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MICKEY (NICOLAE MIKLOS) HERSKOVITS
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ROMANIA, 1949
AGE 24

SHIP: THE GENERAL STUART HEINZELMANN
PORT: BREMEN
RESIDENCES: ORADEA, ROMANIA; BROOKLYN, NY

LEVINE: Today is February 20th, 1996, and I'm here at the Ellis Island Oral History Studio with Mickey Herskovits, who came here in1949 when he was twenty-four years of age. Mr. Herskovits is today seventy years of age and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I want to say welcome and I'm looking forward to your telling, I think a very interesting story.

HERSKOVITS: Thank you.

LEVINE: Let's start if you would say for the tape your birth date and where you were born.

HERSKOVITS: If I make a remark even before that you pronounce my name Herskovits. It's Herschkovitz. Technicality. It's a different—it's difficult for you to pronounce it with my accent. I was born on March 1st, 1925. What was the other question?

LEVINE: And where.

HERSKOVITS: In Transylvania section of Europe which at times belonged to Romania, at times belonged to Hungary. So switch back and forth territorial. When I was born, it was Romania, the name of the same was Oradea, O-R-A-D-E-A. Later in 1940, when this turned back to Hungary, this neighborhood, it became Nagyvarad, which is the Hungarian version of the same city.

LEVINE: So would you spell Nagyvarad for the tape?

HERSKOVITS: N-A-G-Y-V-A-R-A-D, which literally mean there was a big, big—I don't know how to describe it. A big like an army barrack, a huge one and during the Turkish war before, many refugees came there. The word of Nagyvarad is three words. Nag means big. Yvar means that -- that camp flag. Rad gives. In other words, they gave refugees. They give refuge to people who ran from differenc--, from different places. That's became the name Nagyvarad. Literally it means the big camp gives.

LEVINE: I see, interesting. Now, you lived in Oradea or whatever its name was at the time, up until—

HERSKOVITS: Up until we were deported. We were sent to Auschwitz, etcetera.

LEVINE: Okay.

HERSKOVITS: Which was in 1944 on May the 29th that we -- we were put in the wagons. Another comment here. Romania, at last did not deport its people -- just we touching the subject of the Holocaust. Hungary sold out its Jews to the Germans and we became Hungary in August of 1940. Consequently, 1944 we were deported. In Nagyvarad there were about -- roughly about thirty, thirty-two thousand Jews, was secti- - divided in many different groups. Our was the—our group was the third one to be shipped out. [clears throat] Excuse me, and this was in May twenty ---, May, Monday 29th, 1944, arriving in Auschwitz the night of June 1st.

LEVINE: Wow. Well, maybe we could start first by talking about life in Oradea up until 1940. So that would be—you would have been fifteen. Up until you were fifteen years old. First of all, maybe you could just give a little description of the town.

HERSKOVITS: Even before that, my parents—may God avenge their innocent blood, father and mother. I am the oldest of three children followed by a sister, followed by a brother. The town itself was a very nice town. They had all type of people from cobblers and carpenters to singers and artists and merchants and what have --. A cross section of everything. Doctors, lawyers, dentists, etcetera. Living there was pretty harmonious. We had with fights on the streets.

LEVINE: There was a Jewish population and a non Jewish?

HERSKOVITS: We had a Jewish population and a non Jewish population. The older generations seemed to get along better, Jews and gentiles, than the younger. Younger one already on the difference of the -- that time of the -- of the system and that time of the happenings. They were already a little bit more violent. They will stay off the certain side

streets in the evening to -- to gang up on us and beat up, but it still was perhaps—it wasn't so major. It happened, yes. We lived in our life.

We went to school like every kid has to and if we could sneak away from school, we did that, too. To play soccer, which is a predominant sport in Europe. So life was pretty much in the middle or lower middle class. Very few people were so wealthy they could afford every summer to go away on vacation. Those who were still home, maybe every two - three years they went away for a week or two. Some never went away, but it -- the climate was not so bad. The summer we had a couple of hot days; in the winter a couple of cold days. Life was normal, quote-unquote.

LEVINE: What was your father's name?

