

**EI-728**

**HERMAN PARNESS**

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

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**TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: IRV SILBERG**

**HUNGARY, 1922**

**AGE 11**

**SHIP: "RELIANCE"**

**PORT: HAMBURG**

**RESIDENCES:**

- **HUNGARY: MARIMAROS SZIGET**
- **US: KANSAS CITY, MISSOURI**

LEVINE: Today is February 9, 1996, and I'm here in the Oral History Studio at Ellis Island with Herman, Hal, Parness, who came to the United States from Hungary in 1922 when he was eleven years of age. Today, Mr. Parness is 85 years of age and this is Janet Levine for the National Parks Service. If you would start, Mr. Parness, by saying your birth date and where you were born.

PARNESS: I was born December 30, 1910. I was born in Marimaros, Sziget; which at that time was Austria-Hungary. Ah, today, I believe it is Romania.

LEVINE: Okay. And will you please spell Marimaros Sziget?

PARNESS: Okay. It's M-A-R-I-M-A-R-O-S. Next word is S-Z-I-G-E-T. My re --- my recollection of the language Sziget means an island.

LEVINE: Okay. Was where you, were you um, in the same place for the first eleven years of your life, or did the family move?

PARNESS: No. The family moved. I was three years old, we moved to Budapest.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. So do you remember, do you have any memories of Marimaros Sziget?

PARNESS: [laughs as Levine tries to pronounce the name of his town] Ah, not much. As I recall it was like a coal mine city. Basically, as coal mines. I do not remember. I was three years old when I left.

LEVINE: Yeah. Okay. And so then you were in Budapest, up until you left?

PARNESS: That is right. We had four of the boys were born in Marimaros Sziget. One brother, and one sister were born in Budapest.

LEVINE: Okay. What was your mother's name.

PARNESS: Clara. Stuhl, or Stahl.

LEVINE: How do you spell that?

PARNESS: S-T-A-H-L.

LEVINE: And your father's name?

PARNESS: David Parness.

LEVINE: And why don't you give the spelling of your name when it was Hungarian.

PARNESS: The name in Hungary was P-A-R-N-E-S-Z.

LEVINE: Okay. And how about grandparents? Do you have any recollection of your grandparents while you were in Europe?

PARNESS: Ah, yes. My father's father was Mendél. Méndel, and mother was Eva. And my mother's father was Lazar; and mother's name was also Eva but a different Eva. (laughs)

LEVINE: [laughs] I see. Do you remember any experiences that you had as a little boy with either of your grandparents?

PARNESS: Ah, yes. I do remember that my mother's father Lazar, I was a favorite. And we played together a great deal.

LEVINE: What kinds of things would you do? What would you?-----

PARNESS: Well, bouncing around on a lap and so forth and so on. Ah, Mendel, did come out to the States, with one of the daughters. In other words, he did come to America.

LEVINE: Do you have any idea why you were Lazar's favorite?

PARNESS: Ah, no. I really don't. [Laughs]

LEVINE: Uh, huh. How about your grandmothers? Do you have any recollections of them?

PARNESS: Very little. Not as much. I do remember the grandfathers more so than the grandmothers.

LEVINE: And did you have like a large extended family? Did you have aunts and uncles and cousins -----

PARNESS: Yes.

LEVINE: around when you were in Hungary?

PARNESS: Yes. My ah, dad had, three brothers and two sisters. And all but one sister immigrated to America.

LEVINE: Did they immigrate before your father did?

PARNESS: Ah, yes they did. They all did.

LEVINE: Uh, huh. Did you have any sense of what America was like? I mean, from maybe your uncles writing to your father? Did you, did you as a little boy, have any sort of preconceived ideas before you actually came here?

PARNESS: Everything was positive. I mean, everything was beautiful and we were just anxiously waiting, to come out.

LEVINE: Uh, huh. How about, maybe you could name your brothers and sister in their birth order.

PARNESS: Oh. In Hungarian or present names?

LEVINE: Oh, maybe you could give both? For each one?

PARNESS: Ah, yes. Okay. Ah, my oldest brother, was Yeno. It was changed to Joseph. Joe or Joseph.

LEVINE: How do you spell Yeno?

PARNESS: J-E-N-O, with two dots over it. Next was Marton, M-A-R-T-O-N, with a line over it, and he was very simple. Changed to Martin. My name, Herman, H-E-R-M-A-N-N, became Herman with one "n", and actually being called Hal most of my life. My next brother was Kalman, K-A with a line over it-L-M-A with a line over it-N, changed to Karl. And the next brother was Laszlo, L-A-S-Z-L-O. Changed to Leo. My sister, which was the youngest, was Frederica. F-R-E-D-R-I-C-K-A, changed to Frida. The interesting thing about the ages. When we came out to this country, my oldest brother was fifteen. And was two years between each one of us. In other words, fifteen, thirteen, eleven, I was eleven, nine, seven, my sister was five.

