

EI-438

SYLVIA ADLER BALABAN

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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HUNGARY, 1920

AGE 10

PASSAGE ON "THE PRESIDENT WILSON"

RESIDENCE: ARAD

US RESIDENCE: YONKERS, NY

PORT OF EMBARKATION: TRIESTE

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service.

I'm here today, February 25th, 1994, with Sylvia Balaban at her home in Sunrise, Florida. Mrs. Balaban came from Hungary in 1920 when she was ten years old.

Okay, why don't we start by you giving your birth date and the town you were born in.

BALABAN: Gosh. My birthday was January the 2nd, 1910, and I was born in, I think it was Arad. A-R-A-D. Arad. A small town. That's, that's where my parents lived. Then after they, when, when my, after my father left for America, a year later my mother came to America and we were left with our grandparents. And when they passed away, so we were taken in by different families, because my brother, my oldest brother was a

young man and he couldn't take care of all his sisters and brothers.

LEVINE: Well, now, do you remember the year that your father went to America?

BALABAN: Well, it would be a year before the war broke out. Now, it was, was it 1917, or '14?

LEVINE: Well, 1914 in Europe is when the war broke out...

BALABAN: Yeah. Well, that's...

LEVINE: ...so he came...

BALABAN: He came here like a year before, and my mother came a year later. He sent for my mother. He couldn't afford to bring out all his family at one time. So when she came out a year later to the United States, six weeks later the, the war broke out. So that would be, it started from 1914, then was some in 1915. And, and then there was no communication at THAT time. We lost contact, they lost contact with us, and we lost contact with...

LEVINE: For how long did you lose contact?

BALABAN: Well, for about six years.

LEVINE: Oh.

BALABAN: Till after the war. They were trying to locate us right after the war. There was no, at that time there was no communication. And meanwhile in that period of time my grandfather passed away and my grandmother passed away. And we were, you know, we were stranded after my mother left. My brother got married. He was very young. But he met this woman. She was already married. She had a child and she fell in love with him. I don't even know if he knew what love was all about. They got married and we had to somehow be placed with different families. I didn't even know where my brothers and sisters were, because I was with some family, until finally after the war they found out where we were, and my parents found out where we were. And my brother was communicating with them by mail. And they kept sending money and the tickets and money for us. But my sister-in-law, his wife,

wouldn't come to America. So somehow they held back.

She held back. She didn't, you know, they, he was taking care of the finances and the tickets, and we didn't even know that my brother had the tickets, until my parents had some friends in Yonkers where they were living that had a nephew and wanted to come to America very badly. And an-, and another young lady, I, we didn't even know who she was, she also, how these, this, their name was, this nephew's pa-, aunt and uncle, I guess knew this other party, a young girl that wanted to come very badly, too. So he got in touch. This, his name was, Sandor was, I don't know what you would call him in English. He got in touch with my brother to find out what's going on, because his aunt and uncle wrote, wrote to him that if you wanted to come to America he has the chance to come. Because we had the tick-, my brother had the tickets, and my sister and my brother, he wanted to come very badly, but she wouldn't leave her parents. And they were holding back. They, we didn't even know the tickets were there. My parents were sending money and they couldn't understand why we weren't coming. Finally this nephew of their friend got in touch with my brother, and then we found out that, that my

parents were sending money and wanted to know how we were and they wanted us to come. So that's, that's how we got here, but my brother never came. And they were wiped out by Hitler, you know. That's what happened, he and his wife and the family, her family.

LEVINE: Well, tell me your grandfather's name. Your grandfather who you lived with.

BALABAN: My grandfather's name was Schlanger. Yeah.

LEVINE: Schlanger...

BALABAN: On my mother's side. Yeah.

LEVINE: So...

BALABAN: And Adlers is, was my, from my father's side were Adler, and my grandfather, grandmother were Schlanger. My mother's maiden name was Schlanger.

LEVINE: And your mother's...

BALABAN: S-C-H-L-A-N-G-E-R.

LEVINE: And your mother's first name?

BALABAN: Her name was Julia.

LEVINE: Julia Schlanger.

BALABAN: Julia Schlanger. Yeah.

LEVINE: And your grandfather and grandmother name? Schlanger?

BALABAN: You know, I wouldn't remember. I was so young. I wouldn't remember their first names.

LEVINE: Do you remember them at all?

BALABAN: Very faintly, yes. My grandmother, she was a very sweet lady. I remember being in bed with her and, and, you know, she took care of us as long as she was able TO. She was heart sick, my mother was her only daughter. She had this son, David, and another son was killed in the war. And she had a, a, I think she had three sons, and my mother was her only, you can imagine how she felt when her daughter left for

America, you know, and left us all there. We were seven children. Seven...

LEVINE: Do you, so do you remember any experiences with her besides getting into bed with her and, and that. Do you remember anything...

BALABAN: Well, she took, she took care of us. You know, she loved us very much. We loved her. She took, my grandfather I can't remember so well. I, but her I remember. Yeah. I was so young, you know, how old was I when my mother came? I must have been just a couple, when my father left, my brother I heard, my young, younger than I was, he was only three months old when my father left. So maybe I was two, two and a half when my mother, we were like maybe a year and a half, two years apart.

LEVINE: Oh.

BALABAN: See? The children. You know, in those days it was different like today, like today. Having children. Then my mother had three more children in America.

LEVINE: Wow.

BALABAN: That's how we were ten children.

LEVINE: So what were your brother's and sister's names in the order that, from the oldest?

