

EI-543

ABRAHAM SILVER

BIRTH DATE: JANUARY 29, 1911

INTERVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 13, 1994

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INTERVIEWER: ELYSA MATSEN

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PORT OF EMBARKATION

OLD COUNTRY RESIDENCE: LIVERPOOL

UNITED STATES RESIDENCE(S): WILLIAMSBURG, BROOKLYN, NY; WEST HOLLYWOOD, CA

MATSEN: Good afternoon. This is Elysa Matsen for the National Park Service. Today is September 13th, Tuesday afternoon, evening, 1994. I'm in the home of Mr. and Mrs. Abraham Silver. And we are in West Hollywood, California. And I'm here with Mr. Abraham Silver and Mrs. Silver. Mr. Silver, could you please for the tape give me your, your name, your full name, and your date of birth?

SILVER: My name is Mr. Al Silver.

MATSEN: And your date of birth?

SILVER: Date of birth is 1911.

MRS. SILVER: January

SILVER: January.

MRS. SILVER: Twenty-ninth.

SILVER: Twenty-ninth of January.

MATSEN: Okay.

SILVER: Which brings it to in, in the year 1994.

MATSEN: Can you tell me some, a little about the town that you grew up in?

SILVER: Well, we were in, at home, when I say home, it's, we know each other on the, on the.

MRS. SILVER: Liverpool.

SILVER: Yeah, Liverpool. On the street if I, if somebody wants to know a certain address they take you right there with you. And, and that's never done any place.

MATSEN: So do you remember sir, the house that you lived in?

SILVER: And we had a kosher fish and chip shop in Liverpool. And we spread it out to four or five stores within fifty years.

MRS. SILVER: Al, she wants to know if you lived there.

SILVER: Yes. That's where I was born.

MRS. SILVER: Al, did you live,

SILVER: I was born,

MATSEN: What was your house like? Do you remember your house?

SILVER: Well, what we have is a store, store. And in the back we, we live.

MATSEN: What did it look like?

SILVER: One bedroom. Four boys and one girl.

MATSEN: What were the names of your brothers and sisters?

SILVER: Oh, that's something.

MRS. SILVER: Oh, I know.

SILVER: Sydney Silver, Lewis Silver.

MRS. SILVER: Allen, also.

SILVER: Celia Silver, Abraham Silver.

MRS. SILVER: Ralph.

SILVER: And Ralph Silver. There were four.

MATSEN: What was, what was your father's name?

SILVER: Henry.

MATSEN: And what did he do for a living?

SILVER: He was, well, it's hard to say. He was helping out in the fish and chip shop. And whenever he gets away they play cards in the club. And he loses, he wins, he loses. But he always comes out not losing.

MATSEN: Oh, that's good. What did he look like?

SILVER: He looked like Charlie Chaplin.

[Laughter]

MATSEN: Well that's a good description. Is there any stories that you remember about you being a, a small boy with your father growing up?

SILVER: Well, when I, in my day I was an errand boy. And whatever I did is making a living especially,

MRS. SILVER: Al, she means before, before. Don't you mean before?

MATSEN: It could be either.

SILVER: Makes no difference.

MATSEN: Whatever story you can remember. How about your mother? What was your mother's name?

SILVER: Rosy, R-O-S-Y. Rosy Silver.

MATSEN: What was her maiden name? Do you remember that?

MRS. SILVER: Bilkiss?

SILVER: Bilkiss.

MATSEN: Can you spell that? Do you know?

SILVER: B-I-L-K-I-S-S.

MATSEN: And what did she, did she have a job as well or did she work?

SILVER: No. She had a job looking after the kids.

MATSEN: That was a job.

SILVER: That was a job.

MATSEN: What did she look like?

SILVER: Oh well, it's hard to figure out.

MATSEN: Was she a tall woman, small?

SILVER: About five three.

MRS. SILVER: Was she heavy?

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SILVER: A hundred, a hundred and forty pounds. Well there it's different. It's called stone. Right. Fourteen, fourteen pounds, one stone. I don't know how that works now.

MATSEN: Do you remember cooking in your family? Did you ever do any of the cooking?

SILVER: We, we'd look at the meats but we couldn't, we couldn't afford the, the, the prices in those day.

