

And they didn't check your heart, give you an examination?

AGRIN: No, mostly in my head they looked. (Robbie laughs and Agrin joins in) But they didn't find anything.

ROBBIE: And how long did you have to wait before you could leave?

AGRIN: Leave Ellis Island?

ROBBIE: Ellis Island.

AGRIN: Well he came one day and couldn't take us, so he went back home, and the next day he came and we went.

THE NEXT REMEMBRANCES OF ELLIS ISLAND ARE FROM MR. WILLIAM GREINER, WHO CAME FROM ITALY UNDER THE FRENCH QUOTA IN 1925 WHEN HE WAS TWELVE. THE INTERVIEW WAS CONDUCTED BY PAUL SIGRIST AT THE ELLIS ISLAND ORAL HISTORY STUDIO ON MARCH 6TH, 1991, WHEN MR. GREINER WAS SEVENTY-SIX YEARS OF AGE. THE FIRST QUOTE THAT YOU HEARD ON THIS TAPE WAS FROM MR. GREINER'S SISTER, EMMA. (INTERVIEW EI-28, ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: MR. GREINER'S AGE IS UNCORRECTLY STATED AS SEVENTY-SIX AT THE TIME OF THE INTERVIEW. HE WAS ACTUALLY SEVENTY-EIGHT.--PAUL SIGRIST, ORAL HISTORIAN--)

GREINER: The main thing --I don't remember very much except big hall and so on --but there was one thing that I resented very much as a kid. They asked the men and the children to form a line and to take out their penis, and the doctor went from one man to the other, and I didn't --first of all I was brought up very conservatively, that that's very, very private --and I resented (Emma laughs) showing somebody there, and besides they didn't tell us what they were looking for. Now I realize that they were looking probably for sexual diseases, but twelve year old boy. I don't, that was ridiculous looking for a sexual disease in a little boy. But anyway, I remember

that, being very puzzled and very indignant at the same time.

NEXT WE HAVE AN EXCERPT FROM THE FIRST INTERVIEW CONDUCTED AT THE ELLIS ISLAND SOUND STUDIO, DONE ON AUGUST 30TH, 1990. IT WAS, APTLY, WITH IDA ELLIS, WHO CAME TO THE UNITED STATES FROM RUSSIA IN 1910 WHEN SHE WAS FOURTEEN YEARS OLD. THE INTERVIEW WAS CONDUCTED BY PAUL SIGRIST ON MRS. ELLIS' NINETY-FOURTH BIRTHDAY. AS AN ASIDE, MRS. ELLIS IS NOT RELATED TO SAMUEL ELLIS, THE NAMESAKE OF ELLIS ISLAND. HOWEVER, MRS. ELLIS DID MARRY ANOTHER SAMUEL ELLIS. (INTERVIEW EI-2)

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you were wearing when you arrived at Ellis?

ELLIS: Definitely. My parents had made for each and every one of us new clothes. We came with very nice clothes here, which as a result of it was very useful because they were all warm things. I had a nice coat. I remember my father had a coat which was mink lined with a fur hat. My mother had a nice coat. We were all dressed very respectable.

SIGRIST: I see.

WHAT FOLLOWS ARE REMEMBRANCES BY MORRIS WEINER, WHO CAME THROUGH ELLIS ISLAND FROM POLAND IN 1923 WHEN HE WAS AN ELEVEN YEAR OLD. THE INTERVIEW WAS CONDUCTED BY JANET LEVINE IN THE ELLIS ISLAND STUDIO ON OCTOBER 19TH, 1991. MR. WEINER WAS EIGHTY YEARS OLD AT THE TIME OF THE INTERVIEW. (INTERVIEW EI-109)

LEVINE: And what was it like, what did people do, how did you feel?

WEINER: Well, we started get our baggage together and get off the boat and we didn't know what we were going to get at, and go through all those exams that they went through.

LEVINE: Now, do you remember approaching Ellis Island?

WEINER: Yes.

LEVINE: And what was your impression?

WEINER: I couldn't wait to see the inside of it, to see what it is all about. This is America.

LEVINE: (they laugh) And what did you see?

WEINER: What?

LEVINE: What did you see when you got in?

WEINER: All we saw was thousands of people were in here, sitting on the benches there, all lined up.

LEVINE: I see. Well, what was your experience seeing the doctor here, here at Ellis Island?

WEINER: Was entirely new, I never knew what a doctor was until it started examining us, and giving us those hot baths here.

(he laughs)

LEVINE: Oh, they gave you a hot bath. (Mr. Weiner laughs) What was that like?

WEINER: Oh, hot baths and they gave us brushes to scrub ourselves and clean ourselves around. Yeah, we were clean anyways.

LEVINE: The examination, did you...

WEINER: Frightening, very frightening, because I saw a lot of people

being taken out of the line. And they took them out of line, they must have been either sick or that person didn't look good to the doctor, whatever. If your eyes were no good or whatever, they'd pull you right out of line and put a mark on your head so the next fellow coming behind them would take you out of line. And they'd keep you here until they can correct your problem or, God forbid, they'd have to send you back. Thank God we all passed the exams and we were allowed to get off.

