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DINAH SAFRAN
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LEVINE: Today is September 9th, 1995. I'm here with Dinah Safran in the Hebrew Home for the Aged in Riverdale, and let's see. As a background, Mrs. Safran came from Austria, was born in Austria, in 1903, which makes you ninety-two at this time.

SAFRAN: Right.

LEVINE: And you came to the United States in 1920.

SAFRAN: 1921.

LEVINE: 1921.

SAFRAN: I left in 1920 Christmas Eve, but by the time I came here, we had a lot to ship and it took a long trip. By the time I came here and by the time I reached Ellis Island it was February the 3rd—the 5th.

LEVINE: February 1921.

SAFRAN: The ship arrived February the 5th to Hoboken, and then they didn't let us into Ellis Island because we were in the third class. My mother and I came here together. They didn't want to sell to poor people the second class. The children here in America, the older children wanted to send tickets for second class, they wouldn't allow. They said we had to come from the third class.

LEVINE: Why did they say that?

SAFRAN: That was their rule. Because they didn't like the poor people, I don't know what it is. Only the middle class came second or first class. We had to come, and there were a lot, maybe forty or fifty people, for the third class and they had a rotten, the Rindham. The name of the ship was Rindham and it took a long trip and finally when we reached here, they stopped in Hoboken and they didn't want to let us into Ellis Island. We had to stay on the ship all day, sleep at night outside in the Hoboken and ship and be in the ship all day, until the ship had to leave for another trip. Then we remained in the Hoboken and we slept there on the floor and waited until we were able to come to Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Oh, boy. Well, let's start at the beginning about your life in Europe before you came, and then we'll get to the part about Ellis Island. Now, where were you born in Austria?

SAFRAN: In Tarnopol

LEVINE: Tarnopol, and that's T-A-R-N-O-P-O-L.

SAFRAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay, now did you live in Tarnopol the whole time until you left?

SAFRAN: All the time.

LEVINE: Okay, then you must have been—how old were you when you left Tarnopol?

SAFRAN: Seventeen.

LEVINE: Seventeen, okay. Now, your mother's name, do you remember?

SAFRAN: My mother's name was Rose.

LEVINE: Rose and who—

SAFRAN: Rose Barshak.

LEVINE: How do you spell her maiden name? That was her married name?

SAFRAN: Her married name. You want the maiden name?

LEVINE: Yeah.

SAFRAN: Because I came on the maiden name, on her maiden name to America because in those years when anybody didn't get married in court, the children were illegal. Only the Jewish wedding, they didn't consider it a wedding. My father and mother never got married in court, so I was considered an illegal, but my father signed on the paper that he takes responsibility. So he made me legal.

LEVINE: I see. So you had your mother's maiden as your maiden name?

SAFRAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, how do you spell that?

SAFRAN: Werkstein, W-E-R-K-S-T-E-I-N.

LEVINE: So that was—

SAFRAN: Werkstein.

LEVINE: Your mother's name then.

SAFRAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And your father's last name?

SAFRAN: Barshak.

LEVINE: How do you spell that?

SAFRAN: B-A-R-S-H-A-K.

LEVINE: Okay.

SAFRAN: Barshak.

LEVINE: Now, so did you ever have that name, Barshak?

SAFRAN: I use it all the time.

LEVINE: But you never—

SAFRAN: I never used the Werkstein. Only when I went to school, but then when I came out, I wanted my father's name.

LEVINE: I see because then your father had signed that he would be responsible.

SAFRAN: I'm legal, yeah.

LEVINE: I see. Okay, and what was your father's first name?

SAFRAN: Manes, M-A-N-E-S, "Mannus."

LEVINE: Okay, and did you have brothers and sisters?

SAFRAN: Yes.

LEVINE: How many?

SAFRAN: We were seven children. You see, my father was married before. He had three children when he met my mother. My mother was married when she was eighteen and she lived six weeks with a man and he died. He got sick with pneumonia and he died. My mother didn't even know that she was pregnant, but then it turned out that she was pregnant and she had a little girl. So she was a young girl of twenty, between twenty and twenty-one with a little girl. So she married my father, who was almost twenty years older than her, with three children. His three children, the older daughter, Rose, was fourteen years old and my mother was twenty. So that was the difference, but my mother was a very kind and quiet person, and she got along well with the children. Later my father decided that he wants to go to America. He left my mother with my brother, which was the first time from their marriage. He was only two years old, and his children, he tried to divide their family, the first wife's family, but it turned out that they didn't like it and they came back to my mother and they said they want to live with her, even though it's hard for her but they wouldn't mind. They'll do anything. They don't want to live with the others. They like my mother and they come and they stayed with us all the time. My mother was very good-natured person.

LEVINE: So when your father first went to America, you weren't born yet?