HERSKOVITS: My father's name was David, may God rest his soul. And my mother's name, Laura. Of course, they prevent the Jewish names, but it doesn't matter.

LEVINE: Okay, what was your mother's maiden name?

HERSKOVITS: Steiner.

LEVINE: S-T-E—

HERSKOVITS: S-T-E-I-N-E-R.

LEVINE: And your sister and brother.

HERSKOVITS: My sister Clare. I'm Anglicizing all the names, they're so different. And my brother Alexander.

LEVINE: Now, what did your father do for work?

HERSKOVITS: He was in business. [clears throat] Excuse me. Flour—not flower that you decorate the table -- the one that you bake with and cook with -- and also imported coffee beans from Brazil. That's was his main business deal (clears throat) till a certain times till about 1943 under the Hungary -- under Hungarian, which Jews were limited to what they can do. So the coffee import stopped and he still dealt in the flour and some salt, which is a big item sold by the, restaurants, coffee shops, etcetera.

LEVINE: Now, what about your religious life in these first fifteen years? What was—?

HERSKOVITS: Whether the first fifteen years or later on, we was very Orthodox Jewish observant --- the Sabbath, the holidays, going to synagogue every morning and at night during the week and on Saturday, holidays again. This was practiced without interruption, at a (pardon the pun) religiously observed up till were --- we were deported.

LEVINE: And how about you, did you have a Jewish education?

HERSKOVITS: Yes. The school system over there is special for the Orthodox kids. In morning from about eight or eight fifteen until one, one thirty go to the secular classes. Home for lunch, afternoon from about two thirty or three until about seven, go to the Jewish education, or what you call here *Yeshiva Katana* -- elementary and intermediate, etcetera.

LEVINE: Now, in other words, would the children—would you go to school with non Jewish children in the morning?

HERSKOVITS: No, no. We went to—the Jewish community built its own school, at least in my town and it was very prominent and we had only Jewish kids. In teachers, professors, we had -- especially in gymnasium, which you people call it junior high -- we had non Jewish teachers as well. In elementary only Jewish teachers. Then we had for -- for the -- for instance -- for Latin (which is an obligatory ob-- subject there) we had a Romanian gentleman and we had for the Romanian language -- like we would call English -- with a Romanian gentleman. Music was a very good gentleman, a Romanian again. We had there for French, we had a French. Until today, I don't know if he was Jewish or not. What was originally from France and how he got lost in our section, I still don't know. But he was teaching French. But we had mix of teachers.

LEVINE: And how about -- were there girls going to school?

HERSKOVITS: Again, girls were going to school, of course, but not to -- not coed. Orthodox people don't go coed. The girls had their own school, which is about a block and a half from us. And -- and at those days we were still nice young kids. We didn't go after the girls yet. Perhaps more interested in playing soccer than pull the girl's hair.

LEVINE: What else did you do for enjoyment, besides the playing of soccer?

HERSKOVITS: If one was a wealthy, they had a bike and they rode a bike. There was no much more. I don't think -- in all the time I went to school, I remember only one kid ever playing tennis -- meaning with his own [not understood] racket, etcetera. A few of them would play instruments.

LEVINE: Like what?

HERSKOVITS: Violin. That was the most prominent thing and one fellow was whether clarinet or flute, I don't know what. It was a wind instrument, and he played. But basically that was it. Either play soccer or you were in school or you were punished why you didn't go to school and you played soccer.

LEVINE: What about after school, did you have duties? Did you have—?

HERSKOVITS: Well, there wasn't too much room for it. Between -- the secular studies in the morning and the Hebrew afternoon, you have to do homework. And homework is homework all over the world. And by the time you finish with that, it's already ten o'clock at night and you have to go to sleep because tomorrow's another day. By the way, we went to school six days a week --from Sunday until Friday. The only thing is that Friday afternoon, the Hebrew department didn't operate -- because being close to Sabbath. So that's for six full days for the secular -- five days for the Hebrew. But the Sunday, Monday, etcetera, etcetera.

LEVINE: Did you have grandparents?