LEVINE: Had you heard about Ellis Island before you left? Did you have some idea...

WEINER: We heard about Ellis Island in the old country.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you thought before you got here?

WEINER: We used to call it "Castle Garden."

LEVINE: Now, you've mentioned on here that you were deloused. What was that like?

WEINER: Oh, they used to give us baths and then they'd look in our heads (laughs) to see if we got any live ones running around there.

LEVINE: And then what did they do if somebody did?

WEINER: Send you back to the bath. Send you back, get cleaned up. Used to take sometimes as many as two, three a day. Hot, steam showers. Where there were showers, water was boiling hot. Scrub us, and they used to come in and check us out right in to the shower.

LEVINE: You mean you had to take it two or three times a day?

WEINER: We had to. They send us in, we had to go in. Yeah.

LEVINE: Then, do you remember the reunion with your father?

WEINER: Yes.

LEVINE: What was that like?

WEINER: I remember my father came to pick us up, my mother says to me --used to call me "Maishe", was my Jewish name; now it's Morris -- "Maishe," she says, "this is your father." I said, "Hi Pop." (they both laugh)

NEXT WE'LL HEAR FROM SARAH CRESPI, WHO CAME THROUGH ELLIS ISLAND FROM TURKEY WHEN SHE WAS TEN YEARS OLD, IN 1913. MRS. CRESPI WAS INTERVIEWED BY PAUL SIGRIST AT HER HOME IN FAR ROCKAWAY, NEW YORK, ON MARCH 13TH, 1991, WHEN SHE WAS EIGHTY-SEVEN YEARS OF AGE. (INTERVIEW EI-29)

CRESPI: It calmed very well and, thank God, finally we arrived at Ellis Island! It was a big, big place with all windows all around. We sat on the floor waiting for my father to come. And my father came. Before we left they investigate you, they tell you, they ask you questions, if you can read, if you can write? They ask my mother something; I suppose she made a cross, something, and when they spoke to me, of course, I spoke to them, they was French people there and so they let us go. The other ones they won't bother, the little ones. The one four years, what does she know? Nothing.

SIGRIST: Describe the big room with windows, were there a lot of

people in that room at that time?

CRESPI: Of course, all the people that came from, got out from the boat, we all, they all went to Ellis Island in that room. You could hardly have room for us, the four children and my mother because everybody sat on the floor and waiting for their relatives to come for them. Everybody was in one corner, they was sitting and they were talking with their own relatives. The only thing was that they asked those questions and they let us, ready to go out. Ready, so we sat down. We sat down and then waiting for my father. My father came with my aunt, the one that was here. She came with him and the first thing when we saw my father, of course you know, we kissed and that, and he gave us a banana, which we didn't have in Turkey, bananas -- maybe they had in Istanbul, but not in my town --and it was (she laughs) it was good, it was good.

THE NEXT EXCERPT IS FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH PAUL MOSCHELLA, WHO CAME FROM SICILY IN 1921 AT THE AGE OF TWENTY-TWO. HE WAS INTERVIEWED BY PAUL SIGRIST AT HIS HOME IN NANUET, NEW YORK, ON FEBRUARY 19TH, 1991. MR. MOSCHELLA WAS NINETY-TWO YEARS OF AGE AT THE TIME OF THE INTERVIEW. (INTERVIEW EI-23)

MOSCHELLA: I remember on Ellis Island we was like a bunch of sheep.

SIGRIST: Yeah, it was very crowded?

MOSCHELLA: Oh, gosh yes, we bumped one each the other. And everybody had a suitcase and dragging suitcase, stuff like that. And I remember the first meal they give to us, they give sandwich, white bread with piece cheese and piece of ham, wrap them up and put them in a little bag, you know, and give to us, and taste so good.

SIGRIST: Yeah, of course, a sandwich, did you ever have sandwiches in Sicily, that would be sort of an unusual form of...

MOSCHELLA: No.

SIGRIST: So that was something new.

MOSCHELLA: That was (laughing) something new for us. I never seen sandwich in Italy, no. That was something new for me, I tell the truth, and tasted like if I had nice piece cake. It was, tasted good.

SIGRIST: At Ellis Island do you remember them doing, for instance, say, the medical examination?

MOSCHELLA: Yes, they examine, if you had lice in your head. If you had lice they shave your hair. I remember that day, quite a few, they shave your hair. And if you had some kind of disease in your eye, then they send you back.

SIGRIST: Were you afraid that this might happen to you?

MOSCHELLA: No, no because I tell the truth, one thing I can say, we was poor but we was poor-clean. My mother, she check the hair every day to the children because sometime, when we start to go to school, stuff like that, you know, and, but no, we was poor-clean. I no was no worried with lice, stuff like that because I was in the police force on the other side, you know, and was no worried about that.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you brought with you? What you took from Sicily with you?

MOSCHELLA: What I took? I took a little suitcase and I had just a few pair of socks, couple of handkerchiefs, and a couple of underwear and couple shirts. That's all I had.

