

EI-426

IRMA WILLISHITZS SCHMIDT

BIRTHDATE: DECEMBER 11, 1895

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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: JOHN MURIELLO, 3/1996

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HUNGARY, 1910

AGE 14

PASSAGE ON "THE CLEVELAND"

PORT OF EMBARCATION NOT RECALLED

RESIDENCES: BUDAPEST, KLEINBETTERSODRF
COLLEGE POINT, NY

LEVINE: It is, let's see, the 17th, February 17th, 1994. I 'm here with
Irma Schmidt. And I'm in Barefoot Bay, Florida. Mrs. Schmidt came
from Hungary when she was fourteen years old...

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...in 1910.

SCHMIDT: '10.

LEVINE: And you were fourteen, and today you're ninety-eight.

SCHMIDT: Yeah, I was ninety-eight.

LEVINE: You, you're already ninety-eight. Wonderful. (they laugh) And you look wonderful, and I, I'm very happy to be here. So let's start if you would tell me your birth date and where you were born.

SCHMIDT: 1895. 1895 in Budapest.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And it was December, your birthday?

SCHMIDT: December the 11th.

LEVINE: And did you live in Budapest the whole time...

SCHMIDT: No, not the whole time. First I...

LEVINE: How long?

SCHMIDT: ...when my mother came here I stayed with my grandma. That was in Kleinbattersdorf [PH], a little town.

LEVINE: Okay.

SCHMIDT: Then when my grandma died, my aunt und [sic] uncle took me to them.

LEVINE: I see. Now, when your mother came here how old were you?

SCHMIDT: I think about three. Three years.

LEVINE: Ah-hah. So did you remember your mother...

SCHMIDT: No.

LEVINE: ...before you joined her here?

SCHMIDT: No.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: Till I came when I was fourteen...

LEVINE: Yeah.

SCHMIDT: ...I was stranger to her. Und she to me.

LEVINE: Yeah. Okay...

SCHMIDT: My aunt was my mother, you know.

LEVINE: Well, now you stayed with your grandmother from the time you were three?

SCHMIDT: No, five.

LEVINE: Five.

SCHMIDT: Then I, then she died.

LEVINE: I see. So, oh, I see. Your mother left when you were three.

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: You went to your grandmother. And what was your grandmother's name?

SCHMIDT: Oh, I don't know.

LEVINE: Yeah, okay. Do you remember your grandmother at that time?

SCHMIDT: No, no.

LEVINE: No.

SCHMIDT: I know she was an older woman.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything you did with her, or do you remember where you lived...

SCHMIDT: I was the boss. Little kids, when I. she laughs

LEVINE: Were you an only child?

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember your grandfather?

SCHMIDT: No. No.

LEVINE: So you really, you memories more or less start from the time you moved in with your aunt?

SCHMIDT: Yeah. Oh, she took me so she loved me.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And that's when you moved to Kleinbett, bettersdorf?

SCHMIDT: Yeah. Then after many years, when I was with my aunt and uncle, the one what brought me over, and she says now I should go to my

other aunt and start to learn German before she lets me come to America.

LEVINE: I see. Okay, well now, what was your aunt's name? The one that you went to live with after your grandmother died?

SCHMIDT: Ilona [PH].

LEVINE: Ilona. And did, was your uncle there, too?

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: And what was his name?

SCHMIDT: Joseph.

LEVINE: Joseph. And what was their last name?

SCHMIDT: Willishitzs.

LEVINE: Willishitzs. And that was your maiden name?

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay, so that was your father's...

SCHMIDT: I don't know my father.

LEVINE: You, oh, you don't know your father?

SCHMIDT: No.

LEVINE: Okay. Okay. So, was Willishitzs your mother's last name?

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: It was your father's last name...

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...and your mother's last name? Okay.

SCHMIDT: And then later our mother remarried.

LEVINE: Okay.