BALABAN: Yeah, well, my, my brother who remained in Europe, his name was David. And my sister was next to her. My older sister, she's (unintelligible). Her name was Hanna. But we called her Anna, but it was really Hanna. Then my brother Max, and my brother Sam, and my sister Bertha who lives here. And myself, Sylvia, and then my brother Irving. He's gone. They were all gone. All my brothers are gone. I just have three, three sisters. This, my three sisters are gone, are just left three sis-. Yeah. Then, of course, three children were born here. Twins. When we came they were about five years old then. And Ned and Dorothy. They're gone. And then I have a younger sister who's alive. She's Regina, Gini.

LEVINE: Gini.

BALABAN: Gini. She was really Regina, but she changed for Gini.

LEVINE: Well, were you closest to any particular one in your family?

BALABAN: Well, I, very close to my older sister.

LEVINE: Which one was...

BALABAN: Anna.

LEVINE: Anna.

BALABAN: Very close. She was like a mother to all of us. Very close to her. I was heart sick when she passed away. So it would be like four years ago. Four or five.

LEVINE: What do you remember about her back in Hungary? What do you remember about Anna?

BALABAN: Well, I don't remember that much because, as I say, we were all separated.

LEVINE: Oh. Right.

BALABAN: You see? We were all separated. But once we got together, and then we came to this country, I was very close to her.

LEVINE: Do you remember the family that you were living with after your grandparents died?

BALABAN: Very, very slightly. I know, I met one of the sons after I was married many years ago. He was here, but I really, I, I can't even remember their name, you know.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about them, or living with them, what it was like for you?

BALABAN: Well, living with them, it wasn't easy. It wasn't, wasn't very, wasn't very pleasant. They weren't interested if I went to school or I didn't go to school, you know. It wasn't compulsory I think at that time, you know. But of course I did, and I, I learned how to read and write, and I could even, you know, today read in Hungarian if I have too. And I

could write, yet, but I had very little education as far as, it, you know, it wasn't compulsory, and they didn't, it wasn't where your own parents, they want you to go and get an, get an education, you know.

LEVINE: Well, how were...

BALABAN: They, I had to do chores. I was a young kid and I had to do chores. I had to help out. Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you, do you know how it was that this particular family took you in?

BALABAN: Yeah, well, they, they had two sons and a daughter who was married. And they all, they all, we all lived together, you know, in, I don't how many, two or three rooms they had. It was very, I remember it being very crowded.

LEVINE: Did they know your grandparents? Is that how you came to go with them?

BALABAN: I imagine they might have known them, yeah. But my grandparents, they were, after they were gone that's

how we ALL got separated. See, my oldest sister, she was, you know, still young then, too. So she couldn't take care of us. And my brother, as I said, he got married and he had to find, they were going to put us in an orphan home, you know. And then, then, of course, I guess my people must have been against it, and, and then they found families, you know. So, but you did, you did things. Believe me, that's how I, I know how to do things today. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Well, do you think that you were, because they had taken you in, you were kind of expected to do...

BALABAN: Yeah. Yeah. That's right.

LEVINE: ...certain chores?

BALABAN: Years ago, yeah, that's what it, that's what it was.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BALABAN: Help out in the, in the kitchen, and wherever, whatever I was needed as a child.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BALABAN: Yeah. Not too many luxuries, believe me. When I see the children are today, you hear them, what the parents go through with the, oh, they don't really know. They really don't know what it is, that they should be so thankful that, that they had parents that, to do everything for them and try to get them a good education. You didn't hear, I, I went to school, and my father, when we came here he was pretty well off. And then, I don't know, he seemed, it seemed he lost everything. And then I was going to school. I was, you know, when you have to learn the language it's not easy. It's entirely different than what I knew, you know, the Hungarian language. I mean, here you have T-H, and V's and W's. The pronunciations and everything is so hard. I mean, I found it very difficult. But i didn't have a chance to get an education here, either, and I was very disappointed. I went up to the eighth grade. And...

LEVINE: And how about the difference between the school here and the school in Hungary that you did go to?

BALABAN: Oh, big difference.

LEVINE: Well, say what it was.

BALABAN: Oh, it's a schoolhouse. It's all the children in one school. It's not like here. The children, my God, the children should be thankful that they have a chance to get an education here and they didn't take advantage of it, a lot of them, you know.

LEVINE: Hmm-hmm.

BALABAN: Oh, it's so different. It was, it's like a one, one...

LEVINE: One room?

BALABAN: ...one room schoolhouse. That's all there was, and the little that I could remember of it. But as little as I went to school, I was able to, you know, to learn. But I mean, as I say, it wasn't compulsory. I just knew how to read and write. I, as much as I went, I just, I probably could have, even here when I went, my mother came to school and she took me out of

the eighth grade. She says her, my father wasn't working and I, I was working after school. I was making, what, what was I making after school at night from six to ten. I don't know what they were paying.

Maybe that time fifty cents an hour or something. And, and my mother said that they, she needed, they needed, that they needed, the household needed the money. So she came, and she spoke to the principal, the principal, I was supposed to graduate. And then I first had to go to continuation school.

LEVINE: Hmm.

BALABAN: I was working, and I was, they were nice, you know, nice enough, I had to take off the day and, and go to school, like for a half a day. Yeah. Did you ever hear of that?

LEVINE: Yes, I did. Yeah.

BALABAN: You know, till you're eighteen...

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BALABAN: ...you have to go. Sure.

LEVINE: Well, tell me about when you were in Hungary, do you remember, were you religious at all when you were...

BALABAN: Oh, yes, we were quite religious. My grandparents were quite religious.

LEVINE: And how about when you went to live with the family that you...

BALABAN: Yeah. They were, they were also, yeah. Yeah, they kept a more or less a, they kept a kosher home. I...