NEXT WE WILL HEAR FROM LILLIAN GALLETTA, WHO WAS FOUR YEARS OLD WHEN SHE CAME FROM SICILY IN 1928. SHE WAS INTERVIEWED BY JANET LEVINE AT THE ELLIS ISLAND ORAL HISTORY STUDIO ON SEPTEMBER 25, 1991. MRS. GALLETTA'S AGE WAS SIXTY-SEVEN AT THE TIME OF THE INTERVIEW. (INTERVIEW EI-96)

GALLETTA: There were hoards of people and then this doctor and the nurses, they were standing on the steps and they would watch people because I guess there were such hoards of people that they didn't have time to examine each and every one. Just by the looks of them, they would pull people out from the crowd and then they would examine them. But we came through without any problem at all. The only thing they said, they examined our heads to look for nits, and we were clean so we were sent right through. And we were healthy looking, you know, we all had nice rosy cheeks (she laughs), and we were lucky. There were many that were sent back, and my sister said some them were jumping off the boats because they were told to go back, and they were committing suicide. Just the thought of that voyage going back and not being able to stay in this country. We were the lucky ones.

LEVINE: Yeah, so then your father came to Ellis Island?

GALLETTA: Yes, my father came to meet us at Ellis Island.

LEVINE: And could you describe that reunion?

GALLETTA: Oh, my goodness, I'm all choked up now as it is, I hope I

can describe it because I can see that almost vividly the way my sisters tell it, that we were in this big, big room, very large room and they call your name out. And when they called Galletta, (pause, she is moved emotionally)

LEVINE: That's okay, take your time.

GALLETTA: My father came running through the turnstile, (she continues to be moved) and he squatted on his knees with his arms outstretched, and the five of us ran into his arms and we were kissing and hugging. We were so happy to be together. (pause, crying) And he said, "We're all together now. We'll never be apart again." And that was it.

LEVINE: Quite a reunion, huh.

GALLETTA. Yeah. Mom didn't come because she was home, you know, cooking for the celebration that she had been waiting all this time for her family to be together. And if it wasn't for this couple that had befriended my mother, we probably might still be in Italy because it took a long time to save up the fare, you know, to send for five more people. And they loaned my mother and father the money to send for the rest of us because they couldn't stand to see my mother crying every day.

NEXT WE WILL HEAR FROM WILLIAM KAPLAN, WHO CAME FROM LITHUANIA IN 1921 WHEN HE WAS SIXTEEN YEARS OF AGE. MR. KAPLAN WAS INTERVIEWED IN HIS HOME IN LAUDERDALE LAKES, FLORIDA BY JANET LEVINE ON AUGUST 23RD, 1991. MR. KAPLAN'S AGE WAS EIGHTY-FIVE WHEN HE WAS INTERVIEWED FOR THE ELLIS ISLAND ORAL HISTORY COLLECTION. (INTERVIEW EI-68)

KAPLAN: When we got to Ellis Island, and the HIAS also took care of the immigrant. It wasn't like it is now, the Ellis Island. They had it roped off in different spots, you know, some of the people from different ships, this one here, this one there. I taste a corned beef sandwich, the first time in my life. And then I also had an orange. That was the first time I tasted an orange and a corned beef sandwich over there.

LEVINE: And did you like that?

KAPLAN: Sure, who doesn't like corned beef. (they both laugh)

LEVINE: Who doesn't like corned beef.

NEXT WE'LL HEAR FROM ELDA WILLITTS, WHO CAME FROM ITALY IN 1916 WHEN SHE WAS FIVE YEARS OLD. SHE WAS INTERVIEWED IN THE ORAL HISTORY STUDIO AT ELLIS ISLAND BY PAUL SIGRIST ON NOVEMBER 5, 1990, WHEN MRS. WILLITTS WAS AGE SEVENTY-NINE. MRS. WILLITTS RELATES A STORY SHE HEARD ABOARD SHIP, WHICH INFLUENCED HOW SHE APPROACHED THE EYE EXAM AT ELLIS ISLAND.«SP
» (INTERVIEW EI-8)

WILLITTS: Ellis Island was a dreaded part of the journey 'cause they knew then that you could be deported, you could be detained, if something was wrong with your --it was well known what you had to go through so it was important that we all stay healthy and all be examined. I got on the boat, I was only five and this little, this gentleman who had been back and forth several times, and, well, my mother took a liking to him because he was so knowledgeable about it.

SIGRIST: He spoke Italian.

WILLITTS: He spoke Italian, oh yeah, he was, and so he took me on a

walk one day and he said, "You know what? When you get over to Ellis Island, they're going to be examining your eyes with a hook." And he says, "Don't let them do it because you know what? They did it to me; one eye fell in my pocket." (Paul laughs) So you can imagine how I entered this.

SIGRIST: Sure. An impressionable young girl listening to a story like that.

WILLITTS: Right. Five years old and we weren't cosmopolitan let me tell you. I mean...

SIGRIST: You believed him!

WILLITTS: Of course, I mean I was five, but I was really five; I was not twelve like they are here. So we get over there and everybody has to pass, and I'm on the floor screaming. I will not let them touch me. And you know what Paul, I passed without a physical. I passed without a, because the other seven passed.

