

EI-626

ZARA KAGAN ELIASH

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INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

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RUSSIA VIA CHINA, 1931

AGE 17

PASSAGE ON "THE PRESIDENT HOOVER"

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Friday, June 30, 1995. I am in New York City, Central Park West, with Zara Eliash. Mrs. Eliash was born in China, I'm sorry, was born in Russia. When she was eight years old, she moved to China. And from China, in November of 1931, came to the United States, and was detained at Ellis Island for three days at that time. She was seventeen years old in 1931. Kevin Daley is running the equipment, the recording equipment, and also present is Adrienne Milan, who works for the NYU Medical Archives, and who was instrumental in finding our interviewee Gustav

Meyerhov a little earlier this year, last year.  
Anyway, may we begin by you giving me your birth date,  
please?

ELIASH: My birth date is July 24, 1914.

SIGRIST: And where in Russia were you born?

ELIASH: I was born in Kiev.

SIGRIST: And, um . . .

ELIASH: Also by chance. ( they laugh )

SIGRIST: Well, is there a story? Would you like to . . .

ELIASH: There's a story.

SIGRIST: All right.

ELIASH: Well, my parents met in Germany. They had to leave to study in Germany because at that time Jewish subjects, again, was difficult for them to study in higher education, which they wanted to get, in Russian capitals, you know. In other cities, one could live, but in capitals, one had to be a, some tradesman or established financially person, you know? So they met in Germany, Kunigsburg[ph], which is Prussia, former Prussia. And, um, and then Father graduated medical

studies in, in 1914, and he went to Russia, not because he had to, he had to, actually, because they had the law that a person had to, could not practice in the country where he wasn't born, or something like that, to that effect. So then he went to Kiev where he had to take state board, and my mother was pregnant with me. And, uh, they were not allowed to live anywhere there in Kiev, but he had to take the state board. So every night or every other night, it's like sort of Nazi situation, they had to sleep in one person's house or in another, and Father studied for exams that way, and I was born there. That was the situation.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever tell you any information about your actual birth, anything concerning the birth itself?

ELIASH: Well, I was born in a hospital then. Is that what you mean?

SIGRIST: Yes, that sort of thing, or if she had a difficult labor with you, or . . .

ELIASH: In a hospital in the center of town. She had an easy labor. She went to study in Germany also, to deal

with children in education. And she graduated there.

But she also couldn't stay there.

SIGRIST: Were you their first child?

ELIASH: I was their only child.

SIGRIST: The only child.

ELIASH: Yes.

SIGRIST: Do you know how your parents met?

ELIASH: They met as students just, uh, you know, through other students, I suppose. Yes.

SIGRIST: This is all prior to them going to Kunigsburg[ph].

ELIASH: No, in Kunigsburg[ph].

SIGRIST: Oh, in Kunigsburg[ph] is where they met.

ELIASH: They met in Kunigsburg[ph].

SIGRIST: I see.

ELIASH: I even have a vase which is in the other room which was given to them on their wedding. ( she laughs )  
They had a wedding, actually, there.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

ELIASH: My father's name was Abraham.

SIGRIST: And, um, tell me a little bit about his personality.

ELIASH: The best there was. I really, we have a small family and very loving, close family. Uh, Father was a doctor. Uh, well, he, really, he was a wonderful man, because people can, here, I can say only here, when he practiced here, he, he had more, half of the patients were free patients, who left his office, I think, not only with samples, but with money, some of them, and friendships, and all that. Things like that. He was old timer, you know, that doctors didn't rush and spent time with the patients and visited, house calls, and stayed two, three hours, if necessary, you know. That type. Very much liked the people.

SIGRIST: Do you, um . . .

ELIASH: Mother, too.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, uh, various types of medicine that was used at that time, any part of that . . .

ELIASH: Well, that comes later on with various diseases, because we had all kinds of plagues, epidemics, rather, epidemics, in Russia. And I went through all

the diseases, because we had no vaccines at that time for everything. You know, I had diphtheria twice, I had typhoid, even though Mother tried to disinfect everything, even a loaf of bread, she used to pour alcohol over it, and light it, and we got typhoid, both of us, she and I, plus pneumonia. This I know. Medicines I don't know really. I know that this was a difficult time. It was after, afterwards, was after the revolution when we, when I'm talking about now.

SIGRIST: Right, right.

ELIASH: But, uh, when we arrived, when Father and Mother arrived with me, so called, to Kiev, he was taken immediately into the army. It was the First World War. And he had immediately the rank of captain. He knew nothing, he didn't know horseback riding. He was in areas where they put him immediately on a horse, in areas in the mountains where he was, had to be on skis. People at that time, Jewish people, didn't go skiing for recreation. They hadn't learned anything like that, you know? But he, they, he survived all that.

SIGRIST: Did your father . . .

ELIASH: He was there four years, in the front.

SIGRIST: Did he talk about his war experiences later on?

ELIASH: He didn't talk easily, but he did talk if, like you talk to me now, you know, somebody is particularly interested in him, yes. Yes. Well, these things I know about him, about his experiences riding a horse without experience. But patients knew, I don't know about troops, people that he took care of, and all that. That I don't know. I know that he had like an agita[ph] on there, you know, put on his, those Russian boots with the, you know, in the winter, they were in Carpathian Mountains and in other climates, you know, where they needed. Every, I suppose, captain, had an agita[ph], what they call it.

SIGRIST: This would be a good time for me to ask you your maiden name on tape, and to spell it, please. Your father's last name, your last name as a child.

ELIASH: My name, maiden name is Kagan.

SIGRIST: And can you spell that, please?

ELIASH: K-A-G-A-N.

SIGRIST: And, um, does it have a different pronunciation in

Russian?

ELIASH: Kagan.

SIGRIST: Kagan.

ELIASH: Mmm. It is rather a common name.

SIGRIST: And your first name is unusual, Zara. Can you explain to me how you were named Zara?

ELIASH: I was named Zara after a literary character, a (?) of character, I think. He was a well-known Russian poet.

SIGRIST: Let me ask you some of the same questions about your mother. What was her name?

ELIASH: My mother's name was, uh, Liza.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

ELIASH: L-I-Z-A.

SIGRIST: And her maiden name?

ELIASH: Her maiden name? I can't think now. Um, I really don't know.

SIGRIST: It may come to you later while we're talking.

ELIASH: Yes. Oh, yes, I know. Sackin, S-A-C-K-I-N.

SIGRIST: And what do you . . .

ELIASH: The reason why I forgot is I connected now to whom I came to this country. I came to stay with my uncle, who was Dr. Sackin.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me, um, what do you know about your mother's family background?

ELIASH: Well, I know that they were, at that time young people were very much, uh, emancipated in every way, in a way that they wanted to study women, too, you know.

Before that it wasn't so. And my mother studied dentistry while my father was in the front, you know?

And our grandparents lived with us, so I was taking care of, and very attached to my grandparents. What else do you want to know?

SIGRIST: Was it common for women at that time to pursue medical interests and dentistry?

ELIASH: Evidently yes, but not that common as later. Not that common as later. At that time, particularly, many women went into nursing because of the war. I think she had a nursing course, too, because she went to visit my father on the front, and she helped there,

but it's not, it wasn't really nursing like you go through, years through it, no.

SIGRIST: What did your mother look like?

ELIASH: She was a beautiful woman. ( she laughs ) She was.

SIGRIST: In words, can you describe her?

ELIASH: I really, she was good looking. Everybody thinks so. I didn't want to speak my mother is beautiful, but everybody remarked on that. She was really very lovely looking.

SIGRIST: What color hair did she have?

ELIASH: She had dark hair but, um, but she became gray very early. So did I. She was gray, I think she said she was nineteen, twenty. Not quite gray, but having a lot of gray hair already.

SIGRIST: And, as a child, living with your mother, what do you remember her enjoying, what activities did she do when she wasn't . . .

ELIASH: My mother was very, uh, it stayed with her till, till the end, almost, curiosity about everything. She was very, uh, you know, lively and interested in

everything, and in people, particularly. That's why they had always so many friends, both of them.

SIGRIST: Was she able . . .

ELIASH: Very good with people, loved people.

SIGRIST: Was she able to pursue a profession, say, a dentistry profession.

ELIASH: She did, she did. She practiced in China.

SIGRIST: Once you got to China.

ELIASH: And in Russia, too, yes.

SIGRIST: Well, that's interesting. We'll have to talk about that.

ELIASH: Yeah, yeah. She did, yes.

SIGRIST: Did you spend most of your childhood in Kiev, or did you move somewhere else?

ELIASH: Not at all, not at all. In Kiev I was only born there, and we stayed there sixteen days, and then father was taken to the front, and we went to Kharkov, which is another big city in Ukraine.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

ELIASH: I don't know how, actually, it's spelled. I think it's K-H-A-R-K-O-V. Kharkov. I don't know. I have to write it out.

SIGRIST: Well, we can look it up. And, um . . .

ELIASH: That's the way I think it is, though.

SIGRIST: And that's a city in the Ukraine.

ELIASH: That's a, right now it's industrial, big industrial city in Ukraine. I was told, but I don't know how right it is, that some time before it was, uh, at one time it was capital of Ukraine, but as far as I know, Kiev was always capital.

SIGRIST: How long did you live there?

ELIASH: In Kharkov? The rest of the time.

SIGRIST: Tell me about your childhood in . . .

ELIASH: Well, that was, uh, that was always nice because, uh, I was a happy surroundings, but we went through a lot, they went through a lot. I, I wasn't worried about things. I was too small to worry about things. But I remember incident that could have worried, you know, people. I, there was, happy situation I remember, I

don't know how they could do it during, that was during Revolution already, '17, after that yes. The situation was very bad. Father was, uh, I think Father, as far as I remember, and hearing it always, he was the head of a hospital. But they were not, they were given money, like, uh, in eggs, and in, uh, loaf of, uh, sugar, things like that, sort of trading what, whatever they put, you know? People, the patients always brought the, things like that. They couldn't pay in money at that time, that much. Probably some did. And, uh, what did I want to say there?

SIGRIST: You were talking about the Revolution.

ELIASH: The Revolution. So we had a lot, after Revolution for many years, it wasn't quiet. Revolution wasn't like one day or several months. It went on and on and on, with so many different parties, the Revolution, like Bolsheviks and Mensheviks and different, uh, groups took charge of the government. So, like, we were, one day I was told that there were seven changes of government in the city where we lived. I remember one thing, that I was with my grandparents, and we were lying on the floor, and the bullets were, um, over us,

all around our heads. Uh, but I wasn't scared again.