SCHMIDT: When I came over here, then I have a step father. A mean little devil. (they laugh)

LEVINE: Now tell me about Ilona, your aunt.

SCHMIDT: Oh, she was wonderful.

LEVINE: What do you remember about her?

SCHMIDT: Oh, she loved me till she died.

LEVINE: When did she die?

SCHMIDT: Oh, what year was it?

LEVINE: How old were you? Do you remember just roughly?

SCHMIDT: No. I was old already. I had six children already.

LEVINE: Oh, it was after you came here?

SCHMIDT: Oh, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. So, Ilona, tell me, describe her to me.

SCHMIDT: Oh, she was wonderful. She was my aunt, but she was like a mother.

She loved me.

LEVINE: And, and do you remember things that you did with her, that you remember?

SCHMIDT: Well, when I came over I had, my step father said now she has to go to work.

LEVINE: Ah. But when you were still back in Hungary, do you remember, do you remember the house you lived in...

SCHMIDT: No.

LEVINE: ...with your Aunt Ilona?

SCHMIDT: No.

LEVINE: No. Do you remember, did you go to school there at all?

SCHMIDT: No.

LEVINE: Okay.

SCHMIDT: That I don't remember.

LEVINE: And...

SCHMIDT: In Kleinbetersdorf I went to school.

LEVINE: What do you remember about school.

SCHMIDT: Oh, we had a mean teacher. A man teacher.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: He walked between the aisle, his hand in the back with a strap. Quick, he turned around, he picked children, make sometime like that. (she gestures) Und then he made us go out there und kneel down, or we got it with the stick. (she raps with her hand)

LEVINE: Ah-hah.

SCHMIDT: That wasn't like now the, the teachers. Now you can't hit the child.

LEVINE: Did you...

SCHMIDT: But we got it.

LEVINE: she laughs Did you have the same teacher the whole time?

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Did you have a best friend when you were a little girl?

SCHMIDT: I forgot them. Little girls, boyfriend.

LEVINE: Do you remember games that you played when you were little?

SCHMIDT: No, we was outside in the field und playing ball, throwing the ball up in the roof and down.

LEVINE: Do you remember Hungarian food that your aunt made?

SCHMIDT: No.

LEVINE: Anything you liked in particular?

SCHMIDT: No. My aunt used to make a lot of Hungarian food. A lot of noodles und olives. And stew. Chicken goulash. Wonderful.

LEVINE: How about bread? Do you remember the bread that you had...

SCHMIDT: They had a lot of raisin bread. Yeah.

LEVINE: And did you have any chores when you were little?

SCHMIDT: No.

LEVINE: Did you have to do any kind of work, or...

SCHMIDT: No. No. Only for my aunt where I learned German, there they had a little sicklish [sic] little boy, I always had to hold him.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: And Uncle said, "Don't you dare put him down." Und I was only what, thirteen, fourteen. He was mean.

LEVINE: Was it, was it a baby, the little boy?

SCHMIDT: Yeah, but he was sicklish. He was maybe two years. He had some kind of disease. Then he died when I came over here.

LEVINE: How about religion? Was your family religious at all over there?

SCHMIDT: Catholic, yeah. We had to go to church.

LEVINE: Did you go on Sunday, or did you, did you...

SCHMIDT: Sunday, yeah.

LEVINE: ...did your aunt go other times, too?

SCHMIDT: No. Every Sunday we had to go. We had to walk up to Grossbetersdorf [PH]. That was the next town. That was bigger than Kleinbetersdorf.

LEVINE: Right. And, and so, how did you get around in the town. Did you mostly walk?

SCHMIDT: Walk. Walk. Yeah. When we had to go to Grossbetersdorf to church early in the morning, we had to walk. Far.

LEVINE: And how about, what did people do for work in the town, do you remember?

SCHMIDT: They had their farms, you know. Und cows, und pigs und chicken.

LEVINE: And do you remember any of the, of the, either taking care of the

animals, or any of...