HERSKOVITS: I had, but they died very early. I only met from the four grandparents, my father's father. He passed away when I was about nine or ten.

LEVINE: Do you have any memories of him?

HERSKOVITS: Yes.

LEVINE: When you think of him, what do you remember?

HERSKOVITS: Yes. A m-- man with a big white beard and the *yarmulka* [skull cap] on his head, that's the only thing. My mother's mother passed away. My mother, may God rest her soul, was sixteen so ha-- she hardly remembered her. My mother's father passed away somewheres, I don't know. They lived in Hungary. Now, bear in the mind. They lived in Hungary. We lived in Romania and my father's parents lived in Czechoslovakia. Again, my father's mother passed away when my father was five years old. Grandfather re-married. So only the *Zeydi,* my father's father, who my father took to -- took me to him couple of times and I saw him. Last time I saw him I was five or six years old, not more than seven. Then he passed away in nineteen thr-- I was about nine or ten years old.

LEVINE: I see.

HERSKOVITS: And the -- the traveling go very expensive. Go from Romania, Czechoslovakia you need the visas. You need the border crossing. You have the train connections. Same thing with Hungary.

LEVINE: So it was pretty much your nuclear family, rather than a large extended family that you grew up with?

HERSKOVITS: Well, in a way, yes. My father had a brother—talking about the same hometown—and he lived and he had four children. Of them, one is left here -- lives in New York. And we were close. And my father had an uncle, his mother's brother, who lived in our town. So this was our nucleus from our family. He was older. His children were older. They flew the coop much earlier than we. We were still kids; they were grown up and moved away. But this was our, what you just said, nucleus. Like Sabbath, which is on *Shabas*-- which is only time we have, one would go visit the other one. The other one comes to visit

you and this was it. And during the week, not too much of the visiting. You were busy with your daily routine.

LEVINE: What about your mother and father, did they socialize in any other ways that you remember when you were little?

HERSKOVITS: They would go over to some friends' house occasionally.-- not too much. They may—I -- perhaps they might have gone to a movie once or twice that I remember. But not much.

LEVINE: Do you remember when the build up began that led to the Holocaust?

HERSKOVITS: Well, the build up to the Holocaust itself became on a Sunday, March 19th, 1944. That's when the Germans came into Hungary and they took over. And I remember that afternoon we went to very important soccer game and our home team won and we came back gloriously and singing all through Main Street. And that night, you want to celebrate. You were going to go to a movie with about six, eight friends. As we come along throughout the Main Street, everything is closed. The *Konditorei*—this is a c-- this is unknown in America. It's a place where you go and just drink coffee and cake and -- and talk with your friends. This is unknown here. Supposed to be called a coffee shop. It's -- here is different. And the places where the older generation go in to play chess or read the papers or whatever with their cup of black coffee. Everything was closed. We found the Germans came in and they settled the whole Hungary like -- like within a couple of hours.

Now, this was March 19th. By April 4th or 5th, we Jews had to wear the yellow band -- yellow star, yellow armband -- and by end of May, they started deportation. Now, they were so expert in by that time the

Germans; that it went very, very fast. And the -- the --you -- to answer you question, this is by the time that it really went bad. Before then already was little sign that Jews were not to deal in -- in certain items. Like my father lost his coffee import business and bread ration was already introduced in either late ’42 or early ’43. At that time my father -- we were a family and the bread is a staple over there -- bought black -- on the Black Market bread rations and we were given into the police. And they came to our house and I said right in front of my father, “I did it.” It didn’t help. Both of us were taken into the police station, beaten up and he had a three month sentence in jail. Not in prison, but a jail for Black Marketeering. Somebody gave in our name.

LEVINE: How were relations between the non-Jewish people, once the Germans came into the town?

HERSKOVITS: That you see the true colors. Some of them became real mean B’s—bas—. Some of them were closer to you than others because they knew what it was. Now some, don’t forget, in these -- at -- in1940s there were still people who remembered World War I who served together with the Jewish guy and they were friends. And throughout the years they did business together and relationships were grown up and they were friendly. Officially, perhaps you kept your distance. You didn’t want to be seen by somebody who might report you. But otherwise it was pretty normal over all. Individuals, and the younger kids that started [not understood] that, the wildness and that extortion. If you give me a certain amount of money, I’m not going to beat you up. You see three, four of them against one. You -- that’s what's about it -- in those days.