I was a child, you know? That, I remember only the incident.

SIGRIST: And the fighting's going right on in the city where you are.

ELIASH: Fighting was going on in the city. Something, maybe you don't know about such things. Like I remember people digging ground to put the, whatever, the money or gold or jewelry or whatever they had, which was precious to them, you know, and hoping to get back again and retrieve it, you know? And one day, another day I remember, which I understood only later, a woman, a woman screamed something awful and, uh, I understood it was a rape later on. So things like that that I remember bad, you know, that are bad. Also once parents came home, didn't find me at home, and were, of course, very frightened. And, uh, prior to that, I must say, the government placed all the people, peasants and everybody, just took part of your apart--, one's apartment. So we had an apartment, let's say in six rooms, part of it was Father's office. And, uh, and so they put strangers in there. They left only one room for him, to see his patients,

and a bedroom, maybe another something room. So they came home and they didn't find me, didn't find the room and who took care of me. And, of course, they thought they lost me. They were frightened to death and all that. I was taken care of by somebody else in the house in the meantime, and she was put in the bathtub, tied up, and, you know. And, uh, she was saved but, uh, frightened and all that. Things like that. Many, a lot of crime, of course, at that time.

SIGRIST: Can you, um, describe for us, perhaps, the situation of getting food during this time period?

ELIASH: Food was very difficult. Father, because he had this good position in the hospital, was able to get, like I brought one day a loaf. They had cones like that, cones of sugar. I still remember that. Things like that. Uh, eggs, and people were selling those things on the market. Everybody was selling something, you know? They would sell silly things. They would sell something that one could buy, but you would, they wouldn't sell it without buying some kind of a, I had, with feathers or something, because we wanted to get rid of that, that was of no value, you know? Things like that. This I remember.

SIGRIST: Did you attend school during this time?

ELIASH: Not there, no. I don't remember, you know? About school, I don't remember. I remember with all that misery they took me to ballet, and ever since then I learned ballet, and I was probably four or five, because I saw ballet and I continued dancing at home. ( she laughs ) That's all. I don't remember about school. They placed me in this ballet school because . . .

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the ballet school at . . .

ELIASH: My ballet school didn't last long because my grandfather was so much in love with me. He came to visit me the next day I was in school. And, uh, and I cried, of course, like a child would cry. I wasn't used to that school yet, you know? So he took me home, and I never saw the ballet school again, to my great, uh, what do you call it, I'm sorry about it. My explanation is bad.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me the apartment that you lived in, in detail, that eventually, of course, you had to share.

ELIASH: Yes. Apartment was, uh, we lived, uh, next to my mother's sisters, too, and, uh, we were just on the ground floor. It was comfortable, but where, uh, they placed afterwards, where they had a better apartment, I think. And, uh, and more permanent, and where they placed other people, that was very nice apartment, really roomy, like this. And, uh, with a grand piano, on which they put all kinds of crocks with food and all that, they passed, you know. Mother was very upset about it.

SIGRIST: These people that were put into the apartment . . .

ELIASH: Strangers, complete strangers.

SIGRIST: But why? Were they people trying to move into the city, or . . .

ELIASH: Well, because you have to be all equal. If you didn't have anything, you were supposed to take it from the people who had it, and that's all.

SIGRIST: I see. So, so the government felt these people . . .

ELIASH: At that time . . .

SIGRIST: Deserved better.

ELIASH: They deserved better, yes. Proletariat. They were supposed to be the, you know, the bourgeoisie. The middle class did not count then.

SIGRIST: Did you have any other cultural outlets? You mentioned ballet. Were there any other ways . . .

ELIASH: This I don't know. I don't remember about my school. I remember, I think, sort of, kindergarten, but not there. I think I got to kindergarten . . . ( she laughs ) To something like that in China. No, it wasn't, I don't remember.

SIGRIST: Your grandparents are around you at this time.

ELIASH: I must have had it.

SIGRIST: Of some sort.

ELIASH: Yes, I, yes, I had it, but I, if I, I was eight years old when I came to China.

SIGRIST: Hmm. Um, you mentioned a grandfather. Whose parents are these?

ELIASH: My mother's.

SIGRIST: And . . .

ELIASH: And my father's parents lived in Siberia, near China.

SIGRIST: Did you ever have any inter--, you . . .

ELIASH: Well, yes. That's why we went to China.

SIGRIST: Oh, I see.

ELIASH: But we missed them. They died before.

SIGRIST: Oh. But that was the original impetus to go.

ELIASH: That was, that and my father's sister also settled there in China before him.

SIGRIST: Tell me about your mother's parents, and what sticks out in your mind about them?

ELIASH: Oh, they are wonderful people. My grandmother, uh, was, uh, I call her the first feminist I know, because she didn't wear, it was arranged marriage at that time, and she, she was, she was always telling me how lucky she was that she loved her husband, you know. That they was happy together. She didn't wear, you know, Jewish people, at that time, they wasn't, our family wasn't that religious, or at that time they couldn't think that much of religion, you know, because there were other problems. And, uh, at least

in their way, their life. So she didn't wear the, she was supposed to have hidden her hair, you know, to wear a wig, but she didn't. So that is one thing why I call her a feminist. And then she took over, I think, the business. I don't know what it was, what kind of business my grandfather had, some kind of trading, grain or something like that, I don't know. But, um, she took, she was in charge, really. Grandfather was more of a scholar, took it easier.  
( she laughs )

SIGRIST: You mentioned that your family was not particularly religious.

ELIASH: No.

SIGRIST: Was there a large Jewish community in this town?

ELIASH: I don't remember anything, except that the young people were against everything. That I know, my mother's generation, you know, they, like everywhere. There were all kinds of groups that, I don't know against whom they were. I know they were called Bundists, and, uh, against whom, I don't know. I suppose again the czar? The czar wasn't so wonderful to Jews.

SIGRIST: But the young people sort of organized themselves,  
and . . .

ELIASH: They were not so Jewish conscious. I never felt very  
Jewish conscious until I came to United, to New York.

SIGRIST: Were there any ways . . .

ELIASH: So terribly, you know? But, nevertheless, they  
couldn't study because they were Jews, and that was  
the main thing in their lives. They were all very  
interested in education.

SIGRIST: Did you have, did you have any, um, sense as a child,  
or maybe heard your parents talk later about the  
relationship between the Jewish population and the  
Gentile population at that time.

ELIASH: Relation?

SIGRIST: Obviously they've, they've kept Jews from, you know,  
schooling and that sort of thing.

ELIASH: Yes, but, and Russia, I don't know. Actually I don't  
know. I think my parents always mixed with people,  
you know, so I don't know. In our lives, we always  
had, especially in China, where I lived, in Harbin and

Manchuria. There was, I never felt anything that, we had doctors, we had a lot of doctors. Muslims living there, and we had, uh, Christians and Jews, and everybody lived pretty nice.

SIGRIST: Well, let's get . . .

ELIASH: Except later on.

SIGRIST: Let's, uh, let's get you to China.

ELIASH: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Explain to me again why you went to China.

ELIASH: Why we went to China, because of the situation, um, I suppose Father felt it would be safer, and Mother, they felt it would be safer. Their family was in China.

SIGRIST: How did, how did the family members end up in China? They were in Siberia, actually.

ELIASH: They went up, they were nearby, and I don't know how they did, but I can tell you we traveled like Dr. Zhivago. We traveled by freight train, and that was, uh, more than a month on the freight train. First stop was Moscow, because my father had a brother

who decided to go Israel, to Palestine, at that time, and he was very opposed to my father going to China. He wanted him to be a pioneer, also, in, in Palestine, but father didn't. And, uh, Father somehow, of course, people maneuvered things, you know? They, he tried to get a position in Siberia, in a hospital, and he was given that. He didn't intend to go there, to stay there, you know? So we went by this freight train, from Moscow was a freight train.

SIGRIST: Do you remember going, um, from your city to Moscow?

ELIASH: I remember very well. Ever since then I'm afraid of trains. They were packed with refugees, or people who leave for some, maybe another city, I don't know. Not immediately out of the country. And, uh, it was crowded, terribly crowded, and they could, they used to, uh, move the luggage through the windows or through the doors, whichever way they could, you know? And they couldn't, they got me through the window, and the Russian, uh, what you call, minister, you know, in this long, black robe and all that, held me, and the train started moving, and I thought, oh, goodbye, I don't see my parents any more. And, uh, of course, I started crying, but it was only maneuvering.

I didn't know that. They got on the train, but ever since then I'm afraid, I was afraid when they, when we traveled by train before to go out of the train just to get, uh, just to walk a little bit or to get a drink or something. That's my, the way I think about it, without psychiatrist.

SIGRIST: So, now, how long did it take you from Moscow to Manchuria?

ELIASH: It took a month.

SIGRIST: It took a month by train.

ELIASH: A month or more. And then not exactly to Manchuria. There, on the way, in Siberia, we had to pick up, only families did that before. I don't think families do that now. An uncle who my father didn't even know, Father's uncle, an old, and old gentleman, with his wife. And they turned out to be very religious Jews, and they carried with them all the pots and pans because they, they couldn't be without it, you know? They had to . . .

SIGRIST: For Kosher cooking, and . . .

ELIASH: Exactly, for Kosher cooking. And who cooked there, I

don't know. And how, also, I don't know. I know, they passed, you know, mountains. This I remember, in Siberia, very beautiful. And, uh, I remember, uh, some kind of an epidemic built, and then hunger built. And hunger built, I know my parents went out to get food, to buy some food at the station, and they would come almost without. Either they'd give away, or just take it. The people took it away from them.

SIGRIST: Can you describe sleeping on the train?

ELIASH: I cannot describe, but I know that the train was a freight train, and my mother was almost killed there by, by the sack of sugar or flour, I don't know, sitting up on the shelf, and it fell on her, and she couldn't say anything. She started moving her legs, and my father turned his head. In the meantime, he had his legs out of the door watching this, the scenery pass by. So it was lucky that way, you know. We were all, uh, many families were together.

SIGRIST: So there were many families going on, to the final destination, to China? Or were they sort of getting off on the way?

ELIASH: I suppose they got off on the way. This, I don't

know. But afterwards, when we got to Chitow[ph], which is a borderline city, near Manchuria[ph], which is northern part of China, Manchuria. Afterwards it became Manchucol[ph]. You probably know the, The Last Emperor movie, yes?

SIGRIST: Yes.

ELIASH: That was, uh, then. It was Manchucol[ph]. So, uh, what was I saying?

SIGRIST: Uh, you arrived in Chitow[ph].