SCHMIDT: No. No, my aunt didn't have nothing.

LEVINE: Oh, she didn't have animals?

SCHMIDT: No.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And how about your uncle? Do you remember what he did?

SCHMIDT: Another uncle what brought me here, he came back to America. He was a shoemaker.

LEVINE: Do you remember the clothing you were wore when you were over...

SCHMIDT: Oh, plain. Plain. Long skirts.

LEVINE: And how about shoes.

SCHMIDT: In summer we was barefooted [sic]. she laughs

LEVINE: Do you...

SCHMIDT: Und in winter we was glad when summer came, that we could take the

shoe off.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And, and did you, let's see. When you, when it was summer, did, what was it like where you lived? Was it mountains or where there, was there water...

SCHMIDT: Yes. The next town was hill up. Und when, on 1st of November when it's like here it's, when they go to the cemetery, there they fix up the graves so beautiful all around, und candle. Und you could see the light from the next town, because that was little hill up. Und we had to go at night to the cemetery and light the candle. You know that time the graves were stiffer then. They was high up and beautiful fixed up. Und burn candle.

LEVINE: Was it like a gravestone, out of stone?

SCHMIDT: No, no. It was just a mountain. Like this one, high. You know, years ago here, too, the graves was like that.

LEVINE: I see.

SCHMIDT: Now it's flat.

LEVINE: I see. So it was raise up, and you put the candles on...

SCHMIDT: Yeah, three candles. Und when we went home, because it was cold we got nice hot chocolate.

LEVINE: And so that was a real celebration, a real holiday that day.

SCHMIDT: Yeah, yeah. I think it was 1st of November. Here it's in May.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: Where they celebrate...

LEVINE: Memorial Day?

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. How about other celebrations? Do you remember any other kinds of events...

SCHMIDT: In May they have the Maypole, you know. When there was a fellow what loved the girl, they put up a Maypole. Und then the kids went around. Und in winter they did the feather. You know, the whole town, the women get together. Today they're here, tomorrow there. Und they put them white feathers from the goose around the table,

and all the women from the town came and took that off, you know.

LEVINE: Took the feathers off of the part that the...

SCHMIDT: Yeah. Und the stem, they put that down here. (she indicates) Und the fellows what loved the girl in town, they picked it up und threw it in her house. (they laugh) They made out, that's the girl I love

LEVINE: Well, did you have boyfriends before you came...

SCHMIDT: No.

LEVINE: ...from your town?

SCHMIDT: No.

LEVINE: You were fourteen, but...

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: now, so tell me now, you stayed with your aunt and uncle until about a year before...

SCHMIDT: No, about two. Then my mother wanted me to go to my other aunt to learn German.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So now where was your other aunt? Where was she? Where did she lived?

SCHMIDT: Well, she lived in, still in Budapest.

LEVINE: Oh.

SCHMIDT: Tell them, they came und got me und came to America.

LEVINE: I see. So what was this aunt's name, the one where you learned German? What was her name?

SCHMIDT: I don't know. She is dead now long ago. They wasn't so nice to me.

LEVINE: No?

SCHMIDT: One time my mother wrote them a letter because the neighbors wrote her that I don't get treated so nice. Mostly him. Her husband and she. When they wrote her the letter my mother wrote back. She says, I don't pay for Irma that you should treat her bad. Yeah.

LEVINE: So did, do you remember your life with this aunt? Do you remember, you went to school then to learn German?

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: And what was that like?

SCHMIDT: All right.

LEVINE: Were there a lot of other...

SCHMIDT: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: ...young people in the school?

SCHMIDT: Just one school for the whole town. And all the classes was in, first grade, second grade, all in one room.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And then what, you learned German in one of the classes, or they spoke German?

SCHMIDT: Well, they, it's a Hungarian place but they talked all German.

LEVINE: Ah.

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now what your mother's idea that you would, that you should learn German before you came to America?