MATSEN: What would, what would your mother make for dinner?

SILVER: There was no dinner just the odds and ends put together.

MATSEN: Like what? What would you have?

SILVER: Hamburger. Well,

MRS. SILVER: Well, she was running the store. She didn't have time.

SILVER: Chicken.

MATSEN: Whatever was, was,

SILVER: Was put together.

MATSEN: What was, is there anything that you can remember was your favorite food growing up?

SILVER: Pot roast, chuck.

MATSEN: That was your favorite?

SILVER: Chuck pot roast.

MATSEN: Do you remember your grandparents?

SILVER: Oh, gee.

MRS. SILVER: No, he never saw them.

SILVER: No, never.

MATSEN: Do you, if you were to, if I was to ask you who you were closest to in your family, who was your closest relative?

SILVER: Well, we were all, all togetherness in Europe, you know. But closeness,

MATSEN: Any brother or sister that you were closest to?

SILVER: One girl and four boys. And always fighting everyday.

MRS. SILVER: Well, one brother brought him here, it was probably Sydney.

SILVER: Yeah. He's in Calif, well, no, he's still, he's in New York now.

MATSEN: Do you remember religious life in your family?

SILVER: Yes.

MATSEN: Tell me about that.

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SILVER: Abraham Silver was a choirboy in Prince's Road Shul. Do you know what a shul is? Synagogue.

MATSEN: Okay. Was this important to your family?

SILVER: Well that wasn't in, just a volunteer, like you said. Volunteer work. Didn't get paid. And I had a sideline and used to take orders out for the fish and chip that we made up.

MATSEN: Now do you remember, can you remember a holiday in your house?

SILVER: A holiday? Yes.

MATSEN: A holiday that sticks out in your mind that you can remember and tell me about.

SILVER: Well it so happened to be this month, Rosh Hashana. Then we have the Yom Kippur, it's next week. Yom Kippur is,

MRS. SILVER: [Unclear]

MATSEN: Do you remember when you were, when you were younger one of these holidays? Do you remember what you would eat for dinner? Do you remember what you would do on a holiday?

SILVER: Well, we'd pray.

MATSEN: As a family together?

SILVER: Yeah, yeah.

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MRS. SILVER: Besides praying did your mom make chicken for dinner/

SILVER: Huh?

MRS. SILVER: What did your mother make for the holidays, chicken?

SILVER: No. She didn't say that.

MATSEN Well, would you like tell me, what would she make for dinner on a holiday?

SILVER: Again, I would say chicken and hamburger, which is close.

MATSEN: Do you remember playing games as a child? What games were the games that you would play?

SILVER: Well you kissed,

MRS. SILVER: Kiss the bottle? Spin the bottle.

SILVER: Spin the bottle.

MATSEN: You'd play that when you were a kid growing up?

SILVER: Oh yeah.

MATSEN: Any other games?

SILVER: Well, football and baseball. That's all a common, common thing.

MATSEN: Where would you go to play, do you remember?

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SILVER: We have to go to, to Prospect Park. That's the grounds are free. Years ago you used to pay for it. Then they gave it free.

MRS. SILVER: It was the Prospect Park at Gateland.

SILVER: Yes, Prospect Park, Sefton Park.

MATSEN: Do you remember a friend that, any, any of your friends,

SILVER: They're all dead.

MATSEN: But do you remember them as, as children? Can you remember any of their names or, or any,

SILVER: Hammond Boaz. Hammond B-O-A-Z.

MATSEN: And what do you remember about him?

SILVER: He was also a go-getter. And he rides the bike. And he tries to show off, you know. I'll always remember that. Now he's underground.

MATSEN: But he was one of your friends in England? Let's jump over to the voyage coming to America. Do you remember how you got to the port where you left?

SILVER: I was brought by the HIAS, H-I-A-S. I guess you're familiar with that.

MATSEN: Yes, I am.

SILVER: HIAS. And growing up we had, we need some money so I went down to the shipyard and try and get a butcher job. And by golly they, they says,

one job left. And I volunteered for it. And then they says, you're a good boy. We're going to pay you a little bit, not a lot, but a little. That's,

MATSEN: Do you remember the ship?

SILVER: It's the Andania, A-N-D-I—

MRS. SILVER: No, that's the ship you worked at. The ship you came, you mean.

