sleeves and a round skirt, like, but it was in one piece. That's all I had.

SIGRIST: And how did you wear your hair back then?

CHATY: I combed it back, and I had it braided.

SIGRIST: So you wore it down, braided and down.

CHATY: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Um, all right. Well, let's back, let's go back to your uncle now. So you saw your uncle for the first time. Tell me a little bit how you and your uncle reacted to each other.

CHATY: We was all glad to see each other, because I resemble him, and he has a son, he resembles me. So somehow we clicked. And they just couldn't get over it, how nice I was. And I, always the people used to tell me how nice I look. I used to get angry. I said, "I don't look so nice!" But we just clicked with this family where I went to get my uncle.

SIGRIST: Now, did you live with your uncle?

CHATY: Yes, I lived with him, and then we went to the store, and he told me, he says, "You watch." He says, "They're going to talk Jewish, because the store was Jewish, Ukern Cohen[ph]." So he bought me clothes,

more clothes. He dressed me, you know, from the top to the bottom. And the, uh, woman told her husband, Jewish, he says, "Jack up that, because he gonna Jew you down." He says, "You jack it up." So my uncle said, "What did he say?" I says, "He said to jack it up, because you're going to talk him down." Oh, then he told him, and he just looked at him. He says, "How do you know?" He said, "That's what you said, didn't you?" She says, "She talks Jewish." She pointed at me. They opened their mouth, they was surprised.

SIGRIST: Did your uncle, those first couple of days, did your uncle try to teach you anything about America, certain things to do or not to do?

CHATY: No, no. But when I heard a plane, I always tell him, "Come in, come in," because the plane, because any time plane came in Europe, there was always the enemy, and they throw the bomb. So I says, "Come in, come in." Now, so, uh, I stayed for about a week, and I just couldn't do, see, I was so used to always working that I didn't know what to do. So they said, "Well, all these people go to cigar factory." So my aunt says, "You want to go to cigar factory?" I said, "Well, I'm going to try. So I went, and I was very

good at the cigar factory. I made very good. He was a Jewish, uh, boss, and I was left-handed cigar maker.

But I couldn't stand the smell of it. I used to, uh, have nosebleed. I couldn't stand it. I said, "It's not for me."

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me exactly what you had to do in the cigar factory?

CHATY: Well, I was, they was making, other people was making bunches. And then I, uh, they put it in my, where, machine where I had, and then I have a leaf, and I put it on the machine, take it out, and take that bunch, and I have to feel it if it's right or wrong, because if it's not enough, it's no good, if it's too much, it's no good. So I take out, or I ask them to give it to me. And then I put it on the leaf, and then I roll it, and then, uh, I go around, and then I cut it with the machine. But I was fast. But I just couldn't stand it.

SIGRIST: Were other immigrants working in this factory?

CHATY: Yes, yes. Yes, they was a lot of Italians. And they taught me one bad word, and I didn't know. So I go home and I said to my uncle, I says, "I know," I says,

"one word." And I told him what it is, he said,
"Don't say that." He said, "They shouldn't teach you
that."

SIGRIST: What was the word?

CHATY: Bollicks[ph].

SIGRIST: Which means?

CHATY: Bollicks[ph]. I didn't know what it meant. And then
they say, "Go to hell." So I go home and I said to my
uncle. "Now, don't say that!"

SIGRIST: Tell me a little more about how you learned English.
The Italians taught you some naughty words, and then
how, I mean, you speak English very well. How else
did you learn?

CHATY: Well, see, we couldn't talk to each other, so when I
got the bunches, see, they had, the other lady was
Italian, so the good bunches, she was getting it, so I
always have to ask. I says, "More." I says, showed
her it's not enough. So they give me a dirty look,
but I wasn't, that's what the boss said, I'm making
perfect. Because when I work, my mind and body and
soul in it. I don't listen here, I don't listen

there. I do my work. When I worked Eastern aircraft, my mind was there.