SAFRAN: Oh, no. My older brother was only two years old, and then he was here only ten months in America and he decided he didn't like it because he used to—he was a tailor. He used to work for himself, but

here he had to go to a shop and he didn't like the shop, and he didn't like the life to be a boarder by somebody, the life like this. At home in Tarnopol, he had his own home and he liked it better and he missed my mother, of course. So he came back from America. Then my sister was born, the one that my nephew is taking an interest in me now.

LEVINE: Now, what was that sister's name?

SAFRAN: She was already—her name is Goldie, and she was four years younger than my brother because my father went away and then came back. So she was four years younger than the brother. After Goldie was born, another child, that was Fanny. Fanny was seven years older than I was. I wasn't supposed to be altogether, because my father was getting old. He was already almost fifty-eight years old when I was born, and he felt terrible. He was ashamed at his age to have another child, but accidents happen and I was the accident. He gave the, you know who a shamus is in the schul? The one that takes care in the schul? He gave him a dollar to give me the name, because he was ashamed to go into the schul and to give me the name. That's how bad he felt when I was born. And as luck would have it, I grew up. I was a very small and tiny child until I was fourteen.

I remember when I went the first day to school, I was a very shy and little girl and I sat down in the last row. So the teacher came to start seeing her pupils and she looks around and sees a little bit of a thing just sitting there, and that was me. She goes over to me. She says, "Why are you sitting here?" I said, "I don't know." She gives me a kiss on forehead and she says, "Come," and she puts me in the first row. I was so small that all the children were taller than I was and anybody would block me that would sit in front of me. So then I turned out that I had a good mind and I was very well liked by the teacher, and I was learning very good and I used to have good marks. Every time I used to send to America to the older children—little by little the children started to leave for America and they used to send me a gift. When I send them the report card with the good mark, used to send me a gift.

My father brought me earrings and other things because they liked—before the war started, I had just finished public school. I was ten and a half years old. The children wrote that my father should sell the house or give it away if he can't sell it, and come to America and bring me to America because they think they can make something of me and not a sewing girl, because the other sisters learned how to sew and they were dressmakers. With my head, they wanted me to go to school and become somebody.

LEVINE: Now, the children that were in America, they were the ones that were from your father's first marriage, the oldest three?

SAFRAN: Three.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SAFRAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And where were they in America?

SAFRAN: And then there was the one that my nephew, his mother.

LEVINE: Goldie.

SAFRAN: She was already also in America and then later the last one went. When the war started, I was the only one left with my father and my mother. All the children were in America.

LEVINE: What do you remember about Tarnopol, about the town itself? What was it like? Was it—

SAFRAN: It was a very nice—it was forty thousand people living. It was a big city. Beautiful [unclear], and nice stores and movies, theater. It was a very nice city. In fact, when the war broke out and the Russians came in, soon as the war broke out, they came in and they liked the city so much that the officers brought their wives to live there.

LEVINE: Oh. Now, was there a Jewish section in that city?

SAFRAN: Oh, sure.

LEVINE: What was—

SAFRAN: My father belonged to the schul. He had his own seat for himself and my mother and he was a real, what you say in Jewish a barabuse. He was well known and he was a very clever man. People used to come for advice for certain things. He could have been a lawyer. He had a very good head, but he became an orphan when he was six years old and he was brought up by an uncle. He had to learn how to sew and he couldn't go to school anymore.

LEVINE: Now, was he born in Tarnopol, too?

SAFRAN: Yes.

LEVINE: And your mother, also?

SAFRAN: Yes. They were all from Tarnopol. My father's parents were in Hungary. They were born in Hungary, but they came to Tarnopol and that's why my father was there.

LEVINE: Can you remember any experiences with your father when you were a little girl?

SAFRAN: Oh, sure. My father, first he didn't—he was ashamed that I was born and then he took a liking to me. He used to teach me how to read storybooks. He used to tell me all kinds of stories and I had my oldest sister, that was the oldest sister from my father's first wife, she had a little girl that was two months younger than I was. So when he went some place, he took the two of us, and everybody used to ask him if they were his grandchildren. They considered me as a grandchild. He used to laugh. He said, "No, she is my muzinki." You know what a muzink is? The youngest child and I don't know how they express it in English. The youngest child. Have they got a name for it in English?

LEVINE: I can't think of one.

SAFRAN: Well, in Jewish it was a muzinki. That was the youngest. The youngest, and he took a liking to me and he taught me how to read and then of course I went to school anymore.

LEVINE: What were you reading in, what language?

SAFRAN: First, he used to teach me how to read Jewish, and then he took a rabbi to teach me Hebrew and he used to read Jewish books, so he taught me how to read. Jewish reading is different than the Hebrew.