SCHMIDT: Well, because she thought here in America it's better German than Hungarian, you know. She wanted me to learn both Hungarian and German.

LEVINE: Did your mother know German?

SCHMIDT: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, did you write to your mother back and forth?

SCHMIDT: Yeah, I little bit. My aunt always wrote mostly. They was afraid I maybe write something, but the neighbors did. she laughs

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: Und you know, my mother bought, paid, bought for me for my aunt, but they wasn't too nice. Not like my other aunt.

LEVINE: After being, after being pampered and spoiled by your other aunt,
then you went...

SCHMIDT: she laughs Yeah.

LEVINE: ...to another place. It must have been hard for you.

SCHMIDT: My other aunt what brought me here, and my uncle, she was good to
me, she loved me like her, if I would be her child.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SCHMIDT: I think Mother must have been a little jealous. Well, see, I know
her better than my own mother.

LEVINE: Yeah. Yeah.

SCHMIDT: Und when I came here her husband wasn't too nice.

LEVINE: I see.

SCHMIDT: I was only fourteen. Then he says, now she is here. Now she has
to go to work and pay the, the thing back. I think it was sixty

dollar.

LEVINE: For the, for the passage?

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: For the trip.

SCHMIDT: It was sixty dollar. That I remember.

LEVINE: Now do you remember why you came to this country when you did?

SCHMIDT: Well, Mother wanted me then.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And do you remember what you knew about America before you came?

SCHMIDT: No. No. They always says, all the, the sidewalks are thing with gold. (they laugh) You know.

LEVINE: And did you believe that?

SCHMIDT: I did, you know. You know, in town, they're not so smart then. Now the children are.

LEVINE: Yeah. So, so do you remember leaving to come to America?

SCHMIDT: A little bit. I remember a lot of train, thing. Und there was a lot of water where we, when we came here before we went to the ship, you know. Must have been far from Kleinbettersdorf where the ship was.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: That was Cleveland.

LEVINE: Cleveland.

SCHMIDT: That I remember.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you packed? What you brought with you?

SCHMIDT: No. No. They did that for me.

LEVINE: Were you tra, who were you travelling with?

SCHMIDT: My aunt and uncle.

LEVINE: The aunt and uncle that you stayed with when you learned the German?

SCHMIDT: No.

LEVINE: A different one.

SCHMIDT: No. The, yeah, my good one. she laughs

LEVINE: Oh, your good one. Oh, good. Oh, you must have been happy then.

SCHMIDT: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: Because she took me when my grandmother died, and I was her eye apple. (they laugh) They didn't have no children, you know, so all her, their love went to me.

LEVINE: I see. And this is your Aunt Ilona?

SCHMIDT: Ilona, yeah. She died long ago.

LEVINE: Okay. So you went probably by train, and, and you, and you went

on, the ship was The Cleveland.

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: You're not sure where that ship started out from?

SCHMIDT: No. That I don't remember. No.

LEVINE: Do you remember about the voyage? What was the voyage like?

SCHMIDT: I think it took us ten day to come from there to America. It was a long ride.

LEVINE: Yeah. Did you have to have examinations before you left? Do you remember that?

SCHMIDT: That I don't remember. No. I don't think so.

LEVINE: And what was The Cleveland like? What was...

SCHMIDT: It was nice. Yeah. I think we must have went in third class.

LEVINE: You had a little cabin?

SCHMIDT: With Uncle und Aunt und me. It was a small little room. I remember the sink where we washed ourself. But the beds I don't remember. We was only the three in, Uncle, Aunt und me.

LEVINE: I see. And then do you remember when the ship came into New York?

SCHMIDT: No. Because then I think they took us on another ship and took us to Ellis Island.

LEVINE: That's right. Yeah.

SCHMIDT: Und they went so fast. Und Ellis Island I remember was a big, big empty thing. Nothing around. Und then we rushed for the, the bus or what, to go to College Point to my mother.