SILVER: The ship I came was Andania.

MRS. SILVER: Wasn't it the Cunard?

SILVER: It's the Cunard line, yes. That's the ship and the name of the ship, Cunard line.

MATSEN: Okay. What did it look like? Do you remember what it looked like?

SILVER: Do what?

MATSEN: The ship, what did it look like?

SILVER: Well it was, it was twenty thousand ton, tons. That's a big ship.

MATSEN: Had you ever seen a ship that big before?

SILVER: No.

MATSEN: Were you excited?

SILVER: Now they make, they make small ones now.

MATSEN: Were you excited?

SILVER: Yes, oh, yes.

MATSEN: Tell me about your brother and, and how he, why he decided for you to come over and,

SILVER: Well, it's like everything else. One brings the other one over. It's my uncle comes from Poland to England. And from England they brought me as a guest. So instead of being a guest I, I,

MRS. SILVER: No, they brought your brother first, Al.

SILVER: Oh, my brother first. My brother first,

MATSEN: Which brother was that?

SILVER: Sydney. (pauses) What else?

MATSEN: And your uncle. What was your uncle's name?

SILVER: Uncle Joe Bilkiss.

MATSEN: Okay. And he was here as well? He was in America?

SILVER: No, not here. He almost was here but he couldn't make it.

MATSEN: So your brother brought you over.

- SILVER: And I paid him money. I didn't want no charity so he, I got a hundred pounds,
- MATSEN: Working? How did you, how did you get that much money?
- SILVER: By working weekends and selling those things on the, on the sidewalk, sodas and stuff like that, anything where I could make money.
- MATSEN: Do you remember how long you were on the ship?
- SILVER: On the ship, three weeks. After the third week they threw me out because I told them that,
- MRS. SILVER: No, Al, you're all mixed up. That's when you were working on the ship.
- SILVER: When I was working on the ship.
- MRS. SILVER: That's something different.
- MATSEN: When you came to America, how long did it take?
- SILVER: Oh, three weeks.
- MRS. SILVER: No, you said, No. You said it was ten days.
- SILVER: Ten days?
- MRS. SILVER: Yeah.
- MATSEN: Do you remember what you took with you?

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SILVER: I had a suit, black and white striped suit, a bowler hat—that's a Derby—and spats. You know the spats over here. You understand.

MATSEN: I do.

MRS. SILVER: And your brother didn't come for you.

SILVER: And my brother didn't come. No. He came at the last minute. He went to HIAS to find out about me. But they found out.

MATSEN: Who came to get you?

SILVER: The HIAS agency, HIAS.

MATSEN: Right. And where did they take you?

SILVER: They took me to the office.

MRS. SILVER: No, no, on a train, Al.

SILVER: Oh, on a, on a train. And the minute I opened my mouth they said, that bloke, he come from bloody old England.

MATSEN: Do you remember seeing Ellis Island?

SILVER: Once, once we passed through there with my daughter.

MATSEN: No. Do you remember when you arrived? When you arrived at Ellis Island, do you remember what it looked like?

SILVER: A barn.

MATSEN: A big barn.

SILVER: Yeah, a big barn.

MATSEN: Were you examined by any medical examiners, by a doctor? Do you remember seeing a doctor?

SILVER: Before we come to another country we get examined. Same, same thing as if you work you've got to have a working card. A health card it's called. Health card.

MATSEN: So when you were on Ellis Island they didn't examine you?

SILVER: No, not at Ellis Island, no.

MATSEN: Do you remember, can you describe the scene for me? What was it like when you got off the ship? What did it look like? Who did you see?

SILVER: Well, I was a stranger, number one. And number two,

MRS. SILVER: Did you see the Statue of Liberty?

SILVER: Statute of Liberty.

MATSEN: What did that look like to you? Do you remember what it looked like and what you thought?

SILVER: I don't know what to say, how you say that.

MRS. SILVER: Strange?

SILVER: Everything seemed strange.

MATSEN: Were you excited to come to America?

SILVER: Yeah. They said you bring a shovel along with you so you dig up the money. [Laughs] That was funny.

MATSEN: What was your first job when you came to this country?

SILVER: Order boy taking orders out for the meat concern.