THE FINAL SELECTION ON SIDE A OF THIS TAPE IS CHARLES BELLER, WHO CAME FROM RUSSIA IN 1910 AT AGE 6. JANET LEVINE INTERVIEWED HIM IN HIS EIGHTY-SEVENTH YEAR IN HIS TAMARAC, FLORIDA HOME ON AUGUST 8TH, 1991. (INTERVIEW EI-82, ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: MR. BELLER WAS INTERVIEWED ON AUGUST 29th, 1991, NOT ON AUGUST 8th.-PAUL SIGRIST, ORAL HISTORIAN)

LEVINE: . . . you remember about Ellis Island.

BELLER: Well when we got over there, we had these lines to go through and they would sign you in and then designate where you're supposed to go, and the people would wander around. My brother couldn't speak a word of English so they put a sign on you and you had

the badge, and somebody else would take a look and say "Over there", they'd point, until they came over to the point where my uncle and my father were, and then we were all in good hands.

LEVINE: Can you describe that, when you saw your father and uncle?

BELLER: Very, very, very happy occasion, my mother and father hadn't seen each other for six years. I really hadn't never seen my father, I was half year old when he left.

LEVINE: Can you remember your first impression when you saw your father?

BELLER: I didn't know what he looked like. We didn't have pictures or anything like that. But when I saw him, he looks like a good strong man, "Well, that's my father, I'm very happy. Papa, fine."
(Janet laughs)

END OF CASSETTE TAPE VOLUME TWO, SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO, CASSETTE TAPE VOLUME TWO BEGINS

THIS IS JANET LEVINE AND THIS IS SIDE TWO OF VOLUME TWO OF QUOTES FROM OUR COLLECTION OF ORAL HISTORIES RELEVANT TO IMPRESSIONS AND DESCRIPTIONS OF ELLIS ISLAND. THE FIRST QUOTE ON THIS SIDE IS FROM ANNA KLARICH, WHO CAME THROUGH ELLIS ISLAND FROM YUGOSLAVIA IN 1920 WHEN SHE WAS EIGHTEEN YEARS OLD. AT EIGHTY-NINE YEARS OF AGE, MRS. KLARICH WAS INTERVIEWED ON SEPTEMBER 12TH, 1991 BY PAUL SIGRIST IN THE ELLIS ISLAND ORAL HISTORY STUDIO. (INTERVIEW EI-89)

SIGRIST: Describe seeing your mother for the first time in ten years.

KLARICH: Oh, it was so beautiful to see her. Ten years I didn't see her. I mean she looked different and I was so grown up. I was only eight years old when she left and then I was eighteen. I was young lady when I came. And she is hugging me, we both cry, we all cry, you know. Then we said, we went to dining room and they serve us. I don't know what they serve us, the main meal, but the French bread and butter was so delicious because we don't have much on the boat, you know. It was so good that my aunt say, "You want some more," and I was ashamed to take another slice. But I said, "I like it." She said, "Just eat because," she said, "I know you didn't have that on the boat," you know, so we did. So it was nice.

THE QUOTE THAT FOLLOWS IS FROM MORRIS SCHNEIDER, WHO CAME TO THE UNITED STATES FROM POLAND IN 1920 WHEN HE WAS TEN YEARS OLD. HE WAS EIGHTY-ONE YEARS OF AGE WHEN PAUL SIGRIST INTERVIEWED HIM IN THE ELLIS ISLAND ORAL HISTORY STUDIO, ON NOVEMBER 17TH, 1991. (INTERVIEW EI-116)

SIGRIST: Did the boat dock first or...

SCHNEIDER: No, the boat docked and, of course, the babble of voices, the pushing and shoving and straining to get through the doors, and the mass of humanity, and it was chaotic. And we heard, there were rumors that we would have to go through some kind of a physical or health inspection. We also heard, in particular with the girls and the women, that they were looking, if they found some kind of a disease or if they found lice in their hair or they found something that would, in any way, their eyes or whatever it was, if they found something that was questionable in regard to their health they could

be returned to whatever port they came to, whatever country they came to. And we were concerned because my sister had, I don't think it was glaucoma but she had some eye problems. And my brother and I, my mother, we weren't stopped at all, but my sister was detained for about ten or fifteen minutes. And being detained at ten or fifteen minutes seemed like hours to me because, as I said at the very beginning, my sister was like my surrogate mother. And we, having heard the stories about people being detained for health reasons, we were concerned that she might be sent back to Poland. My mother was being, being a mother, she was more concerned and more frightened than we were because we had some idea, but not to the extent that my mother was aware of. But luckily after ten or fifteen minutes my sister came out and we all got a clean bill of health. Now we came into the, of course, there were partitions and they had government officials, U.S. Government officials, and we had to go through the various routines that took place at the time; the inspections, the routines, the paperwork, the paper pushing. And finally when everything was cleared, we were taken into another room with partitions and my mother spotted my father. The only picture I had of my father was just a photograph when he left for the United States. And I thought, when my mother started, got excited, my sister, who had the better memory of my father than I did, she got excited, I knew it was my father. My father had with him, he brought a bag of hard candies, and he threw the bag of hard candies towards me but, of course, my father was more or less a scholar, he wasn't a baseball player, and it landed quite some distance from me. I had a cane with me. A simple cane and, somehow or other, I got the cane and I was able to inch the bag of

candy towards me. And, to me, that was my first contact with my father and the American sweets. Somehow or other that cane was very important to me, and in the many moves that we made unfortunately that cane was lost, and to this day I miss that cane because, well, if there was such a thing as a breach between the old and the new, this was the breach, the bridge that became when my father threw candy at me and I retrieved it with the cane. I miss that cane!