LEVINE: So do you remember being examined at Ellis Island?

SCHMIDT: What I make?

LEVINE: Examined by the doctor?

SCHMIDT: No, that I don't remember. No.

LEVINE: No?

SCHMIDT: No, because everything...

LEVINE: You, it was, it happened very quickly?

SCHMIDT: Yeah. Nothing around. Not like now. Oh, my God. And, you know, on Ellis Island all the thing was up, not 1910. We went around from room to room to look where they show things.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. It wasn't like that?

SCHMIDT: No. I mean, now we never seen 1910. It was '11 there and '12, where they show people in Ellis Island. I don't know what happened to the '10. (they laugh)

LEVINE: Well, so in other words, that just happened very fast...

SCHMIDT: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: ...in your memory of Ellis Island. So then did anybody meet you at Ellis Island?

SCHMIDT: No. Aunt und Uncle, because he was here once in America, too. He was working here. Then after which came, brought me and his wife,

my aunt, here.

LEVINE: I see. And then you took, to get to College Point, New York, you took something. A train...

SCHMIDT: A bus.

LEVINE: ...or a bus.

SCHMIDT: A bus. Yeah.

LEVINE: A bus. Okay. And then, what was it like to see your mother?

SCHMIDT: I was shy. Und she wasn't the, the loving kind, you know. She was like my daughter.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So she wasn't demonstrative, or...

SCHMIDT: No.

LEVINE: ...unintelligible affectionate. Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: No.

LEVINE: And what was your mother's first name?

SCHMIDT: Louise.

LEVINE: Louise. And so was your mother married when you got there?
Remarried?

SCHMIDT: Yeah. Step father.

LEVINE: And, remember his name?

SCHMIDT: I think Joseph Foran [PH].

LEVINE: Okay.

SCHMIDT: Und he had a son living with my mother.

LEVINE: And how old was his son?

SCHMIDT: Oh, he must have been seventeen before he went to school. See, he went to school, but they didn't let me go to school. I had to go to work.

LEVINE: So when you first got there, do you remember anything that struck

you as very different about this country? When you first...

SCHMIDT: No, I didn't go there, because right away look for a, a little housegirl, you know.

LEVINE: You were looking for a job...

SCHMIDT: I had to work.

LEVINE: ...to work in someone's house?

SCHMIDT: I had to pay my sixty dollar back.

LEVINE: Now was your mother also working?

SCHMIDT: No. Not that time. No. She took care of her husband and that son.

LEVINE: I see. So you found a job? Did you find one quickly?

SCHMIDT: Yeah. Watching children, you know. Und then afterwards when I was little more used to here, then I went to, to another place. A German place. Und they treated my like if I would be, they called me "Little Irma." she laughs They didn't just call me Irma,

"Little Irma." And I stayed there. German people. He had a, a butcher store, the man. And I was there two years.

LEVINE: So your German came in handy then?

SCHMIDT: Yeah. Und they loved me, too.

LEVINE: Great.

SCHMIDT: They bought me everything. Clothes und thing. I got ten dollar a month.

LEVINE: Did you live with them, or you lived with your...

SCHMIDT: Yeah. I lived with them for two years.

LEVINE: And they had children?

SCHMIDT: No.

LEVINE: No.

SCHMIDT: Well, she had a daughter. She got married. A married daughter. Und a son she had. But that was married, you know.

LEVINE: I see. I see. So then what happened? After you were there for two years, what did you do then?

SCHMIDT: Then my mother always says all my friend earning more money than I do there. You know, they earn sixteen dollar a, a month, and I just got ten. So they kept after me, oh, leave that place. Look somewhere else. Well, they, I got a place where I got more money, but that wasn't like that. You was just a worker. Took care of children.

LEVINE: So then when did you meet your husband?