LEVINE: Do you...

BALABAN: My mother here, when we came here, my mother was kosher.

LEVINE: Do you remember any food that you had in Hungary? Any Hungarian...

BALABAN: Special food?

LEVINE: ...specialties.

BALABAN: Yeah. It's, well, you know, like roast, I make it here, too, like stuffed cabbage, and, and we used to make, here they call it noodles, you know, the broad noodles with, with cheese. I even eat it here. I boil, you know, and I use far-, farmer cheese. And then they used to make, my mother used to make it. I even, she, she was making it here even. From raw potatoes, she used to grate the potatoes, and then she would mix it up, I don't know, I think an egg, and then flour, and make a certain consistency, and then boil up water. And while the water was boiling, she would drop it off, she would drop it from the teaspoon. And it was settled, and it would, and, and then we'd use sauerkraut on it. We used to, yeah, in, you know, with sauerkraut, and we used to love it. And you call them crepes here. Blintzes, you know. Used to make it with, with, make, make the leaves and fill it with cheese or, instead of jelly we used to call it "lekvar [PH]." They have it here, too, I think in the jars you can buy them. And, yeah. And, of course, chicken which was, chicken, duck. They use ducks, too.

LEVINE: Too.

BALABAN: Yeah, ducks.

LEVINE: Did people have ducks of their own...

BALABAN: Yes.

LEVINE: ...that they'd raise them?

BALABAN: Yeah, most of them had their own chickens and ducks. I remember going to the, well, he's not, he's not called a rabbi. He's a in, he, in Jewish he's a "schrecher [PH]," you know, to have the chicken killed. And then you bring it home, and they would clean it, pluck it, you know. Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you, did the people that you lived with, did they have animals? Did they, what did they do?

BALABAN: Yeah, they had chickens. They had chickens. They had chickens, they had I think cows, too, yeah. They had milk. They used to have milk. But I was, I didn't, I

didn't, I didn't milk. I was too young to milk the cows. I never milked the cow. (she laughs) But I would feed the chickens. That I would do. Yeah.

LEVINE: And did, and what did he do? Was he a farmer, the, the man of the household?

BALABAN: I really don't know. I don't remember what, what he did. I really don't know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BALABAN: I have such a little memory of that. I remember the, the apartment. I remember the grounds, you know.

LEVINE: Describe the grounds. What were they...

BALABAN: Well, you know, like in the country. It was, you know, small towns. So everybody lives like in the country. And, you know, trees...

LEVINE: Now, what town was this where you were living when you were with this family?

BALABAN: This was Arad I think. Arad. A-R-A-D. Yeah. Leles.
Then we, after that when my, my brother was, was
living in Leles. And then when we, before we came to
America we were all in Leles. We were living with
him...

LEVINE: Oh.

BALABAN: ...till we got everything settled to be able to come
to this country.

LEVINE: Oh, so like for a matter of months...

BALABAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...once you found out you were coming, you...

BALABAN: That's right. Yeah. So we were in Leles. It was a
little bigger town. Then the next town would be
Satorialijauhely.

LEVINE: Could you spell that?

BALABAN: Ujhely would be Y-U-H-E-L, I guess. Ujhely. Yeah.

Then, of course, Budapest is the next, next big city, was, you know, to us, but I was never there. We were too young, you know.

LEVINE: And spell Leles for the tape.

BALABAN: It would be L-E-L-E-S, I think. Leles. Yeah.

LEVINE: So, let's see. So when you were, when you were living in Arad?

BALABAN: Arad, yeah.

LEVINE: Arad.

BALABAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember, did you have any enjoyment? Was there anything that, that, that you did that you remember fondly as a...

BALABAN: No. Nothing at all.

LEVINE: No.

BALABAN: Just, nothing. Nothing at all. It was very, very, very, I was very sad, naturally, you know, you're separated from your brothers and sisters. So, your mother. First your father, then your mother. And I remember so little of it now, you know, being away. The term small towns, I don't know how the small towns are here, you know. I real-, I, I don't think there was, there's any small towns here like they had in Europe in those days.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BALABAN: Yeah. Very small towns, you know. Families, Jewish families, non-Jewish families. But they were, you know, there was no such a thing as anti-semitism in those days in small towns, you know. In fact, one family that I remember, I had a mole here, and she remembered my mother. And she says, oh, she comes to America, she's going to look for my mother because I had a mole here which I had removed years ago, because my mother had a mole here, you know. And she said I looked so much like my mother, so.

LEVINE: Hmm-hmm.

BALABAN: So, I mean, they weren't Jewish people, but they, they were very nice. Neighborish [sic], you know. I mean, they, there was no such a thing as anti-semitism in those days in small towns. That only started, you know, in Germany. Rumania I think had it, because my husband came from there. They had, they had that in Russia, they had all those programs [sic], you know, where they were, people were running away because they had the czar and, and, but in Hungary it was a small town.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything...

BALABAN: Where we lived.

LEVINE: ...anything about World War One. Was there any way that it effected you?

BALABAN: Well, I remember, yeah, I remember a little, where the soldiers were given leave, you know, to take a rest, and they would come to these different homes. And I remember them coming. They had to give them shelter

and food, you know. Like, like here they go home on a furlough. But here they had to come to different families, had to take them in, and feed them and...

LEVINE: These were Hungarian soldiers?

BALABAN: These were, yeah, Hungarian soldiers. My...

LEVINE: Do you remember...

BALABAN: ...my uncle, uncle was killed in the, in the, I remember, my mother's brother and my, my, my father's one brother was killed during the world, first world war. I mean, I don't remember what they looked like or anything, but I remember, you know, them talking about it.