LEVINE: What recollections do you have about your brothers. I know your youngest brother and sister were born here, but the other ones, while you were still in Hungary?

PARNESS: No. My younger sister and brother was born in Budapest.

LEVINE: Oh, they were born in Budapest? The others were... Oh, I see.

PARNESS: The others were born in Marimaros Sziget.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. Well, how do you remember them? Were you closest to any one of them in particular, or did you spend more time with one or?

PARNESS: We were a very close knit family. I can't actually pick out any individual that I was closer to than the other. My oldest brother, he sort of took over, especially after my dad left. And sort of took care of all of us. Ah, those days we didn't require babysitters, we took care of each other. We were one group, very closely knit, and enjoyed each other.

LEVINE: Were you a religious family?

PARNESS: Ah, to some extent, I would say. Well, I would say not quite orthodox, but between conservative and orthodox.

LEVINE: Do you remember by any chance, any observances in Hungary of a religious nature?

PARNESS: Well, Passover was a big thing with us, and of course Chanukah was also a big thing because it meant gifts and so forth. See.

LEVINE: What was your father doing before he came to America, as for work?

PARNESS: Just before he emigrated to the United States, we had a fruit store in Budapest. And we ran the fruit store. And, then we sold it when he came out to this country. And all of us participated in the fruit store working, such as my mother and even us as youngster. I recall, we used to go to the market to pick up fruit every morning. I would say maybe four or five in the morning, to bring it back to the store. And we used to go to the market to bring the fruit back. And we didn't have horses. We had a two wheels on this truck, ah, being pulled. And we would always push in the back and Dad would pull in the front and we

would unload the fruit to the store and we would sell it that day. And the heavier loads of course, like watermelons and things of that nature, we had somebody else bring it over to us. But that's one of the rituals of always, my Dad and some of the children, of going to the market, four or five in the morning before we went ---we went to school.

LEVINE: Was it very far away?

PARNESS: Ah, no. It was really, I would say --- I would say possibly an hour and a half walk.

LEVINE: Uh, huh. Wow. Maybe you could describe a typical day. Like you would get up and some of you would go to the market. And then, what about school, what was that like?

PARNESS: Schools in Hungary, the boys have a different school from the girls. You don't go to the same school. You go to different schools. And,

LEVINE: Was this a religious school?

PARNESS No.

LEVINE: No It was a public school.

PARNESS: No. No. It was a public school.

LEVINE: Uh, huh.

PARNESS: And, actually you have four years of lower grades, then you go to what's called a Gymnasium, which is the higher grades, equivalent to

high school. Ah, but the interesting thing, thing about it is the ah, discipline is very strict at the school.

LEVINE: In what way?

PARNESS: In other words, you more or less worshipped the teachers and so forth. And ah, schooling was quite good otherwise.

LEVINE: And ah, did you go to school like all day, all day? The way..?

PARNESS: Yes it would be an all day session. We used to come home for lunch, or take lunch, whatever the case may be.

LEVINE: And then what would happen after school? Typically?

PARNESS: We would generally work in the fruit store. Help out.

LEVINE: What was your mother doing in the fruit store?

PARNESS: Basically sales, and talk to customers.

LEVINE: So um, so you were right in the city?

PARNESS: Oh, yes. We were right in Budapest. Right, I would say, maybe two, three blocks from the ah, main thoroughfare, which was a square.

LEVINE: Mm, hm. Mm, hm. And how about actual food that you remember eating, when you lived in Budapest? I mean, do you remember particular dishes or particular kinds of food that, that were a real staple in your diet?

PARNESS: We had a lot of soups. Soups was always a big meal. And, lot of stews, of that nature. And ah, it was usually a portion consisted of one meal, like for example, if we had noodles, noodles for the evening or meat, you had meat with potatoes and so forth and so on. It isn't like today, we have a main dish and two vegetables and dessert and soup and so forth. It was staple. It was good edible, tasty food. But it was nourishing.

LEVINE: Uh, huh. And were you like sort of what you would call middle class? I mean you weren't real poor and you weren't real rich. Would you, how would you say your family fell in? Economically?

PARNESS: I would say we were pretty much middle class.

LEVINE: And um, let's see, how about enjoyment? Like your mother-and-father's social life? Did they, were there any things that they did as adults, in Budapest that you remember?

PARNESS: The social life was actually visiting other families, getting together, singing, and telling stories and jokes. I recall definitely they, they always told jokes in another language so we wouldn't --- we wouldn't understand it. [laughs]

LEVINE: [laughs] Did they, did most people know another language?

PARNESS: Yes. In fact, my, mother, knew six languages.

LEVINE: Oh, how was that? That she came to know so many languages?

PARNESS: Well, in Europe, the countries are so close to each other and you move around, that you, you just learn it. It's like here, going from New York to

New Jersey. They're from Hungary. You're almost in Austria. You're almost in Czechoslovakia, you're almost in Germany.

LEVINE: And how about the music. What do you remember about the music there when you were a little boy?

