

EI-414

MARGO NASH

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE and PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

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TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: DOUGLAS TARR

FIRST ORAL HISTORIAN FOR THE ELLIS ISLAND ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
1973-1975

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Tuesday, November 23, 1993. I'm the director of the Ellis Island Oral History Project and have been so since 1989. With me is Dr. Janet Levine. Janet Levine is our staff oral historian, who has been with us since 1991, and who began as a volunteer in January of 1991. Running the equipment for this interview is Kevin Daley. With us is Margo Nash. Ms. Nash was sort of at the beginning of the Oral History Project. She began the project in August of 1973, and then worked for just about two years after that on the project. Correct?

NASH: Yes, right.

SIGRIST: Anyway, I want to say welcome. This is indeed a treat for us.

NASH: Thank you.

SIGRIST: Can we begin by you giving me your birth date, please?

NASH: I don't do this for everybody. (They laugh.)
11/13/41.

SIGRIST: And where were you born?

NASH: I was born in Manhattan, and I grew up in the Bronx.

SIGRIST: I see. So you're a local, more or less. I guess I'd like to just start a little bit by having you tell us how you got into the National Park Service in the first place.

NASH: (sighs) Well, in 1973 I read a newspaper clipping that the National Park Service at the Statue of Liberty was about to begin an Oral History Project about Ellis Island. And really the reason that that Oral History Project came up was that the American Museum of Immigration at that point was very new. I think it was just opened on Liberty Island in 1972-ish. They were just really getting set up. And so

suddenly they had in this museum, they had people who were concerned with history. And interpreting, you know, the story of immigration. So the then-curator of the, the first curator of the American Museum of Immigration was a man named Edward Kallop who, I think his background was actually art history and he was a Princeton graduate.

SIGRIST: Can you spell Kallop, please?

NASH: K-A-L-L-O-P, junior. And who, coincidentally, his family went back to the same town that Bartholdi came from, which name eludes me at the moment. But, so, he told me the story that, you know, he would be strolling through Liberty Island, and then a visitor would sort of collar him and point over to Ellis Island and say, "Oh, you know, we came through here fifty years ago." And so, I think it was his idea that, gee, wouldn't it be a good idea to get their stories on tape. And, somehow or other, so they made that plan, and I guess they involved a private organization called the American Museum of Immigration, Inc., which was the one that had originally collected funds and the exhibits for the museum, which I think, well, anyway, I don't know if

it's even still in existence at the Statue, or if its stuff was incorporated here at Ellis. But, anyway, so plans were, you know, underway. And somehow or other this little article appeared in *The New York Times*. I, casting around for something to do at the time, saw it, and it just excited me, and I applied. I called up that day. I spoke to him. He was a very nice man. And he said, "Come over for an interview." And between the time I called him and the time of the interview I ran to Columbia University's Oral History Program Department and made myself into an oral historian, and asked them for, you know, different sample interview schedules and whatnot, and I read a little bit about it, and so I had all these materials. And then when I arrived at the interview, I presented myself, you know, as a person who was outfitted to begin immediately, and I was hired. And . . .

SIGRIST: What was, what was Kallop's background in terms of oral history? I mean, was this just an idea that he had, or . . .

NASH: It was just an idea that he had.

SIGRIST: I see. So he had no formal training in it himself.

NASH: No. No, he didn't. So, so he was quite relieved, of course, when I had some, you know, some suggestions about how to proceed. And he had, so he had, in the meantime, accumulated different names of people. I guess they had put out, you know, this thing had been in the paper, and so people had, a lot of people had responded. And, at that time, you know, oral history was not anything anybody knew about. About two years later it became very popular, but at that point, I mean, the idea of, you know, taping people, living people, about history, really was not something that was very much on anybody's mind.

LEVINE: So there were a lot of applicants for the position that you got?

NASH: I don't know. (laughs) I don't think so. I don't think so. I was just very lucky and very swift, and I guess he liked me, and so that was it. And so, you know, and then I went on my first interview.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about what Kallop told you, what he was thinking about the project as opposed to maybe what you were bringing to it?

NASH: Well, I mean, basically what they were thinking about

were people who passed through Ellis Island.

And . . .

SIGRIST: Was there some grand plan in his mind? You know?
What was the goal of all of this?

