

**EI-536**

**RENEE MACHAUF NEISS**

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**INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.**

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**AUSTRIA, 1940**

**AGE: 28**

**PASSAGE ON: VOLENDAM**

**PORT: ANTWERP**

**OLD COUNTRY RESIDENCE: VIENNA, AMSTERDAM**

**UNITED STATES RESIDENCE(S): NEW YORK (WASHINGTON HEIGHTS)**

LEVINE: Today is August 23<sup>rd</sup> 1994. And I'm here in the Ellis Island Oral History studio with Renee Neiss who came from Austria when she was twenty-eight years of age in 1940. She is visiting here from California. And I'm delighted to meet you and I'm looking forward to hearing your story. Why don't we start at the beginning, and say your birth date and where in Austria you were born.

NEISS: My birth date is April the eighteenth 1911. I was born in Vienna, Austria.

LEVINE: Did you live in Vienna up until 1940 when you came to this country?

NEISS: I lived till 1938. I left 1938 to Holland, illegal. And there I gave birth to my baby because I had no right there for any hospital or any doctor. And it was very dangerous to stay there because our lives were in danger.

LEVINE: Okay. Let's begin talking about your life before the rise of Hitler, when you were living in Vienna before it became dangerous for you there. First of all, what was your mother's name and her maiden name?

NEISS: My mother's name was Mindl Bertisch, maiden name.

LEVINE: Could you spell it, please?

NEISS: Bertisch? B-E-R-T-I-S-C-H. And the first name was Mina, like M-I-N-A.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. And your father, his name?

NEISS: My father was Emil Machauf.

LEVINE: Okay, Machauf, that was your maiden name.

NEISS: M-A-C-H-A-U-F.

LEVINE: Okay. And did you have grandparents living in or around Vienna that you saw with any frequency when you lived there?

NEISS: Yes. My grandma was living with us. But she was put in an old age home because of Hitler. So, but it didn't help because he took her out-. I was left already but my mother wrote to me. They took her out of the old age home and brought her with ninety-two years to Theresienstadt. And there she died after a few years.

LEVINE: Do you remember--? Could you discuss the circumstance? I mean was, was that something that happened, that people, elderly people were taken out of the home?

NEISS: Everybody was taken. Many people. They're Jewish, they're taken out of their homes. I saw that, that Krystall night that they, I had a store, a milliner store. And the people, my super, came in the back and told me close your lights, and close the doors. I will not say that you're in there. That way I was safe. And they're taking all the people of the house, from the house, they are Jewish. And I was there closed in. After a while when it was quiet I went out. Of course I didn't look Jewish. I was blonde and blue-eyes and nobody bothered me really. So I went home. But when I came home I looked through the window. The people were taken out from across the street from that house in a big truck, pushed in with whips. Hit them with whips, and pushed them like sardines in a truck and put them away. They never came back. And it was very bad.

LEVINE: Do you remember--? Can you describe what, what--? What was--? What happened within your grandmother's situation? She was taken to an old age home?

NEISS: From an old age home to,

LEVINE: Oh, she was taken from an old age home, oh.

NEISS: From an old age to Theresienstadt. It's a concentration camp.

LEVINE: I see.

NEISS: And my mother, I don't know where she died. She must have died in a transport because she didn't make it. They took everything away. I had a store. They took that store away. They took our apartment we had. And they took everything that they could take.

LEVINE: Now how is that done? In other words, when you say they took your apartment, what actually happened?

NEISS: They just came, just, I had to close it when I went home. No, it was closed. They put a seal on the front of the door so I couldn't open it anymore. And then they came, like SS people came to my house and asked for the keys. And I gave it to them because they came, they had guns and, And there was a lot of trouble before. I had to change my, the name I had. I had Renee Neiss [?]. And they said that it not German. And I had, perhaps they don't want I should write German. I

should send it, write it in Jewish, letters, Hebrew letters. Well I didn't know but my uncle did it for me. He wrote it for me, make, everything was costly, you know. They wanted the tax. We should pay the tax. And they made on the front of the, of the store they made signs, "don't go in, Jewish". And they made on the window marks, these Hakenkreuz, these swastikas. And it was bad. Even before they closed it was bad because they, If someone came in to buy and they were not Jewish, they were, they are not Jewish, they put them in the window and hang a, hung a board on them, she's a pig. She is a swine [unclear]—

LEVINE: This was, this was somebody who, who—

NEISS: That's under Hitler's regime.