SCHMIDT: Oh, it was a mas, masquerade ball. I had a girlfriend. Mary was her name. And they took us to a masquerade, masquerade ball. But, of course, the aunt und their unc, had to take us there, you know. That time you just didn't go alone. You know, they had to watch us. Und there I met my husband. Of course, I didn't want him, but he was always after me. she laughs

LEVINE: So were you dressed up in a costume?

SCHMIDT: Yeah. I was like a "pagliaccia". Like a clown. This side was green and this white. (she indicates) Und my girl friend was a

different color, but we two was the same. (they laugh) But we had a wonderful time.

LEVINE: Do you remember what your husband was dressed up as?

SCHMIDT: He was like a Hungarian hussar. I don't know what that is, like in the army, something. I don't, hussar, I don't know what that is.

LEVINE: Like a soldier?

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: And was he also from Hungary? Your husband?

SCHMIDT: No, he was a German.

LEVINE: A German.

SCHMIDT: Yeah. He came a couple, yeah, I think two years later here.

LEVINE: After you?

SCHMIDT: Than I did. Yeah. So

LEVINE: But he liked you, but you weren't, you weren't so crazy for him at first.

SCHMIDT: No. Nothing. But then he came over, see my aunt und uncle. My aunt was then working by rich people as a cook here. And when my day was off, Thursday und Sunday, I went there und he came to meet us. Und in the evening we went dancing.

LEVINE: Oh. Did you like to dance?

SCHMIDT: Oh, yeah. Und now I can't. (they laugh) I get dizzy [unintelligible]

LEVINE: So, so you, did your husband court you for a while before you got married?

SCHMIDT: Yeah. I knew him, and maybe four, five months, then we got engaged, then got married. In, when did we get married? November the 28th. And that must have been January. In the January, February, March, April, Mai, June, July. No, that couldn't be. she laughs

LEVINE: Were you here about, what, four or five years by then? How, how long had you been here by the, from the time you came when you were

fourteen until you got married?

SCHMIDT: Well, then I was about eighteen going on nineteen when I got married.

LEVINE: So then did you have children right away?

SCHMIDT: A year later she was born. (she indicates her daughter, who is in the room)

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And so tell me your children's names.

SCHMIDT: Oh, no. Yeah, she was born. Eleanor, then Alfred, then Robert. Robert, then Rudy and Louis. Do I got the six? Eleanor, Alfred, Robert...

ELEANOR: Freddy.

LEVINE: Freddy.

SCHMIDT: Oh, Freddy. And Rudy. Now there's one missing. (voice off-mic)

LEVINE: You had six?

SCHMIDT: Six. Four boys and two girls.

LEVINE: Wow. So then you must not have worked...

SCHMIDT: No.

LEVINE: ...after you had your children.

SCHMIDT: For a while I worked by Kleinitz making baby stuff.

LEVINE: Oh.

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: You mean sewing?

SCHMIDT: Because then they was big already, the children.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Yeah.

SCHMIDT: Then I lived in College Point with my husband und...

LEVINE: Now what did your husband do?

SCHMIDT: Oh, he worked a lot of places. One time he worked in a ship yard.

Then he worked like at creamery, manager, you know, where they make buttermilk and all that, for seven year in one country and seven year in the other. You know, they had to be in the country place where the creameries are. So that was seven and seven, fourteen years, you know. Then after which he gave that all up and we came to New York.

LEVINE: I see.

SCHMIDT: And then we lived in College Point. We had our own home. Some of the children was born already, married. Then the grandchildren came.

LEVINE: Do you think you, you kept any of the Hungarian ways that you learned when you was, was, were in Europe? Do you think you kept any of those customs or those ways of doing things?

SCHMIDT: No. No. Just cooking. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And how was it learning English for you?

SCHMIDT: I did slowly. But still I don't talk the right way. she laughs

LEVINE: You talk fine.

SCHMIDT: They all say I have a dialect.

LEVINE: It sounds good. (they laugh) It sounds good. So you, so you, you just learned it by...