NASH: Well . . .

SIGRIST: There may not have been a goal.

NASH: I don't think, you know, at that, I think it was modest at that point. And then as we got into it, you know, it became apparent that it could be something like what you're doing. I mean, something on a grand scale. But I don't know that they had the funds for it. I know that they didn't have the funds for it. And, and I think also as things proceeded, it had a life of its own. And within the bureaucracy of the National Park Service, as time went on there was sort of a sense that this was becoming a little mini-empire which had to be squashed. So, that sort of kept things in check. What did I bring? So we were kind of, I guess the idea was just to work in the metropolitan area, and I think what I changed, perhaps, or what evolved was that we start interviewing people who didn't only come through Ellis

Island. So we actually did, you know, a lot of tapes of people like that also, who flew in, who came in, you know, on another coast.

LEVINE: You made that decision to inter . . .

NASH: Yes, with him.

LEVINE: What, do you remember why you made that decision?

NASH: Well, because, you know, we were not so married to Ellis Island as you are. I mean, we were the American Museum of Immigration, so it was about immigration. It didn't have to be strictly about Ellis Island, although, you know, that was very interesting. And, I mean, we realized that, you know, every gem that we found out about Ellis Island was very precious, and as the time went by, you know, interest itself was picking up in Ellis Island, and so we realized that we, you know, whatever we had was very desirable, because people were making TV programs about immigration. They'd want to talk about Ellis Island, or movies, and so they'd come and look for whatever snatches or snippets or films, you know, that the museum had.

SIGRIST: And this is coming out of a long period in American history where being an immigrant was sort of a bad thing. You know, this is the time where it's all beginning to turn around.

NASH: That's exactly right. That's exactly it. Yeah. So it was the time when there was, you know, I mean, in colleges, I guess, there was a new interest in ethnicity, in race relations, and social stratification, and then it went to ethnicity. And I think there's a lot of confusion exactly who is ethnic and what was ethnic. But, anyway, there was, you're absolutely right, at that time, you know, this sort of sense of pride and people starting to, you know, go back into their own histories, so it came right then. But really, just before all the oral history projects started, I think.

LEVINE: When you said the project really developed a life of its own, could you say something more about what was the life that evolved of the project? How did it form itself?

NASH: Well, what I mean is that, I mean, in the, within the structure of the National Park Service and Liberty

Island, you know, and the people who ran it at the time, not so much in the very beginning but afterwards. When I first came in, the superintendent, whose name escapes me, who was there, was kind of a laissez-faire superintendent, and that was not apparently to his credit. And so when he left, or was pushed out, or whatever, or moved upstairs, they were going to read the riot act, and so they brought in somebody else who read the riot act. And so they were kind of trying to, you know, shape up. Now, I don't know if that was strictly at Liberty Island. I mean, maybe that was throughout the entire Park Service. Maybe, you know, it had to do with politics and who knows what. But, and it had probably a lot also to do with the individual style of the next person who came in, Luis Corbello Garcia [A reference to Superintendent Luis E. Garcia-Curbelo]. (laughs) And it became to begin to feel much more like the Pentagon when he came in. And, you know, uniforms had to be just so, and it began to feel sort of paramilitary, I would say. And so, in other words, this part of the island, the American Museum of Immigration, it had sort of connections with the outside world, you know. I was a person who did not wear their uniform, you

know. I mean, it was just out of this man's control, and he didn't like it, in my view.

SIGRIST: Some things never change.

NASH: (She laughs.) So, you know, and there was a lot of interest in what was going on, and that's, I guess that's what I mean. And we had other projects we wanted to do, you know, spinoffs from that, so it had a life of its own.

SIGRIST: Can you talk about your first interview?

NASH: My first interview was in Washington Heights. I wish I could remember the name of the woman.

SIGRIST: I think it's Karlsson, isn't it?

NASH: No.

SIGRIST: Were those the first interviews?

NASH: It wasn't. It wasn't. It wasn't Karlsson. In any case, she was a Russian Jewish lady who, I think she was about eighty-one when I first interviewed her, and, you know, it was sort of uncomfortable and weird going up there because I hadn't, this was my first experience, I mean, interviewing, basically, period.