LEVINE: They would take like, Who would they take to put in the window that way?

NEISS: The woman who bought when she was a Christian woman—

LEVINE: Oh and she bought in the store—

NEISS: And she bought in a Jewish store, they put her—not in mine because I had a small store, But, of course, if it was a big store they put her in the window and put a sign on her that she is a swine, a pig, you know, like. And it was really bad. They forced people to live with this mixed marriage. They forced, I had a friend he had a store. He was, he cut

hair, a barber. And he was married to a Jewish woman. He had to leave her. He forced her not to be together; otherwise they would put them both in the camp, concentration camp. It was really wild, very bad.

LEVINE: Can you think of any changes as, as this Hitler regime was building up—

NEISS: Yes.

LEVINE: Can you think of the changes that happened from what your life had been, ordinary life had been, and other things that began to happen as this built?

NEISS: Yes. Just before I could go anywhere I wanted to go, in a restaurant, or in a movie, or anywhere. But I couldn't do this because it says Jews and dogs are not allowed in here. So you couldn't go. And my husband said he doesn't want to stay there. We have to go out illegally. I had to leave my mother because she, she didn't think it would be that bad. Nobody thought it would be bad that they would kill people like this.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you thought? I mean once you realized that people were being taken away in trucks, what, what were you thinking?

NEISS: I was very afraid. If I heard them marching through the streets, I was very afraid. I couldn't sleep. I couldn't, I always thought they would come. Yes, it was very bad.

LEVINE: Before the rise of Nazism, what was your life like? Was it--?

NEISS: It was very nice, very nice. Vienna is a beautiful city. And it has nice woods all around. And people are very friendly. The food is very good in the restaurants. And you have all the culture there. So nobody could think it will happen like this. They have the opera and theatres. And I enjoyed this. It was very nice. But the people were not nice.

LEVINE: And how about as being a Jewish family, part of a Jewish family, were you, how were you treated before Hitler came on the scene?

NEISS: I had no troubles, no. But my brother had a friend, they were from the first grade to end of college they went together. And when Hitler came, the last year of college he didn't, couldn't finish because Hitler came. And that friend sent him back all the books they were studying together for so many years. Sent him all the books and said I'm sorry, I can't see you anymore because I was illegal, a Nazi, you know. I was, I worked illegal for the, for the German party, for Hitler. So it was like this. Couldn't believe it. Some people, you know?

LEVINE: Were you a religious family?

NEISS: Yes, we hold our holidays. I mean just the holidays not the, I didn't go every day to the synagogue. But we kept our holidays. And my grandmother was very religious.

LEVINE: Was this your mother's mother?

NEISS: Yes.

LEVINE: Yeah. Can you--? Can you think of any experiences with your grandmother prior to, to Hitler, when you were younger and things were more harmonious?

NEISS: Yes. She went with us to the park. She taught me some baking, cooking. Yes, she was very nice, very nice. We had someone who comes to our house to clean, make the laundry. But on that day nobody came anymore. And they just came and got their money even they didn't work (she laughs). So and we told them, listen. My brother said to them, listen, that's not honest. You ask something you shouldn't get. So some went away.

LEVINE: Well how would you describe the change in, in ordinary people that you, that you had dealings with?

NEISS: Yes. They didn't talk to us anymore. They were afraid. Because they arrested Christian people too, if they helped Jewish people. So they were very afraid. But some were better, some were worse, you know.

LEVINE: How about your father? What was he doing for a living in Vienna?

NEISS: My father was dead already for many years. He was not there.

LEVINE: Oh, how old were you when your father died?

NEISS: I was twenty-one.

LEVINE: But he must have had, well did he have a business before he died or what was his work?

NEISS: He was a painter.

LEVINE: An artist or a, a house painter?

NEISS: No, a house painter.

LEVINE: And your mother, did she work at all?

NEISS: Yeah. She was a businesswoman. She had a, she bought in the, She bought some merchandise out to the, in the outside of Vienna for people who not, couldn't come in to buy stuff. So she went out, get some orders for sweaters, shirts, anything, you know.

LEVINE: So she didn't have a shop but she just went out.

NEISS: She just went and she got the orders and then she ordered it in the wholesale place and she delivered it to them.

LEVINE: I see. Were you an only child or did you have brothers and sisters?