LEVINE: Now, what's the difference between Yiddish and Jewish?

SAFRAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Is Yiddish and Jewish the same?

SAFRAN: Yiddish and Jewish is the same.

LEVINE: The same, uh-huh.

SAFRAN: Yeah, Jewish is English and Yiddish is in Jewish and that's what it is. So he used to like me and he used—but I want to finish. When they wrote that he should bring me to America and he said at his age, he was fifty-eight years old when I was born, so he was already sixty-eight

years old because I was ten and a half years old. He said, at his age, he'll come to America, nobody will give him a job and the children will have to support him, and he doesn't want that. He wants to make his own living and he didn't want to go. I graduated in May and in June it broke out the war.

LEVINE: What do you remember of the war personally?

SAFRAN: Like it was yesterday. All of a sudden it started to shoot. My—one of my other sisters was a married woman. She had five children and she was the only one remained in Europe. The others were all in America and her husband went to America not even a year before. You know, he thought that he'll be in America, he'll be able to bring her up with the children to America, and he didn't have a chance because the war broke out. But he was lucky anyway, that he was in America because they would have taken him to the army. So this way at least he was in America, but she remained living in Tarnopol. First she had her own home. Then she couldn't afford to keep it and she moved in with my father and my mother and me with all of her five children she had. The youngest was but one year old when I was eleven. He was ten years difference between us, but the oldest one was one year younger than I was.

LEVINE: I see.

SAFRAN: So we lived all together like that.

LEVINE: Now, was your father—he was sewing?

SAFRAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: He was a tailor at that time, too.

SAFRAN: But when the war started, how many people wanted new clothes? They had to buy food and other things, so my father couldn't make a living anymore.

LEVINE: What did you do?

SAFRAN: And I was only not even eleven years already, and it went on, the war a few months. So I was eleven years old, so I started to work. I used to make paper bags. I used to paste envelopes. Anything I could get a hold, and then I went in once to a friend of mine's house and I saw they were working on cigarettes, so I tried to help them to make cigarettes and I liked the idea of working with the cigarettes. So that girl's father didn't like the idea. He didn't let me. So as young as I

was, only eleven years old, maybe two, three months more than eleven, so I went myself in one of the streets where there were a lot of stores and I went in and asked if anybody wants I should make cigarettes. So one man that had a store there, he asked me my name. He gave a look at me. I was a small thin little girl. He gave a look at me and he says, "You know how to make cigarettes?" I said, "Sure." He said, "Let's see," and he took me inside in the store. He took some tobacco and you know, the tubes and he showed me, and I made a few of them. He said, "What's your name?" and I tell him. As soon as he heard my father's name, my father was well-known, popular and he was respected, very much respected. So he said, "All right. I'll give you home to make." I think he'll pay forty cents, Russian kopeks because it was Russia already at that time. He'll pay me for a thousand cigarettes to make, forty kopeks. So I took it and I came home and I showed my father how to make it, too, and I showed my nephew, the one the sister that lived with me, also, and we all made a living from the cigarettes. My father used to say what would he have done without me? If without me, I am supporting him, and he trusted me whenever he had some money to put away or something. He didn't trust my mother. She might buy something, and he didn't want her to spend it. So he trusted me more even than the mother.

It turned out that he said what would he do without me? So I was born with a purpose. That's all.

LEVINE: Yeah. How did you live? What did you do for food and everything?

SAFRAN: Well, my mother used to cook and buy the stuff, of course. Once a week we had a piece of meat. Otherwise, she used to make dairy meals mostly, which was cheaper. Anything that was cheaper and we all lived that way. Then across the street was an empty apartment, so my sister took it, rented it with the children because we were so crowded all the time. So they lived in that apartment across from us and she used to work. She also was a good dressmaker and she could make some dresses. If not, she worked with the cigarettes and supported herself with the children. She struggled plenty. We all struggled and that's how, but we had years. We lived through it. Then the Germans came. After three years, they finally—the Russians didn't want to leave our city. Every place else they chased them out, but not from our city. They liked it and they were comfortable there.

LEVINE: And what were they like, in your experience, having the Russians in the city?

SAFRAN: Oh, over there at least there was more food to eat. The Russians, yeah, but over there they had more food and we weren't afraid of them. Of course, if a girl was older, used to send me out first to see if a

soldier isn't going. They were afraid to trust the soldiers. They didn't want to take no chances, but I wasn't afraid. I was a little bit of a thing. Nobody would bother with me. So I had a break that way.

LEVINE: Can you talk a little bit about how the borders changed and any effects that had on you?