But, and once I sat down in her living room and turned the tape recorder on, I mean, and she just talked. And, you know, after that I knew, hey, this is going to be wonderful. Not just the interview but, you know, the rest of my time in that project, which at that point I hoped would go on forever. And so she talked about how she got on the last boat leaving from, I don't remember now, Latvia or Lithuania, but some country on the Baltic coast before the First World War, and how all the people were screaming and crying and trying to get on this boat, you know. And I mean, the scene was so, the way she described it was so vivid, you know. And, hey, I was back in, you know, 1913 or '14, whatever it was. And then she told me about how she had this little flirtation on a ship with a, you know, the guy, the young guy who, who ran, the telegraph operator. And she said, "Oh, you know, it was very, it was very sweet. We didn't do anything. We never even kissed, but maybe we held hands." And, and she said that, you know, he told them that they were in danger of being torpedoed, and she said, "Did I need to know that? I didn't want to know that." (She laughs.) Well, anyway, and, you know, she was also, later she told me about how she

was on strike, she was in the garment industry, she was a sewing machine operator, and they paid her nothing. She was a young girl, she should look nice, and they didn't give her enough money so she could wear, you know, nice clothes, and so she went out on strike, and talked about it. And that was a very important strike, the, you know, the garment workers strike at that time. Well, anyway, that was my first interview, and I remember when I left I was dazzled. I, you know, it was like I saw the next decade. I had a vision. Because I didn't know anything about oral history or oral history libraries or anything. I said there should be, you know, I mean, I had this vision.

I said, "These tapes should be in libraries for everybody to see, you know, and there should be books and, you know, and recipes and photos and movies." I mean, I saw it all. Unfortunately I, you know, I wasn't in really a great position. I tried, but I was not in a good position to, you know, bring a lot of those things about.

SIGRIST: Were you running your own equipment? What equipment were you using, and was there someone with you?

NASH: Well, it depended where we did it. Some people came

to the Statue, to the museum, and they had a contract for so many interviews with a company called Acoustiguide which now does all the interviews for museums all over the country, you know, the guided tours. Anyway, they're, so they did some of these interviews. They went with me on some of the interviews. I can't remember how we really decided which ones they did and which ones I did, but they also bought me some equipment, you know, that I had, a microphone and what was then the state of the art, more or less portable, tape recorder, so it was, you know, one or the other.

LEVINE: So while you were doing the interviews, this Acoustiguide people were doing interviews also?

NASH: No, I was the only interviewer.

LEVINE: You were the only interviewer.

NASH: Yeah. But I'll tell you one story. They didn't often go with me. You know, usually I just had my little Sony portable. I can't remember what model it was, but the radio, all the radio reporters of the day, I noticed, would have it, so it was a good one. But one time we went to visit, Isaac Bashevis Singer, and in

his big, fancy apartment on West, on West 86th Street, and this beautiful building, beautiful apartment, and we all went in there, and the Acoustiguide guy, you know, started bringing out all his fancy equipment. And he hooked something on to the furniture, on to the chair where Singer was sitting, and I guess at the end of the interview he took it off and there was a scratch there. Well, Isaac Bashevis Singer just about had a heart attack. He says, "Oh, my wife, my wife is going to be so scared." (She laughs.) You know, it's so funny. Of course, you know, he, I mean, he looks like a, he writes about, he did write about, you know, goblins and demons and, he was very, but on the other hand he was a very bold writer, but it was so funny to see this man quaking at the thought of his wife, you know, seeing this scratch on the . . . So, in other words, this was the time that Acoustiguide came with us, and they screwed up the furniture. (She laughs.)

LEVINE: Did you, did you seek out famous people who had come?

NASH: I did. I did. But I didn't only, I mean, some of them, you know. But I sought out every, you know, lots of people, and lots of people sought us out. I

mean, I put, tried to put articles in different ethnic presses. I think we did have some, oh, I was on, I went on television, you know, on some spot on Channel 5 asking people, you know, to contact. It's a wonder thousands of people didn't contact us with all the publicity we did. But, yes, I also looked for some famous people.

LEVINE: Who else was famous who you spoke with?