ELIASH: Chitow[ph]. That's the first place where I saw, I was in a restaurant, with palms. ( she laughs ) Palm trees, you know, little palm trees.

SIGRIST: Potted palms.

ELIASH: Potted palms, of course, potted palms. I loved that. And I saw a Chinese man selling, even though it wasn't yet China, he was there, selling peanuts, and I never saw peanuts before. And then Father and Mother had to separate to cross the border, so my mother and I were supposed to have a person who took us across the border, and we were by train. I don't know how Father got there. We joined, we met each other

already in Manchuria[ph]. But, uh, this man got drunk on the train, and Mother was very afraid. Of course, I must say, I say that about them, because I was not emotionally involved. I was too young and too, probably, interested and curious. It wasn't anything for me, you know? But that's what I know about it. A sad situation. It was not a happy situation. And she used to see him on the streets of Harbin afterwards, the same man who brought other people. She was scared every time she saw him. It wasn't a very pleasant experience.

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

SIGRIST: Why did your parents have to split up to go over the border?

ELIASH: They couldn't go together. I was supposed to call this man Father, Daddy, and the other, and Father had to go separately, otherwise you couldn't go. Maybe he had another person to take him.

SIGRIST: I see. This was his job, sort of, to, to escort people over the border?

ELIASH: His job? He took, he got whatever they had, you know?

SIGRIST: That's how he made money.

ELIASH: That's how he made money.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the process of crossing the border and what that entailed?

ELIASH: Also not. I really don't. I don't know, strangely that you have such gaps in, uh . . .

SIGRIST: Well, the memory sort of comes in and goes out.

ELIASH: This I tried to remember, but I never remembered that.

SIGRIST: Once, once the family, did you have to wait for your father to come across the border, or did you go first?

ELIASH: We met there. That's all I remember.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. And then where did you go?

ELIASH: And then there was a sister, my father's sister. He missed already seeing his parents by then.

SIGRIST: They had died.

ELIASH: They had died. They were buried there. And, um, a sister lived there, very wealthy, very well-to-do, because she, she really was married to a man who was,

uh, very big personality in that area. As far as, he was a businessman, you know? He owned a lot of properties and factories and this and that. At the beginning of the, of that city. The city was not yet twenty-five years old when we arrived.

SIGRIST: And which city is this again?

ELIASH: Harbin.

SIGRIST: Harbin.

ELIASH: H-A-R-B-I-N.

SIGRIST: And you're in China proper now?

ELIASH: That's Manchuria. That's a part of China, northern part of China.

SIGRIST: Um, you mentioned seeing the palm trees and the peanuts.

ELIASH: The peanuts, yeah.

SIGRIST: What was, once you got to China, now, you're eight years old, this is 1923?

ELIASH: '22.

SIGRIST: 1922. What are some of the things that you see around

you when you get to Harbin that were, just, different?

ELIASH: I was not aware of things. I was just happy to be there, I remember, with Father and Mother and aunt and whatever. My parents had a culture shock. They really had. Because they went through all kinds of epidemics. They went through the hunger, and the hunger built, and for themselves it was a very difficult time emotionally, and physically, too.

SIGRIST: Where did you go to live in Harbin?

ELIASH: Right in the center of town.

SIGRIST: And, um . . .

ELIASH: And Father establish his practice. And he did very nicely there.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the building, the house, the apartment, whatever it was.

ELIASH: The houses were, like any European town. The houses, the architecture was like any European town, because the, well, in Russia, too, it was like being in Europe, the architecture.

SIGRIST: How many rooms did you have?

ELIASH: We had a, well, at first?

SIGRIST: Oh, you moved.

ELIASH: Oh, we moved.

SIGRIST: Yes, uh-huh.

ELIASH: In, uh, in China. We had comfortable house. I had my room, parents had a bedroom, living room. Father had his offices. And there, of course, in China, at that time, it is sort of a colonial life. So they, the people that work for you are very inexpensive salaries, you know, work for almost nothing.

SIGRIST: And who were those people?

ELIASH: And we had a houseboy. Chinese.

SIGRIST: They were the Chinese.

ELIASH: And Chinese cook, and, uh, sometimes even Japanese, uh, nurse they tried to get from, because they were known to be very good nurses.

SIGRIST: The Japanese?

ELIASH: Yes, but it never worked, because, or anybody else, nurse, Japanese or not, because my grandfather would

look at a nurse and he would say either she is cross-eyed or she is too tall, she is too fat, she is too small, or whatever. Never good, so never, nurse, I didn't have nurses. I just grew up like that.

SIGRIST: Did you go to school in China?

ELIASH: I went to school in China.

SIGRIST: Oh, talk about that.

ELIASH: It was Russian school. There were several schools. There were gymnasium, and there were, a school, commercial school. But it's not, uh, not, mathematics and all that wasn't stressed. It was really a general education.

SIGRIST: And were these only Russian students that were in the school?

ELIASH: Russian, Russian, yes.

SIGRIST: So there's a large Russian population.

ELIASH: There was a Russian, yes, because it's a, because Harbin was the center for, for the railroad leading to, to Russia, and to the, to the Orient. And afterwards it became center for, they built, Soviet

government built a famous railroad there, it's called, uh, Eastern something railroad. I don't remember the translation, how to translate something like Eastern railroad. And it was a big complement of Soviet people afterwards there.

SIGRIST: Is . . .

ELIASH: Also, when they . . .

SIGRIST: I'm sorry, go on. I didn't mean to interrupt you.

ELIASH: Well, and they lived separately, sort of near the railroad there was a big, uh, area where they lived. And, uh, we lived on, sort of near the railroad. It was a very big, wide railroad, very wide, not as wide as the Hudson, but pretty wide. And we had all kinds of sports there, you know, like there is such a thing like, river would freeze very solidly for winter, so they had traffic on it, you know, they would push, like a, it wasn't, how would you call it, sleds. It was a sled for, uh, ice, you know, with a man, of course Chinese man, pushing it with a pole, you know? You would press on the ice, you know, and this way he propelled this, uh, vehicle, and so that was very nice. And we were covered with fur, some kind of

cover, and all that.

SIGRIST: So it gets cold in this part of China?

ELIASH: Very, extremely cold. It's like Siberia, the same weather.

SIGRIST: Is there, um, do you remember . . .

ELIASH: And very hot in summer. It's near Gobi desert, too. Near, uh, it's near Mongolia.

SIGRIST: Do you remember a snowstorm that occurred while you lived in China?

ELIASH: We didn't have snowstorms, but we had continuous winter, snows all the time. I told somebody that it was, um, like 40 below zero, and they didn't believe. That, my nephew, that's his fault. But I think he begins to believe me now, because everybody else, um, tells about this climate. It was very, very cold. A Siberian climate.

SIGRIST: How did you heat your house, living in a place like that?

ELIASH: We had, we had stoves, I remember. Wait a minute. That was in Russia it was one way. We had also stoves

that almost built into the wall, like in Holland, maybe, they do that, you know? In all places.

SIGRIST: Like a European . . .

ELIASH: Yes. Like in peasants homes they used to build, sort of, stoves in the wall.

SIGRIST: Did you . . .

ELIASH: And people stood near and warmed themselves up.

SIGRIST: Did you have one of these stoves in every room?

ELIASH: No, then we also had, uh, steam, I think. I don't know what we had.

SIGRIST: Did you have electricity?

ELIASH: I didn't pay attention. Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: In China you had electricity.

ELIASH: It was very, very comfortable, and very luxurious, even, back then. Because, at least, when I talk about my aunt's house, it was like a palace. Afterwards it was taken by consulate, I think, by Russian consulate when they came, you know? When they, you know, had to leave, they died. And went to them.

SIGRIST: Tell me about your . . .

ELIASH: Confiscated, like they confiscated my mother's . . .

SIGRIST: Did that happen within your time there, in China, or after . . .

ELIASH: No, after.

SIGRIST: Afterwards. Tell me about your, your father's business, his . . .

ELIASH: Father practiced very well. He practiced on the Mongolist people that lived there, except also Mongolians would come that, they never came alone. They came in the big crowds. They came, uh, like, uh, the whole family. If one patient, with the whole family. Six, seven people. And, uh, that was, that was it. And, uh, Chinese, some Chinese. We were on the third or fourth floor. Of course, there was no, no way up, just the steps. And if there was an old lady they would, she would, you know, on piggyback and her sons, or her husband carried her like that, you know? So, but, uh, otherwise he had, uh, my father studied Chinese, too, because he wanted to be, we had translator. The translator was the houseboy. But not

everybody can be present, you know, in examination. So it wasn't so easy. So Father studied Chinese, too, but I didn't study because I was, uh, we had very good curriculum there. And when I graduated, I was accepted at New York University on the strength of my diploma, that's all. In fact, the first, the first, uh, year was probably in University. I mean, the last year of high school is like the first year . . .

SIGRIST: On the level of a college.

ELIASH: The first year of college, yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me about, um, you mentioned earlier your mother practiced dentistry in China.

ELIASH: She practiced dentistry in China.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit about that?

ELIASH: Well, she had the office in the apartment. We had a very nice apartment there with a balcony and everything, and a piano again, and I studied piano four years, which I don't remember now how to, you know, how to . . .

SIGRIST: With a Russian teacher, or a Chinese teacher?

ELIASH: Russian.

SIGRIST: Interesting.

ELIASH: No, no, nothing to do with Chinese, unfortunately, except trading, just, uh, we spoke pigeon English, or pigeon Russian, and they spoke half Russian, half Chinese, and we did the same.

SIGRIST: Now, your . . .

ELIASH: And they brought food to the house, like fish, for instance. It was, you know, it was moving, jumping. They had such poles, on the shoulder, and on both poles are baskets, and they brought food like that. I don't remember about meat, whether they had a butcher or they brought meat like that. And, uh, the cook is always the main character in the kitchen. You wouldn't let me, you wouldn't believe it when, I didn't, when I came to United States, I did not know how to, I did not, uh, take a glass of water myself. Because it's completely, that was, the man, he wouldn't allow anybody in the kitchen.

SIGRIST: Did the cook, um, prepare mostly Chinese style food, or Russian style food?

ELIASH: No, not at all. Never had Chinese food until I came here. ( they laugh ) In other parts of China, yes, like in (?), became fine, many of my friends know about Chinese food, but not in Harbin.

SIGRIST: What was your favorite food that the, that the cook prepared?