SAFRAN: Nothing at all. I lived with it. I used to when I grew up a little, I used to go to dances and I used to go to parties. I used to go to a movie, and lived like any normal person. What we did [unclear] the richer people, that's all. But we grew up and were all right, and that's how we lived. Then the Germans came in, so I had a girlfriend that was my size. So one German soldier just saw us both walking. That time I was already I think starting to grow up, fourteen or fourteen and a half years old. So he started to measure us, in his eyes, and we look alike. We used to dress alike. So we didn't like it. We ran away and we left him there. We didn't want to bother him. And we lived like that until after the Germans were chased out from the Polish. The Polish came. Then it started trouble because there wasn't enough food. The Russians had a lot of food, and they didn't have, so they started to ration. So we had to support ourselves.

I remember once when they rationed us potatoes. So I picked up—I went. My father was already too old to go to get the potatoes, a sack of potatoes about fifty pounds or a hundred pounds. Who knows, a big sack. So I used to go and whatever they had to ration, I used to buy it and I used to go to the drugstore, whatever we had to buy. Everything, he send me instead of he should go. Once I picked up a sack of potatoes and I sprained my back. I was laid up for a while and I suffer on the back all the years from it. That was my present from the war.

LEVINE: What about medical care? Can you think of any kind of illness that struck and how it was treated over there?

SAFRAN: I had all the sicknesses. I had mumps and I had scarlet fever. I had measles, and I lived through them. My mother tended to me, and that's how we lived.

LEVINE: Do you remember any kinds of rituals like around marriage or birth or death? Any kinds of ways that these things were observed when you were little?

SAFRAN: They used to make weddings. People used to get married. They lived a normal life. It was only a different kind of government, but otherwise the life went on the same thing.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, did you encounter anti-Semitism there?

SAFRAN: No, nobody bothered us. No. We used to have—I remember my father paid a few cents, a gentile woman to come Saturday to light the fire because he was religious and he wouldn't light it on Saturday. So she used to come and she used to light it, and my mother used to give away the wash to a gentile woman every few weeks. Small things she washed herself, but the bigger things she gave away. There was no anti-Semitism. It was all right. It was a normal life.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. What is your fondest memory of your childhood, of growing up there?

SAFRAN: Nothing at all. Nothing different. I was like any normal child.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, but you were particularly good in school, it sounds like.

SAFRAN: Yeah. Yeah, I had a very good mind in school and I once won in school a box of candy for spelling because the teacher said, "Whoever will spell, will get a box of candy." So I was the one that won the box of candy.

LEVINE: Do you remember the word you had to spell that made you the winner?

SAFRAN: No. No. No. The teacher used to like me a lot. She used to make me bring her books and all that. I was well liked through school and I never had any trouble. I was a very shy and quiet, quiet girl. I was the bashful type. The fact is, the woman I became good friends with, over here I have, her mother used to come in to play with her little girl because I was ashamed to walk into there in somebody's house. I was so bashful. She used to call me in and she wanted me to be friends with her girl and we became such good friends. We grew up together. We went to dances together and then we came to America, and she came a few months after me, and over here we kept our friendship all the time and her children—I didn't have any children—her children were growing up in my hands and they call me, "My second mommy."

LEVINE: Oh. Now, is she alive today?

SAFRAN: No, she died five years ago.

LEVINE: And what was her name?

SAFRAN: Her name was Polly. Here she is.

LEVINE: Well, tell me—

SAFRAN: You see, that's her husband.

LEVINE: Oh, I see, uh-huh. Can you remember some of the things you did together when you were growing up? Games or what you did?

SAFRAN: We went to dances, sure, but I used to work anyway because we had to eat. But Saturday we used to go out and we went to movies. We went to dances. We started playing around boys and girls together. It was like a community. Any normal child, like over here they do.

LEVINE: When did you start thinking that you'd like to go to America?

SAFRAN: As soon as my father died. My father died. You see, they send us from America matzos for Passover and instead of it should come so he use, it didn't come to Passover because the mail was very slow. So my father used to joke and say, "It will probably come for schulus." You know what schulus is? Six weeks after Passover. Then all of a sudden one day on a Saturday, the day before schulus, he started feeling bad. He was only seventy-four years old and he said to my mother, he came back from schul and he said to my mother, "Make my bed because I think my time came." That was the expression he made. Of course, she made his bed and then she called the doctor and the doctor asked if he was sitting in the sun a lot or if he was in the Turkish bath, and he was in the Turkish bath. He went the day before the holiday to the Turkish bath and he used to brag that he can stand the heat. You know, in a Turkish bath, the higher they go, the hotter it is, and they, all the men used to go down. It was too hot for them and he used to brag that he can take it longer. So he got a stroke from the Turkish bath and two days later, came the matzos. My mother says, "Look, you were right. You said it will come for schulus." Here it's schulus. Just schulus. The matzos came, but he didn't already understand anything and the next day he was dead. He died the day after schulus.