PARNESS: Oh, the music was delightful in Hungary. Each eating place, restaurant, would have a gypsy orchestra and we'd always love to listen to it. And they had a place called Galad Hedge [ph] which was right on the Danube River. We used to go for picnic's there and you always have people playing music in the mount---, in the hills and you hear it all over the place. And Hungarian people love music and they, they, they – they just love life and music and they love to be happy.

LEVINE: How about dancing? Was there a lot of that?

PARNESS: Dancing is a very big thing. You have music, you got to have dancing. And you have your "czardas", and you have your...

LEVINE: You have your what?

PARNESS: Czardas. Which is a form of a dance. See. It's a traditional Hungarian dance. And then when it comes to music, which we call *holgato*, [ph] which is, means actually, listen to. It's usually sad, and refers to love, but you can sit and listen to it.

LEVINE: Did you develop a real love for music as a child?

PARNESS: Oh, yes. Yes. I love to play. Ah, music.

LEVINE: Did you play an instrument while you were still in Hungary?

PARNESS: No. I took it up in ah, in, [not understood]. where I started on a cello.

LEVINE: How about your family members? Were any of them playing instruments at that time in your...?

PARNESS: My dad was known for his voice. For singing. He had beautiful voice. The rest of the family, was not involved any more than, enjoying, and participating in song fest, and things of that nature. I'm actually the only one that branched off to the point where I became a professional musician.

LEVINE: Uh, huh. And you think that love for it started then, so early?

PARNESS: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Yeah. Yeah. Okay, now why was it that your father came to this country when he did? Which was apparently about three years before the rest of the family?

PARNESS: Ah, yes. First of all, in Europe at that time, he had a lot of difficulties. And he decided that, his brothers were here of course and they kept on *nudging* (bothering] him to come out, and ah, he came out with the definite purpose of making sufficient money to bring us out. And he left and came out here and worked. Now there's another reason, which we just about beat a deadline. Having five boys in the family, the army was ready to grab you and my oldest brother was fifteen. At sixteen, you must serve. I don't recall but it's two or three years, that you're compelled to serve in army. And we just beat that with him.

LEVINE: Mm, hm. Was, did you have a sense of what it meant to be in the army in Hungary? I mean, was there something specific about being in that army that people tried to avoid it? Or would it have been any army?

PARNESS: Well, it was compulsory.

LEVINE: Oh, it was compulsory. So everyone...

PARNESS: And it wasn't so much patriotism, for simple reason is the government kept on fluctuating. At one time the Romanians took over, one time the Russians, the Bolshevik took over. One time it was the, what they called the Whites took over. So the government kept fluctuating so you never knew where you stood. You didn't have the patriotism that you – that we have right here, today.

LEVINE: So there wasn't a real allegiance because there was no stability. Uh, huh. So, do you remember your father leaving for America?

PARNESS: Not really. I, I don't recall. No. I don't know why, but I don't recall him leaving. I know that he left. And we heard from him often.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything that he wrote or that you heard?

PARNESS: Oh, yes. He kept on writing . By that time, we sold the fruit store and we were just holding our own, going school and waiting for the day when we could get our papers to immigrate to the United States. We heard from him continually. In fact, we were dependent on him for livelihood.

LEVINE: I see. Your mother stopped working and

PARNESS: Oh, yes

LEVINE: was taking care of the family

PARNESS: She was taking care

LEVINE: members, and he was sending money.

PARNESS: She was taking care of the six of us, and I believe my oldest brother did some sort of part time job.

LEVINE: Was your oldest brother already out of school by then?

PARNESS: No. He was still going to school. But we all did different things to try and have some sort of subsistence.

LEVINE: Mm, hm. Mm, hm. So when your father had saved up enough and he could bring his family over, do you remember your mother, what she packed to take here?

PARNESS: [laughs] I don't know what she packed but she packed us. (laughing) Yes, she had quite a job on her hands to travel with six youngsters, with the youngest being five. But we took what we could carry and we walked away from everything else.

LEVINE: Did you, as a child, did you bring anything in particular of yours that you wanted? Do you remem---

PARNESS: Ah, no. I don't recall anything.

LEVINE: Uh, huh. So, do you remember the departure? Was there a saying goodbye that you remember?

PARNESS: No. We just picked up and left.

LEVINE: How did you leave? What was your mode of transport when you left?

PARNESS: Ah, it was train. It was difficulty. One thing, I recall, was quite difficult. Just before we left, I forget who was in power then, whether it was the Bolsheviks or the Whites or whoever. But they usually took the children and sent them to camps for a couple of weeks. And my brother Martin and I, we were at a camp. And I caught a disease where I was isolated from him and the rest of the camp. My scalp. Got some sort of a break out. And ah, [not understood] ] I was being treated. And we were afraid that we wouldn't be able to leave because of that. And that was always a dilemma, all the way over. We were afraid we were going to be rejected because of that. But finally, we got approval to leave, and we left. That, that was one thing I remember that really, we were scared.