SIGRIST: And would, is that where you picked up most of your English, was just out working, or did you go to night school, or . . .

CHATY: No. So from there I quit because I, I couldn't stand it. So I went to the, uh, wool factory.

SIGRIST: A wool, a wool factory.

CHATY: Yeah, wool. They had a lot of cans there, and then the machine here, and then that part, eight cans go into one. But that smell was just so heavy. I was getting headaches. So I went to do housework. (she laughs) So I went to Mrs. Wood, she was a young couple, married. So I, I listening, and you know German, you can figure what that word is, and then they told me to cook, because she was a young couple. So they, uh, was getting company, and they told me how to set the table, on what side to put this, and on what side to put that. So they wanted meatloaf, and just meat, nothing else, just a little salt and pepper, and half raw. And I don't like it. So what was my portion, I put it on the side, and I made their

the way they wanted. So I made mine into stuffed cabbage, and they smelled that. After that I had to make the stuffed cabbage.

SIGRIST: Was there, um, how long did you stay with the Woods?

CHATY: Not too long, because they was, as I say, a young couple. Her husband wasn't in too much. He was always on the go. And the woman heard, Mrs. Wood heard somebody downstairs, she left the water running. So I went up the third floor, that's where I was sleeping, and she comes up on the third floor and says, "Somebody downstairs," she says, "you go down and look who it is." I was afraid. It was on West State Street, the rich people. I was afraid. So I went down, and I told her, I says, "The water running in the kitchen." Oh. So kind of, uh, didn't like it too much. So I went to Mrs. Siegel. That's where I learned English. I was talking Jewish to her, she was talking English to me. And they was laughing, because they know what they going to tell me, I'm going to, it's not what I think it is. So they told me to put the ashes down outside, so I go out and I look, I says, "Gee, the sun is shining." I says, "It's not raining." Because ashik[ph], ashik[ph] is like

raining in Hungarian. So then they was laughing before I went to them, because they know that's what I'm going to do. So, uh, they had a little boy. He went to school, and he had the, uh, because he was in the first grade. So I was reading that, my own way. And that little boy says, "No, you pronounce it this way." And that's how I taught myself how to read. I went to school for a couple of weeks because I worked far and I had to walk, and it's far, real far. So I went to get the citizen paper out. So I went to school. But it's so much letters in the English that I could read, I read my newspaper, I read everything, and I know what I'm reading, but when I was reading from the beginning, I didn't know what that word meant. As I was reading, "Oh, that's what that means." I learned myself.

SIGRIST: Do you ever remember making a mistake, trying to say something in English and making a mistake that people thought was funny, or that you were embarrassed by?

CHATY: Well, see, the way I was pronouncing it, it didn't sound right, and they was laughing. I says to them, "Why are you laughing?" He says, "Well, you don't say it that way." "Well," I said, "that's how it says

here." So he said, "No." He said, "It sounds this way."

SIGRIST: What year did you take out your citizen papers?

CHATY: Oh, uh, about, uh, I can't really remember, a couple years later when I got married, because I got married the next year, about three years or four years after I got my paper, and then I was witness for so many, many people.

SIGRIST: So you got married soon after you got here, then?

CHATY: Yes.

SIGRIST: Let's see, you came in '21.

CHATY: Yes.

SIGRIST: And you married in . . .

CHATY: Next, the next year.

SIGRIST: In 1922.

CHATY: Yes.

SIGRIST: So how did you meet your husband so quickly?

CHATY: Well, see, the people from my city was here.

SIGRIST: City in Hungary.

CHATY: Yeah. And the son was here, in America. So, uh, then they introduced me, because I went to these, my uncle took me to these people, and then they, my husband's family was coming to these people, and that's how we met. So I figured, I don't remember my parents, so his parents could have been, I adopted for my parents. But it didn't work out that way.

SIGRIST: What was his name?

CHATY: Frank.

SIGRIST: And his last name was Chaty.