MATSEN: Where was this?

SILVER: In Liverpool.

MATSEN: No, no in America. What was your first job in America?

SILVER: Oh the first job in America. They, on Fairfax Avenue,

MRS. SILVER: No, Al. In Brooklyn.

MATSEN: In New York, when you were in New York.

SILVER: Oh, in New York.

MATSEN: Did you work with your brother?

SILVER: I joined, no, I joined the, the union.

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MRS. SILVER: No, that was later, Al. When you first came from Liverpool you worked on a job; it was one of their friends. It wasn't one of your aunt's friends give you a job.

SILVER: But I forgot his name.

MATSEN: Well that's okay. Let's see. Do you remember after you came here where you first lived? What was your house like? Where did you live when you came to New York?

SILVER: To New York that's Williamsburg. That's New York.

MATSEN: Where did you live when you first came to New York?

SILVER: Williamsburg.

MATSEN: And what did your house look like?

SILVER: It wasn't a house. It was put together fast.

MRS. SILVER: He lived with his aunt.

SILVER: I lived with my aunt.

MATSEN: What was her name?

SILVER: Her name is Bilkiss.

MATSEN: No, her first name.

MRS. SILVER: Clara.

SILVER: Clara.

MATSEN: Clara.

SILVER: C-L-A—

MRS. SILVER: R-A.

SILVER: R-A. Clara.

MATSEN: Now what was that like, living with your aunt?

SILVER: No good. You never live with relatives. No good.

MRS. SILVER: Lived there were a few years.

SILVER: Yeah, a few years.

MRS. SILVER: With his brother.

MATSEN: Your, your brother lived with your aunt as well?

SILVER: My brother lived with me. And we were paying Clara Bilkiss so much money.

MATSEN: What did you do after that? Where did you live after that?

SILVER: What did I do,

MATSEN: Where did you live next?

SILVER: Where did I live?

MATSEN: Mm-hmm. After you lived with your aunt then you,

MRS. SILVER: We got married.

SILVER: New York.

MATSEN: Oh then you met, when did you meet your wife?

SILVER: Nineteen,

MRS. SILVER: Nineteen thirty-seven.

SILVER: Nineteen thirty-seven.

MATSEN: Can you describe how you met?

SILVER: Yeah. We went to a dance. And we start doing the dancing. You forget, eh?

MRS. SILVER: I didn't forget.

SILVER: [Laughs]

MATSEN: And then you moved, you went right from living with your aunt to living with your wife? Where did you first live?

MRS. SILVER: We had an apartment. We lived, we lived with my mother. It was right before the war.

MATSEN: And where were you working at that point?

MRS. SILVER: You were working in a butcher shop.

SILVER: And I joined, they told me to join the union, gentile union, and you'll get much advance, money.

MATSEN: Okay. Are you happy that you came to America?

SILVER: Oh why sure. I'm somebody, was somebody. I am somebody now but I,

MRS. SILVER: We went back to Liverpool.

MATSEN: You did?

MRS. SILVER: Yeah.

MATSEN: When did you go back?

SILVER: About eight years.

MRS. SILVER: In 1972, I think we went back.

SILVER: Sure.

MATSEN: Did you, can you tell me a little bit about what it was like to live in America during the wartime?

SILVER: Wartime? Well I had, my ears wasn't right so they, they didn't let me go.

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MRS. SILVER: They didn't take him. He had a punctured ear.

SILVER: Punctured eardrum.

MRS. SILVER: He didn't know it.

SILVER: But my best years is right here in California.

MATSEN: When did you come to California?

MRS. SILVER: Twenty years ago.

SILVER: Twenty years ago.

MRS. SILVER: In 1974.

MATSEN: And have you been living in the same area in California?

MRS. SILVER: Yeah.

MATSEN: Well, thank you very much, Mr. Silver and Mrs. Silver for your help as well.
This is Elysa Matsen and,

MRS. SILVER: Now, where'll this be?

MATSEN: I'll tell you in just a minute. I just want to sign off for the tape and then we can talk about it.
This is Elysa Matsen signing off with Mr. and Mrs. Silver and Peter Hom on the thirteenth of September 1994 for the Ellis Island oral history project.
Thank you.

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END OF INTERVIEW