LEVINE: Do you remember when your brother (she coughs), excuse me, when you, your brother told you, had the tickets, and wanted to send you all, all the brothers and sisters...

BALABAN: Yeah. Finally we found out through this, this, this...

LEVINE: Nephew.

BALABAN: ...this nephew of my parent's friend, that he said, you know, that the par-, the, the aunt and uncle wrote to him, that my parents had mailed the tickets and they've been sending money. Why are we so delayed? So finally he couldn't hold back anymore. It was, it, she, she was young, he was younger than her, and, and she was al-, she was, you know, in, in those days they, they, they had chaperons, you know, to get, she married a man that she didn't love. But she married him. Then she had a child even with him. And then she wouldn't live him. So she wouldn't live with him. My brother was a young man, maybe nineteen years old, very handsome, he was the oldest. And she fell in love with him. And that's what happened. And they got married, and, and we were left out in the cold. It's not where a sister-in-law comes in and tries maybe to keep the family together, you know what I mean? It wasn't so. We all had to go find a place, somebody had to take us all in, and I don't even remember where my other sisters were, in what, with what families they were until we all got together when

we, before we were leaving.

LEVINE: Do you remember leaving the family you were staying with and going to...

BALABAN: Yeah. I remember. Yeah, they, she was, the lady was very nice. Very nice. And they didn't have any young children, you know, the boys were grown. The two sons were grown, but they were married. And the daughter was married. I remember her. I heard she had a baby and the baby was born dead or something. I, you know, this, you know, you hear these things. You don't really, I mean, I didn't, they don't tell you these things. I was too young, I guess. But I remember them talking about it, and. But they all lived together. You know, most fa-, and I, families living in one apartment. And they were nice to me. I mean as far as abusing me, like beating me or anything, no. But I had to do chores. I had to do like, like everybody else. I had to do things around the house.

LEVINE: So do you remember the reunion with your brothers and sisters at your brothers?

BALABAN: Oh, yes. When we got, all got together it was already different. Yeah. Till we, before we left...

LEVINE: What was that like, the...

BALABAN: That was in Leles. That was nice. That, till my, we were already with my brother, the married one. You know, he, we had no, we all left wherever we were, and came back, and we were with him until we were ready to come. It was, then it was all right, all right. It was nice. And then, of course, when we knew that we were coming, oh, that, you know, our parents are looking for us and that we were coming to America, sure, it was, it was great. Very much, very nice.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything you thought about coming to America before you got here? What you...

BALABAN: Well, I, we heard a lot, you know, that it was a very big country, and everybody thought you'd find gold, you know, money in the street in America. (she laughs) That's what the European in those days thought, that it's, you know, very rich country. And it was, it was something to look forward to. We were

all very happy. Very happy to get together, and be, the family together. And at that time, as I said, my father was doing well, and he had a house when we came in Yonkers...

LEVINE: What was he doing for work when he was here?

BALABAN: I, well, originally in Europe, I think I heard he was, he was a shoe maker. And when he came here he was working in, in factories doing labor. Labor. And then I don't know what happened. He got into the, into the patent medicine business of some kind. He was a very bright man, but, you know, in Europe you didn't have a chance to get your education. My father could pick up a violin and just play, just play by ear any song. Just sing the song once and he could, he could play it. He used, he knew how to read a Yiddish paper, the American paper. He spoke fluently. And he could read the, you know, the Hungarian paper. Even, even later on in years he was a, he, he could read all those papers. He was a very bright man.

LEVINE: Do you remember any of the Hungarian songs?

BALABAN: No. I, I couldn't say I do. I forgot. Yeah. I forgot.

LEVINE: Well, would, so, when you, what did you do when you left, do you remember leaving your brother's house with your brothers and sisters?

BALABAN: Yes.

LEVINE: And what was that like? Do you remember what you packed, do you remember...

BALABAN: We didn't have too much. (she laughs) Whatever we had we took along. We didn't have much at all. My, my mother had everything prepared for us when we got here. No, we didn't have, if we had one pair of shoes we were lucky. We didn't, but we, I remember when we went to the, we went to the, you know, we had to stay in the hotel, I think, I think it was Austria, in a big hotel. And they only spoke that time in German. And we were afraid to speak Hungarian. And we didn't know how to speak German. And I know I needed a pair of shoes. So my father had sent money. So this nephew of their friend had the money, and I remember

they bought me a pair of shoes. Clothes, whatever we had. Very little. But when, when we, the boat. Oh. Everybody...

LEVINE: What, where was the boat leaving from?

BALABAN: From Trieste.

LEVINE: And the name of the boat?

BALABAN: That's, that's, isn't that Italy? That was "President Wilson."

LEVINE: And describe that.

BALABAN: Yeah. Well, that, we were waiting for days. And we stayed, as I said, stayed in the hotel. And then finally when they announced that the boat was leaving, it took sixteen days. We got here December 16th, 1920. They said it was sixteen. In those days, you know, they just started to, the boats just started to sail, you know, because it was after the, the war, and during the war you couldn't, you couldn't, you couldn't travel.

LEVINE: Were you in steerage on the boat? What kind of...

BALABAN: You know something? It was horrible. It wasn't private, that's for sure. It must have been steerage.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BALABAN: A lot of people. And very sick. And it was, oh, it was, it was, you know, I haven't gone on a cruise since I'm here, because I always think I'm going to get sick. I remember people were so sick, and couldn't eat, people throwing up. It was, then when my brother, my younger brother who was younger than I was, when we started feeling better, you know, we were young, so we recuperated faster than the older people. And I would try to entertain the other people on the boat.

LEVINE: And what did you...