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...everyday...

SCHMIDT: I read the paper, und so nobody teach me.

LEVINE: Did you have friends who were from either Hungary or Germany...

SCHMIDT: No. Yeah, a couple, but they lived in New York somewhere, each was in a, working in a, a house, you know. Und I was somewhere else. I was way up in Aqueduct Avenue. That was way up in the Bronx I think, by them rich people.

LEVINE: So what, what would you say that you're most proud of that you've done in your long lifetime?

SCHMIDT: I don't know. she laughs

LEVINE: What do you feel good about. What, do you remember any very happy times, when...

SCHMIDT: I always was happy.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember, when, did you, did you learn any ways, what do I want to say, attitudes or ideas about life from either your aunt or your mother? Ways that you...

SCHMIDT: No.

LEVINE: ...think about...

SCHMIDT: I was a simple girl. (she laughs) I lived from day to day.

LEVINE: And you were happy. You had a decent life.

SCHMIDT: Oh, yeah. Yeah. I'm still happy. she laughs

LEVINE: You look happy. she laughs Are you happy that you came to this country?

SCHMIDT: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Because I was wondering how my mother looked, you

know. But then I was like a stranger to her, und she to me.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you stayed closer to your aunt...

SCHMIDT: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: ...even after you came here?

SCHMIDT: Yeah. Well, my aunt always liked that, you know. Like I was her baby, you know. They didn't have no children. Even when I was America, and my aunt and uncle lived in New York in Seventy, Seventy-sixth Street, I always came to see them. She always thought I'm her girl till she died. And she gave me that nice ring here. (she shows a ring) There's seven diamond in.

LEVINE: Oh, that's lovely.

SCHMIDT: It's like, this one. One time I was with her, and she had it in her drawer. I says, "Nanni, why don't," she says that ring going to me mine. I says, "Nanni," see Nanni is aunt, "why don't you give me that ring now. Why do I have to wait till you die." I said, "This, at least you can see how I enjoy it." And she gave it to me. (Levine laughs) Yeah. Well, wasn't that right?

LEVINE: Yeah. Good.

SCHMIDT: Why shall I wait till she died?

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: Und every Sunday when I still was married in College Point, lots of times I went to New York to see her.

LEVINE: Oh.

SCHMIDT: And sometime my mother came there, too. Then she divorced her husband.

LEVINE: So how about this stage in your life?

SCHMIDT: What I have?

LEVINE: This stage in your life? Your old age stage?

SCHMIDT: Oh, wonderful. Wonderful. Only my eyes getting a little bad.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: Und I'm starting to get wrinkled. Do you see? (they laugh)

LEVINE: So, so what do you enjoy doing now?

SCHMIDT: Going to bingo. (she laughs) Now I can't go till Sunday.

LEVINE: Were you, well, so, and you've been here in Florida for a while?

SCHMIDT: Oh, yeah. A couple times, once we had, for seven years we lived in Palm Bay. When we sold our house in Cape Coral. Then we came to Palm Bay because my daughter lived there, too. And my hus...

LEVINE: This was, your husband was still alive then?

SCHMIDT: That time. He said why should we live there and Eleanor is here in Florida. So we sold the house, and we came. Two houses from her a man, he was a merch, merchant marine, I think. So he said I can have that house for seven years. No, two years. That I

was there more than seven years, because he didn't retire, retire, you know. Then all of a sudden he says, "Well, now I retire." she laughs That was a nice house, too, I lived. Und they liked me so, you know, all over the houses were so expensive. He wanted two hundred dollar. When I paid the first rent, he says, "Hundred ninety." (Levine laughs) Und other people got so, so I don't know, they must have loved me. Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, is there anything else you can say about starting out in Hungary, and coming to this country when you were fourteen, and living...

SCHMIDT: No. I was so stupid. she laughs

LEVINE: Why do you say...