SIGRIST: Well, where did you get the cane? Do you remember?

SCHNEIDER: That I don't remember.

SIGRIST: But you had it.

SCHNEIDER: I had it. Either my father had it, but I had the cane.

SIGRIST: Hm. Tell me about when they released you, tell me about your mother seeing your father and that reunion.

SCHNEIDER: Well, the reunion for my father and mother, of course, I, for me, it was all, I was absolutely bewildered at meeting my father for the first time, being in this huge and wondrous country and, I guess, in my own little way, I didn't pay much attention to what was going all around me, with the other people. I didn't pay too much attention to my mother's reaction or my father's reaction. All this was so awesome, so overpowering that the memory of my mother's seeing my father or their reaction or their getting together and, unfortunately, I was preoccupied with my thinking, my own feeling.

SIGRIST: When you saw your dad, were you excited, were you disappointed, was this the man that you had expected to meet?

SCHNEIDER: I was excited and I was expecting, no, it wasn't, I was excited because it was my father; I didn't know my father. So, it was no let down, it was no disappointment; this was my father. I had ten years of catching up to do, and I felt this was Day Number One, that I had a father that I could go to. I had a father I could call "Dad." I had a father that I could, if I was hurt, I could go to. I had a father, period.

SIGRIST: I see, so this was a very emotional kind of thing.

SCHNEIDER: Yes, it was and, well, I didn't pay much attention to anything else but the fact that at long last, after ten years, I met my father and I was with my father.

NEXT WE'LL HEAR FROM ROSE FEINGOLD, WHO CAME FROM RUSSIA IN 1922 AT THE AGE OF FOURTEEN. SHE WAS INTERVIEWED ON AUGUST 25TH, 1991 BY JANET LEVINE AT HER HOME IN PEMBROKE PINES, FLORIDA, WHEN SHE WAS EIGHTY-THREE YEARS OF AGE. (INTERVIEW EI-73)

FEINGOLD: So when we came into this big empty room, we were standing and waiting, we thought, "Well, you know, we'll go someplace right away. They wouldn't let us stand there all the time." But we remained standing there for hours. So we couldn't stand so long, so we sat down on the floor, and I began crying, you know, I was still a child and I was very unhappy. But then, and then the experience of going down to eat in that beautiful room, which wasn't very pleasant, and I think the food wasn't very good either. I don't remember that much but I know it was a very unpleasant experience.

THE NEXT SELECTION IS FROM EDWARD CHOLAKIAN WHO CAME FROM ARMENIA WHEN HE WAS THIRTEEN YEARS OLD IN 1920. HE WAS DETAINED AT ELLIS ISLAND FOR NINE MONTHS DUE TO HIS TRAUCOMA CONDITION. HE WAS INTERVIEWED AT AGE EIGHTY-THREE BY NATIONAL PARK SERVICE AUDIO-VISUAL TECHNICIAN BRIAN FEENEY, AT THE ELLIS ISLAND STUDIO, ON OCTOBER 19TH, 1990.
(INTERVIEW EI-7)

CHOLAKIAN: Well, soon as we got out of the boat here, they stopped me. That was it. Doctors right away knew that, they didn't have to examine me, I had traucoma, they could tell, you know. So here I stayed nine months, but my father was in the United States so he was able to tell them that he would pay the room and board, I presume that's what you call them. And so they kept me here but they were talking about sending me back, but they couldn't, we had no country: The Turks took everything, the land and everything else. In fact, the town I was born in, damn Turks even changed the name. It was called Hahgin, now it's something else, somebody told me the other day. I don't want to hear about it. The only place where you can find Hahgin now is on old, old Turkish maps. In fact, I saw one, one place; I wanted to steal that book (he laughs) but I didn't; too damn honest I guess (he laughs).

FEENEY: Do you remember what year you came to the United States?

CHOLAKIAN: Yeah. September 20, 1920.

FEENEY: That's when you landed?

CHOLAKIAN: That's when I landed. In fact, I have the passport home! The passport I came with is this big (he gestures).

FEENEY: Do you remember what Ellis Island was like when you first

got here? What your first impression was when you saw Ellis Island?

CHOLAKIAN: You know, I really didn't think about nothing.

FEENEY: Did you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when your ship came in the harbor?

CHOLAKIAN: Yeah, I saw it everyday but nobody told me what it was. (he laughs) It's really funny. My father used to come visit me, my mother used to come visit me, but they didn't know either. My father came here seven years before me but he didn't know a word of English because he stayed with the, his uncle or somebody and he used to go to, I think he worked in the steel mills, he used to go to steel, work there and come home and never talk to anybody, so never learned English. And, in fact, after I got off Ellis Island, my father took me to school, you know. I was already fourteen by that time and so by that time I was able to catch on the language pretty fast.