[End of Tape One, Side A/Start of Tape One, Side B]

LEVINE: Do you remember his funeral and everything?

SAFRAN: Sure.

LEVINE: What was that like?

SAFRAN: The same as any other funeral.

LEVINE: Same as here.

SAFRAN: Same as here. Same thing. We had our cemetery there. Later I sent money to they should put a tombstone for him because I left for America, he didn't have no tombstone yet. As soon as he died, I wrote a letter that father passed away, so the children came and went and bought tickets for us.

LEVINE: For your mother?

SAFRAN: Mother and me. My sister with the five children had to wait until her husband sent her tickets, and her husband wasn't too much in a hurry. He lived here a good life. He was also a tailor, but a very good one and he held a good position, and so he wasn't such a hurry to bring her up with the children. But the other children contributed the money to send them out because he said he can't afford six people, you know. But it took a few months before she came after me. She looked—I looked on her back, if she didn't become a hunchback. She looked so shriveled up, in those five months that she was alone with the five children struggling, that it was a unusual difference in a person to change in a short time. This is what I remember very well.

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you remember you and your mother getting ready to leave?

SAFRAN: Oh, sure.

LEVINE: And leaving.

SAFRAN: Yeah, and we decided, you know, when we made out the passport and everything. So we decided that we want to go as soon as possible. We don't want to wait for my sister because you'll start waiting for her. They send us a hundred dollars for expenses to go to America, and they send us the tickets, but the hundred dollars, they were foolish here. They didn't send it, that they should pay us the hundred dollars, only what the value of the dollars are and it was worth only thirty dollars and we didn't have enough money. I said if I'll start waiting for my sister, I will eat up the money and wouldn't have nothing. So my mother left everything to me. She was very timid, quiet, whatever I said will go. So we decided we'll go. So it came out that there was a visa for just Christmas Eve. So one of my father's cousins came to us and gave us an argument, "Why do you going to leave on Christmas Eve? Why can't you wait until Betty will get ready, too?" So I said, "No, we are leaving now and I can't help it any other way." She went off, we left.

So we packed up our bundle and we took the train and you know what? One of the soldier came into the train and took my bundle and threw it out the window. He wanted the seat.

LEVINE: What kind of a soldier was this? What—

SAFRAN: A Polish.

LEVINE: Polish soldier.

SAFRAN: So I had to get off the train and pull back the bundle and finally I sat down with my mother on a different seat in the train and we went to Warsaw. We had to go to Warsaw first for the other visa. I had to go for a German visa, a different kind of visa, not only a Polish. So the German consulate started talking to me and he asked me certain things in German and I answered him. I spoke a very good German and used to read German books. I used to write German letters to the children. So the consulate there was excited and a half hour he was sitting and talking to me in German. He said it's the first time—he called me a Polish girl. I wasn't Polish, but he called me a Polish girl. A Polish girl should speak such a good German. He couldn't get over it.

LEVINE: Now, why did you have to go through the German consul? Because now the country was Polish, right?

SAFRAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: But how come the German?

SAFRAN: Because we had to go to Holland America. We had to go through Holland. We had to go to—we went to Berlin first and then to Holland. It was a long trip. It took us three weeks, the trip until we finally came to Holland. Then we had to wait for that rotten ship that we got.

LEVINE: Well, you know, it sounds like—you said you were shy and timid, but it also sounds like you knew how to take charge.

SAFRAN: I could take charge of everything. I could be a responsible person. That's why my father started defending of me because he saw with me he can get along better than the others, didn't bother as much. They were different. They lived their own lives and I always took care of her. I was very devoted to my mother, because if my father wanted to punish me sometime as a child, my mother used to protect me. And if I asked sometimes a penny for a candy or something and my father didn't want to give it to me, my mother gave it to me on the sly. So that's what it did, it made a difference.

LEVINE: Yeah. So tell me about the Rindham, the ship that you got.

SAFRAN: About the ship we had, it was right on the [unclear]. You know how a ship is built, on the bottom of the ship each rat was so big and ran over the people. It was terrible and I became seasick the minute the ship started to move. My mother wasn't seasick and I was seasick the whole time. The sailors used to come in to clean out, they couldn't pull me off the bed to clean up. It was terrible. My mother thought she would bring me dead to America, but it took me so long. It was thirteen days on the ship and I couldn't hold my head up. It was impossible. I had to go to the toilet. I couldn't move, it was terrible, and I went through hell until finally the shipped stopped. So they didn't let us out. They said that some people said they'll send back the ship with the people on the third class. I said, "I'll drown myself. I don't want to go back to Europe, and I don't care what I do, I'm not going back," and I remained there, but they didn't send us back anyway.