SCHMIDT: Years, years ago the fourteen year old girl isn't like now. Some of them have a baby already here.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SCHMIDT: We was more shy, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Yeah.

SCHMIDT: Und in Hungary when, when kids, Sunday we went out to the field, played ball or so. Und I had some kind of a poppy seed in the, in the field growing, you know. We always took and ate it. Stole it from the farm. she laughs

LEVINE: Did you ever go back to the old...

SCHMIDT: No. No. My husband went back to Germany, but I didn't. I didn't have nobody there. A cousin. Never knew them. My uncle and aunt must have died, but I never wrote them. Since I came I never wrote them a letter. Because I thought the way they treated me.

LEVINE: So you made your, another new life here.

SCHMIDT: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay. Well, is there anything else that you can think of that you'd like to say before we close?

SCHMIDT: Oh, I'm just a happy-go-lucky. Und God loves me because he doesn't want me up there yet.

LEVINE: No.

SCHMIDT: No.

LEVINE: Well He, you look wonderful, and you have a wonderful attitude.

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: So, okay, well...

SCHMIDT: It's nice to be happy, right?

LEVINE: Yes.

SCHMIDT: Only now for three weeks my feet bothered me. I couldn't step on it. But now since yesterday it's getting good.

LEVINE: Oh, good. Good. Okay...

SCHMIDT: Und then when we went to Ellis Island, when my daughter und son-in-law took, oh, boy, we walked that out. Well, of course, I had to be in wheelchair. I couldn't walk too far, you know. We went all over.

LEVINE: How did you feel seeing...

SCHMIDT: Oh, good. I said, "Ah," opened my mouth, and look how beautiful.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, it's a trip, Ellis Island is a national monument,
and it's ...

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...it's a tribute to people like you who came to this country...

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...and started all over again.

SCHMIDT: And we looked all over them pictures of what they have up in each
room. But it's, it's so hard to get in with the wheelchair,
because it's so many people, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah. Yeah.

SCHMIDT: But I enjoyed it.

LEVINE: Well, good.

SCHMIDT: Nobody took me there. Just my daughter und son-in-law. After be here so many years, right?

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, I'm glad you got to see it.

SCHMIDT: Well, I didn't have time with the six children to bring up, you know. Und when they was gone, the grandchildren came.

LEVINE: How many grandchildren do you have?

SCHMIDT: Oh, my God, I don't know how many. Some of them, they got divorced, they went away, you never heard about them. Only my daughter had four, und Eleanor had four. But then, you know, we was further away. I didn't see them too much. Christmas und New Year's und so. But my other daughter, the youngest one, they lived, I lived downstairs und they lived upstairs. So actually I brought them up.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: When they played outside in the yard, they did something, Grandma came over, und. she laughs When they came from school, where

did they land? By Grandma. She had pudding ready, milk ready, cake. she laughs

LEVINE: So you've enjoyed being a grandma.

SCHMIDT: Oh, yeah. Und the little boy, he, oh, he was my first one. Und you know, now he don't know Grandma. They forget you. No Mother's Day or birthday card, noth, well, he lives here in Florida.

LEVINE: Well, okay. Well, if there's nothing further we'll stop here. I want to thank you very much...

SCHMIDT: Yeah. And I thank you.

LEVINE: ...wonderful story.

SCHMIDT: Maybe if I go again to Ellis Island I would see you.

LEVINE: You'll look me up. Definitely.

SCHMIDT: Oh, you know, when we was there, there they had, they talked, you know. And the show was over. And we talked to that woman and man. Then we told whatever he said, I said, "Oh, just that the

way what I seen it." And we start to talk and talk, you know.

LEVINE: Well, I'm glad you got the form and filled it in, and sent it back.

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay, well, this is Janet Levine. And I'm talking with Irma Schmidt. It's February 17th, 1994, and we're at Barefoot Bay, Florida.

SCHMIDT: Hmm-mm.

LEVINE: And I'm signing off.