FEENEY: If we can go back to Ellis Island for just a moment, you say you were detained nine months for treatment of trachoma. Do you remember where you were kept here? Were you on what we call the south side of the island, in the medical wards?

CHOLAKIAN: It seemed to me like I saw the Statue of Liberty, is that the side where the medical ward was?

FEENEY: From the south side, you mean you could see it from your window?

CHOLAKIAN: No, I had to go outside. But I did see it everyday. I

had nothing else to do, just...

FEENEY: Were you in a ward with other children or were you isolated?

CHOLAKIAN: No, I wasn't isolated but there was no children. I guess there might have been but I don't remember that part but there were people coming and going every day.

FEENEY: Do you remember if you were in one of the, like a big room with many beds or were you in a little like small room with just a single bed?

CHOLAKIAN: That's another one I don't remember. I don't remember at all where I even slept.

FEENEY: Do you remember anything about the nurses or the doctors?

CHOLAKIAN: Yeah, I remember the doctors, the coming and going you know, they used to hold my legs and hands to treat me with a, some kind of a blue stone. You know they didn't have medicine those days, not for traucoma. They have it now, but nobody has traucoma. That came from filth and everything else under the sun, dirt. The only people that have it in the United States now is Indians. You know, these Indians, they still live in tents and things like that. They're only ones have it.

FEENEY: So how exactly did they treat you ?

CHOLAKIAN: They just...

FEENEY: In other words, what you say that they didn't have medical treatment as we know it today. What sort of treatment did they give

you, do you remember?

CHOLAKIAN: Yes, I remember the treatment. They held my legs and hands and there were a bunch of doctors, they would turn my eye lid and rub a piece of stone.

FEENEY: Really.

CHOLAKIAN: Yeah.

FEENEY: You mean like a mineral or something.

CHOLAKIAN: Something like that, yeah. All I know, it wasn't very pleasant.

FEENEY: Was it painful?

CHOLAKIAN: It must have been (he laughs) because I remember them holding my arms and legs, so...

FEENEY: Do you remember what you did just to keep busy? I mean you were here for nine months.

CHOLAKIAN: I just roamed around the hospital, went outside look at the Statue of Liberty, nobody told me (he laughs) what it was.

FEENEY: Have any toys or games or anything for you to play with or...

CHOLAKIAN: No, nothing, not that I know. They used to have entertainers though come once in awhile, I think. The one I remember, this guy came was "Pack Up Your Troubles In an Old Kit Bag," and I

remember that part of it. It was quite interesting. Every so often somebody would come and entertain you. That's the only reason I learned English, a few words like that because people come and entertain. They wouldn't talk in other languages; it would be English, you see.

NEXT WE WILL HEAR FROM VERA TANNER WHO CAME THROUGH ELLIS ISLAND FROM ENGLAND IN 1920 AT THE AGE OF TWENTY. MRS. TANNER WAS 92 YEARS OLD WHEN SHE WAS INTERVIEWED BY PAUL SIGRIST AT HER HOME IN SCHENECTADY, NEW YORK, ON JANUARY 22ND, 1992. (INTERVIEW EI-120)

TANNER: I had a good ham and cheese sandwich, that I never had such a good one in all my life.

SIGRIST: Did you, you had that at Ellis Island?

TANNER: Yes.

SIGRIST: Yeah, how did you, did you buy that or did somebody...

TANNER: No, there was a man went around with a huge, big basket for everybody. See, there was a lot of people waiting to go through customs, not customs but, you know, the immigration. So they were feeding them with a , I don't, I've wondered lots of times what we had to drink, but I can never remember.

THE NEXT SET OF MEMORIES ARE FROM AN INTERVIEW WITH GEORGE PASTIKA WHO CAME FROM CZECHOSLOVAKIA AT AGE THIRTY-TWO AND WAS DETAINED ON ELLIS ISLAND WITH HIS WIFE IN 1953. HE WAS INTERVIEWED AT THE ELLIS ISLAND STUDIO ON SEPTEMBER 26TH, 1991 BY PAUL SIGRIST. HE WAS SEVENTY YEARS OLD AT THE TIME OF THE INTERVIEW. (INTERVIEW EI-99)

PASTIKA: At least I was capable of communicating because I already

spoke, you know, English as such. And, the first moment I mean you see so many people, you know, all different races. You had ship jumpers here, you had prostitutes from Cuba and Canada and we were all mixed up. You had people who had problem with maybe their X-rays or what have you, you know. So a lot of people were around or those, for whatever reason, they were detained, right? Like myself, we didn't know, and then, naturally, we came to interrogation, right, A little bit later. So, I was talking to that immigration officer. He was posing all sorts of questions and all that, so I told him the whole story as I knew it, you know. And when --my wife was actually interrogated separately from me --and all the time they were asking what was I doing in China? (he laughs) When she came back she said, "I know he was all the time asking what you were doing in China." And when this happened it struck me why they were asking what was I doing in China. Now during the Activist, while I was working for that particular Intelligence, you know, unit, I was posing, there was another fellow, he was a priest, right? A real priest, a Catholic priest, and we were down in Germany interrogating, where we were posing --he was a missionary from China --I was his assistant who came back with him, right? --which was only just cover story, right? Now that struck me. I mean here is why they ask all the time what was I doing in China. And that got me real mad, you know. So, I wrote a letter to President Eisenhower, in which I expressed that the United States had the right to refuse me admission, right? --that we came to this country legally after completing all whatever was required to get the visa, right? And, but I think that nobody has got a right to put me into the prison because for me this was a prison, you know, without