NASH: Well, we did Svetlana Alliluyeva, [Joseph] Stalin's daughter, somebody named Andre Lutece who was the owner, sorry, Andre Soltner, who, I think until recently was the chef and owner of Lutece Restaurant, French restaurant, Otto Preminger, Isaac Bashevis Singer. A man named Potofsky, Jacob Potofsky, who was, one of the founders of the International Ladies Garment Workers Union. [Jacob Potofsky was in fact a former president of the Amalgamated Clothing Workers of America, not a founder of the ILGWU.]

SIGRIST: [Leo] Tolstoy's daughter even.

NASH: Tolstoy's daughter [Alexandra], yes. And I kept recording, even when I went to the bathroom I had my tape recorder, (laughs) and I forgot to turn it off

inside, there for all the world to see, hear. And, to tell you the truth I can't remember. Well, we did somebody who was a [New York] state assemblyman. His name is Michael Pesce, at the time. I don't know, maybe you know better than I, some of the other people I did, but I, I can't remember.

SIGRIST: How many interviews did you do altogether, do you think?

NASH: Well, I think I did about a hundred and twenty-five, something like that. Maybe, but some of them, I tell you, some of them were doubles. I don't know why, maybe some of them, they wanted to get on the better recording equipment. I counted that many. I want to say between a hundred and twenty, a hundred and twenty-five.

SIGRIST: Are there certain interviews that stick out in your mind for one reason or another?

NASH: Oh, there are lots of them. Oh, I want to say also I interviewed Pauline Trigere, but she, the fashion designer, but she kind of, when she saw the transcript she became so horrified by what she said that she denied that she said everything, and I think she

wanted her tape back. I mean, we never changed a word, but she couldn't stand reading her own words. Are there certain interviews that stand out in my mind?

SIGRIST: Maybe difficult ones, since you just brought up a difficult interview, you know, did you ever have trouble with people getting upset by what you were asking them, or they wouldn't sign a release form? Because I know many of these interviews don't have release forms. Something that may stick out in your mind.

NASH: I think they got lost. I don't know why they don't have them. Difficult? No. I, I don't, I can't say that, I mean, off the top of my head. Because the people that I would speak to basically were people, you know, who were volunteering and were very anxious to do it. I mean, I can remember touchy moments. Sometimes I felt people said too much for their own good. I mean, there was a woman who was talking about a plot to kill a Latin American dictator or something like that, and I thought, "Are you really sure you want to talk about this?" "No, no, no, no, that's perfectly all right." You know, I mean, people just

had this vision about the Statue of Liberty as being this saint and this was like, you know, the holy temple, and that they, nobody was ever going to, you know, everything was going to be all right. I mean, they were sort of in this state of, you know, euphoria, describing their immigration experience and so happy to, you know, their life stories and everything, that they kind of, you know, I think, lost their judgment sometimes. So I can't think of any really. Well, Stalin's daughter was a very, she's a very tortured person, and words didn't come easily to her. So I found it sort of, and there were a lot of things that she didn't want to describe, you know, all the things she had written about. You know, so in other words, there was nothing much left to talk about. And so I wound up, you know, like talking about, you know, what was it like to have her raise a daughter in America or, you know, American food. I mean, really, if anybody listened to the tape, they'd think I was asinine for asking these things, but everything else, she had written three books already and she told me I couldn't talk about any of that stuff, you know. So, but the funny story about her was I interviewed somebody else who had been in a

prison, who had been in a prison during the Second World War. He was, I don't know, from some eastern European country. He had been a politician and he was a political prisoner, in a Russian camp. And he claimed on tape that Stalin's son, her brother, had been in that same camp, and somehow he knew that Stalin had ordered this son killed, you know, which as we all know is perfectly possible given, you know, his paranoia. And so, and it was not well-known, I think, whatever happened. It was sort of a mystery about what happened to this son. And, you know, here was this man telling me, "I know, Stalin killed the son."

So when I met, when I interviewed Stalin's daughter I was like, you know, I was listening to her, and as, and I had forgotten that, and then I remembered, "Oh, boy, I remember, you know." You know, I thought, "Oh, boy, I know who killed your, you know, your brother."

And then I thought, "Oh, I can't tell her that, you know. Hey, I know who killed your brother: Your father!" (They laugh.) So I decided I wouldn't tell her that. It just didn't seem like, you know, good judgment. You know, people cried. That was awkward, you know. I mean, not really, but just sad and awkward.