NEISS: No. I had a sister. I had two more sisters and one brother. My brother died in Israel. My sister died before Hitler in Vienna. And one sister I have still in California, living.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, when--? Do you remember when it, it became apparent to you that you had to leave in order to save your life?

NEISS: Yes. After the Krystallnacht, after that day it was very bad. And you couldn't go no place. Everything was, you were not allowed to go. And it was very hard. So even I sneaked out and I get—because nobody bothered me. But my husband, he had dark hair. And if you're dark hair you're no good (she laughs). You look too Jewish. You're Jewish. Anybody, they didn't care. They didn't like people with dark hair. And it seems very crazy but it's like, it was like this. And he said he does not want to go, not want to stay. He has to go. And it was really when, I was in the third month pregnant when I left. So—

LEVINE: What was your journey like, leaving Vienna?

NEISS: Well it was hard. But in a way, because I didn't know what will happen because we had no visa, no where to go. So we went illegal. When we came to the border we went in the trolley car. And one SS man

came to us and I was very afraid. And he said what are you doing? He know we're not from that town? It's a very little town in Kleveland. This was in Germany. And he said what are you doing here? I'm from the duty --where you pay to go over when you bring stuff. And my husband said, oh, yes, that's very good. But we need you, we want to see you anyhow. So he took us off the thing. It was a lie but he tried to save his (she laughs) life. So he took us there and I had to undress. And they looked all my clothes, too, if I take something illegal out. And, but we had our papers in order. I had my, my tax paid. And I had exactly the money what I could take out. And I had ten shillings too much so I had to send that back. And then the woman said, all right. I find nothing. Put your stuff on. And she was nice because I had some jewelry on me, and because I had to go out because I didn't know what will happen. So and my husband said it's okay. But I had a bread and a salami and they cut this all in pieces to see if nothing is built in. They very, then they said, all right, show me the way how to go. And my husband said the Gestapo in Vienna told us to come to you. You will help us. And they believed him. I don't know. I was surprised (she practically giggles). And then they, they sent us someone with a bicycle to show the way. There was a way through the woods. It was drizzling rain and we had to run through the woods. And you heard don't come back because if you come back I can't help you. Something like this. He threatened us. And we was running, running through the woods. And on the way there was a fork. And I said I don't know how to go. It's, it's straight, across, left, right. I have no idea. But that was already Holland; the border of Holland. And I know they take the people back, back from there and sent them back if

they find that they're, they're very patrolled, you know. So when I look up was two women staying a few meters away from me. And I went to them. And I knew a little bit Holland not much, but I said "Ast U blief, Nymagn" [spelling?]. That was the town where we want to go to get the train to Amsterdam because in Amsterdam we had an uncle. My husband had an uncle and he, we could stay there.

LEVINE: How do you--? Do you know how to spell the name of that town where, where you—

NEISS: Nymagn. I'm not sure. It's N-Y-M-A-G-N. I'm not sure exactly but something like this.

LEVINE: So you asked the two women—

NEISS: The two women said, oh you're refugees. Come on. In five minutes there's a bus coming. I take you. It was such, I think they were two angels (she laughs). And they took us to the bus. And they paid for us the tickets. And then she wanted we should go eat. I said, no please. Here is the money. The five gulden per person. Get us the ticket to Amsterdam and show us because we don't want to speak German. We don't want to speak because they'd send us back. So they were very nice. They bought the tickets for us. And they put us on the train. And—

LEVINE: So they went with you on the bus?

NEISS: Yeah. They went anyhow on the bus. They went to the bus. So I don't know how, I didn't see no houses, nothing but, just in front of you there was two women. And they were very nice.

LEVINE: So then you, you got to the train.

NEISS: When we got to the train we went in direct to Amsterdam. Even there my husband was afraid. He said "Just don't go from the front, go from the side ways". But not long ago we were in Amsterdam. We had to go to the police to tell them we're here. The Queen, it was about Christmas. And the Queen let all the people who came through that time in that week could stay. They would not send back.

LEVINE: That was the week you came, you arrived?

NEISS: Yeah. That was the week I arrived. We came on December eighth. And so it was in lucky. But in, it was not so good in Holland either. My, my husband, after two or three weeks about, they took him to a work camp in Holland. It was Hoek van Holland. So that he shouldn't be able to work. They didn't want that refugees should work and take away the job from other people. Not like the United States she laughs). It's, yes, they took him in a camp. And I was alone with, with I was by his aunt and uncle and stayed there. And when I went, when (she is moved) I gave birth on April the thirteenth 1939 to my son, Edgar, my husband came to visit me with two policemen. They did not let him go out. And the Jewish organization had to pay for his stay in that camp, in that work camp.