BALABAN: That time I knew how to sing Hungarian songs. (she laughs) Now I don't remember any of it.

LEVINE: So you sang for...

BALABAN: We were singing for them, and, and entertaining them, cheering them, you know, it was, they were really sick. They used to just come on deck and just lie there. And...

LEVINE: So you would go up on deck and...

BALABAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...sing.

BALABAN: Sing. I would try to entertain. My younger brother, he was about a year and half than I was. See, my mother had us very close.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BALABAN: Yeah. Two years I think was the most.

LEVINE: Do you remember the boat coming into the harbor in New York?

BALABAN: Oh, yeah. That was something. You see the Statue of Liberty. That's why I, and Ellis Island. Of course, we didn't see, I didn't see too much of Ellis Island because when you come, you come in, you know, you're in rooms, you know, as you come in, and you're being interviewed, and you're being asked all kinds of questions, and they'd, they'd examine you. They'd check you to make sure that you're, you haven't got any problems, health problems, you know. So you really, and it's kind of frightening, too, because you're afraid maybe something is wrong with you, and they'll send you back, and, and here my parents were waiting for us. It was, oh, you couldn't imagine, I didn't even remember what they looked like. I didn't even remember my father at all, and my mother neither. No, it was very, very, it was exciting, at the same time very sad.

LEVINE: Do you remember that, when you first saw them and you...

BALABAN: Oh, sure. I didn't recognize them. I didn't know what they looked like. That's a horrible thing, isn't

it?

LEVINE: Very hard on a young child, sure.

BALABAN: Yeah.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

BALABAN: My father, I didn't know what he looked like at all.

LEVINE: So what happened. When you, when you met them, then you met them at Ellis Island.

BALABAN: Yeah. And we were all relieved, you know, released, we were all okay. And of course, my father at that time, he was doing very well. He had a car and a chauffeur. He didn't drive but he had a chauffeur. And he had a beautiful house in Yonkers for us.

LEVINE: You mean he had a chauffeur that he just...

BALABAN: He didn't drive, but he, he had a chauffeur that drove. And I, I remember him. He used, he, he used to buy him his clothes, for the chauffeur's clothes. He was a very generous man when he had it, but then everything went kaput and it was bad.

LEVINE: Do you remember the trip to the house in Yonkers from Ellis Island?

BALABAN: Yeah. We went by car. We were, I don't know how we got into the car, you know, I don't even remember how many, we were, were six children, right? Seven, my brother left behind. So I don't know, maybe they came with two cars, because they, we had to go to Yonkers. And this was, what was that, East River someplace?

LEVINE: Battery Park.

BALABAN: The Battery Park. Yeah. That's where the Ellis, that's where the boat came in. And, yeah, coming to a nice house, private house, but maybe about eight rooms.

LEVINE: Do you remember your impression when you first came there?

BALABAN: Yeah, I remember the house, I remember the address, where we lived. I'll never for-...

LEVINE: Where...

BALABAN: In Yonkers. It was 39 Pierce Street. I'll never forget that house. That was our first house. That was a house...

LEVINE: How did you, what did you think when you saw the house?

BALABAN: Oh, I never saw anything like it, you know. Here you're coming from Europe, from a small town. (she laughs) If you get one or two rooms you were lucky. You know, everybody, that's what I say when children over here are doing such terrible things, and they have such opportunities, you know, to better themselves and go to school and get their education. It's so important.

LEVINE: Can you think of any attitudes that your mother and father had that they tried to instill in you?

BALABAN: Well, one, well, my mother, she was, one thing, and we all are, my sisters, my sister that lives here, too. Cleanliness is so important. She always told us, "It's not a shame to be poor, but it's a shame not to be clean." And she says, "Even if you have patches on your clothes, as long as it's clean." And that's how, that's how we were brought up.

LEVINE: Hmm-hmm.

BALABAN: I mean, brought up, how long did my mother live after? I was, she passed in 1946 I think. We, no, not '46, '26. 1926.

LEVINE: Six years after you came?

BALABAN: That's all I knew my mother. That's right. July, July the 30th, 1926 my mother passed away. We got here...

LEVINE: December.

BALABAN: ...December. So about six years, right?

LEVINE: Yeah.

BALABAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: What did she...

BALABAN: Six years.

LEVINE: ...die of?

BALABAN: Cerebral hemorrhage. She had high blood pressure, and she, you know, she wasn't under the doctor's care like how, look at me, I'm under, every three months I'm checked by the doctor. I, I, my pressure was, oh, my whole family, we, somehow it must have been in our genes. And she was, those days, she went to the doctor when she felt real sick. She just went like that.

LEVINE: What was it like being with your mother for those six years?

BALABAN: It was strange. It was strange because there were three other, there were three other children. Well, she was expecting my younger sister when we, we got here in December...

LEVINE: She had twins.

BALABAN: ...no, the twins were already like five years old or six years old. We got here in December, she gave birth to my younger sister in July, July 16th. So we had like, we were, we were like alienate-, you know, they were, they, all of a sudden here they are by themselves, the twins, and all of a sudden coming...

LEVINE: Six children.

BALABAN: ...six children, grown up practically. We were, you know, not grown up. I mean, I was, I was only ten, and then eleven. And my brother was even younger. But all of a sudden we all come in. It was very hard. It was hard on them. It was, it took a long time for us to really become real sisters and brothers. After that we were all very devoted. Very devoted.

LEVINE: So did you ever feel close to your mother?

BALABAN: Yes and no. Yes and no.

LEVINE: In what way?

BALABAN: I loved her because I knew she was my mother. But I, there wasn't that love that I gave, that I give my children. It was a different, they, it, they, they maybe didn't know how to show it. You know, even my father. They...