I stayed there and waited so long until finally they let us into Ellis Island. When they let us into Ellis Island, my mother, they looked into her eyes, so she started to complain. So the doctor send her—the one that look into the eyes, sent her to a doctor to see if it's something wrong with the eyes, because when anybody had bad eyes, they didn't let them into America. Did you know that?

LEVINE: Yes, uh-huh.

SAFRAN: So they sent her to a doctor to make sure that her eyes are all right. My eyes were all right. So they sent her away to see the doctor, and they sent me into the room in Ellis Island where they interview the people that have to get off the ship. So I came in crying and I was standing there crying. So I see some man stands there and talks to the inspector that was sitting there that was supposed to interview me, and he goes over and he talks to him and something and then he says—later I knew what, but at that time I didn't know. So then he says with his hand like this, don't cry. Don't cry. Don't cry. What the hell does this man want from me? It's his business if I want to cry? I felt terrible. Then it turned out it was my brother and he recognized me because I look exactly like the other sister. When they used to see her later—

LEVINE: Which sister is that?

SAFRAN: Huh?

LEVINE: Which sister did you look just like?

SAFRAN: The one on this side.

LEVINE: What was her name?

SAFRAN: Fanny.

LEVINE: Fanny.

SAFRAN: She was seven years older than I was, and when I came to this country, I was seventeen years old and she was already a married woman with a child of three years old, and I looked exactly like her. Now I can imagine how I grew up in the last three years. From fourteen to seventeen was such a change in me and he was wondering then, the door—my brother told me later, when the door opened and I walked in, he said, "What's Fanny doing here?" He couldn't imagine that it was me because he knew I'm a small child. He said when he came to America the only child he missed was me. I was two and a half years when he left for America. Because he says I was an unusual child, very talkative and joking to know about. He liked me a lot. He missed me more than anybody else when he went to America. How do you like that?

LEVINE: Which brother was that? What was his name?

SAFRAN: The doctor. He became a doctor later. That was the one that was two years old when my father went to America.

LEVINE: What was his name?

SAFRAN: His name was Max Barshak. His Jewish name was Moishe and here he called himself Max. Later when I showed my mother, "Momma, this is Moishe," she gave a look. She says, "No, that's not him." She didn't recognize him. He left a young boy of seventeen. See, we were fourteen and a half years of difference. I was two and a half. So she didn't recognize him. I said, "Momma, I spoke to him, it's Moishe." She couldn't believe it. Then he comes over to her, she says, "There's something wrong. He became fat." He was a doctor already and he was married and had a little girl already of eighteen months when I came here.

LEVINE: So he recognized you because you looked like Fanny.

SAFRAN: Like—

LEVINE: And then what happened at Ellis Island?

SAFRAN: Then they told me—by the time they—so, yeah, another man comes over to me and he says, "Don't cry." I said, "That man keeps on telling

me." He says, "Don't worry. That's her brother. Don't worry, he means well, but they'll bring mother back to you. Don't worry." But then finally that inspector called me over because my brother spoke to him again. Called me over, he says, "Dinah?" I said, "Yeah, Moishe?" I'm telling you, I couldn't imagine him, Moishe. He says, "Why do you cry?" you know, in Jewish. I said, "They took my mother away and I can't understand why." He says, "Don't worry. They only took her to the eye doctor and she'll come back, but it's too late already today to get you off the Ellis Island because it's after four." Until four they let out the people. After four they wouldn't let you out, so you have to wait until tomorrow morning. You'll have to sleep over on Ellis Island. So I had to sleep over with my mother on Ellis Island. They gave us two bunks and one little blanket. I put the blanket on the bunk and I had my winter coat because it was winter when I came here. I had a winter coat and my mother her winter coat. We covered ourselves and we slept like that and in the morning they gave us breakfast.

LEVINE: What was that like?

SAFRAN: Huh?

LEVINE: What was the breakfast like?

SAFRAN: Something different that I didn't eat. They gave a [unclear]. In the morning? I never had that. You know, so they had cereal and the coffee. To me it was a delicious, good breakfast and my mother was also not complaining. She was surprised that they gave so much food to eat, and then ten o'clock my brother came, and I saw him come in. I said to my mother, "Momma, this is Moishe." She couldn't believe it, but when he spoke to her, she realized that he grew up and he changed. He was a young boy and he was slim when he left for America, a young seventeen year old boy and here he was already I think thirty-one years old and married and a little girl of eighteen months. It turned out that they let us off from Ellis Island.

So then they decided that being my father isn't here anymore, there's no use to picking out a home for us. So I can live with one sister and my mother can live with another sister. So they took my mother to the sister, the one that my nephew is coming here, comes here all the time. And me they took to that Fanny, but she happened to have a husband what wasn't a good natured person. Nobody in the family cared for him, and I stayed with him and I was separated from my mother, which I didn't like because I loved my mother very dearly and I didn't want to be without her. She didn't complain or anything. What could she do? They told her to stay with the daughter. So she used to help. She had a little girl six months old. She used to help her with the diapers and do all these things and she didn't complain.