LEVINE: So you were taken—what camp were you taken to when you were taken away?

HERSKOVITS: When they put us in a wagon, all of us, the whole family landed up in Auschwitz. That was about one thirty at night, Thursday, June 1st. Next day would have been June 1st. Immediately -- and I'm sure you heard about this already -- we were separated. My brother and I being young, crafty guys on one side; my father, my God avenge his innocent life on other side. And miraculously—I don't know how until today, I saw my sister later and she told me that mother was also taken on other side. Meaning, we were the gr-- labor camp. This was the extermination camp . This was in Auschwitz. We spent a few days in Auschwitz, about four or five days. You were—my brother and I were still together. I didn't see my sisters after that.

You were shipped over to Mauthausen. That's also a very famous -- infamous -- name over there. We spent another four, five days, where our group was divided in certain sections. We had to send to different sub-camps. My brother and I and a cousin and some friends, we landed up in a place called Melk, M-E-L-K. That has the second biggest monastery outside the Vatican. Of course, nobody knew anything. Melk in a prom --- a little in prominence in United States when Rosalyn Carter visited that place. That's how they wrote about. Otherwise, it was a nondescript city. It had an army base where we were stationed and we had to go out to work, etcetera, etcetera.

LEVINE: What was the work like? How hard were you worked?

HERSKOVITS: Okay, pretty hard. There was a different groups. Some of them, we built them factories in a mountain or in a hillsides. The first group they were the strongest, were mostly Polish and Ukrainians. They were strong like oxes. They dug up the earth in the hole. Then my group came in, we put up the frame and the cement (the *beton* [concrete]) to

make it lik-- like a regular tunnel. And that's what we did. It was murderous work.

LEVINE: What was the tunnel for?

HERSKOVITS: Later on we found out it was a tunnel they built. They made manufactured parts for their -- their airplanes, Messerschmidt mostly -- motor parts. And this was -- and this was one or two of the A, B, C, D, E up to E or F different tunnels. When was about three-quarter finished, start digging your next one -- starting. Interestingly enough, very recently -- about eight years ago -- my son and I and my friend [unclear], we went to Europe and went to Melk and look over this place. And later on to Ebensee where we were *formel* [procedural] taken over when the war was close, and this place is still standing -- visited. We took some pictures. The things are still standing there. I don't know if any functional, but the frames are still there.

LEVINE: Yeah. What could you say about how people changed in that horrible situation of the camps?

HERSKOVITS: They changed for the worse. They became animals. Don't forget, everybody for himself. If you don't eat this piece of bread, you die. Another one ate it but still hungry, he might steal your piece of bread. You have shoes, his shoes already rotted off his feet. (clears throat) He might steal your shoes when you sleep. Some of them, very few were still human beings like you would say Yiddish a *mensch*. You know what it is. You know where you are and you have to look out for them. Unfortunately, by and large we 'came animals. You go on and that's the way we go on. The death rate was extraordinary high. Beatings was high -- were -- and -- and food, we don't have to talk about it. And later on we found out that at Melk, Camp Melk,

comparatively speaking to Mauthausen or Gusen or a [not understood] or Ebensee was the least of the worst places.

LEVINE: What might you be beaten for?

HERSKOVITS: He didn't like—he didn't like you. He just told you, "Oh, you just up to something." You didn't have anything. You have-- there's no [not understood] why you beaten up. We had a few sadists and every morning going out to work was more or less peaceful. Coming back, they always picked up one or two guys. We had to come in five in a row, so it's easier to count. They pick up one or two guys and just isolate them from the group and just literally beat them until they were unconscious or killed. No reason. You didn't keep your steps with the thing, that's a good reason.