LEVINE: What was it like? What was--? What--? What happened in those work camps? What did your husband tell you about it?

NEISS: Well, he said they had to clean the rooms and the toilets. They had just work and stay. And sometimes they had to turn the earth. I don't know. He did work there, light work. I mean it's not, it was not a prison. But like a prison. He couldn't go out by himself. It, it, it was like a prison.

LEVINE: And it was all Jewish people were there or were there other people also confined in that work camp?

NEISS: I don't know. Yes. I think there was other people, too. I don't know. But most Jewish people. People who came illegal. They,

LEVINE: I see. So what was it like for you to give birth to your first born in such circumstances?

NEISS: It was very hard because I was alone. My mother was not with me. She was still in Vienna and,

LEVINE: Did you have communication with your mother at that time or not?

NEISS: Yes, yes, yes. And it was very bad. I sent her some packages, some letters. I want to send her some money. And she said, don't send me any money because she didn't get it. That means I didn't get it. And

then the war broke out here in the United States and they had no communication. And I even paid in some money to get a visa for her to get her out. But I got the money back. It was too late. Everybody closed the doors.

LEVINE: This was what year, 1939?

NEISS: Nineteen forty.

LEVINE: Nineteen-forty. Well what was your plan? You were, you were staying with you uncle? When you were in Amsterdam?

NEISS: Yes, I was staying with my uncle, with the uncle from my husband really.

LEVINE: Oh and you were trying from the time you got to Amsterdam, were you trying to get to,

NEISS: I had the visa already. That's why I went on the way from Vienna because we had no chance to wait there. They would kill us.

LEVINE: I see. So let's see. What, was your uncle in any, in any kind of danger in Amsterdam?

NEISS: Yes. My uncle when Hitler went to Amsterdam, to Holland they took him in a concentration camp. Yes.

LEVINE: That was after you had gone.

NEISS: I had gone. I was, I was going out in time.

LEVINE: Okay. So how was it that you were able to leave finally?

NEISS: I had my, my affidavit. That affidavit was given to me but I had to wait. My quota was not ready. You know they didn't even get the affidavit you have to wait. And so we figured out I don't want to wait in Vienna anymore because it's too bad. So we went illegal. Even it was already don't go away. If you go away and we catch you we put you away. Something like this. But we went, when we went away it was three o'clock in the afternoon so we didn't wait till it's night. And we went out. We were lucky.

LEVINE: And your husband, did he, how--? When he was in that work camp did he feel he was better off there than he would have been had he stayed in Vienna?

NEISS: Yes. I think so because in Vienna we were threatened. Our life was in danger

LEVINE: And, and your mother, was she being threatened when, when you had some communication with her from Amsterdam?

NEISS: Well it was no good. But she doesn't believe. She said she didn't want I should go. She said I can't believe that it should be worse, she

said, in Germany. It's already two years or, I don't know how many years before. And nothing happened. So it will go over. She talked like this. And that was bad. She didn't want to go because of her mother. It was hard because, but then later she put in, in that home for old people, old age home. That didn't help anyhow.

LEVINE: Okay. So when your quota finally did come up, I take it.

NEISS: Yes.

LEVINE: And, and once the quota came up did you travel from Amsterdam to—

NEISS: To Rotterdam.

LEVINE: To Rotterdam. And that's where you left for the United States.

NEISS: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. Okay. I think we'll pause here. We're going to turn the tape over.

NEISS: Okay.

LEVINE: And then we'll continue with the voyage.

END OF SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

LEVINE: This is side B and I'm speaking with Renee Neiss. Okay. So you went from Amsterdam to Rotterdam. And there what ship did you take to the United States?

NEISS: From Rotterdam we took a closed train to Antwerp—

LEVINE: Oh, you went to Antwerp.

NEISS: Belgium. And there was a ship, Volendam.

LEVINE: Okay. And did you have any kind of examination or any kind of interrogation before you left Antwerp?

NEISS: Yes. Before I left, I think a month before I left, I went to the consulate, to the American consulate. And I had examination and everything was okay. And then I got the visa.

LEVINE: Well what, they examined your papers and did they also examine you physically?

NEISS: Yes, they examined my papers and physical.

LEVINE: Okay. Now you were traveling with Edgar, your baby.