knowing why! Now, friend of mine was supposed to meet us, right?
I gave that letter to him because I didn't trust them to mail it from here. He mailed it from Manhattan someplace. It took maybe a week or ten days; we were called again, right? And we were cleared. I have seen the file, you know, on top of that officer's desk, I mean Immigration Officer, whoever he was I don't know, and that letter was just hanging right on top practically, you know. So I ask him, "If we are good and okay now, why weren't we when we came in January?" And he just told me, "Let a sleeping dog lie. I cleared you and you just, you have about time to get the hell out of here. Next half an hour the boat is leaving for Manhattan." So, we (he laughs) threw everything into, you know, and off we went.

SIGRIST: Before we get too far ahead of ourselves, I have a couple more questions about Ellis to ask you. One is did you stay with your wife at Ellis or were you separated?

PASTIKA: Yeah, no, no, no, we were in married quarters.

SIGRIST: Can you describe what that was like? And where it was?

PASTIKA: Well, I mean it was clean. I mean we got clean bedding and all that, right? And at night we went to bed, and in the morning I went down here because, I mean I omitted to mention one thing; I used to wash these walls around the main big hall for fifty cents a day, right? And my wife worked for a lady who was a social worker here, typing, so she earned more. She earned dollar a day. That's why we had a few dollars, you know, to pay the cab and all that (he laughs) to get to the address.

SIGRIST: How did you get the jobs here? Who offered you those jobs?

PASTIKA: Oh, I don't know, it just, to tell you the truth I, my wife got acquainted with that lady somehow when she was making her rounds and she took liking to her or whatever and ask her if she knows how to type, right? So that's how she worked there. There was, I don't know, some fellow who introduced me to that old guy who was supervising here, you know, cleaning and whatever, so that's how I started to slap the rags against the wall I mean, you know.

SIGRIST: And you said there was a real interesting cross-section of people.

PASTIKA: Oh, yes, I mean, you know, all people. I remember one lady who was separated from their family because they found something, you know, on her lungs or whatever, you know. She was awfully sad. And there were, I mean, Cubans for instance. There was one guy I used to talk with, he was very smart but he was illegally here, right? Very nice fellow. Another Cuban couple who also had some problem but they were here legally, and they were kept incommunicado; I don't know, several days, you know. Finally they released them, and then finally they were also admitted, because once I met him in subway when I was going --I used to at Idlewild at that time, which is now Kennedy, right? I used to work for KLM there, so we met in subway.

SIGRIST: So there were actually, there were quite a few people there.

PASTIKA: Well, there were a number of all possible, you know,

nationalities, Chinese and I mean whatever comes to Ellis Island, right? I met also one fellow, once because there was in, there was beyond the fence there was another health section, right? And there was also this guy who was for one and a half years travelling between New York to Casablanca and Southampton to New York and you know because each country refused to admit him so he spent about one and a half years at that time on the boat, travelling the seas. Whenever I mean the boat landed here, so before they turned around, right, for to pick up other passengers, so he was always transferred to Ellis, right?

SIGRIST: Were you ever allowed out of the main building for any reason?

PASTIKA: No.

SIGRIST: You had to stay inside.

PASTIKA: Yeah, you could walk out, along the fence. That's how we talked with friend Riboni for instance, who was on the other side of the fence, so we were walking always by the fence, back and forth, back and forth, you know.

SIGRIST: Were you guarded?

PASTIKA: Well more or less they had, I mean, you know, in uniform women and men, I think --I don't know there were some who looked like the police in blue shirt and blue pants --but I don't know whether they were, you know, from the police or whatever, I don't know that.

SIGRIST: Talk about where they fed you and what you ate.

PASTIKA: Oh, we used to go downstairs where dining halls, right?
Food was good. Can't say any complaints about that, good.

SIGRIST: Was it different than what you were used to?

PASTIKA: Was different than what we used to.

SIGRIST: What was different about it?

PASTIKA: Oh, the way it was cooked, you know, that's different than what you have in Europe, for instance, right? But it was good, and plenty of it, you know. About food we couldn't complain at all.

SIGRIST: Did they supply any entertainment for you of any sort?

PASTIKA: Well, there was just one TV down in the main hall. That's where I watched inauguration of President Eisenhower at that time, right?

SIGRIST: And that was pretty much it. They didn't show movies or anything?

PASTIKA: No, no, no no, no, no, the other entertainment was we used to play canasta or checkers, you know, which are different a little bit, you know; so that was just all entertainment or read magazines and newspapers or what have you, right?