LEVINE: Now, what would you say happened to the people who were your keepers? I mean can you say anything about what change came over them or how they—

HERSKOVITS: Depends on times. At one time, we had these young punks, these SS kids were the ones to show off that they are -- twenty, twenty-two, twenty-five year old. They want to show they are such a big somebodies. So they were mean. At la-- at certain stage we had an old group, Wehrmacht, old Wehrmacht people in their fifties. They were human being. They knew what we are. They knew what they are. They know the circumstances. They was like, "Don't bug me, I'm not going to bother you." That's for a while, and by and large you stay away from their way. If you see one coming, you run the other way, unless they really caught you physically. But otherwise, there's no contact with them. There very few, one or two, who finished half a cigarette and threw it on the floor for you can pick it up and smoke it. .I

think there was maybe one or two out of how many hundreds I don't know.

LEVINE: Is there anything that you could say about human nature, just based on that extreme kind of human experience?

HERSKOVITS: Human nature, in my experience, it's a cover. It's a fa-- it's a façade. When everything goes well, you smile, you cute, you gorgeous, your behavior is proper and so on. And you look out, "Hello, how are you? And may I do this for you." When you down in the nitty-gritty, when you life is at stake you become—well, not so nice. Is you life. It's either me or him and usually you vote for yourself and that's what it is. Very few people can maintain that nice, proper behavior. Should maintain them always, most of them, and those were the first to die. Those were the first to die. They were too nice, too lenient, forgiving.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So when the liberation came, how did it come to you personally?

HERSKOVITS: I was -- no. A day and a half before—(clears throat)—excuse me—we were not driven out to work and we knew something is coming. That would be Friday night, May the 4th, I believe.

LEVINE: How did you know something was coming?

HERSKOVITS: I just told you, we weren't dri-- we were not driven out to work and they let us sleep. We was -- that time we were night shift and Friday night nobody comes out.. Saturday morning—oh, we didn't get food, anything. That's another thing. Oh, we skipped here one thing. After Melk, when the war was pretty close to us, we were evacuated and taken to Ebensee, still in Austria. That's one of the most beautiful

picturesaisch [sic] neighborhood. Franz Josef who was -- who the Emperor of Austria had his summer home in Bad Ischl, which is five kilometers—what is it, three miles?—from this place. Then we were—that over there was very terrible, just three, four weeks over there. The work was terrible. If you work, you get about a quarter of a kilogram bread a day. If you didn't work, you get one slice.

Friday night we didn't go out to work. Saturday morning they were from mouth to mouth words, nobody goes into these tunnels. We didn't know what it means. Nobody goes to the tunnels. Later on found out -- this was a big camp, where Melk we were five six thousand people. This had about eighteen to twenty thousand people, Ebensee. All the tunnels were wired. They wanted to get into the tunnel to blow us up. This a documented fact. Then some loudspeaker comes in, one of the Germans, "Everybody go into the tunnel. We want to save your life." and so on and so forth. Nobody went into the tunnel. This was Saturday.

Sunday afternoon -- I say about one thirty, two o'clock -- first the American Third Army and a Canadian unit came in to operate -- to liberate our camp. We were numb. We were so—didn't know what goes, but we were happy. I sleep, we didn't have to go to. So the first thing out, they put up -- they didn't know this -- field kitchens. For for--forty-eight hours we didn't eat anything, everybody hadn't eaten. They gave us food and we got sick out of nowhere to get the heavy bean soup with some meat in it or some other thing. So we ate and the more you ate, the more they gave you and brother, we got sick! This last a couple of days. Then you started to recuperate a little bit. Took a start.

My brother was killed four days before our liberation. At le-- he was beaten up a few days before. That's when he died. And he was separated from me in different barrack we called the -- the unit tent. They called this a barrack. I was different. I went in to the front of mine -- I knew from Europe. (clears throat) And to [unclear] they told me he died. This was Sunday, Saturday. He died the previous Wednesday. It was May 2nd. And then we tried to -- to stay alive.

LEVINE: How much did you weigh when they came?