ELIASH: Oh, we had sort of French cooking and continental cooking, Russian cooking. And they cooked everything. He would come to my mother in the morning with a pad what, for the day. And, uh, he, he was the, the main character there. He also, he would not peel potatoes, let's say, or carrots, or anything. That's beneath him. He had to have gold teeth, or several gold teeth, to be seen. And very fat. That he had, that showed that he's very important. And then he employed, he employed or he got a man who would do menial work for him, like peeling and doing things like that. And everything was not that expensive there.

SIGRIST: You're smiling as you're talking about the cook.

ELIASH: I'm smiling because . . .

SIGRIST: And he must have a special place . . .

ELIASH: No, not the cook. The houseboy was my special.

SIGRIST: Why was he so special to you?

ELIASH: He and I were friends. He was like my amma[ph], nurse. He was taking care of me. He, he, uh, I wasn't allowed, when I remember later on, when I went to high school, let's say, we went, we were skating rink, yes? I was never allowed to go alone. He, or grandfather or somebody, saw that I, because, because of my uncle, unfortunately, who was well-to-do, and my parents used to get letters from kidnapers. At that time they were kidnapping. They would, nobody would kidnap a girl, but they had letters, so they were afraid. So I never was alone. Even with schoolchildren, we would go to school, and I knew that I saw somebody that I know near me, you know? And my father wasn't well off, not at all, but it didn't matter to them, because I knew who my uncle was, you know, and he would take care of it.

SIGRIST: And the houseboy sort of . . .

ELIASH: It was just a threat. So the houseboy was always with me, and he used to be probably talented, and he used to paint, you know, the scrolls and all that. So he

and I, I used to have my clay with me. I don't know where I got the desire to do sculpture.

SIGRIST: Was this the first time that you became interested . . .

ELIASH: Yes, I did, yes, since childhood. I did my sculpture, and he did his birds, or flowers.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what his name was?

ELIASH: Cortya[ph], Constantine. They gave him Russian name. Of course, he had Chinese name, which I didn't know. Uh, he was, uh, he, we called him Cortya[ph], which is diminutive. Russians are very much for diminutive, several names for one name, you know? And in Russia, there in Harbin, I must told you, we had friends, uh, my closest friend is not Jewish. My old closest friends were not Jewish, and the school was completely mixed. We felt nothing bad about anybody. For instance, the only thing was that, uh, there was a religious class for Christians. Jews didn't have it. So we had history, Jewish history. And doctors had (?), and the rest of the studies we all mixed and enjoyed it. And so were the grown up, too, completely mixed group.

SIGRIST: So if the . . .

ELIASH: A very good feeling.

SIGRIST: The Russian Jews got along with the Russian gentiles.

ELIASH: Very well.

SIGRIST: How did the, how did the Russian population get along with the Chinese population?

ELIASH: Russian did very well, but not so surely. We never really had any dealings with it. They could be my father's patient, they could be tradespeople that we deal with.

SIGRIST: Household domestics.

ELIASH: Restaurant, that's it. And I regret it, because if I were grown up by this time . . . ( she laughs ) By this time I've learned a lot more. And my parents, too, and all that. But, uh, at that time there was not such a connection. It's just too much, too close to colonial time then, before. When we went, there was no colony. But other places, like Mother and I went one summer to New Chanzine[ph], to summer resort. That's not far from the Great Wall. And, uh, what

was I talking about?

SIGRIST: You and your mother went on a . . .

ELIASH: Yes, but what I was talking before, before that?

SIGRIST: Oh, we were talking about the relationship between the Chinese and the Russians, and you were saying everyone got along well, but that, um, the colonialism, the colonialism . . .

ELIASH: I saw a girl, yes. We went, made various excursions, and they do it on donkeys there, because it's hilly and all that. So we went the donkey. While you're on the donkey, the Chinese man runs alongside. He doesn't have another horse. He runs alongside. But you are not galloping. You are not really, you know, going slowly. Still, he's on his feet. And I saw a girl, I was very upset. Ever since then I remember that, I was told she's English girl, I wasn't sure. Uh, getting off her donkey, and beating, whipping this young man who had this donkey. So that colonialism was instilled in them still, you know? And, therefore, maybe, there was not so much contact. But in other parts of the country, I suppose, many of the people, I have a friend, several, who knew Chinese,

who lived in different parts of China, like in Peking, or moved in some other parts, yes.

SIGRIST: So you were in a much more European atmosphere.

ELIASH: I was more in, the Russians were mostly there, yes. The Russian (?). Then afterwards, of course, there were also White Russians who fled from, uh, the Revolution, too, but even before. And, uh, when Japanese came in '30 . . .

SIGRIST: 1930.

ELIASH: Started to, uh, try to conquer part of China, they introduced a lot of, uh, drugs and all that, and drug, the dens were, opium dens, and all that. They tried to cut off the situation, the people, you know, at that time. And the White Russians, with the Japanese at that time, I don't harbor any feeling about anybody, but that's, that's how it was. Uh, but this group of White Russians, uh, White Russians are, I would say, former aristocrats, or former, I don't know what, government people and all that. They, they were the kidnapers. They, they did the criminal things with the . . .

SIGRIST: So this is when the atmosphere is changing.

ELIASH: Many of them, many of them. That was at the end of my stay there, towards the end. They killed a friend of ours. They, they kidnapped him, and he came to concertize. He is a concert pianist. He came from Paris to give concerts. We had, by the way, we had very good, uh, musical life there. All the famous people came to, like Kreisler[ph] or Heifitz[ph], I don't know, those well-known people. Also, I forgot to tell you what. Well-known people like, uh, Fairbanks, came.

SIGRIST: Yes, Douglas Fairbanks?

ELIASH: Uh, Senior.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

ELIASH: And, uh, and, uh, um, the humorist . . .

SIGRIST: Charlie Chaplain?

ELIASH: Rogers, Will Rogers.

SIGRIST: Oh, Will Rogers.

ELIASH: Will Rogers, at that time. And, you know, in smaller place, many people get to know. So my parents would know some, meet some of these people.

SIGRIST: Were there any American residents in Harbin at that time?

ELIASH: I don't think, there were more, other people who remained from colonies, like, uh, there was Swiss colony and all there were, not colony, still group from former times, and we remained there.

SIGRIST: Why did you . . .

ELIASH: Many, there was very literary life there. We had quite a few, we had law school, we didn't have medical school. We had, uh, other graduate schools. And, uh, and there were many poets in that area.

SIGRIST: Ports.

ELIASH: Poets.

SIGRIST: Oh, poets, poets. Uh-huh.

ELIASH: And literary people, many. And some we knew because, uh, because we just tried to, my mother arranged literary, we just had to do these things, you know? Literary afternoons people, we were children, but since childhood we had groups of people, and somebody would talk to us or read to us. Russians always read

poetry.

SIGRIST: But this cultural aspect was very important.

ELIASH: Very important then, yes, yes. Even on Christmas time when we had parties, we would stand up, as children, and have to recite poetry.

SIGRIST: What about, um . . .

ELIASH: That was entertainment.

SIGRIST: You mentioned American actors coming in. Was it, what about films? Did you see . . .

ELIASH: I don't know why they didn't . . . Whom?

SIGRIST: Films. Did you have American movies that you saw in Harbin?

ELIASH: At that time, uh, no. I just tried to recall, I don't think I saw any films yet there. And there were no museums, very strangely. They had temples and this and that, which was museum for me, but it was not museums per se, you know? But there were musical, uh, chamber music and, uh, things like that.

SIGRIST: Tell me why you wanted to come to America?

ELIASH: I wanted to come because my, many of my cousins and my family, extended family, and my parents and all that, were doctors, and I decided I must be a doctor, so I came to study premedical. And because my uncle visited us from United States, and, uh, he liked me, and he had no children, and he thought it would be nice if I, uh, I spend time with them, with my uncle and aunt who didn't have children. And so I came. But, of course, I had another idea. I wanted to study premedical, and all I knew is the ivy colleges. I knew about, uh, Princeton, Harvard, Barnard College, better colleges, better-known colleges, known there. And when I came here, I didn't speak enough English, so I needed a translator when I went to Barnard, and they say, "Come next year." And I had to study, but New York University accepted me. So I went for a year there, and then Barnard College accepted me.

SIGRIST: How did your parents feel about your desire to go to America?

ELIASH: I had no desire to go to America. I knew nothing about it. They arranged it.

SIGRIST: They arranged it. That's right, with the uncle.

ELIASH: They arranged it because they wanted me to get out. We had already bombs flying through the, through the air in Harbin, with Japanese trying to conquer that part of the world, and it wasn't safe. And, plus, the kidnapping business. That wasn't safe. Not for everybody, but I was in that position, and not because father was doing so well, or he wasn't doing so well. He came here actually almost with nothing, because he had to rescue my uncle's business there. And, um, you know, like family, just give away everything to family. And then my uncle died and, uh, father was in a bad situation when he came here.

SIGRIST: When you were in China, what did you know about America? How did you perceive America before you got here?

ELIASH: I didn't think about it. Tell you the truth, I just wanted to study. I knew that that would be easy. And I thought that I would live on the campus or something, but I imagined it would be interesting and nice. But I came to two people who wanted to have a child. ( she laughs ) And they didn't want me to go to live somewhere. So we tried the city here, you know, New York University, and then Barnard College.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about the . . .

ELIASH: I went back, you know, in '34.

SIGRIST: Back to China.

ELIASH: To visit them, to visit my parents. That was interesting.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me about the process of getting ready, getting the proper papers and that sort of thing, before you left for America in '31?

ELIASH: Well, that was done, that was it. That was the mistake that consul, American consul, made there. He, I was a minor, and he did not get any of my, he did not let me sign any papers. He made my mother sign all the papers. So when I arrived and my uncle and auntie met me here, and I thought I will go home with them, they wouldn't let me. They took me to Ellis Island. So that I was there for three days.

SIGRIST: And did they think that you were your mother? Is that . . .

ELIASH: Yes.

SIGRIST: Because her signature was on these . . .

ELIASH: Yes. Well, whatever it is, I was not what I was. But my uncle had a big practice here among them. He had a Senator Copeland at that time. I remember the name, but I never met the man. And he, and at that time Ellis Island, as far as I understood, did not, uh, divide people that were criminals and that were not criminals, the element, you know? People, okay. So . . .

SIGRIST: Well, actually, before we get too far into Ellis Island, we need to just pause for a moment so we can put another tape in.

ELIASH: Fine. I'll have a drink. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: And then we'll continue on. So this is the end of Tape One with Zara Eliash.

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

SIGRIST: Okay. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. It is Friday, June 30, 1995, and we are now beginning Tape Two with Zara Eliash, who was born in Russia then lived in China and finally came to America in 1931. Mrs. Eliash, we were just going to get you

on the boat to get to America.