SIGRIST: There really wasn't much to do.

PASTIKA: No, no no no, it was rather boring in that respect.

THE NEXT SELECTION IS FROM RACHEL CHENITZ WHO CAME FROM PALESTINE IN 1922 AT AGE TEN. MRS. CHENITZ'S FATHER WAS A RABBI IN PALESTINE AND, LIKE SO MANY IMMIGRANT FAMILIES, HE PRECEDED THE REST OF HIS FAMILY IN COMING TO AMERICA. MRS. CHENITZ WAS INTERVIEWED BY PAUL SIGRIST AT THE ELLIS ISLAND STUDIO ON JULY 14TH, 1991 WHEN SHE WAS SEVENTY-NINE YEARS OF AGE. (INTERVIEW EI-54)

CHENITZ: Ellis Island. The boat docked, they dropped us off in Ellis Island, but like a bunch of cattle or sheep I tell you, not like humans. And then came the time of examining everybody.

SIGRIST: This was the first day you were here.

CHENITZ: Oh, was that a day! That was an experience. Apparently traucoma..?

SIGRIST: Traucoma

CHENITZ: Traucoma was prevalent at the time. Everybody was tested to the eyes with eye drops, and again and again. All right, we passed through that then they tested the ears. They took you from one little cubby hole to another, and there was a physician in each area examining you. We had a very peculiar experience. When we were in La Havre my older sister decided to buy my mother a nice pair of shoes, (she laughs) so they had low heels, my mother never was accustomed to heels. We wore sandals. So she tied it up and that was a hinderance to us because they took her and they started to look at her feet (she laughs) and test her, they were going to send us back because they thought something was wrong with her, she was going to fall prey to the city, you know, to the government, until they were convinced that she can walk because she had to take her shoes off and

she walked. They couldn't understand why. (she laughs). We had so many experiences.

SIGRIST: Was Ellis Island very crowded?

CHENITZ: Yes, yes it was. Not only crowded but all kinds of people from all walks of life. There was no such thing like an upper class or middle class. Everybody was intermingled. It was miserable. The days weren't so bad but the nights, they had these bunkers. There were no stools to get up on the top of a bunker. There was no linen. Nothing to cover with. Every night you had to go to a certain area to get blankets. Thank God that they had sterilized the blankets. We probably would have caught all kinds of diseases.

SIGRIST: Were there lots of people in this dormitory room with you?

CHENITZ: Oh, yeah, the whole place was filled, completely. And it was a huge hall, nothing but bunkers in it, and everybody had to make a dash for it. Each one had to go for blankets, and my mother said to us "Go get blankets." (she laughs) I carried a blanket that was heavier than I, and we couldn't cover, we didn't get two blankets, we got one; so my mother contrived an idea that we divide the blanket into halves sort of, sleep on one half and cover with the other half. Necessity, the mother of Invention. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Now how long were you here for?

CHENITZ: I don't remember exactly, but I know it was a little more than two weeks.

SIGRIST: And this was because the quota had run out.

CHENITZ: Quota. My father had to interceded to appeal to Washington. He had to have a Congressman appeal and it was a big to do; and then the papers were filled with it, that we made history actually.

SIGRIST: Talk about an average day at Ellis Island. What did you guys do all day?

CHENITZ: Boring. Boring to death. Nothing to do.

SIGRIST: You said it was dirty.

CHENITZ: Dirty. Filthy wherever you went. And looking, the most important thing was to look forward to have family to come to see you. My father would come, my sisters who were already here would come, and we had some cousins who lived in New York and they would come, that was the Godsend. For that we used to stand and look or else we'd look out at the harbor and see the different ships going by and the people, that was our hobbies. We had nothing else to do.

SIGRIST: What did you take with you when you left Palestine? What did you have with you? What were your worldly possessions at this time?

CHENITZ: Two times nothing (they laugh).

SIGRIST: Did you have, you know, not even a suitcase, literally just what you had

CHENITZ: A suitcase, (she laughs) what was in the suitcase? My

mother, my father, some of the books that my father wanted badly, that my mother didn't give away, that was one thing in the suitcase. She had two pieces of linen that she salvaged. She (laughing) put that along. Actually, there was nothing.

SIGRIST: Did you have a toy or anything like that?

CHENITZ: Who had money for toys, are you kidding?

SIGRIST: All right, so it was really boring here, were you allowed to go outside at all?

CHENITZ: Boring and filthy. Filthy more than the boring. (Paul laughs) I have never forgotten the filth. You know when they show these bag ladies and the poor people in New York, it reminds me so much of the poverty that we saw on Ellis Island, but it was so poorly controlled, so very poorly controlled.

SIGRIST: So you actually saw people who were poorer than you who were here. People...

CHENITZ: I would imagine, I don't know if there's such a thing as degrees, I guess so.

SIGRIST: Talk about feeding you. What kinds of things, did they feed you any new foods you had never seen before?

CHENITZ: There was no fruit, there was no vegetables. They had potatoes; they were very soggy. I remember how soggy they were. And they had meat. Meat, meat! I guess they killed a lot of horses! (she laughs heartily)

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