SIGRIST: Did you go to nursing homes at all?

NASH: I think I went to a few.

SIGRIST: Do you remember anything specific about interviewing in a nursing home, because it's a whole different ballgame, of course?

NASH: Right. Well, I went, yeah. I went to see one woman who was Swedish. She had diabetes. Her leg was on the verge of being amputated. It was depressing. It was kind of sad and a mess, you know. And she wasn't all that coherent. But one line she said always comes back to me. It comes back to me at odd moments, you know, and she was talking about her ex-husband, who had just walked out on her, and she said, "He was cranky, very, very cranky. He didn't want to have a, he didn't want to have a wife." And so sometimes, whenever, well, anyway, those words come back to me. (They laugh.) Well, going, the thing about going to nursing homes or, say, senior centers, something like that, I remember, well, it would be this big production and they'd have everybody out there and be a circle of people, and then this one would chime in, and this one would chime in, and it was kind of, like,

got out of control, and it was kind of a mess when you listened to it. And I mean, there were some people who were on the verge of senility, if not, you know, already in the full throes of it, who I interviewed. And there was one man who had actually worked on the Panama Canal, and who was in his nineties, and he really didn't, he really wasn't terribly coherent. But the one thing he remembered about the Panama Canal was that he got his, he got his pension. He fought, he was still, I think he had to fight for it. You know, it took him, like, fifty years to get it, and it was small, but he was still living on it in his nineties. And, and also he remembered the sound of his feet in the mud of, you know, in the building. He kept saying, "Squish, squish, squish." You know, that was, that stayed with him.

SIGRIST: You know, this brings up an interesting question. I don't know if you're thinking along this line too, Janet, but the interview, was the gist of the interview to record the immigration experience, or to record actually the whole life in one way or another?

NASH: It got to be that, it got to be that. And maybe it got a little out of hand in that way because, you

know, we did seem to get, in a lot of cases, a lot of sort of trivial stuff. I mean, but then again, I mean, these people were, it was hard because, you know, the people themselves felt they were speaking for posterity, not to mention their own posterity, you know, their own grandchildren and whatnot. And they would, so that they would kind of think of it, many of them, as their own life story, so you kind of wanted to go along with them, and if they're, you know, were willing to do this for you, why not allow it. And also, I mean, I had a sociological background, and I thought that really was, in a sense, part of that experience, you know. It became of them what social class, what type of occupation, you know, where they, what neighborhood. That was all an extension of that.

LEVINE: Did you have some kind of a structure that you always tried to cover in the interviews?

NASH: Well, insofar as the acts, which you've mentioned already, the immigration experience, you know, what was the ship, you know, what was the boat like, where did you arrive, who called for you, the money, the medical, the Ellis Island, you know, how did you get

your visa, and that. But after that they were off kind of. I'm not sure I did a great job. (She laughs.) I mean, sometimes I'm embarrassed when I think of, it kind of, you know, got a little out of hand sometimes, but . . .

SIGRIST: Well, I imagine with you as with us, every interview is different. Every time you sit down in some, in front of someone, it's a whole different kind of experience. So you fly by the seat of your pants every time you sit down to do an interview.

LEVINE: And always to go with a good story is kind of what you're about.

NASH: Exactly.

SIGRIST: We're going to pause just for a moment, and Kevin is going to flip the tape, and then we're going to ask you some more questions.

NASH: Goody.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: I'm speaking with Margo Nash. Why don't you say,

Margo, the dimensions of the project for the period of time that you were involved in it. When you started out, you were the sole interviewer, and how did it develop?

NASH: Well, I was basically the sole interviewer, and basically the person who looked for the people. But just to give it a context, I was very much under the direction of Edward Kallop, who also reported not only to the National Park Service, but also to this little outfit that may or may not still be located in the basement of Federal Hall, American Museum of Immigration, Inc. That "Inc" is very important. And the, there was another person called Paul Weinbaum, who worked in the museum, who eventually took over. He was Ed's assistant, and he was also very New York bred and born sort of person who was, got his PhD in history, I think, at City College. And was hired by Ed and, so he was involved in the exhibits, in the special exhibits. But we all chewed the fat, kind of, about, you know, people we might like to interview, or as far as the Oral History Project goes, I was basically it. But, I mean, I didn't feel that independent. I just want to sort of create a picture