LEVINE: Mm, hm. So do you know, was it a regular doctor who was treating you? Do you remember what kind of treatment you were getting?

PARNESS: Yes. At the clinic. At that hospital, at the clinic was treating us.

LEVINE: And you were the only one in the family that had this.

PARNESS: Yes. And I caught it at, at the camp. And at the camp you're isolated. In fact, I had to stay at the camp a little bit longer until the doctor could treat me over there. Then when he gave us the okay, and this was coming up pretty close to our departure date.

LEVINE: Mm, hm. Oh, so that must have been, there must have been a lot of anxiety. Uh, huh.

PARNES: Yes.

LEVINE: When you took the train then, and then you arrived. Did you go directly to the port where you were...

PARNES: We headed for Hamburg. We went through Vienna and other cities by train. We entered Hamburg and they had an enclosure there. We were there awaiting the ship to leave for the states.

LEVINE: Did you have to stay there for more than one day?

PARNES: Oh, yes. We stayed there weeks. Weeks at a time. Until all the immigrants got together at this particular camp and they were processed and examined, and papers examined. And I recall all the Hungarians got together. And there's no such thing as a dining room. You had to shift for yourself. We used to pool all our money and live practically on, bread. Rye bread and salami. And I recall making tea. There was a building there. And hot water came out of a faucet. So they kept on making tea out of that. It --that was really a crucial time. And things weren't too good. The eating situation. The accommodations. The sleeping situation. We were just being held, held up until everything was process so we could get on a ship.

LEVINE: What were the, what was the human dynamics like? What were the human dynamics like with this group of people all sort of anxiously waiting to leave

PARNESS: Yes

LEVINE for America?

PARNESS: Yes. Yes. We had freedom. We could go out in Hamburg on the streets. But my mother spoke fluent German. So all the Hungarians came to her. She had to check all the papers, for all the individuals. And ah, we were kept busy. It was a good thing. Because it was really a crucial point of our life. But as a unit, as a group, we sort of hung on to each other.

LEVINE: Well, your mother must have had a certain amount of prestige because she did know so many languages and

PARNESS: Oh, she did.

LEVINE: could be helpful to people.

PARNESS: In fact, even back in Budapest, the fact that she spoke different languages, the soldiers, whoever was in control, always gave us a little extra here, little extra there, because my mother could communicate with them.

LEVINE: Mm, hm. Mm, hm. So what was the name of the ship that you...

PARNESS: It was Reliance.

LEVINE: And do you remember any...

PARNESS: It was the German-American Line, if I recall.

LEVINE: Mm, hm. Do you remember anything that happened on board ship?

PARNES: Oh, yes. It was, on the ship we had it pretty nice. We had a room to our own. And we had beds and food, everything was included. I think it was, we were traveling third class. I was sick [laughs] from the time we left until we came. Until we arrived. I recall one instance, it was interesting. I was on deck and an alarm came up, a fire alarm. And we thought we were going to go down. They shut all the passengers inside. And they almost broke the doors down trying to get out. They thought it was the real thing. It was a fire drill. I happened to be outside, so I enjoyed seeing what was going on.

LEVINE: You were on the deck ----

PARNES: I was on deck, yes.

LEVINE: rather than in the cabin. Wow. Wow. And was there anything else about that voyage, anything that happened on it that sticks in your mind all these years?

PARNES: Ah, it took about ten days. If I recall, we had four stacks. And you had different segments. We were on the, I recall we had seven floors. We were on the fifth floor.

LEVINE: So that means there were first and second class passengers that were on the upper floors?

PARNES: Yes. And there were some even below us.

LEVINE: And was there a dining room? You probably weren't that interested in it, but did people go to a dining room to eat? Do you remember that?

PARNESS: Ah, yes we did. But it was more like standing in line to get your food.  
More like buffet, I would say.

LEVINE: Do you remember when the ship came into the New York harbor?

PARNESS: Oh, yes. The ship almost tilted. [laughs] because all the passengers ran over to see the Statue of Liberty. That was a sight behold. It was the most glorious site I ever saw.

LEVINE: Now were you aware at that time about the Statue of Liberty?

PARNESS: Yes. We knew about it. In fact, it was the talk of the ship. And we were all looking forward to seeing it?

LEVINE: How about the New York skyline? Do you remember seeing that? Did you arrive in the evening or the morning? Do you remember?

PARNESS: No. I don't remember. No, I don't remember whether it was day-, oh, it had to be daylight. It was daylight because I recall seeing the Statue of Liberty.

LEVINE: Oh, right.

PARNESS: Yeah. It was daylight. Yes. It was glorious site. It was just awesome. All the big buildings. Because in Europe, they had nothing compare to the heights of the buildings that we have here.

LEVINE: And then do you recall going to Ellis Island?

PARNESS: Oh, yes. Yes. We came as a group. And that was the crucial point of the trip because here is where you're accepted or declined. And we still had the fear of me being declined. I was afraid of being sent back to the country.