NEISS: Yes.

LEVINE: At that time.

NEISS: Baby Edgar I pick up, came with me on the boat.

LEVINE: And it was just the two of you traveling together.

NEISS: That's right. My husband had to stay back because he was in the camp. And his visa was not ready.

LEVINE: Once his visa was ready he would be able to leave the camp, was that,

NEISS: Yes.

LEVINE: I see. Well how was it saying goodbye to him? Did you see him before you actually left Amsterdam?

NEISS: Yes. I saw him for a short while. But he said I have to go. I have to go because my baby was eleven months. And if I would have waited another month I would have to pay for him a whole fare. And as a baby I just have to pay a little bit. I think ten dollars, something like this.

LEVINE: So the plan was that your husband was waiting for his visa. And when it came through he would join you in the United States.

NEISS: Join us, yes. That was bad situation. I didn't like to go. But they said, they forced me. The committee in Holland forced me to go. They said you have to go because you have to pay an other ticket, full ticket. And that's too much.

LEVINE: So what was the crossing like? What was it like on the Volendam?

NEISS: The Volendam was very nice. The weather was a little rough. But the crew was very nice. And they helped me. And they could take care of my baby. And it was a very nice voyage.

LEVINE: Were, were you traveling in first, second, third or steerage class? Do you know?

NEISS: It was, I think it was one, the same. But they gave me a very nice cabin because they couldn't put the bed in for the baby, a crib, there was no place. So I had a very nice big pleasant cabin with two beds on the side. So I could put the baby (laughs) in the bed.

LEVINE: So it was just you and the baby in the cabin.

NEISS: Yes. It was nice. It was a very nice voyage.

LEVINE: Do you remember any of your conversations with people on route or anything that happened?

NEISS: No. Everybody was happy, happy to go out, to come out and leave because in Holland it was not so good anymore.

LEVINE: Were there mostly Dutch people aboard?

NEISS: No.

LEVINE: No. It was all different—

NEISS: It was all different. Most German people, Austrian people. It was mixed.

LEVINE: And do you remember the Volendam coming into the New York Harbor?

NEISS: Yes.

LEVINE: What was that like?

NEISS: When I saw the Statue of Liberty a warm and exciting feeling came through my whole body. And I felt finally free. And I was anxious to start a new beginning. I was very happy.

LEVINE: Did you remember seeing Ellis Island from the ship?

NEISS: No. I just, they told me I can't go down. Even my brother-in-law, my sister-in-law wanted to pick me up but there were no citizens. And the

man who gave me the papers, the affidavit, could not come. He had a store that was very busy. So they brought me to Ellis Island because I traveled just with a child and without husband. That was it only. Everything was okay.

LEVINE: Do you remember when you came to Ellis Island?

NEISS: I don't know the exact date when I came to Ellis Island. I know only when I left was March the twentieth. It was about six days at Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. And was your voyage about a week long?

NEISS: Something like this, yes.

LEVINE: So it was March or April when you arrived here in 1940.

NEISS: I arrived March the twentieth in the, in New York.

LEVINE: And during those six days did you, did you know what your situation was? Did you know why you were being detained at Ellis Island?

NEISS: In the beginning they didn't tell me. But then they told me, because I came, at the hearing they told me I came, because I came alone without my husband and with a baby. And they wanted only that the man who gave me the visa should pick me up, nobody else. So after

three days they said I could go. But the man couldn't pick me up. I had to wait other three days. It was the weekend he picked me up.

LEVINE: Did you know this man who had sponsored you?

NEISS: No. He was relative to my husband. But he didn't know us. It just, he sponsored us.

LEVINE: I see. He knew your husband's relatives and he was willing to—

NEISS: Yes. He gave us—

LEVINE: And he was a citizen.

NEISS: He was a citizen, yeah.

LEVINE: So what was your six days like here at Ellis Island? How do you remember it today?

NEISS: Well, it was not a pleasant (laughs ironically) remembering. When we came to Ellis Island the women and the children brought up on the second floor. There was one big room. And next to my bed they put a little crib for the baby. There was a big room, restroom, with no doors on it. You had no privacy. And it was very dark. And the windows were up and very small. And the ventilation was not so good. And there was a lot of noise. Many children were there crying. And in the, in the morning they brought us down to the breakfast. But before we

went down they counted us. Then we could sit down and get the breakfast. And after that we went in the big room where everybody was waiting for a hearing. And it was not pleasant. It felt like a prison.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you were thinking about life in America based on your first six days at Ellis Island?