HERSKOVITS: I was waiting for this question. Thirty-five kilogram -- about seventy-four, seventy-five pounds. I had no trouble with cholesterol or of being over weight. And then this food that made me that I lost even a few more pounds because I also had the biggest sickness of dysentery diarrhea that knocked out the half of the camp until the doctors found out. They had field hospitals. They took us in there and, okay, was thinkin' that less than a few days time, we came back. Of course, we could barely walk and a few of us, we were still twenty, twenty-one, twenty-two year old guys. You're strong. Little by little we came back to it and they didn't rush us. We was there about another three, four weeks, I believe. To -- they fed us and then --

LEVINE: How did people—how did people change? How did people act when the liberation came? I mean—

HERSKOVITS: Nothing particular. I made it. I'm alive.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HERSKOVITS: And then a few— about a week later, said, "Oh, do you maybe -- you see my father? You see my brother?" You know when the -- it's, you

know, self delusion -- self hypnotazes [sic]. I'm sure he's alive somewhere. I just cannot find him. Then you find out the whole truth. They are not here anymore. I went to that—about three - four days before the liberation, the crematorium didn't work. So the dead bodies were piled up and I went there in to find my brother. Literally, I find my brother in this pile. I pulled him out. I wanted to give him a burial, but there was no burial. It was landed up in a mass grave. After liberation, the American brought in the local German, Austrian big shots, the Bűrgermeister, Mayor, and the -- all the big [not understood] . Said, "You dig the grave and you bury them and watch out how you doing," and that's what they did for days and days and days. That's I guess a very small portion for -- for the revenge, but they did it. Then at one -- one service in a mass grave for all of them. Over the mass grave for all of them who died, but my brother was there among them.

LEVINE: Okay, we're going to pause here and turn the tape.

END SIDE A, TAPE ONE BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE 1

LEVINE: Okay, we're beginning now Side 2 and I want to mention on this tape that Mr. Herskovits—

HERSKOVITS: How about just Mickey, good enough.

LEVINE: Mickey. Okay, so I can pronounce that. Mickey has been interviewed for the Survivors of the Shoah and so he has a videotape of the experience of the Holocaust. So maybe for this tape, if there's anything that you can think of maybe that you would want to mention further about the Holocaust, maybe something you didn't think of at the time or just some kind of statement, you can mention it here. Then we'll go on to the rest of the story.

HERSKOVITS: Well, briefly, you don't live that down. Fifty years that has gone by -- fifty years I am, quote, liberated or freed, unquote. In these very days, I still have occasion—not as much as at the earlier days—I have dreams. About three, four weeks ago I dreamt I'm being deported. Wasn't Auschwitz, but it was a deported. They -- they put me in a wagon, I was sent down. I observe *Yortzayt* [death anniversary] which comes at usual in very late May, early June for my parents, my brother just three weeks apart. Even today at that time of the year, I have bad dreams and I -- I'm -- I'm moody because you don't live this down. To go into the -- the thing of Shoah, you would have to start from step one and go through. Is like -- like they say about eating, you get a -- an appetite while you eat. When you go into it then, I -- I --- details and sidetracks come on and on and on. To put it here would take a whole day, separately, regardless of this project what we are doing now. So thank you for the offer, but I -- I'm declining under the circumstances that although it's for now, but it's not now for here.

LEVINE: Okay.

HERSKOVITS: For that's -- at this point.

LEVINE: Okay, that's good. Okay, why don't we talk after the liberation, where did you go next and what happened?

HERSKOVITS: After liberation, we -- as I mentioned before -- we were a few days still in Ebensee to catch enough strength to able to walk around. Then little by little the people went home. We came home. We—I mention we 'cause a friend of mine lives in Miami (I'm sorry) near Fort Lauderdale. We met in first grade school way back when. We worked together. We're still the best friends. My kids call them Uncle,

etcetera. In fact, a few days I'm going down there to see him. For spend --- spend about four or five times I go down there. So we came home. They gave us a couple of -- of -- wagons -- train cars -- but we were still weak and we couldn't get either, so we slept on the stop of the car. That's how we went home. We went back to our hometown.

LEVINE: And what did you find in your hometown?