So I can't—I couldn't understand why they did that, but my brother-in-law kept on complaining, "Why did they have to send her to me?" They only lived in three rooms. They had to put up a folding bed for me to sleep and he complained. So I understood and I didn't like it, and I complained to my brother and I told him that I don't like to stay with him and do something. So he spoke to my older brother. The older brother, he was the one from the first wife, and he was married and he had a wonderful woman, a wife and they didn't have no children either. They helped my brother become a doctor. They were very close all the time. So he told that brother about me. He said, "Let her come to me." I can't stay with Fanny, so they took me. Later it turned out, for a while I stayed with them, but then it turned out that it's no good. So one of the older sister, the one that had a little girl two months younger than I was, she lived downtown and she had on Second Street an apartment there and downstairs lived the superintendent, a Jewish couple and the Jewish couple had seven children. She was the superintendent from that building. I even remember the number 116 East Second Street. That's where she lived, and the landlord gave her another apartment, she should have where the children should sleep. So she rented out two rooms from the other apartment, a kitchen and a dining room. So my sister said I should rent it, and I grabbed it right away. I think ten dollars a month, and I was glad. I went to work here and I paid already the rent.

LEVINE: What did you do for work?

SAFRAN: My brother recommended me. He was a doctor, so he had a patient that has a factory from silk, you know, winding machines, all kinds. So I became a winder. First I wove and then wind silk.

??: Are you recording?

LEVINE: It's so interesting. You could keep talking. Okay, so you had the job as a silk winder, as a winder in a silk factory.

SAFRAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And so then you took the two rooms.

SAFRAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Just you alone?

SAFRAN: I lived with my mother until later we got a better apartment. We changed. It was a two room apartment, also, but it had a toilet. The other one I had to go in the hall in the toilet, but this was and it was

already twenty-one dollars a month and I can't afford already. So we took—

LEVINE: Was that in the Lower East Side, too?

SAFRAN: Yeah, [unclear]. So we moved there and I lived there until I got married, with my mother. Then I took my mother to me to where when I got married.

LEVINE: How did you meet your husband?

SAFRAN: I belonged to a club. A lot of our Tarnopol people got together and they organized a club and when they saw me, they called me in to become a member with them. So I was there with them. I was president. I was vice president. I was always there. Even though I was the shy type, it turns out different. So we lived together and then my mother lived with me for over twenty-one years.

LEVINE: What was life like in the Lower East Side when you first—

SAFRAN: Very comfortable and lively. I used to go out. My sister used to complain, you [unclear] downtown. Always you don't want to—they lived in the Bronx and they always wanted me to come, and I wasn't in a hurry to go to the Bronx. I was busy. I wanted to go dancing, wanted to go to the club. We were always active. We used to make [unclear]. We enjoyed ourselves. That's how I met my husband, but when he wanted to go out with me, I made one proposition. "I can go with you on one condition." "What is that?" "Only if my mother can live with us. Otherwise I don't want to start up because I don't want to leave my mother." He said he's satisfied and it was all right.

LEVINE: And what was your husband's name?

SAFRAN: Brainard Safran, but they called him Benny. Benny Safran.

LEVINE: Now, is he also coming from—

SAFRAN: He came from Lemburg. That was a bigger city than Tarnopol. It was the main city from us from Silesia. Yeah, and he was a very nice man. Yeah. And we went—there, that's him. We went to Los Angeles once and he got on the airplane. A man got sick, so the stewardess went over to my husband and asked him if he's a doctor. They needed a doctor. But that's how he looked, like a doctor, but he was a plumber. [Laughs] So I made fun of him. I said, "Yeah, you're a doctor from the toilets." [Laughs]

LEVINE: Let's see, how can we—so what happened then? Was your husband a plumber when you first met him?

SAFRAN: Yes, sure. But he didn't work—that time he worked for somebody else, but later he got a license and he worked for himself. That was different.

LEVINE: Now, did you stay in the Lower East Side for many years?

SAFRAN: No. Then as soon as I got married, I took an apartment right away in the Bronx, four rooms. Me and my sister, we lived one near another, and I lived there for many years in the Bronx.

LEVINE: And did you work after you were married?

SAFRAN: No. First, I didn't. Later, I don't know what had happened. Something. They gave me a present when I gave up the job and all that, but later it was the Depression started or something.

LEVINE: The Depression?

SAFRAN: Yeah. So I had to go to work. My husband felt terrible. He said he didn't get married I should support him, but he couldn't help it, so I went to work for a while. But I worked in a factory where they made belts. Some different things, but I had to make something. I've been through plenty in my life, but I met everything with courage and that's all I can tell you.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything else about the Depression time?