that we had this cozy little spot in the Statue of Liberty. You know, for a good while when I was there in the offices of the American Museum of Immigration, which basically were a couple of little rooms and a long office which held some, you know, the photo collection and the various treasures tucked away in the cabinet. It was a, it was a nice little world of its own. And we also had, we had these people who were sort of devoted to the Statue of Liberty, I mean, virtually worshipped it, you know, who would sort of come there with gifts for the, you know, I mean, they had been getting more things for the exhibits than they could possibly handle. I mean, I don't want to dwell on that, but that was, you know, that was my, my work area from which I, where I reported back to, from my various travels.

LEVINE: And you said there were other activities that were connected with the interviews that you were engaged in?

NASH: Well, after we, you know, had assembled, you know, a fair amount of interviews, like I said, I had had these different, you know, visions in a sense that, you know, what could be done. I mean, well, we had a

film, we had a film series. I did, well, you know, it's sort of hard to tie that in exactly with the, the Oral History Project. We, one thing we did, we sort of wanted to build this little community of the people that we had interviewed, you know, the idea that they were all from different, you know, places, although most of them were Jewish. (She laughs.) No, there were a lot, there were many nationalities, but it always seemed whenever I would go out to interview somebody and I'd think they were Scottish, they were really Jewish. And, you know, if they were in the Dominican Republic, that's because they came from Germany and they were Jewish. And all the Jews were really in New York. Anyway, that tends to be the case. But, anyway, there were people, a lot of different nationalities. And, you know, that same impulse, that impulse of, you know, what we're saying of recognizing, you know, different, the value of immigration and ethnicity and all of that, we would sort of build them into a little community, and we actually had a, you know, a reception where all these people came, and had various speakers, so that was something, we did newsletters to keep people informed about the collections.

SIGRIST: So you tried to maintain a kind of personal contact with the interviewees.

NASH: Absolutely. Yeah. And, of course, they were elderly, too. And, you know, some of them, I mean, I personally developed significant friendships with a few of the older women, you know, who I interviewed. One in particular, who was a Czechoslovakian woman, who, you know, she told a very touching story. But, anyway, she became herself a little, sort of a correspondent for this Czech newspaper in Texas written in Czech, because that's where a lot of people, Czech people, went. And so she would write about her, she would write about me and what I was doing, in her, you know, column.

SIGRIST: There are significant parallels, actually. I have to say this for the sake of the tape, between what Janet and I do now and the way that the project, even though it's on a, you know, a bigger scale, significant parallels with how you ran the project. And the two that stick out in my mind are actually what we've just talked about. One is this kind of inter-personal relationship connection kind of stuff between us and

the interviewees. We maintain this, I mean, we send out Christmas cards to every one, and do all that sort of thing. The other thing that strikes me is the fact that just as we do now you sort of operated in your own little world. I mean, you were part of the National Park Service, the Statue of Liberty, but the Oral History Project was its own entity, it had its own life and, in a funny way, you were buffered, it seems, against what was going on around you. You operated in a little bubble, sort of, and we do that very much here. We are certainly our own little world, and treated that way, I think, by the staff and by the administration. You, of course, said later that maybe the bubble burst a little bit, and the Park Service, wanted more power in what you were doing. But those are the two parallels that really stick out in my mind. It's amazing how similar, between the two. Can I ask you about when you started interviewing people who worked here at Ellis Island?

NASH: Well, soon after, you know, just as people turned up. I didn't interview a whole lot of people, but a captain, I think I interviewed a captain, different, somebody who was a social worker, somebody who was

interned here. (She laughs.) I mean, there were one or two of those, you know.

SIGRIST: Was that a group of people that you actively sought out, the workers, or not so much?

NASH: Not so much. I think, I think they more, somehow, we didn't, I didn't seek them out, but I think others somehow knew about them and, so, I would interview them. But it was obviously an important thing, you know. It would have been good to do more.

SIGRIST: Well, the reason I ask is because in that set of interviews, because I sort of lump all the interviews that you started with, but all the way till about 1980 as one set. There is a huge amount later on after your time of people who worked here. And I'm not sure exactly when they were done. I would say between '77 and 1980, somewhere.