ELIASH: Oh, yeah. That was interesting.

SIGRIST: You mentioned that you had to, your mother signed your papers for you, which was later the cause of why you had to go to Ellis Island.

ELIASH: Exactly.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me what you packed to take with you to America?

ELIASH: Oh, everything. I had beautiful wardrobe. In China, we don't have, we had some, we had a good department store, but it wasn't for clothes, really. So we had a habit of having a dressmaker live with you for several weeks, and do like, make like a dowry, whatever it is, clothes, whatever it is. And they prided themselves on being French clothes, whatever, French styles, they had the magazines and all that. And I came here with fantastic outfits.

SIGRIST: Can you describe, do you remember some of the outfits?  
Can you describe them for me?

ELIASH: I have, first of all, living in China, living in Manchuria where we lived, we needed warm clothes. So

fur coats for us, we wore since childhood. So it was nothing new. When I came here, I had a squirrel coat, a beaver coat, jacket, or something. I had three or four things like that. And a pony coat, which you don't see now.

SIGRIST: Pony, you're saying.

ELIASH: A pony, out of a pony.

SIGRIST: What color is that?

ELIASH: White and black. It was, no, it was mostly black, mostly black, that's right, beautiful. And, uh, and I had, at that time you wore a lot of long dresses, at least Mother thought so, here. So she was right, because when we went to theaters here, you wore any clothes. And when you . . .

SIGRIST: And when you say long, you're talking about floor-length.

ELIASH: Long, evening clothes. Floor-length evening clothes.

I remember I saw the first play was here, with Helen Hayes, What Every Woman Knows. For me it was very impressive, and how she walked on the stage and all, that was fantastic. And she, and, uh, everybody in

the orchestra, at least, was in the evening clothes.

SIGRIST: In . . .

ELIASH: But at that time was different.

SIGRIST: So in China you had all your clothes . . .

ELIASH: Made.

SIGRIST: Made, prior to coming.

ELIASH: Prior to that I didn't wear evening clothes. I graduated, I had a ball, whatever it is, everybody was there, and not I had the ball, my class had the ball.

And that was my first evening dress. But I had many more that Mother had made for me.

SIGRIST: What about objects?

ELIASH: And they all were beautiful here. They're just right.

SIGRIST: Um, what about objects that you took with you, if you took any objects?

ELIASH: No, just, no. I didn't take any objects. I wasn't interested in any objects then.

SIGRIST: Was there some kind of a send-off dinner for you?

ELIASH: Oh, there's continuous, uh, forty people saw me off at the station, you know? It's not so many family. We don't have such a big family there, but friends.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me what . . .

ELIASH: With roses, with the roses, with flowers, with, you take this flower, it is so stupid to take flowers on a train when they wilt right away. You cannot have vases, you cannot take care. And I didn't even know how to take care of things. I was a child. I came here completely very young, rather protected childhood, you know? And we had, childhood in China at that time, there were no dates, like in America youngsters do. Dates? We're, no going out with anybody particular or thing, in groups. We were always friends. In our house we had, when I come from school we had half of my class in my house, always. Either my parents wanted me to, to have friends because I was the only child, I don't know that. Or they were just open house, that's all. And we had many meals. Our afternoon meal, after lunch, which is dinner. Breakfast, lunch, coming back to China.

SIGRIST: You mean the heavy meal was at lunchtime.

ELIASH: The heavy meal was lunchtime. Then there was tea, with pastries and everything. The tea cooked, the cook. And, of course, the boys and girls like it very much. Yeah, you know? And we had, uh . . . ( she laughs ) Then we skated every summer. I forgot to tell you that. There was a skating rink.

SIGRIST: Are you talking about rollerskating or ice-skating?

ELIASH: No, no rollerskating then. It was ice.

SIGRIST: Ice. Every winter.

ELIASH: Every winter.

SIGRIST: Every winter.

ELIASH: And every day. There was no figure skating yet, and I knew only one lady, who was a friend of our parents, who did that. But no, we didn't.

SIGRIST: Tell me what it was like to say goodbye to your parents.

ELIASH: Terrible. Not so terrible for me. Later on was terrible. I was curious, I was interested. I'm going somewhere. It was terrible for my mother. She took me to Japan. I, um, my, the ship was Cober[ph], from

Cober[ph], leaving from Cober[ph], which you hear  
now . . .

SIGRIST: Yes, with the earthquake, sure.

ELIASH: The earthquakes. And that time Cober[ph] was, of  
course, a very Japanese town. We lived with a friend  
of my mother's who lived in a Japanese house. And you  
could see, you could hear the clicking of the, women  
at that time wore Japanese, uh, outfits, dresses.  
They didn't wear Western clothes there. MEN mixed,  
but women only Japanese clothes. So that was that.  
And for Mother, it was very difficult to part with me.  
When she did, she said that she didn't know, she made  
a stupid thing, terrible, to just let me go like that  
alone, but she, she talked to the captain of the ship,  
and he said people will take care of her. She would,  
and he did come to see me every once in a while. I  
was in another class. I was in, excuse me.

SIGRIST: How did you get from Harbin to Cober[ph]?

ELIASH: By, by, uh, wait a moment. We took a train to  
Moogden[ph], and in Moogden[ph] we, they took a, they  
took a room just to rest for the day during the rain.

SIGRIST: Moogden[ph], you're saying.

ELIASH: Moogden[ph], that is also in, that's in China. I didn't see anything of Moogden[ph]. Then we boarded the train to go to, uh, to Cober[ph] eventually. But, uh, on the plane, on the train I became very friendly with Japanese, uh, young man, he sat next to me. A boy my age. And he turned out to be the son of the general on the, and every station, every important station, a big crowd used to meet this Japanese general. And, you know, forever, forever greeting him, you know?

SIGRIST: Bowing, you're just gesturing.

ELIASH: Bowing, yeah, that's the gesture. And, uh, he was very important. I don't know who he was. The young man wrote to me later on for several years, and he wrote that, uh, that Tokyo, they hope that Tokyo will be as populated, or even more so, which it is, than New York someday, which it turned out to be.

SIGRIST: How did you feel about having to go to Japan in light of the fact that the Japanese had caused so much trouble in Harbin.

ELIASH: It didn't bother me. ( she laughs ) There I was not sensitive. I don't really know much about it. I was

just interested with, traveled, we saw it a little bit. Uh, Mother traveled a little more after I left, but we saw a little bit of Japan then. After all, we spent there a month.

SIGRIST: Did your father go with you, too?

ELIASH: No, Father no.

SIGRIST: Just you and your mother traveling?

ELIASH: Yeah, Mother took me there, and Father remained at home with his practice, and probably felt miserable. I remember he packed me. Before I left, there's trunks, probably. We probably had a trunk or something. I don't know, heavy things. And he packed me, it was so carefully and everything. And then after he packed I said, "Forgot this? Do you remember? Do I have this there?" ( she laughs ) I remember he got very mad with him. It's only because he was so tense and upset because he, I was his love, you know? He loved me. So he was so upset, and we remembered it then, forever, later, you know, how upset and how angry he became with me, and he took everything out and packed all over again. ( she laughs ) But, uh, I don't remember if they found

something or not, I have no idea. I know that I was, upset for that thing, only, that I knew that he was upset.

SIGRIST: So you got on the ship in Cober[ph].

ELIASH: I got on the ship in Cober[ph], yes.

SIGRIST: And the name of the ship was?

ELIASH: President Hoover.

SIGRIST: President Hoover.

ELIASH: And it turned out to be, for me, maybe my parents knew, but I didn't know that it's going to be first maiden voyage of that ship. We had, we had General Pershing on the ship, and we had, you remember the sisters, movie sisters, Constance Bennett and, uh, do you remember those?

SIGRIST: Constance Bennett?

ELIASH: And her sister.

SIGRIST: And, um . . .

ELIASH: The other one. Well, anyway, the other one was on the ship.

SIGRIST: I should know that. Anyway, maybe it will come to me.  
( he laughs )

ELIASH: The other movie star was there. Uh, and, uh, when we  
arrived to Honolulu . . .

SIGRIST: Joan Bennett?

ELIASH: Joan Bennett.

SIGRIST: Joan, right. Constance and Joan.

ELIASH: She was very pretty. And Honolulu, there was  
tremendous greeting for, um, Pershing, General  
Pershing. The, overhead, the planes and the, I think  
I didn't see a plane until then, because we didn't  
have planes. That's why I traveled by ship.

SIGRIST: What, um, what time of the year is this?

ELIASH: The cruise was . . . Excuse me.

SIGRIST: Go ahead, go ahead. I'm sorry.

ELIASH: The cruise stopped in San Francisco, which was very  
good for me. Not just stopped, I was there about  
three days, three or four days. And I had my aunt  
there. She was delighted. And I was happy, and then

my friend, whom I still see now, I was for his eightieth birthday two years ago in California, and, uh, we're in touch all the time, he, he met me at the, and my cousin, and I was with them all the time. And then, um, then it stopped in Los Angeles, where I also had family, which I didn't know, but they, they had signs, wore something, they knew who I am, to greet me. And I was also with them for about three days. And first time I saw that area, of course. And then, then we went, uh, via Panama Canal. We saw the locks and everything, and on the ship everybody was wonderful to me, really wonderful. And when they went sight-seeing they took me. I didn't feel like a single lady. ( she laughs ) They just took me around everywhere.

SIGRIST: What time of the year . . .

ELIASH: And then we stopped, excuse me, in Cuba, too, in Cuba. I don't know anybody who was in Cuba besides me, at that time, '31. And also sight, and then I came here, and I had such a greeting. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: How long did it take from Cober[ph] to New York?

ELIASH: Forty-two days.

SIGRIST: Wow. And what time of the year was this?

ELIASH: November.

SIGRIST: So this was in November of 1931.

ELIASH: '31.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me where you slept on the ship?

ELIASH: On, oh, I slept, I had a, what they call, what did they call those rooms? The stateroom, yes? With another lady, and the other lady turned out to be a missionary. And she wanted me to, to, uh, change my religion. And I said, "Well, I don't want to. I'm Jewish, and I used to be Jewish." She said, "No, whatever." She bothered me so much that I finally complained to somebody on the ship, and they moved her, and I remained alone, and I was perfectly happy.  
( she laughs ) Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did, um . . .

ELIASH: But the ship was very nice atmosphere.

SIGRIST: Do you remember weather conditions on the ship at all?

ELIASH: I remember seeing flying, flying, uh, fishes, fish.

When they told me that it will be then. And then we were in typhoon.

SIGRIST: And can you explain . . .