LEVINE: Uh, huh. Were you still treating your head, your scalp problem when you arrived?

PARNESS: Ah, not really, but there were still signs of it.

LEVINE: Uh, huh. Did the family ever discuss, I mean, what would they do? If you had to go back, did that mean the family went back? Or do you remember anything about that?

PARNESS: To this day, I have a feeling that I would have went back and the family would have stayed.

LEVINE: Huh. So...

PARNESS: I may be wrong, but there was a feeling I've had and I feared that.

LEVINE: Yeah. Maybe that was your fear, but whether or not it actually would have been that way.

PARNESS: It wasn't discussed. But being a child, you know, it's very scary.

LEVINE: Well, through a child's eyes, what was the so-called processing like for you at Ellis Island?

PARNESS: Ah, I recall them taking all our clothes and cleaning it. I remember the big room where we used to sit on benches and just sort of hung out and

we had, I recall we had, we showered and so forth. Which to this day I call it de-lousing.[laughs] That's as good name for it as any.

LEVINE: Was lice a problem with the people who were coming over?

PARNESS: Yes. It was a problem. It was a problem aboard ship too.

LEVINE: Mm, hm. And what happened. Did, was, your scalp must have been looked at.

PARNESS: Yes. We were held over at Ellis Island because of my scalp.

LEVINE: Let's pause here. We'll turn the tape and we'll continue

PARNELL: OK.

LEVINE: with your telling about that part.

END SIDE A BEGIN SIDE B

LEVINE: Okay. We're resuming here. You were talking about being held over at Ellis Island because of your scalp. Maybe you could tell what happened?

PARNESS: When the doctor examined my scalp, he, pushed me to one side. a different area where I saw everybody else go. Well, I really got frightened. I said, this is it. And we stayed overnight, another night, and I was reexamined by another physician the following day. And I was cleared. I was okayed.

LEVINE: So, you stayed a few days at Ellis Island?

PARNESS: I think we stayed two days in Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Now, were you with the rest of your family when you were here at Ellis Island when you were held over.

PARNESS: Yes. Yes.

LEVINE: So were you and your family in one room or were you in a room with a lot of other people?

PARNESS: No. We were basically, it was very makeshift. I recall being around those benches all the time. And just making do what we had. I don't recall the facilities beyond that.

LEVINE: Mm, hm. Do you recall the dining room at all here at Ellis Island?

PARNESS: No. I do not.

LEVINE: Uh, huh. What did people do when they were just waiting and waiting? I mean, did people play cards or sing?

PARNESS: Well, cards is one of the things they did or basically sit and talk and just console each other and being very impatient and very jumpy.

LEVINE: Mm, hm. Well, it must have been a fabulous feeling when you were cleared.

PARNESS: Yes. Yes.

LEVINE: So then, once you were cleared, what happened next for you?

PARNESS: Well, our arrangements was made. One of my dad's brother, who was Joe, he lived in New York City. In fact, he had three bakeries. He was quite successful. And he met us. He picked us up.

LEVINE: Now, had he also changed the name to, with an "s" instead of "z" at the end.

PARNESS: Yes. Yes.

LEVINE: So he took you to his home?

PARNESS: Ah, yes, he did.

LEVINE: And where was that?

PARNESS: Is in Bronx, is in Bronx. He had a bakery in Brooklyn and he had two in the Bronx, I think. In fact, to this day, there are some bakers that are still using the same name. I don't know ----I don't know if it's the same family or not. I do know there are some Parnes bakeries, but one S Parnes.

LEVINE: Oh, in the Bronx?

PARNESS: Even in Jersey.

LEVINE: Oh. Uh, huh.

PARNESS: I guess, I presume that he sold the bakery and the bakery just kept on using the name over and over again and just kept on passing it on.

LEVINE: Well, how did your uncle's home in the Bronx compare with the home you had left in Budapest.

PARNESS: Oh, to us it was like [not understood]. He lived in a nice apartment house. He had a number of rooms. He had two sons. And, he was quite successful. And, he did something which was very nice. He took the six of us, out to department store and outfitted us from head to toe with new clothing. Everything new. And we all had new outfits, because we were headed for Kansas City, Missouri.

LEVINE: Well, do you remember, could you describe the difference in the clothes that you arrived with and the clothes that you got outfitted with?

PARNESS: Ah, well,

LEVINE: Any aspects of it.

PARNESS: Well, I would say, here we were in britches in now, and there we were in more or less short pants. There weren't too diff ----- too much difference in the styles. Except that I think we were more or less using hand me downs. One advantage we had with the hand me down, because you can buy for clothes for the oldest one. It kept on going down to the last one, so you got a lot of wear out of it. But the clothes were very much the ah...

LEVINE: The same style.

PARNESS: Same style.

LEVINE: Uh, huh. Did your Uncle Joe, did you have a sense of being greenhorns? Because he had been here a while?