NASH: I know that, yeah.

SIGRIST: And, and that's, that's great for us, because in other words we don't find that many people who worked here, and the ones that we do almost always worked here in the later years.

NASH: Yeah.

SIGRIST: In the '30s, '40s, and '50s. But in that set of interviews there are people who were matrons here in 1910. I mean, you actually go back to the peak years. And I was just wondering if that was always one of the focuses of the project, or if it was just kind of a by-product.

NASH: It was a by-product in my, when I was there, but I think it became more of a focus when I left.

LEVINE: You said you advertised for people. How did you get them? Did you actually find people who came to visit the Statue of Liberty, and they just mentioned that they had come through, and you interviewed them, or . . .

NASH: It would happen sometimes, but, I would say that, I mean, that happened before I got there that, you know, Mr. Kallop, Ed Kallop, I mean, would meet them. And also what happened was that the Museum of Immigration was sort of opening, in '70, late '72, and so he was sort of squiring around a lot of people who had donated things to the museum and, you know, doing a lot of public relations. And so as he was doing that,

you know, these things would come up, and he was starting to accrue, you know, names. So I personally didn't have that experience so much. I mean, I sought people out in other ways. I think I said, you know, through newspapers, and once I went on television. I think I said that already, right? Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you find that people that you interviewed actually wanted to display other talents that they had, like they wanted to sing on tape or recite a poem in their native language on tape, or . . .

NASH: Yes.

SIGRIST: Or do something that couldn't be recorded, dance, maybe?

NASH: I, yes. I'm not, I'm not a hundred percent sure, you know, I think it was mutual, you know. I don't know, maybe sometimes they were a little reluctant, or maybe they weren't so reluctant that they let me know. But, yes, there were people who I had, you know, an opera singer who had met Charlie Opie [ph], and I think maybe he sang "The Song of the Volga Boatman," I don't know, on the tape. And then this lady who played spoons, you know. And I loved that, you know. Yeah.

People . . .

LEVINE: There's another parallel. (She laughs.)

NASH: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: And I wanted to ask you a question about the release forms. Now, all of our interviewees sign a release form that makes the material in the interviews, and I should go on tape saying that the interviews are not edited in any way, that what is recorded is recorded and not doctored with, everyone signs a release form that makes this the property of the National Park Service and, therefore, the property of the American people. And we generally have no problem with people signing release forms, and I wanted to ask you if that was also something right from the beginning, if people had to sign release forms right from the very beginning, and maybe experiences you had with the release form and getting people to sign the release form, maybe writing up the release form initially.

NASH: Well, like I said, I went to Columbia (She laughs.) Oral History Library, and, I mean, my, you know, my memory is fuzzy about the release form, except that I, I think I sort of used that as a model. So we had a

release form and we were very well aware that we needed, that was a big item, and where these release forms went that you can't, you know, I really don't know. And yes, people, uh, generally quite happy to sign them. And even sometimes would add in little notations, I mean, like Stalin's daughter wrote in something that this was never to be, I don't know what, something, you know. And there was something else I wanted to say. But the part about the American people that you mentioned, you said we had a release that this is the property of the National Park Service, and therefore the American people. We didn't hear about that part. (She laughs.) I mean, it was the property of the National Park Service. I didn't know that they were exactly synonymous with the American people. I'm still interested to know if I'm interested in getting copies of the transcripts if it will be, if I'm an American person, but . . . (She laughs.)

SIGRIST: And you'll get to read our release form, because you'll have to sign one at the end of the interview. (They laugh.) Do you have a question, Janet? No? I wanted to ask you about the uniform, the National Park

Service uniform, and if you had to wear it. You talked a little bit about this initially. I just wanted you to maybe elaborate a little more.

NASH: Well, when I started there was no talk of my wearing the uniform. I mean, in fact, my job was not to be on, you know, not to be at Liberty Island, which is where I was, of course, not Ellis Island. I was off the island much of the time and it was never mentioned that I should wear a uniform. And then when Superintendent [Luis E.] Garcia[-Curbelo] arrived I, he wanted to know why I wasn't wearing the uniform. And I don't know how I got out of it, you know, and I don't know if he pressed me for it, you know, to do it. But I know that I was definitely looked on askance because I was not wearing the uniform, and then later on I heard that, well, perhaps I wasn't fit to wear the uniform because I was (She laughs.) I wasn't the right frame of mind or mindset or obedience or loyalty or what have you. But all things, regimes change and anyway, that's the end of that story.