ELIASH: They said in the tail of typhoon, which was very bad. Almost everybody was sick but me and a few people. Uh, that, that was the end of the typhoon which we caught. And otherwise everything was a good sailing.

SIGRIST: Did they, um, take you through safety drills on the ship?

ELIASH: Yes, absolutely.

SIGRIST: Can you describe that?

ELIASH: Well, as usual, they're, uh, the same as usual, maybe not as sophisticated as now with boats, you know, and all that. But, uh, they just told us, I think they had this, the ring, what do you call it, the ring to, if you end up in the water, to keep you up.

SIGRIST: Oh, a life preserver.

ELIASH: A life preserver. And they rang the bell several times regularly. At intervals, but regularly. We had to go through that.

SIGRIST: Were there activities on the ship?

ELIASH: No, no, not really for young people. I don't even remember. There was one young woman that I was friendly with, got friendly with, a young girl, really, from Philippines, but she was not Filipino. She was of Spanish descent. Lolita, I remember her name, Lolita.

SIGRIST: Lolita.

ELIASH: I just remembered. And, um, we were sort of friendly during the ship right. That's all. That was the end of it. I don't remember other young people there.

SIGRIST: Had you already . . .

ELIASH: But all, I must tell you, all the officers, or not officers, I danced with everybody, and they were very nice to me, and we had a good time.

SIGRIST: Did you get a chance to speak to General Pershing while you were on the phone?

ELIASH: No, I didn't even know until, he was there, until this reception for him. And I wasn't in the same class. I was in, uh, what is it? There are three classes then.

I was in the middle class.

SIGRIST: Second class.

ELIASH: Second class, what I was.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how much the voyage cost?

ELIASH: No, I have no idea. I know that, uh, that the captain visited me a couple of times. He did not invite me to any captain's dinners, but he visited me, and he also sent somebody to see how, whether I'm doing well. But there was a very unpleasant experience. I don't remember the name of a gentleman, a furrier, who went to China to, to get the furs, you know, good furs. They have very good furs there. And, um, he tried to, he learned that I was there through somebody, Mother knew somebody, but she didn't know him. But when Mother heard that he will be there, and somebody knows him, she was very happy about it. It turned out to be a very bad experience. He tried to make me take some furs and go through the customs here, you know? And I, without ever having any such experience before, nobody would ever tell me, I refused. I said it's not the sort of thing that I would do. He would be laughing, he says, "You just carry it in. You wear

one thing, and you carry another," or something like that. So, anyway, he bothered me all the time. He was a very vulgar man. He had come in the dining room and altogether embarrassed me. And then, then he just, uh, stopped at the end, because I refused completely. But he bothered me all trip, all the trip.

SIGRIST: Tell me about visiting your aunt in San Francisco. That was the first time . . .

ELIASH: Yes, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: You're in America at that point.

ELIASH: Yes. She was a nurse, a practical nurse, in the hospital, and she was sort of, after divorce. And, uh, she loved me, because I knew her in China before, before she went to America.

SIGRIST: This is your mother's sister?

ELIASH: No, father's sister.

SIGRIST: Father's sister.

ELIASH: She, she was very happy. She was very loving and very nice, and I remember first breakfast, American

breakfast I had on this soil. Fruit cup. ( she laughs ) I remember fruit cup, and toast. ( she laughs ) Things like that I didn't have. I don't remember what I ate in China, to tell you the truth. I don't.

SIGRIST: Did I ask you if you had studied any English prior to being on the ship?

ELIASH: Yes, but our teacher, English teacher, later on, came through San Francisco, any former students of her had to take her around and help her, because her English was very inadequate. And I did not study long enough.

SIGRIST: Did you know enough to . . .

ELIASH: And I was given a French, a French teacher, to study French, and for some reason I, I, uh, I was skipping it, running away.

SIGRIST: Well, you mentioned that you . . .

ELIASH: And she was here, a block away from me, now.

SIGRIST: You mentioned that you, um . . .

ELIASH: She's . . .

SIGRIST: Communicated with a Filipino girl on the ship, with

what? How did you communicate?

ELIASH: In English. Whatever I learned, I picked up a lot on the ship, too. What I want to order, and what I, I understood a lot, but not really to converse well, you know, but somehow people were very nice to me, so I'd probably make myself . . .

SIGRIST: Yeah, you make it through somehow.

ELIASH: Yes, yes, yeah.

SIGRIST: All right. Well, tell me what happens.

ELIASH: Not to study enough in the college, you know? Not to compete. Even when I started here in New York, in New York University, I started immediately with sciences and everything, and everything, everybody was American, and I, I have to learn, study English at night. And, uh, so I learned some things just by rote. Once I took a wrong exam completely, because we were all in one room, the advanced and my group. And I took the, the other class. So the, the professor afterwards wrote a letter to my uncle. He wishes that many students had such perseverance and wants to study as well. I was all right.

SIGRIST: Tell me what happened when the ship arrived in New York.

ELIASH: Well, that was a bit, I couldn't understand it, they let me wait with a few other people.

SIGRIST: The ship docked.

ELIASH: The ship docked.

SIGRIST: Did you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

ELIASH: Yes, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Did you know what that was?

ELIASH: I saw too much of the Statue of Liberty later on from Ellis Island. ( they laugh ) From Ellis Island, I mean, not now.

SIGRIST: The ship docks, and then they pull you aside.

ELIASH: Yes, they, they, they, uh, I don't know. There were tables, and they pass everybody. Everybody goes their ways, and people meet them and all that, and my uncle and auntie met me, and, uh, and what happened is that, uh, they detained me, and I started crying. They didn't know am I going back, or am I staying here, or whatever it is. But uncle reassured me that he will

do something about it. He talked to his friend, Senator Copeland, and Senator Copeland talked to somebody there, and they made for me special privileges, which was a room for eight beds with a double ceiling and the windows on top. Somebody came, before we went to bed, to close even those little windows, as though I would escape. And, uh, because they told me then that they did have criminals among the people. They did not separate them at that time, yet. I don't know.

SIGRIST: How did you get from where the ship docked to Ellis Island?

ELIASH: I think there was a boat.

SIGRIST: They brought you, they, you had to leave your uncle, then, I assume, or did he go out to Ellis Island with you?

ELIASH: No. No, they visited me once, because they were not allowed to visit us, but because of the senator he was allowed to, he and my aunt. And he said that I could, I could drown the Ellis Island with my tears. I was really upset. Anyway, I can tell you how it was in Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: Yes, please.

ELIASH: When you go, I remember when you go to bed at night, uh, at the bottom of the stairs stands a person who gives you towel and soap, and that's all. And you go upstairs. I think I could recognize my room if it's still there, and you go upstairs, very nice balcony on second floor, and, uh, I was put in that big room. I got scared, you know, because I was never in such a colossal hall, you know, for eight people or ten people, and I was alone with my suitcases there, cold. I slept, I think, in my fur coat. And I, I thought there were bugs there. I don't know. I really don't know. So I thought the coat would protect me, whatever it was. No bathtubs really, or anything. Well, I don't remember where it was, probably somewhere in a separate there, I don't know. This I don't remember. I remember in the morning women were given, about eleven o'clock, women and children were given milk and a cracker or something. The men were not. Then we had to take a walk, like prisoners, take a walk in the, around and around and around, and then dinner. When I first went to that dining room, there were two tables that I remember, two big tables. One

was Italian, the other one was Jewish. And both tables wanted me. The Italians thought I was Italian.

( she laughs ) I had black hair, and maybe I, they thought so, or they liked me, and the Jews wanted me, so I went with them. But that's, that's all I remember, and crying. That's all.

SIGRIST: Do you . . .

ELIASH: And then hearing. There was a hearing on Monday, and they apologized. They said that that was a mistake. They are sorry.

SIGRIST: Why was it that you stayed three days?

ELIASH: It was, because it was a weekend.

SIGRIST: It was a weekend.

ELIASH: Otherwise they probably would have, uh, maybe they would have had the hearing next day, maybe not. Anyway, it was an experience.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, you said that you had a hearing. Do you remember who was present?

ELIASH: Uh, there were several people with, like, a judge. I don't know, there are several men. There was always

no women then before in those expositions. And they asked me questions, and I answered the questions, and that's all. They said, "We are very sorry, we're in the wrong, and you can go home."

SIGRIST: Do you remember what language you were conversing in at that time?

ELIASH: Only in English.

SIGRIST: In English. You were using your English.

ELIASH: Yes, yes. I didn't know much, but I understood enough.

SIGRIST: You mentioned that your uncle came to visit you.

ELIASH: My uncle came to visit, and they allowed him to visit me a very short time, just a few minutes with auntie and a guard, as though I was a big criminal then.

SIGRIST: Did your uncle bring you anything when he came?

ELIASH: No, no. Probably he was not allowed, no. I had enough with me. I had enough stuff. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: Where is all your luggage at this point, while you were at Ellis Island? Do you know where your luggage was?

ELIASH: It was in my room, I think.

SIGRIST: You had it with you.

ELIASH: I think it was in my room, because I remember taking out my coat or something. I don't know. In November I wouldn't have had use for a very heavy coat. I don't remember. There are some things I miss.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of the other people who were detained there for any reason, someone who might stick out in your mind?

ELIASH: No. I was pointed that this woman was a murderer, and another man was a murderer, but that might be just stories, you know? Just to dramatize the situation. But everybody was together there.

SIGRIST: What did you do during the day?

ELIASH: I just waited.

SIGRIST: Where did you wait?

ELIASH: We didn't do anything. I think I ate, and I walked, I did what the (?) do. (?) walked during the day, so I walked in that garden, in that yard. What did I do? Nothing. I was just waiting in between, I was just, I

remember the boredom, that's all. Boredom.

SIGRIST: Was there a designated place for you to sit and do nothing, or did you have to go somewhere?

ELIASH: Oh, no. We chose, I mean, for instance, dining room I could eat with anybody. I mean, whoever asked me to sit with. And I, first time I sat at one table, so I remained there. I don't remember one person from there. I don't remember how, I remember they were nice to me but, uh, I don't remember anybody in particular.

SIGRIST: Did you have to undergo any kind of medical exams while you were there?

ELIASH: No.

SIGRIST: Nothing.

ELIASH: No. Not that I remember. It might be, so, actually before that they did very thorough exam of the eyes and all that, you know? I think they probably did something, but I don't remember it.

SIGRIST: Did you know what Ellis Island was?

ELIASH: I have no idea. I have no idea. To me it was a shock

that they brought me there.

SIGRIST: And you said you could see the Statue of Liberty from . . .