LEVINE: Did you ever feel close to him?

BALABAN: I loved him, tried, you needed him, I always helped take care of him. And, but as far as being, you know, I guess parents in those days weren't that close to their children. I hear that even now from a lot of children. You know, listen to these talk shows sometimes, and, and you hear that I was never close to my father, and. I can't say that because I loved my parents, but I was, but I didn't know them. You know what I mean?

LEVINE: Hmm-hmm.

BALABAN: Like I met you for the first time. Now, if I know you longer I'll probably start liking you and caring for you a lot because I, you know, if I like somebody I really do. So, you know, they were my parents. We knew that they were my parents. That's about all we knew. But as far as being, I went to work. Every penny I made I gave to the house, to my mother.

LEVINE: Well, how, you went to school for a few years when you came?

BALABAN: How long did I go to school?

LEVINE: I came here, was maybe...

LEVINE: You were ten.

BALABAN: ...maybe five years?

LEVINE: Did you start out in, what grade did you get put into when you first came?

BALABAN: You know, I don't even remember. I had to learn from the begin-, the language. See, the language is such a barrier, terrible, when you don't speak the language. I mean, I knew A's and, and, and, and, and D's. I mean, I knew my alphabet in, in, you know, I could write in Hungarian, but it was different. TH's and V's and, you know, the pronunciation, and the, that's very imp-, when you don't speak the language it's so hard, but I was doing very well. My, I remember when my mother came to school and wanted to take me out, I was in the eighth grade, I was going to graduate. So the principal, she, she liked me so much she says, my mother says, "Well, I can't afford to buy her, you know gradua-," she said, "Don't worry about it. We're going to, we're going to see that she gets it. That, that we want her to graduate." And my mother took me out. Because I had, I was going to make a few dollars more if I worked full time. So then I had to continue to go to school, because even then you had to go to school. I had to go to continuation school.

LEVINE: So what job did you get when you...

BALABAN: I was working in a department-, in a, in a private store, selling, you know, and they were so fond of me, I was already buying merchandise later on, you know. And I worked there till I got married. I was eighteen years old I got married.

LEVINE: And what was your relationship like with your older sister...

BALABAN: Oh.

LEVINE: ...once you got here?

BALABAN: Oh, she was like a mother to us. I loved her all the time. I loved all of them, but I was closest to her. Wherever I lived they, they were living, all, practically all the family. Wherever I moved they would see that, my husband would see that they would all try to live near each other. So we were, Saturday, Sundays my house was an open house. Everybody used to congregate in my, in my, in my place. My sister lives right here, and she lived only a few blocks from me, but everybody used to come to me. Sunday was like an open house.

LEVINE: Hmm-hmm.

BALABAN: Then, of course, tragedy hit us. My, I, we had a son, he, he took sick and we lost him. So things were...

LEVINE: Tell me about meeting your husband.

BALABAN: Meeting my husband. It was on, on Decoration Day on the 30th of May. My sister and another friend that lived in Yonkers came to visit us. And they invited me, this, this young man lived in our building, and invited my sister to go on a, was it a hike or a picnic? I think it was on a hike. Is that what they called it? Hike or a picnic. And he got a friend for this other friend of ours, a young girl. And I tagged along. (she laughs) They were, I tagged along. I was without a, I was so young. I was, you know, I met my husband, I was sixteen in January, and I met my husband in May. So how many, a few months. So I tagged along. And when we, they were, they, they, these people belonged to a club, like, you know, when you come to Europe? So they called them Landsleit [PH], you know, that they, one knows this one and one

knows that one, and they get together and they have like a club and they meet. So when we got there, when we got there, they, one introduces the other. And this young man that lived in our building, he was in the cleaning, working for a cleaning company, too. And when he saw my, when he saw my husband, he called him over, and another, a few other boys, and introduced us. And my husband was also working for a cleaning company, so he knew him. You know, dry cleaning. So, introduced us, and that was that.

LEVINE: Was your, was your husb-...

BALABAN: My husband was with em the whole, the, you know, and after that he kept, he met my mother, too. He, every day he was coming all the walk, he walked, we found out he, he found out he was only living 104th Street, and we were living 103rd Street in Manhattan, if you know Manhattan.

LEVINE: Hmm-hmm.

BALABAN: He was living between Fifth and, and Madison with his, with his fam-, with his aunt and uncle and cousins.

And we were living between Park and Lexington, 103rd Street. So naturally, this was in the summertime already, so he would, after work he would take a walk over, and he met my mother. And I didn't want to go whit him.

LEVINE: Did you like him right away?

BALABAN: I liked him as a person, but I, I had two older sisters. I had my sister Bertha who lives here, and my sister Anna who was I very, my oldest sister. And when he met my mother, my mother liked him right away, you know. And I didn't want to go with him. So my mother said, "Why didn't you want," my mother says, "Why didn't you want to go with him?" I says, "Ma, you have two older daughters than me. What, it doesn't look right I should go out and they have no boyfriends, you know?" Somehow or other he just came around, and this was, this, I met him in May, end of May. So June and July, July 30th my mother passed away. See? So after that, I, he came, he came, I mean, he was like a moral support, you know. It was such a shock to us, you know, losing, losing your mother. So he, and then he had this friend, my hus-,

my sister's sis-, husband, who was a friend of his also. So we all met, you know. And he started coming around also with my husband, you know. And we started going together. We went out about a year and a half.

I was only at that time when I met him sixteen years old. Got married at eighteen.

LEVINE: Was he also from Hungary?