PARNESS: Oh, he didn't treat us as such. Of course, we spoke Hungarian to him. But he was really a prince. He took us under his wing, and really took good care of us. Of course we, took us to restaurants which was new. And we had good food. I don't recall how many days. We stayed here for a number of days with him.

LEVINE: Can you recall anything that struck you as new and different in particular those first few days or weeks here?

PARNESS: Well, the department stores were fascinating. Fabulous. Because they had everything. Where in Budapest there was lack of clothing. Lack of food. Lack of most everything. And here everything was abundant.

LEVINE: Mm, hm. And did you know your Uncle Joe from when he was in Hungary?

PARNESS: No. I didn't recall.

LEVINE: So after you stayed for some time with him, then tell about your trip to Missouri.

PARNESS: Oh, he put us on a train. And , we were headed for Missouri. And I recall, we were still wearing old clothes. We didn't wear the new clothes. We carried them. But, before we arrived to Kansas City, we changed, all of us changed to our new clothing. Because that was --- that was – that was a good feeling.

LEVINE: Yeah. Did your father meet you?

PARNESS: Yes. *Páter* (Father) met us at the station.

LEVINE: And what was that like?

PARNESS: We were home again. We were family. Very touching.

LEVINE: And where did your father take the family then?

PARNESS: Ah, we went in, we moved in for the first couple of nights with another uncle. Uncle THomas. He lived in Kansas City, Missouri, and he was in the cleaning business. He had a tailor shop. We stayed there until we were able to find an apartment in Kansas City.

LEVINE: And what was your father doing for work when the family arrived?

PARNESS: He was a garment cutter and a pattern maker. In fact, that's what he did for the two, three years that he was here to make sufficient money to bring us out.

LEVINE: So then did you start into school fairly soon after that?

PARNESS: Yes. Came here, for about a month, we were being tutored. I believe it was a Y. And after about a month of tutoring we , went to the public schools.

LEVINE: Was the tutoring mainly in English?

PARNESS: English.

LEVINE: . to teach you English.

PARNESS: Just language is all it was.

LEVINE: How about your mother? Did she know English when she arrived?

PARNESS: No. She didn't. That was one language she did not know.

LEVINE: And when you got to school, were there a number of other immigrant children in your school?

PARNESS: The school that we, where we lived, was basically an Italian neighborhood. We went to the school. We stayed there, not too long, because we found out we were learning Italian before learning English, and we had a lot of difficulties there. Because there we were greenhorns. And ah, as children will with children, they jumped on us, we fought. We had to travel in a group because we were always in fights. They were teasing us. Anything bad happened in school, we were blamed for it. So ah, we had to move to another area. Because we weren't getting anywhere at all. We finally found a house that we were able to purchase, and we moved into what's called more or less suburbs. Which was a different type of school completely. Which was pretty much Americanized. And there, we hit it off very well. Most simple reason is, when we got there, having this many boys, they had an athletic event coming up which was a track meet. And we participated in this track meet, each one of the brothers were in it and we won five gold medals. And we won the championship of the city. The school, won the championship of the city for this particular track meet. This is the lower grades, the elementary. This was elementary school. Ah, so they put us up front and were treated beautifully. And we had a home. We had our own home which had three bedrooms, and , quite comfortable.

LEVINE: Now, had you and your brothers been involved in track events in Budapest?

PARNESS: In Hungary, yes. Yeah. They were quite strenuous about, in athletics. They stressed that because they built you up for army. That's the purpose of it. And athletics was considered an important factor of ah, the schooling. school system.

LEVINE: Now, were there other Hungarians in the neighborhood that you moved to?

PARNESS: In Kansas City?

LEVINE: Where you had the home? In the sort of suburbs?

PARNESS: Ah, yes. In fact, they had Hungarian clubs. They had soccer teams, and they had groups. And ah, my older brothers basically became very active in these different groups.

LEVINE: How about your mother and father? Were they social clubs for them too?

PARNESS: Not too much. They pretty much worked. Basically my mother took care of the family and my dad continued working and my oldest brother went to work almost immediately.

LEVINE: What did he do?

PARNESS: More or less the same line as my dad.

LEVINE: And when did you take up music --then in the --

PARNESS: I took up music in this suburban school which was called Horace Mann.  
Ah I took up the cello there. I started there.

LEVINE: Do you know why the cello?

PARNESS: Strange enough, I didn't care what it was as long as it was music. But because of my size, and the cello is a big instrument, they gave me a big instrument. [laughs] But I feel in love with the cello. To this day I'm playing.

LEVINE: Uh, huh. Let's see, so what did you do then after you finished with school?

PARNESS: When I finished school, I went to work in a music, music business basically. I was touring -- Chatauqua, Lyceum....

LEVINE: Oh, I see. So you were a musician. That was your career from the beginning.

PARNESS: Yes. On the cello. I went to ah, I won a scholarship to Missouri University, Kansas University, Horner Conservatory of Music. I took advantage of the Horner Conservatory of Music, where I studied privately, which later became part of the Missouri University. And I played classical music. In those days, back in the silent days, the movies had music on weekends. During weekday, you had piano, and during the weekend they had maybe a four or five piece orchestra. So while I was in high school, I was already playing in the theater.