ELIASH: Yes, from there, a very good view. ( she laughs )  
Very nearby.

SIGRIST: So, um, they brought you into the hearing, and they told you that this has been a terrible mistake.

ELIASH: That's all. And then I don't know how it is, maybe my uncle was, maybe he was there already waiting for me.  
I don't know. I suppose so. Because I was ready to go very fast from there.

SIGRIST: This is sort of a strange questions, but when the three days that you were at Ellis Island, did you wear the same clothes?

ELIASH: I don't remember. Probably. I was too miserable to think, even. Even now I'm the same way. I'm not very much interested, I am interested, I like clothes, but I'm not a changer. I can wear the same thing several days in succession. ( they laugh ) And there I didn't, I didn't bother. And I wasn't clothes-conscious then. I was too young. It's not American

children.

SIGRIST: Right, it's a whole different mindset.

ELIASH: A different mindset. Nobody thought about sneakers that are out of style or something.

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE TWO

SIGRIST: Did your uncle come to Ellis Island to get you, or did you go into Manhattan and meet him?

ELIASH: I had a personal shock with uncle and auntie, because they really didn't get along well. I didn't know that. He never told Auntie that I'm coming. So when I came Auntie sat with her migraine bandage over the head. I didn't know those things existed, but it was explained to me. And she had a shock, but she was very, very wonderful to me and very lovely in general. From then on, always, we were very close.

SIGRIST: Where did they live?

ELIASH: They lived in a very wonderful area, right here, Central Park South, which is a Trump building opposite, um, uh, St. Moritz Hotel, Sixth Avenue and Central Park South.

SIGRIST: And, um, tell me again . . .

ELIASH: And they had, they had a duplex. I didn't pay much attention to niceties, but it was very nice, with a wonderful view to the park, and thirteen floor, and twelfth floor, and Uncle had very interesting clientele, because he loved, he was an ear, nose and throat man. He had people who were singers and well-known people, like, um, what's his name? Paul Robeson, who became, he was his friend, and he was delighted that I spoke Russian, because he was studying Russian then to, to leave this country, you know? He planned already then. So he practiced it with me. He used to come and sit down at the piano and play and sing, and, wonderful. Many people like that. He had an interesting crowd of patients, and friends among them.

SIGRIST: Were you given your own room in your uncle's?

ELIASH: Uncle's? No.

SIGRIST: Home.

ELIASH: No, they didn't have it, because it was duplex, but lower part was for his offices and living room. And

that's where I, I had the living room, that's right, but not a room to myself. Uh, that was in the, on his floor. And then, uh, upstairs was, uh, a bedroom, and another living room. That's what living, actually, where I spent most of the time.

SIGRIST: Now, were you expected to . . .

ELIASH: I was very lonely. Then I was sick. Then I was sick for a long, homesick. I was really homesick. I read my letters recently. I am so stupid that I threw them all out. I didn't want to, I didn't want to go through the, I read a couple of letters, I didn't recognize myself, that I was so mature and all that, and that they were so interesting letters. And, but nothing bothered me deeply except that I missed them so much.

SIGRIST: Your parents.

ELIASH: My home. Yes, yes. And then the life between my uncle and aunt was not so wonderful, so it was not a happy, and then they had no friends with children. They knew one, one friend. Still, there was one couple with, my age, one girl my age, another. They were too sophisticated for me.

SIGRIST: Were you . . .

ELIASH: Do you remember Stormy Weather, the song?

SIGRIST: Yes.

ELIASH: Well, these people, the man was, the father was a lawyer, and he had friends, many friends, so we were there for dinner and all that, and then afterwards I and the younger girl, who was my age, and this, uh, composers told me where they were in there, the ways talking, they talked, and I didn't speak much, but I understood a lot, or everything, by then. And, uh, the man says who is this, uh, this sleeping beauty or quiet something about me. I understood it, but he said it sort of sarcastically. But that was he. That was the time, remember? That's not your, uh . . .

SIGRIST: I know Stormy Weather.

ELIASH: That's Stormy Weather. But that was, yes, that was very popular then.

SIGRIST: Were you expected to pay back your passage? Did your uncle pay for the passage? No, your father did.

ELIASH: Father did, and Father sent me, and at a great

sacrifice to, there was no sacrifice for them, for me, but I know that it was very difficult, because it was terrible exchange, very unfavorable for them, that they send me continuously.

SIGRIST: What about, were you expected to . . .

ELIASH: And Mother was sending packages for me. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: What would she send you?

ELIASH: Clothes, more clothes.

SIGRIST: Clothes.

ELIASH: I didn't need it. How much do I need? I didn't know young people even. I went to Barnard College. It's all girls school. Occasionally there were some invitations and all that. And at New York University, no, it's coeducational. So my auntie and uncle said, well, you're welcome, and you can entertain here and see some friends here if you make. So one young boy, (?), and I liked him, so I invited him for lunch with the maid in the house, which is so, so formal. So he got scared, and I never saw him again. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: So your uncle at least is trying to, to . . .

ELIASH: Then we lived at that time already, we moved to St. Moritz Hotel, because it was after a crash, and times were bad, and my uncle was needed, also lost some, something, a lot. So it was better for him to live in St. Moritz Hotel which was owned by a Greek gentleman by the name of Mr. Taylor, and he was friends, and he said to uncle that it's better, you can have practice from the hotel as well as your own, and we had the apartment upstairs. Afterwards I was married on the roof of the St. Moritz Hotel. But that's it. So, but I wanted to say something about it, apropos, what I was leading to, but I forgot.

SIGRIST: You were talking about the formality of your uncle's lifestyle.

ELIASH: Oh, yes, that's right. Not formality. At that time, Auntie was a much older woman and all that, so she, for me she was older, she was fifty only but, uh, oh, no, she was probably in her sixties, also for me it's young now, but, um, at that time she was an older person. Uh, formality was that several people came from China, wanted to see me, and they didn't understand. I had to entertain them in the lobby of the hotel downstairs, you know? That certainly is not

very wonderful for a young person who misses her home.

It's not because they were insensitive. They just didn't think, they didn't know properly, probably. They always lived by themselves. They had no children. They didn't realize how important it is for me, you know? They said go down and meet them, go down and meet them. So we sat and, uh, talked. And this man brought me packages and friends. Russian Jews, people are very social and very friendly. They expected a little better greeting. I knew it was wrong, and I felt very bad about it. But those are small things.

SIGRIST: Did your uncle and aunt speak to you in English?

ELIASH: My aunt knew only English. She was an American lady who was born here, and her mother was born here. Her father came from Germany during, um, what do they say, '49? I don't know, not '49. Just before Civil War, and he fought in Civil War in the south. And, uh, so we spoke English. That's what speeded up my language. Now it's, uh . . . ( she laughs ) Retarded. ( they laugh ) It's more difficult now.

SIGRIST: Are you writing back to your mother and father?

ELIASH: I wrote to them constantly.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things are you telling them about your life here?

ELIASH: I can't remember. I read two letters, and I cried, and I threw out everything.

SIGRIST: But, I mean, how did you want to present your new life to them?

ELIASH: I just told them what happened. It's almost like a diary. But I said, "Don't worry, don't worry about this. This will be better." Or something else, you know, something that bothered me. But I told them what bothered me. But I . . .

SIGRIST: So you weren't trying to hide the fact that you were unhappy?

ELIASH: Uh, no, I didn't tell, no, that I didn't say, I never told them. That part I never told them. I'm happy that I miss them, but I never told them I was unhappy in these surroundings. This I never said, because I think that I hope that they will come, otherwise they will ask me to come back, and I didn't want to go back. That I knew, you know? I liked here right

away, and I wanted them to get out.

SIGRIST: And that was always in the back of your mind that they might come to America?

ELIASH: I think so, I think so, but I never talked about it, and they never even planned, because they had a very good, normal life, many friends and all that. But, uh, my aunt and I went to visit in '34.

SIGRIST: So you were here for three years, roughly. Two years, anyway.

ELIASH: They came in '35, really.

SIGRIST: But you went to visit them in '34.

ELIASH: In '34.

SIGRIST: What was it like to go back there and see China?

ELIASH: Oh, it was very difficult, because I went with my aunt, and she was a difficult, a difficult person to travel with. As soon as the ship started off the, ( she laughs ) going in that direction, she said, "I want to go back, I want to go back. I can't . . .". She was really suffering from, also from the seasickness, too. And then we had to go, we went

there, very stupidly, without, at that time Manchuria became Manchuco[ph] over there, the emperor, you remember, The Last Emperor. And, uh, Manchuco[ph], and United States did not recognize that country. And, uh, they told us in Japan when we get to Japan we will get the visas. That's the way to go. It's a serious thing. So we got to Japan. All the friends of my, my mother's friends tried to, to help me to get the visas. Nothing doing. They said on the border, you go miles and miles, like six thousand miles away, and what you go through to go there. Then we had to go through Korea. In Japan, altogether, the Japanese customs people, I don't know, they, I was suspicious character, because I was a student, and they didn't trust students at that time, and why am I coming back. I said, "I'm coming to visit my parents." They didn't trust it somehow. Nevertheless, they gave me a difficult time. Anyway, oh, uh, we had to cross the Yellow Sea, and that is very choppy. And, uh, my aunt, of course, was very ill. In order to get to the boat, nobody understood us. There was no directions, maybe, not in the language that I knew. So finally, I asked everybody, finally I found somebody who spoke English, a young man, and he, he brought us to the, to

the ship that we, we had tickets for. Otherwise they didn't want to help. So we crossed that ship with great difficulty, because my aunt begged me to throw her overboard. She was so sick that life didn't matter to her, you know, so seasick. And we got to the, to the train to go to, uh, Harbin, which took four days. And, and there were no, no, in these trains, the locks, they were (?), they were wonderful trains. But, uh, but they had, uh, only Japanese food, and at that time I ate only rice, because I couldn't eat anything else. I love Japanese food now, but because they had spittoons everywhere, and they aimed at it no matter what distance, and I couldn't eat for four days. I lost eight pounds, I think, in the four days that I, uh, when I arrived they got frightened, the way I looked. Then my aunt, we didn't get, uh, a cabin to sleep, so I begged and I found a cabin for my aunt to stay. So she got undressed, she went to bed, and who opens the door? A man, because in those, there is no distinction. They are mixed, mixed customers. So Auntie got dressed and left. So we sat together somewhere there through the night. The next time we got for her some place to, to stay separately. I had a terrible time with her.

SIGRIST: Why did she want to take you back to China?

ELIASH: I wanted to visit my parents.

SIGRIST: But why did she . . .