BALABAN: No. He was from, as I, he was, originally it was Russia. But during, after the first world war Rumania took part of that Russia. You know, that time, you know, whatever land they could, they could get. So it was Rumania, Bessarabia they called it. And that's where his parents, his, well, he didn't, his mother died when he was very young, when he was, she was only twenty-eight years old. She...

LEVINE: Did he had, he had started out in Europe, or he had been born here?

BALABAN: No, he came from Europe, too. But he, oh, oh, he, he was really a, a scholar. But he didn't have a chance in Europe because he had a step-mother. And when he

finished high school he wanted to go to college, you had to go out of town. Where they lived there was no colleges, you know, in the, in the smaller towns. You had to go the big city. And the step-mother, naturally, it was a step-mother. So he couldn't go. But he was, he was a real, he was very bright. And my son, my son, he should rest in peace, was also very bright. I lost a son. He was only thirteen and a half years old.

LEVINE: Oh.

BALABAN: Yeah. That's...

LEVINE: What was your...

BALABAN: That killed my husband.

LEVINE: What was your husband's name?

BALABAN: Sam. Balaban is the sec-...

LEVINE: Yeah.

BALABAN: Yeah, Sam.

LEVINE: And, and how many children did you have?

BALABAN: (she sighs) I would have had three. I lost my son, I have, after I lost my son, my husband and I, I used to cry, but he couldn't, he kept everything in, and he want, he, he wanted another child. I was an older, I was in my early forties when I gave birth to my daughter. And I went to the doctor, and I spoke to the doctor. I said, "Doctor, I don't know what to do." I says, "You know, we lost our son." He was a gynecologist. And I says, "I don't know what to do. My husband would love to have another child." He says, "Look," he says, "you're old enough, you're young enough to have another child." He says, "But no child will take the place of another child. But it will keep you so busy that you will not have time, so much time to think." Because my, my, we had a business, a cleaning business, cleaning store. And my husband at night, on the way going home, he brought my whole family to Astoria, lived in Astoria. We had a, a house. And he bought, first we were in an apartment, then we bought, and my son took very sick.

So the specialist said to try to keep him outdoors. So you, so we bought a house with a porch, and we were able to wheel him out with a, he had, he, he, came down with scarlet fever, and then he contacted, he had a, the streptococcus germ that went through his system, and damaged the valves, which today can be replaced. In those days there was no such a thing. I used, he had a heart specialist coming to the house. There was nothing they were able to do. They said if he could pull through puberty maybe he'll have a chance, you know. So he was thirteen in July and he passed away in November.

LEVINE: Hmm.

BALABAN: My oldest daughter got married. No. No. December. My oldest daughter got married, his sister. That was the only daughter that I had at that time. Got married November 27th, and he passed away December 27th.

LEVINE: Oh.

BALABAN: A month later. So the house was so empty. For a

whole year we didn't put a television on. We didn't go to an affair. There were weddings and bar mitzvah's in the family, and we were just, you know, heart sick. And then my husband wanted another child.

I said, well, he was such a good person. I said if I could do that for him, I was afraid. I have birth to a healthy child. Who should know they all get scarlet fever, which children did. They didn't have the penicillin yet, they had sulfur. And they treated him with sulfur right away, but it, I guess it didn't help. So I was afraid I'll have a child maybe, you know, at my age, I, I might have, God forbid, a, a, a sick child, you know. So I was very nervous all through preg-, yes, as I said, I went to the doctor, and he said there was no reason why I couldn't. So it took I guess months and months. My husband gave up. He says, "I don't think so," that, you know, he said, "Let's forget about it." So I felt the same thing. We went away to the country. We closed up our business for two weeks, and evidently something happened there. (she laughs) I haven't, (unintelligible) you wound up talking, here you go again. Sometime, so, I when I came home I was suppose, you know, get my period. And it didn't come.

So I was already heart sick over it, that this was, this was around September I think. Went to the doctor, and I guess they took the test, and he said sure enough I was pregnant. But all through my nine months pregnancy I was so nervous. I was burping and burping like somebody was drunk, you know. But God bless her, she was born a healthy, normal child. She was, she's the most, she's the most beautiful, she a mother of two.

LEVINE: Be careful with the...

BALABAN: Her daughter is going to, she's finishing three year college.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BALABAN: She went back to college after she had her two children. And she's a art teacher. And my oldest daughter, that's her son when he was bar mitzvah'd. This is her son. (she refers to a photograph)

LEVINE: Hmm-hmm.

BALABAN: And this is, he's graduating high school now in June.
This is his graduation picture. (she sniffs) Excuse
me, I...

LEVINE: Be careful of the mic. Wait a minute. Wait a minute.
Wait a minute.

BALABAN: Ooh. I want to get a tissue.

LEVINE: Here, let me. Can I get for you?

BALABAN: Yeah, I have tissue right there in the den, on, on the
table there. On the table. Yeah, there's a box of
tissue.

LEVINE: Oh, I see.

BALABAN: You could give me the whole box. I should have, oh,
wait a, oh, I'm sorry. I have one right here. I'm, I
have one right here. All right. Thank you. Thank
you.

LEVINE: So...

BALABAN: I didn't realize this.

LEVINE: So you have grandchildren and...

BALABAN: I have great grandchildren.

LEVINE: Great grandchildren.

BALABAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BALABAN: I have two great grandchildren. Here's my oldest daughter's grand, son. The younger, she has two sons. (she jostles her mic) He just gradu-, he, he left college after two years, and he just went back. He went back to college. He finished two years of college. And he got his masters in counseling and therapy.

LEVINE: Oh.