LEVINE: Wow. Um, let's see. And did you meet your wife in Kansas City?

PARNESS: No. Ah, I met my wife through music. Incidentally, after a while with the ah, when television came in, not television, the movies rather, color, the talkies.

LEVINE: Talkies, uh, huh.

PARNESS: Talkies, they came in. The, a lot of musicians lost a lot of work. Let me say I wasn't eating regular. So I had to change instruments. So I changed to string bass and tuba and started playing jazz music and dance music with groups and I more or less dropped the cello or it was secondary. And that's how I met my wife. I was at a resort in -- in the orchestra. She was a -- she was a guest at the hotel. And we hit it off pretty well. And she went back and then came back later in the season for a regular vacation. She was there originally with her parents. Her parents were there with a group which they came to this particular place every year.

LEVINE: Was this a Hungarian resort in particular?

PARNESS: No. No. No. No. No. No. In fact, it was Tamiment in Pennsylvania. Tamiment Country Club. And things were a lot different. In fact, it was a pleasure to work there. Just to give you an idea, at the same time I was there, Imogene Coca was there, Sid Caesar was there. Danny Kaye was there. Ah, Jerome Robbins was there. Max Liebman was there. And from there we went directly to the Show of Shows. So we had a new musical comedy every weekend, and I did a lot of the writing and arranging. And we had rehearsal. We worked hard. But we enjoyed it. It was a different type of thing in entertainment and resorts than it is today.

LEVINE: Uh, huh.

PARNESS: Ah, Carol Channing was there too. I can't leave her out.

LEVINE: No. (laughing) Wow. So this was a different phase in your musical career too, I mean that kind of music.

PARNESS: Oh, yes. Then I played with a number of ah, big bands. I did a lot of traveling. All over, from coast to coast. Touring. And ah, and then when I went into the service, I got out of the music, after I got out of the service, I went into another profession.

LEVINE: Oh, in the service, were you in the band?

PARNESS: No. No. In fact in the service, ah, I volunteered. I wasn't drafted. I enlisted because, being patriotic, and the feeling that the country has done so much for my family, I just felt obligated, ah, to enlist. Which I did. Ah, ask if I played in the band. Three different times, I was called up ah, to join different group, and I declined. I says, I didn't join the army to play music. I say, I want to do something more than that. And I worked myself up to the point where I became an officer. And ah, I asked for it and I got it. I went in the morning of D Day, in Omaha Beach, Normandy. At that time I was a second lieutenant. I took in forty men with me. And I was with the military, ---- combat military police unit. And our mission was traffic on the beach.

LEVINE: Mm. Wow.

PARNESS: Oh, and coming back to the music. Then when, I was engaged during that time that I was in the service. My wife was here and I was in Europe. See. I decided that I had it with music. I wanted to get out of it. And I made up my mind that when I get out of the service I'm going

to give up music. Which I did. I sold all my instrument because I was just sick and tired of traveling and I wanted to get married and settle down. Which I did. Where there was no traveling involved. [laughs]

LEVINE: Well, tell me where the patriotism stemmed from? As far as your mother and father? What was their attitude about becoming American? I mean, did they want to become Americanized?

PARNESS: Oh, most definitely. In fact, my dad became a citizen in 1927. And all of use became citizens so-called, derivative. And that's where the problem was, they couldn't find a record of me being a citizen and held up my ah, officer's candidate school until finally that was approved I couldn't go to officer's school.

LEVINE: So when you got out of the service and you wanted to settle down, what profession or what kind of work did you settle on?

PARNESS: I went in photography. I was always interested in photography, I knew a great deal about it. And ah, I went to a photography school under GI Bill of Rights. And took a complete course. And up until my retirement days, that was my occupation.

LEVINE: I had my own studios. I worked for other people, I was in management. I was in photography all this time.

LEVINE: I see. Well, what do you feel most proud of? That you've done, in your life?

PARNESS: Ah, it's quite complex.

LEVINE: Perhaps most satisfied with?

PARNESS: Well, one of the most satisfying things, well, going in D Day I feel was a big accomplishment. And ah, not only that the unit, --- with the combat unit, we went right through with the lines. We were always front line units. But one of the things that I got the biggest thrill out of. In high school, this is going back to the high school. So happened my instructor was a radio man and he was busy at nights. See, he couldn't participate in the school activities such as plays and operas and so forth and so on, so he trained me as a conductor and I learned how to conduct. And I conducted a complete opera, as a student. And the principal of the school loved it, to have a student who was capable of ah, doing this, of leading a full orchestra. So, that I enjoyed very much.

LEVINE: Mm, hm. And then once you retired from photography, you took up the cello again?