ELIASH: Oh, I don't like to put it on the, on the tape, but I think Uncle wanted a little more freedom, and so Auntie went along. She, she was still interested in Orient, and it was the opportunity to see something maybe, and . . .

SIGRIST: She just didn't realize the rigors of the trip.

ELIASH: No. It was very difficult.

SIGRIST: Tell me what it was like to be back, to see where you lived in Harbin.

ELIASH: It was wonderful. I met, when I arrived, but I was, again met with the forty people at the station. And, again, my aunt was not used to that. Whenever we were invited, as soon as we came home, of course, all these forty people came with us. Tea and dinner and whatever it is, they were there. So she couldn't stand it. She couldn't stand anything. She couldn't stand the people, she couldn't, she needed quiet, and

all that. Nobody thought of her, putting her up in the hotel. There was a hotel just opposite friends of ours, of my parents. She would have been offended, probably, too. So, anyway, she, she was not happy. But afterwards she talked that wonderful, interesting, and she saw real, Harbin consisted also part non-Chinese, and part Chinese town. And, you know, the smells, the garlics and smells of food that she wasn't used to it, you know? I wasn't used to it, but I was interested. We took her to see it. She couldn't stand anything of that part, you know? So afterwards only she talked about how wonderful it was, you know? But, uh, during that time she made my life pretty miserable.

SIGRIST: Tell me about seeing your parents, and how that felt.

ELIASH: Oh, it was wonderful. They saw me smoking a cigarette, and thin like a skeleton because I lost weight, and they were very unhappy about it, and I saw my friends. At that time it's a very difficult time, because I was lucky, I had to go to, I could go to America, you know, it was at that time everything. And many people couldn't. They had to return to Russia, to Soviet Russia. And I lost, actually they

were killed, they were starved to death or something, because the Russians tried to get them back to Russia.

For what reason, I don't know. Actually to punish them, because they treated them very badly, and many were in, like, labor camps and all that, and they died, a few of my friends. So I was the lucky one, really.

SIGRIST: How long did you stay in Harbin?

ELIASH: I was, like from, uh, I told you, '22 . . .

SIGRIST: No, I mean the visit.

ELIASH: Oh, this visit?

SIGRIST: Yes.

ELIASH: Was only summer vacation. It was quite long. It was a whole summer. Like a month-and-a-half, probably, something like that.

SIGRIST: How did you . . .

ELIASH: I was going, I was at Barnard College. At that time they thought I lived in pagoda, the Barnard College girls.

SIGRIST: Oh, because you had, you had come from China.

ELIASH: Because I came from China.

SIGRIST: They thought you lived in a pagoda.

ELIASH: Yes. How does it feel to live in pagoda.

SIGRIST: Um, how, how did you think about America during your trip to China, that one trip? How . . .

ELIASH: I didn't think. What I remember now, I didn't think. I was just looking forward to it, but I had no idea, and I didn't read about it, like I would take a trip now I would read about the country I'm going to. I didn't read about it.

SIGRIST: Were you anxious?

ELIASH: I was, too, I was just out of high school. And we've been reading, like, a literature, like Dickens, Susan Scarr[ph], and Sir Walter Scott, and everybody foreign country, the classics, whatever it is, but I didn't read about contemporary America. I just imagined it, of course, big everything, buildings, tall buildings and asphalt, and I found it nicer because we lived right at the park. I went skating there.

SIGRIST: During that summer vacation, was there any, um, did

your parents talk about their moving to America?

ELIASH: No, they didn't even think about it then.

SIGRIST: Not even then.

ELIASH: But when we came back, I must say that Auntie really moved the whole family here. She said, "That child . . ." Meaning my mother, " . . . should be, they should move, they should live in, uh, United States. It's not, there is no future there.

SIGRIST: They came in 1935, you said?

ELIASH: 1935.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about their, their, um, adaptation to America when they came.

ELIASH: They became the most enthusiastic Americans, and Kate Smith was the best singer.

SIGRIST: Singing God Bless America.

ELIASH: God Bless America. They sang God Bless America. They loved everything American.

SIGRIST: Where did they come into when . . .

ELIASH: They Americanized very easily. They got many American

friends. I really didn't have any Russian friends here before, before I married. When I married, my husband, he was also a Russian Jew.

SIGRIST: Did your parents come in through the Port of New York, or did they come in through the West Coast?

ELIASH: The West Coast, yes.

SIGRIST: And, um, did they speak any English?

ELIASH: No, not at all. I don't know, maybe they learned some on the ship a little bit, maybe.

SIGRIST: Did they live with your aunt?

ELIASH: But then they studied.

SIGRIST: In San Francisco?

ELIASH: Aunt, Auntie is a New Yorker, really.

SIGRIST: But your other aunt, in San Francisco, that you went to visit?

ELIASH: No, no. No, no. Uh, no, she lived separately. We had an apartment. But this aunt still stayed for a while, and then she left. Then she went back. But before that, I forgot to tell you that I changed four

colleges. I told you that. That was before.

SIGRIST: Well, Barnard, then NYU.

ELIASH: No, NYU first, then Barnard, then UCLA, because I thought parents would settle in the south, and they settled in, uh, in San Francisco, which was right for them, because more of a city, and they're used to city life, not driving the cars and all that, you know, it's easier.

SIGRIST: Well, we just have a couple of minutes left, and I want to ask you what year you got married?

ELIASH: I got married in 1939.

SIGRIST: And you said you married a Russian Jew. What was his name?

ELIASH: Yeah, also from Kiev.

SIGRIST: Yes?

ELIASH: But I didn't know, I didn't know him then. My, older than I, fourteen years old.

SIGRIST: And what was his name?

ELIASH: His name was Leo.

SIGRIST: Liam?

ELIASH: Leo, L-E-O.

SIGRIST: Leo, Leo.

ELIASH: Leo Eliash.

SIGRIST: And, um, what was his profession?

ELIASH: Well, he, uh, he just, uh, he was an electrical engineer, and he was the head of a Swedish firm in Germany, and then they had to flee. They came with the last ship. They came here with the last ship.

SIGRIST: So that would have been what year, roughly?

ELIASH: '38.

SIGRIST: In '38. So he was freshly here.

ELIASH: So, yes, yes. He came in '38, and I met him, uh, just then.

SIGRIST: Did you have children?

ELIASH: I have no children. We had no children. I have children by marriage. I have my nephew, my husband's nephew, and him I knew, when I married he was

fourteen, so I knew him for many years, and we're very good friends, and he has also six grandchildren now, so everybody's sort of close to me.

SIGRIST: And, um, I'd also like you to talk a little bit about your sculpting.

ELIASH: Oh, sculpture was always with me. I don't even remember when I started. Even when I was in San Francisco, when I graduated from Berkley, and on the side I took lessons. I found an art class, one teacher, and so I studied there, but it wasn't much because my father and mother found out it was not a nice neighborhood, a dangerous neighborhood, and it was late at night. I studied after my studies there, the college. So I didn't, I dropped it. But before that, in New York University, the first, I took some courses in theory in art, and I, I was bored with that. I probably had not an interesting teacher. And then I didn't do anything about it. But I discovered galleries, I myself, because Auntie and Uncle were not interested in that. So I, uh, went to the galleries, and I'd learn all of the, on 57th Street, the museums, and all that. And I became more and more interested in that. And since I didn't get into medical school,

because first of all we lived in, uh, in San Francisco, and I could have gotten in the East Coast, but by that time my father's finances were poor, and he had no, didn't pass yet the state board or nothing, so I, I was, uh, too (?), and all that. It wasn't interesting to me. So I, and I was always interested in art, so I started, studied art. I went back to Columbia. ( she laughs ) Yeah.

SIGRIST: What, um, uh, so when did you actually start creating your, uh . . .

ELIASH: For about, well, '47, I think. My professor threw my out of school, he says, "Be on your own." I already exhibited then.

SIGRIST: And, um, what medium did you prefer to work in?

ELIASH: I, well, you see, I will show you, in everything. Wood, I mostly carve. I prefer carving. That's why . . .

SIGRIST: Wood and stone, or . . .

ELIASH: Wood and stone, whatever it carvable. ( she laughs )  
But not now any more. I retired. ( they laugh ) I am not well now. I am not really very wonderful

health, and I'm not strong, so I cannot do it.

SIGRIST: I see here in your sitting room that you have mostly figures, human figures.

ELIASH: Yes, that's right.

SIGRIST: Is that what you mostly . . .

ELIASH: That was probably period, probably that was the period also of work at that time that I saw around me as a girl, you know, in the 1940's. It was figurative work. The abstract expressionist came in '40s, in '50s.

SIGRIST: And did you exhibit your work . . .

ELIASH: I exhibited every year until about the year before last. I go in group shows. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, let me ask you one final question.

ELIASH: I was also in, uh, excuse me, go ahead.

SIGRIST: No, no, you go ahead.

ELIASH: I don't want to brag, but I was . . . ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: No, go ahead, go ahead.

ELIASH: I was, where was I? In American, um, Who's Who in American Art, I think, or something like that. But I always miss, I always prolong filling out applications and all that. I was in Europe and I, of course, missed the deadline for the, so I'm in supplement. It doesn't matter. It's the same. That was long ago. That was in '47.

SIGRIST: ( he laughs ) Well, I mean, have you actively sculpted right up until . . .

ELIASH: Yes, all the time until recently.

SIGRIST: Until recently.

ELIASH: Yeah. But no so recently, because my husband was ill the last, uh, eight years or so, so I was busy with him. Yeah.

SIGRIST: When you think back on you life.

ELIASH: Hmm?

SIGRIST: Do you have advice that you would give to a young person on how to lead an interesting, full life?

ELIASH: I cannot do it, because I was very lucky. I was just plain lucky. I had wonderful childhood. I didn't

have a very wonderful time when I came, not time, I'm not looking for time, but period was difficult for me.

Not adjusting to American life, that was all right, but adjusting to this sort of loneliness that I, homesickness that I felt for years until they came back, my parents, you know? And then I married. I was never alone, really, in my life. So, uh, I was just lucky that I was surrounded by love, and I gave my love, probably, to all of them, just as well, so I cannot say anything else about it.

SIGRIST: Well, I want to thank you very much.

ELIASH: Thank you so much.

SIGRIST: This has been a most fascinating immigration story.

ELIASH: Thank you. But I will tell you, since we're off the air . . .

SIGRIST: Wait, we're not. Let me just sign off here.

ELIASH: Yes?

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Zara Eliash on Friday, June 30, 1995, here in a very lovely apartment on Central Park West.

ELIASH: Thank you.