BALABAN: He just got his masters. Now he's got to get a job. (she refers to a photo) That's my younger daughter's

son. He's not married.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

BALABAN: Now, her other son, her older son has two children. One little girl going to be nine, and the little boy going to be six. So I have, that's my two great grandchildren.

LEVINE: Well, tell, what, what impact do you think it had on you as a person, starting out in Hungary, and losing, you know, your parents as a...

BALABAN: You mean...

LEVINE: ...to, came to America, and then your mother died. I mean, how do you that effected you?

BALABAN: Well, it effected me, sure. Losing, I hardly knew my mother. I mean, about six years, that all. I didn't remember her when I, you know, because I was so young. And then we were like six years, that all I knew her. So, but I was very fortunate when, because I, I met my husband, and he was a wonderful man. Great.

Great. Wonderful man, who really...

LEVINE: What do you...

BALABAN: It's too bad I'm twenty-nine years a widow. I lost him.

LEVINE: Oh.

BALABAN: It was twenty-nine in December, yeah. And my younger daughter, she was, she's the one that I had.

LEVINE: Right.

BALABAN: She was only, she was only twelve, not even thirteen.

LEVINE: Oh.

BALABAN: And he passed away.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BALABAN: But he was very happy with her. He brought, she brought some joy to his, to his life, you know.

LEVINE: Hmm.

BALABAN: Because after loosing my son. It's just, I have pictures of my son in there.

LEVINE: Oh. After we...

BALABAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...we're just about finished now, but...

BALABAN: Uh-huh.

LEVINE: ...(she clears her throat) tell me what you feel most satisfied about from your lifetime.

BALABAN: Well, I'm, I'm, well, first I'll say I'm not, I'm unhappy not having my husband here to share his grandchildren and his great grandchildren. (she is moved) And as far as my children, they're great. My son-in-laws are great. They're wonderful. I have a lot of respect from them and I give them the same. Yeah.

LEVINE: And how about this time of your life? Are you enjoying this...

BALABAN: No.

LEVINE: No?

BALABAN: I'm kind of lonesome.

LEVINE: You are?

BALABAN: Very lonesome now. I retired. Going to be fifteen years. (she sniffs) I had to go to work, which I never worked before. I used to help my husband. After he passed away I have, I was left with a young child, not too much money. So I had to go to work. I worked for almost fourteen years, a couple months less than fourteen years.

LEVINE: What were you doing?

BALABAN: I was selling. I worked in a, in a, in a card shop in, in New York, on 42nd Street. And I was in, you

know, I didn't work for so many years, I, I didn't even know that I was able to do it, but they hired me, and, and they were very pleased with me. And they were very good to me. After my daughter, my oldest daughter was divorced after ten years of marriage. And her father was gone already when she, when she met this nice young man, and she got married and she moved to Dallas, Texas. So I used to go there on vacation, and they were very nice to, like, after Christmas we had a very busy season before, it's a card, it was cards, and, and, and, and, and all kinds of stationery and, and souvenirs. (Levine sneezes) And we were very busy before Christmas, a lot of tourists. So I would go, and they would pay me, I would go to my daughter, you know, take the plane, and I would take off two weeks. And they would give me a nice bonus for Christmas. They were very, very nice to me. And when I told them that I bought a place in Florida they were heart broken. And they said, when I said good-bye to them, they said nobody could fill my shoes. They were so please with me. And don't you think, they sold the store couple a years later. And the people that bought it I heard that they went out of business there. It was on 42nd between Sixth, it was closer to

Sixth Avenue, right across from Bryant Park.

LEVINE: Oh.

BALABAN: Maybe you know the store if you know Manhattan.

LEVINE: Sure. I used to work...

BALABAN: The Oxford Shop. The card shop. I worked there almost fourteen years.

LEVINE: I was at the Graduate Center of City University, or City College Graduate Center.

BALABAN: Yeah. This was near the public library on Fifth Avenue.

LEVINE: Yeah. Sure.

BALABAN: The big library.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BALABAN: I used to take a walk down there at lunch hour, at,

you know, like Saturday. I never took lunch hour, to take fifteen minutes and I would be down. You know, I was, I was working like I would be working for myself, and they knew that. I was very devoted to the, to, to...

LEVINE: Well, is there anything else that you can think of? Did you visit Ellis Island?

BALABAN: No. I never went back.

LEVINE: Oh. Uh-huh.

BALABAN: I never went back. I didn't have who to take me back. You know, to who to go with, you know, my daughter was quite young. But of course, when she got married already she got busy. Now the children are older though. They go, you know, so that's why she must have picked up that paper, and, and she must have asked me a few questions and she filled it out. Because I, I didn't, I forgot all about it. I, she must have mentioned it.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BALABAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, I'm glad she did that...

BALABAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...and I'm glad we got to speak with you.

BALABAN: I don't know if anybody wants to listen to this. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Well, I think it's an interesting story...

BALABAN: You think so?

LEVINE: ...and I thank you very much.

BALABAN: I'm sorry I can't give you more information when I was so young.

LEVINE: No...

BALABAN: You know, when you're older you could...

LEVINE: Well, you remember...

BALABAN: ...you remember more, you know.

LEVINE: ...whatever you remember is of interest.

BALABAN: I was so young then, and.

LEVINE: Okay, well...

BALABAN: It's like a, like a haze now.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, this is Janet Levine. I've been speaking with Sylvia Balaban. (Mrs. Balaban blows her nose) And it's February 25th, 1994. I'm at Mrs. Balaban's home in Sunrise Lakes, or, no, Sunrise, Florida.

BALABAN: Sunrise, Florida, yeah.

LEVINE: And I am signing off. Thank you very much.

BALABAN: You're welcome.