PARNESS: Oh, no. No. That's a --- that's a long story, again. (laughing) I sold all my musical instruments, except the cello. I couldn't sell the cello because the neck was broken. So I put it in the back closet somewhere and it stayed there. This is after we were married fifteen years, a professor from Kansas City came by and looked me up and I --- we took him out to dinner, and he says, how are you doin' on the cello? So I said, I'm not playing. He said, what do you mean you're not playing? He says, you can't do that. And ah, he says, anybody that play the way you -- you --, you have no business stoppin' -- stoppin' playing an instrument. I said, I'm out of the ---out of the music business. So my wife surprised me at one of the birthdays. She took the cello and had it repaired and gave it to me as a birthday present. Then I start playing again. That was fifteen years I was away from it. That was, that was heart-sickening. My mind would work, my fingers would not. I knew I could do something and I couldn't do it. So until I got acclaimed to it.

And now I play, as an amateur, I don't play professionally, I wouldn't dare. I'm not where I used to be. But however, I 'm still enjoying it.

LEVINE: And you do play?

PARNESS: Oh, yes. We have, maybe I'll play with two or three orchestras a year. And I have a string quartet which we enjoy playing. We play quartets, more or less my contemporaries. Two violins, viola and cello and we just play music. We get together at night, we play like other people might play cards, we play music.

LEVINE: Now when did you use the name Hal Barnes?

PARNESS: Oh, I was living in New York City. I had my one orchestra, so called society orchestra. We played basically club dates. And I changed the name to Barnes, instead of Parness, I dropped the "p" and put in a "b" to make it more coherent and easier for public to recognize and remember.

LEVINE: Do you feel like you have kept any of the ways of your boyhood? Or any of the Hungarian kinds of attitudes or customs or anything? Do you have any sort of part of you that's still Hungarian?

PARNESS: I love to play gypsy music for that. And as far as Hungarian, the rest of my family, more or less stuck to traditions and clubs and organizations. I sort of went away from it because I did so much traveling. I was on the road a lot. I was away from home. So I had a little different environment. In fact, ah, I'm told that my manners of speaking is more western than European. More from Kansas City. Which is possibly so.

LEVINE: And ah, how about this phase of your life? How is it now that you're retired and you have time to do what you want?

PARNESS: Well, ah, it's ah, restful in some respects. I'm known as Mr. Fix-it? Like my grandchildren call me Pop-Pop. Anything is broke, They say get it to Pop-Pop, he'll fix it. And of course, I'm more active in my music. My photography, I gave up completely. I got rid of all my equipment. Cause as long as I had equipment, I knew I was -- still -- stay with it. Same thing with my instruments. If I knew I still had my musical instruments after I got out of service, I would continue playing. This way, I just don't do it.

LEVINE: Uh, huh. Why don't you mention your wife's name and maiden name for the tape, and your children's names.

PARNESS: Oh, lovely. My wife's name is Constance. Buechler. B-U-E-C-H-L-E-R. She's in Jersey. She lived in New York when we married. Incidentally, I was home two weeks from service, when we got married. We were engaged during all that time I was in Europe. I once, ---my one daughter, Joyce, [coughs] married Carl Nampra. They have two boys, Eric and Craig. The other daughter, Candy, married John Moore. They have a son, Daniel and a daughter Kendall.

LEVINE: Now, we're getting close to the end of the tape. Is there anything you'd like to say before we close about being born in Hungary, living your first eleven years there and then immigrating to this country and really living out your life here?

PARNESS: Ah, it's quite busy. I feel that I've had a very busy life and ah, as far as accomplishment, I think I accomplished a great deal. I love my family. And, I feel that this country has done so much for the immigrants.

Especially my family. Just imagine, my dad, my father, had three brothers and two sisters and they all have children and grandchildren and great grandchildren. They have done a great deal. And there's absolutely nothing that I can think of any member of my family, of any of the brothers and their families and their children that I can be ashamed of and not say that they didn't do the best, and they did everything they could possibly do to make a happy life and appreciate what this country has done for all of us.

LEVINE: And how about here? Your visit? This is now your second visit to Ellis Island? How do you feel coming back to this place?

PARNESS: I got a first thrill out of it. I thought it was terrific first time I came. Came with some friends and tried to recollect -- things. And tried to go over things, things that I remember. And my children as a gift to me, surprised me one day by ah, an official certificate of registration. Evidently they gave a donation to be officially have my name listed. Herman [Hal] Parness came to the United States from Hungary. I have not seen it, but I understand it's going to be displayed on the... Where is that going to be displayed?

LEVINE: The Wall of Honor.

PARNESS: Wall of Honor, okay. Thank you. [laughing] I just couldn't think of it. But I feel ah, really a thrill to be able to participate in having my name on the Wall of Honor and I'm grateful to my children, my grandchildren for giving me this gift.

LEVINE: Mm, hm. Well, you're the kind of person that this place is all about. It's been a real pleasure talking with you. I've been speaking with Mr. Herman, Hal, Parness, who came from Hungary in 1922, when he was

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eleven years of age. And this is Janet Levine for the National Parks Service. I'm signing off and than you.

END INTERVIEW