CHATY: Yes.

SIGRIST: And, um, you had told me earlier that he had come from Hungary when he was a child.

CHATY: Yes, eight years old.

SIGRIST: Um, so you got married quite soon, then, after you got here. What did your husband do for a living? How was he . . .

CHATY: He was a carpenter.

SIGRIST: And were you staying with your uncle until you got married?

CHATY: Yes.

SIGRIST: Of course, you're living with families, right, so you're not really with him.

CHATY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Was there anything in America that you really didn't like, something you couldn't get used to?

CHATY: Not that I could recall. Not that I recall, because here is the freedom. You could speak here, you couldn't do it at home. Mother was against the daughter, daughter was against the mother. It was horrible. But here . . .

SIGRIST: Well, we have just a couple of minutes left. I wanted to ask you, can you, can you tell us your children's names?

CHATY: When the children came?

SIGRIST: Yes. What are the names of your children?

CHATY: Well, the next year I got married on the fourth, and

next year on the sixth my daughter born, the oldest one.

SIGRIST: And what is her name?

CHATY: And, uh, I ask my husband's friends, they was very good friends, they stood up for us, I says, "Where," I said, "my stomach is growing big." I said, "I don't know why." He said, says, uh, "You're going to have a baby." I said, "I'm going to have a baby?" I says, "Where it's going to come?" I didn't know where the baby going to come out. I never had any idea, because I never read any book, I never. So they, this lady friend says, "You'll find out." So she was kind of like a mother to me. She told me what to, uh, the first night what to do, what to put down and all that. I didn't know nothing. And then when, when I went to the hospital, well, there was, the nurses was getting the bed ready to take me in, and I got a hold of the bed, and I pulled it up, and I pulled my daughter up. And then when they came in, "Well, what happened you don't have the pain?" I said, "I don't know." I didn't tell them what I did, because they didn't ask me, and I didn't know why I shouldn't do that. So I carried it for two more days, and she born, she was

blue. They had to hit her hard. And I had a heck of a time. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: And what is her name? Her name?

CHATY: Margaret.

SIGRIST: Margaret.

CHATY: Margaret.

SIGRIST: And is she the only child that you have?

CHATY: No, and I have my younger one, Betty.

SIGRIST: So you had two children.

CHATY: Yeah, I have two daughters.

SIGRIST: Margaret . . .

CHATY: They are wonderful.

SIGRIST: Oh. Let me ask you one final question. Are you glad that you decided to come to this country?

CHATY: Oh, indeed, indeed I am. I wouldn't change it for no one, for nobody.

SIGRIST: Did you ever want to go back to Hungary?

CHATY: No, I don't want to even see it, no. I have bad memories, I don't want to. I would like to see it just the place where I born, how it is, but it doesn't bother me at all, no.

SIGRIST: You had a tough life there.

CHATY: My, if anybody had, believe me, I could write a big book, what I went through. You wouldn't believe. And I'm still here.

SIGRIST: And America gave you a whole new chance.

CHATY: Oh, yes, indeed, it did. Indeed it did. I had the feeling when I came, I want to come, I want to come, and I want to come. And I was in a car accident, and I told my husband what's going to happen. Something going to happen, he didn't want to believe me. It's a lot to say. And that happened. I was so badly hurt, the doctors, three doctors, said they just going to put me in a room. But I made it. They said a miracle woman, brain concussion, and dislocated and cracked, and then me, I hit the dashboard so it mashed like a pancake. Ahhh.

SIGRIST: Well, you're here, and you're very much alive. (he

laughs) Mrs. Chaty, I want to thank you very much for coming up here from Trenton and letting us talk to you for an hour-and-a-half about coming to America.

CHATY: Oh, that's . . .

SIGRIST: It's been wonderful.

CHATY: It's wonderful to be here, really, believe me. Only I know. I was there, and I know.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Mary Chaty on Tuesday, September 14, 1993, at the Ellis Island immigration museum recording studio.