NEISS: Well, I was not afraid because I am a milliner. And I know to work. And I know it was, everybody wore a hat that time. And I know I will get a job. And that was right. I got a job right away.

LEVINE: Okay. So the man who had sponsored you who was a citizen, he came for you after six days. And do you remember leaving Ellis Island and, and how you—

NEISS: Yes. We went with the subway to heights, to Washington Heights, New York. And there I was staying with my husband's sister and her husband in one room with the baby.

LEVINE: What was that like?

EISS: Well, (laughs) it was better than anything else; better than being over there.

LEVINE: And, and did you know them at all? Had you met them?

NEISS: Yeah, I knew them before. Yes. They came over from Vienna one month before me. And my husband came after I went with them. My husband came after a month. He came, came out of there. Yes. He joined us.

LEVINE: Do you remember the reunion with your husband?

NEISS: Yeah. That was very nice. It was just on my birthday and I was so happy(laughs). I had the best gift (laughs) is this.

LEVINE: Okay. Well now that your husband and your baby and you were all here, then how did your life unfold?

NEISS: Well, we took an apartment. And my husband had a hard time to get the job because he was a salesperson but he couldn't speak English. It was very hard. But he started to work in Kline's department store. And then he worked as, in an other place where he was manager in a bake place. And that was long time. I had a job on Fifth Avenue. I designed turbans and hats.

LEVINE: And did you like that?

NEISS: Yeah. It's my, my job. I learned this and I knew how to do it very well.

LEVINE: And how, how did you like living and working in New York City and living in this country?

NEISS: Oh I liked it very much. I lived over thirty years in New York. And I, later I went to work in a bridal department and I made bridal veils. I had the opportunity because the hats were not so good. It was ten years with Miss Ruth on Fifth Avenue. And after this I went to Best and Co. on Fifth Avenue in the bridal department designing bridal veils. And I had no trouble.

LEVINE: So, let's see. What, what was your husband's name?

NEISS: Nathan.

LEVINE: Nathan. And then you had two other children.

NEISS: Yes.

LEVINE: And their names.

NEISS: Stephen and Maureen is my daughter.

LEVINE: And, let's see. When you, well, when you look back on your life and starting out in Vienna and going through what you did, how would you say that affected the rest of your life in this country?

NEISS: It was, it was worth all the trouble I had (laughs) because it's very nice to live in the United States. It's the best place. Because there you could have your religion and feel free to do whatever you want to do. My both sons went to college. And they have good jobs.

LEVINE: Did you become a citizen?

NEISS: Yes. After five years I became a citizen, as soon as I could (laughs).

LEVINE: Was that, was that a big day for you when—

NEISS: Yeah, sure. I was very happy. I'm still very happy to be in the United States.

LEVINE: What do you feel most proud of or most grateful for in your lifetime?

NEISS: I think here you could, if you want to learn something as many things are free, you're free to go to evening school. You can become whatever you want. If you like to be whatever you want to be. It's very easy. You don't have to pay much high fees or some, (pause) some hardship. I mean it's, you could, after you work a day, you could go in evening school and learn the language. Everywhere they should do this. It's very important.

LEVINE: Would you have any advice to give to the immigrants who are coming into this country today?

NEISS: Yes. They should learn the language. It's very important. And if they can they should learn any trade if you don't have any. Because there are many schools to give you advice and to help you. And you should take the advice.

LEVINE: And how is this, this phase of your life, this phase that you're in now that you aren't working and—

NEISS: I'm very happy. Yes. I go visiting my daughter. I'm very often there. And I go out with a trip here and to Atlanta. I see my children, my grandchildren. And it's easy. It's nice.

LEVINE: Do you think you carry forward any customs from Austria that you learned as a, as a girl and as a young adult? Do you carry over any attitudes, customs?

NEISS: Yes. I like to make hikes to go row and go swimming, you know. I like this. And I keep my religion. We hold our holidays. And that's it. I mean, I'm really happy.

LEVINE: How about cooking? Do you, do you, do you cook in the way that—

NEISS: That's right. I make many dishes for, Austrian dishes.

LEVINE: Could you describe one or two of them?