SAFRAN: There's plenty to remember. What do you want to know?

LEVINE: Well, I mean, did your life change much during that time?

SAFRAN: Well, a little. It was very hard. My husband wanted to get a job out of the town, not where we lived in the Bronx. I didn't let him. I said, "We'll struggle together," but he didn't want me to go to work. I said, "Look, it's only for a while. Things will change." Eventually it did change and he never left any place. We lived together all the time.

LEVINE: Do you think the fact that you came here as a seventeen year old young lady, I guess, and lived the rest of your life here, do you think the fact that you immigrated to a new country, do you think that made a big difference in you as a person?

SAFRAN: I don't think so. I was always like myself and I just tackled whatever was necessary and that's all.

LEVINE: Yeah. What makes you feel very satisfied that you've done in your lifetime? What makes you feel good that you managed to do?

SAFRAN: Well, that I didn't commit any crime, and I didn't go anything in the wrong place. I didn't, if I could ever—my husband and I were both the type, if anybody help, we helped. We had eight cars in our lifetime and whenever we went some place, we never went with an empty car. We always took along people, whenever we went here. There's a picture he made in a fair. I was—either I was the president or arranged a banquet and all that. I led a very nice, comfortable life and I was always—and I became a citizen. April the 1st, 1926, I became a citizen. The judge spoke to me a few words and then he asks me, "Do you like America?" I said, "I should say I do?" He laughed and that's all, and that was the truth. I sure do like America. I never—I said as long as I live, I don't care to make a trip to Europe. I went to Los Angeles, I went to different parts here, but never outside of America. I said, "This is my home, and I want America." And I'm always happy I America.

LEVINE: How about your mother, how did she feel about America?

SAFRAN: My mother liked it very much, too, but she only wanted to be with me. When she was sometime a few days with my sister, she was glad that she's back home with me. She wanted to be with me all the time. She died, she was eighty-six years old.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. How about this phase of your life? How do you—

SAFRAN: Hmm?

LEVINE: How do you feel about this phase, your old age time in life?

SAFRAN: This time I'm not satisfied. I don't like to be that old and I'm sorry that I reached that age. I would rather die than to live this, and I'm comfortable here. It's a nice home, and all that, but I am not happy. I don't like that life. There are people here that are eight, ten, twelve years. I don't know how they—I couldn't take it. It's not in me.

LEVINE: Do you make friends here? I mean, do you find people—

SAFRAN: It's very hard. Very hard. Most of them are deaf. You can't talk to them. Very hard to associate with somebody. I have some people at the table, one of them, she has the earplugs all the time with the ears,

and the other one is always something wrong. I don't like it. That's all I know.

LEVINE: Okay. Okay. Well, is there anything else you want to say about coming here, being American?

SAFRAN: No. I'm only lucky that I have that nephew. He is one of the most wonderful people in the world. His things, he's got two sons and a daughter. The daughter lives in Israel and the two sons are here. Yesterday they both called me up. Every week they call me to [unclear] and all that. They are religious. They are religious and I used to be religious. I was brought up, my father was religious, but since it was with Hitler, with all the trouble and they let so many Jews killed and all that, I stopped being religious. I like kosher meals. I wanted to come here because I wanted kosher, but I don't like any [unclear]. But the thing is, that it was no good. I got mixed up already.

LEVINE: You were saying when Hitler, with the whole thing with Hitler, you stopped being religious.

SAFRAN: Yeah, so I stopped being religious and I never ate any ham or all that, and that's what it is. But I don't believe there is a God. If there was a God, he couldn't let happen what had happened. I stopped believing. That was it.

LEVINE: Okay, just what is your nephew's name?

SAFRAN: Herman Stern.

LEVINE: Okay, and he has children.

SAFRAN: Most wonderful children. He's got ten grand children and they are all unusually nice people and I'm very happy about it. He has a sister, one sister that was six months old when I came to this country. She was just now seventy-five years old. She talks to me over the phone, but I'm here such a long time already, she didn't even find the time to come to see me once, and my nephew comes twice, three times a week.

LEVINE: Okay.

SAFRAN: He is such a wonderful person.

LEVINE: Well, good. Okay, well, I want to just close off here. I've been talking with Dinah Safran and today is September 9th, 1995 and I want to thank you very much for a very interesting interview.

SAFRAN: Yeah, found it interesting?

LEVINE: I certainly did.

SAFRAN: Yeah, okay.

LEVINE: And the way you say things is very interesting, too.

SAFRAN: Yeah? Okay.

LEVINE: Yeah. Okay. Thank you very much.

SAFRAN: You're welcome. So what—

[End of Interview]