SIGRIST: Did you find that because the Oral History Project, i.e., yourself, sort of, you weren't at Liberty Island a lot, and I'm sure when you were you were in your

office busy doing things, and at least here there's a certain mystery about what Janet and I actually do. Did you find that amongst your peers at the Statue of Liberty that you were treated in a certain way or that they perceived what you did as maybe less important than what they were doing?

NASH: No.

SIGRIST: Or anything like that?

NASH: No. It was a much friendlier atmosphere, and it was a smaller place. And we all, I don't know about you, but we all took the boat together. And the thing was that the life of that place had more to do with the workings, the daily workings of, because there was an exhibit area, and there were maintenance men who serviced it, and there was a lot of interaction, so, no. In fact, I helped, I was the union representative at Liberty Island for a time. Maybe that contributed to why I wasn't fit to wear the uniform. I forgot about that. But, so I was very much involved with the workmen and, you know, in fact, I went back there a few years ago, and it was very touching, you know, and all these guys who, you know, some of the guys were

still there years later. And they said, "Hey, Margo's back!" You know, so it was, I felt very close to some of the people.

LEVINE: What was the circumstance under which you stopped doing the interviews?

NASH: Well, they decided, I mean, I was hired on a line. You know, I was a federal civil service temporary employee, and I think that they just tired of having, you know, a slot for a full time person doing that, and I guess it was just appropriated, you know, on a, just, you know, on a different basis to people to do interviews, but not on a full time basis. So I didn't want to stop. (She laughs.)

LEVINE: How do you think about it now when you think back, that period when you were doing them?

NASH: Oh, it was a very rich, exciting time in my life. You know, it was a very powerful sense to work for the Statue of Liberty. I do it, too, you know. I mean, sort of make it into an icon, but at the Statue of Liberty, and you would pick up the telephone and call people and say, you know, "I'm from the Statue of Liberty, and I want to interview." And, you know, it

was like you were from the Vatican or something, you know. And they were just, except for Einstein's daughter. (She laughs.) She wasn't impressed. That's the one that got away. We really wanted to do Einstein's daughter. So it was, you know, and I, I was very fond of Ed Kallop and we were very close in there. We had a lot of fun, really a lot of fun. So it was a wonderful time in my life. And it set me on another path, for good or ill, of writing, you know. Because when I got done with it I said, "Hey, are we interviewing? This is fabulous. I love to interview." And, you know, then when I had to leave I, I said, "Oh, I'll go to a radio station. I'll be an interviewer." You know, but it's not so simple, you know. So that sort of made me realize I was interested in journalism. And from there I went to journalism school, and had other, you know, experiences as a writer and so forth, in journalism.

LEVINE: Do you ever draw on that material at this point in your life, or did you in the intervening years?

NASH: No, no, I didn't, and I'm thinking about that now. I'm thinking about that now because obviously, you know, as some of these people, especially people well

known, die, you know, like they had an Otto Preminger film series recently, and I thought, "Hmm, you know, that would have, I wonder if anybody has the kind of material that I got from him?" And, you know, I see a lot, and Tolstoy's daughter is dead, you know. I just, you know, and even the times, because it was done in the seventies, and, I mean, here we are in the nineties, it depicts a different time in the country and the city. So it has an, in addition to just the content, it has a, you know, a historical value of another type. So I, I'm very interested in doing that now.

SIGRIST: Any other questions? No? Well, I guess that's a good place to end, I think. Margo, thank you very much. You've been most enlightening, and great information. I love the story about Singer's chair getting scratched. (They laugh.) But you've been very helpful. You've really filled in some gaps, because we really didn't know how all of this started, and just kind of made up our own history, in a way, and I'm very pleased to see that a lot of what we made up was actually true. So, anyway, I want to thank you, and . . .

LEVINE: And I want to thank you. (They laugh.)

NASH: My pleasure.

SIGRIST: And this is Paul Sigrist signing off with Janet Levine and Margo Nash on November 23, Tuesday, 1993. Thanks.