NEISS: Yes. I make a apple cake. And this is a very light dough with apples, filled with apples and apricot jam and it's very good. A lot of compliments when I make this. Also my children like dumplings, in German, a merange knejdl (laughs). That is apricot dumplings. And I make a potato dough mixed with, with flour. And the dumplings I

make the dough and I fill each piece with one apricot. Take the pit out and put a piece of sugar in, and close it like a dumpling. And cook it and it's very delicious. On top I make some bread crumbs, fried bread crumbs with sugar. Yes, that's very good.

LEVINE: Can you think about, on the one side, any attitudes or values or ideas that you learned from your mother or father or grandmother as you were growing up, ideas they wanted to instill in you?

NEISS: Yes. They said you have to be honest. And say always the truth. And learn, they wanted, they forced me to learn a trade. My mother said you have to know a trade. Because in Vienna if you don't go to college everybody gets to choose a trade to learn something so they know it. And they learn it very much, you know, very from the ground up. And I did this. I had to go as a apprentice in a place to learn milliner to become, to know how. And then they sent you from the state. You have to go to a school like a art school. They teach you about how art, how the ancient people wear hats and what kind and all the history, and the material. And they show you, beside what you learn in the place, they show you how to make a hat, how to make all kind of stitches. And they're very, very [unclear]. I have to be pleased to learn just as a apprentice, where you get not much but a little bit, like pocket money. But after this you have to make a test. And if you make the test, you have to make a hat and a trimming. And they ask you some question about material. After this you are able to work for someone else in a shop as a milliner. And then you get paid. After three years when you do this you work there and you have the

experience three years you could make a other test and get the master's degree where you can open up your own store. Not before anybody could open up a store if you don't have the master's degree. And so when you buy something there it's always perfect. So I did this. I went to and made this, I had a store, small store. But I was very happy because everyday I got the other customer referred from someone. And I was very busy. But that ended by taking it away, you know.

LEVINE: Now do, do you, can you think of any attitudes or ideas, values that you passed onto your children?

NEISS: Well, I wanted they should be, make the college. It's always good to have an education. So I told them to go and do it. And they did. They had a, they were very good children. They're still good children (laughs). And, yes, I think in the United States they should do something like this, too. They should send the children when they are finished with school, high school, or if you don't make high school, should tell them to go have a job. Learn something so they know to really work right, the right way and not just piecework, you know, little by little. Everybody makes a little piece. That's not so good.

LEVINE: You mean like a trade where they can really—

NEISS: They should really learn a trade. And that would help, I think, the people here in the United States, like they do it in Vienna and Austria. I don't know how they do it in Germany. But I know you have to learn

three years a trade whatever it is. If it is dressmaking or shoemaking, whatever it is. They should have to learn. And then they have to make a test. And then go on and learn for three more years before they could open a store or something really do right. But many people say they know it. But they really are not schooled.

LEVINE: Yes. Now how about heroes? Did you have any heroes in your lifetime, people you looked up to at any point in, in time?

NEISS: In a way, my husband was a real hero. I have to say it. When it was very bad and they went for all the men, took first, you know, to put in concentration camp, he had the opportunity to go to Belgium, to Antwerp because he went illegal there with his sister and the brother-in-law. And I couldn't go because I didn't know that I was pregnant. But I had the store. And I was in the store. And he left. And said he will pick me up. He will see that I should come there, too. So when I found out I'm pregnant and my mother said she would not let me go alone no places. And it was very bad the situation. So I cried. So my mother-in-law came and she said, okay, I will write to him. I will let him know. And I got already the visa to go just, to wait. But I could, could have got the visa. But I have to wait for the quota. So when she told him in the letter that I'm crying, and I have the visa and we have to wait only. So he put his life on line and he came back to Vienna. I was very upset because he came back, because I didn't. He didn't want, we're going to go together when we go. And he came back. And he went through the Krystallnacht that they. And he has a really

hard time because he was, had dark hair and dark eyes. And so he decided not to wait. So we went. (pause) But he came back (laughs).

LEVINE: Yes, that is quite a man. Okay. Is there anything else you can think of about your immigration experience or changes in your lifetime that you've made, anything before we close?

NEISS: Not really. I'm very happy to be in the United States. I think it's the best country to be. You're free here. And you could do, you could have your religion, and you could do what you want as long as you don't hurt someone else.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I want to thank you very much for a most interesting interview. I have been speaking with Renee Neiss who came from Austria at the age of twenty-eight in 1940. And today is August twenty-third, 1994. We're in the oral history studio at Ellis Island, at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. And I'm signing off.

END OF INTERVIEW