HERSKOVITS: Before, why did I go home? Most of them did not go home. Stayed in a camp and then go kind of to US or straight or whatever. After the liberation -- about a week, ten days -- I met some girls who were classmate of my sister. I knew my brother is not here and, finally, they tell me that they saw Clarie (which is a nickname of her) comparatively well after the liberation. This gave me encouragement so I'm back to our so-called hometown, quote unquote. And that's where she gonna -- she gonna show up, so at least I know I have her. I went back to the hometown. I didn't find anything. I found—that's not true. I found about six, seven pictures of our family. Where we lived in a beautiful two family house. Two family side-by-side, not on top of each other like here. It was empty. Another family lived there. The Jewish people. They were very nice, so to speak. They were -- offered me a room in a back of the house.

LEVINE: They were Jewish people?

HERSKOVITS: Jewish people, high ranking Communist officials. Don't forget, by this time it's Communist regime. High ranking Communist official. They offer me very, from the deep of their heart, a back room in my place where I lived. Immediately, I didn't have where to stay. I stayed a couple of days and I said to him (excuse the expression) "The hell with you all." and I moved in with another friend. I were basic—my main

purpose was to wait for my sister to show up. I was working odd shops -- odd jobs, I'm sorry -- and running here and just enough to have to [unclear] already, just to get enough food to eat. The friends I was living with, they came home before me and they had their own apartment they had back, and they just gave me a place to sleep. That's all I needed.

Things went by -- a half a year, a year, my sister didn't show. But this brings us down to August '47. I would have to go to -- to Romanian military to be a soldier. I said, "No, thank you. I just had enough. I'm not gonna soldiering for anybody." So I ran away from there. I cross the country -- I speak Romanian and Hungarian, plus another few languages. So I went over to Hungary. This was in August '47 and started to work my way—to work [clears throat].(excuse me) -- to work the American section of Austria. Austria was cut off already by that time -- half Russian, half American. To go to my American section then start to come up here. I had an uncle of mine here, may he rest in piece. Somehow he found me through the letter and he wrote to me he wants me here. Of course, I wanted to come here, too. After two years, I thought it's -- I waited enough for my sister. I didn't see any sign of life. Little by little I left. And I made my way back first to Budapest. Debica then Budapest then Vienna and from Vienna I stayed about three months.

LEVINE: You were working all the way along?

HERSKOVITS: Yeah, working. Working. I was like smuggling myself. Black closing. Then after Vienna -- which I was three months because I was -- Jewish high holidays in September, in October or November -- and I went over to Linz , which was in the America sector. And after Linz had three DP camps, so I settled in Wels-- in Ebelsberg was one of them and I

stayed there. I was there for a year, three-quarters. Over there I got a job working in a kitchen, plus I played soccer for the camp team for which we got a care package every month. Which some of it we eat, but most of it we sold on the Black Market (excuse the expression) and kept us up.

LEVINE: How did you know—how did you get the contact with your uncle here?

HERSKOVITS: I still don't know. It seems—it seems -- a very strange --- my uncle—we come back to this later. He died six week before I got here. I never got to talk with him. He had a wife, a wonderful woman, but she was a housewife. Had a son, so he's still around, he's a genius. He told me some -- some story he thinks, but he didn't know. Uncle Bernie, may he rest in piece, put up a sign in a synagogue -- which more other people did -- looking for family this, and this and that and that. Somewhere along the line he got an answer, "Yeah, I know you nephews," and gave him an address, and I think -- I think the first letter didn't come to me.

It went to the Jewish Community, but there were so many of us. So through them they found me. I believe this. And later on when I wrote to him when I left—this happened shortly below I left. I think it's probably the spring of '47 when he finally found me. In late '47, I wrote to him that don't write to me here anymore. I'm getting out of here and I will contact you whenever I—so I wrote to him from Austria, from Ebelsberg. In Ebels-- then we contact regular correspondence. In fact, he sent me a suit and shoes. That then the first time I saw the American style of shoes, very pointing, and we were laughing at it. And then I was the-- I was working, working in a kitchen and playing soccer and we had a more quote, normal, unquote life.

This happened in—oh, while I got to Forty- Se-- in Ebelsberg, they started to take -- list names who wants to go where. People wanted to go to Israel to fight or to prepare for fighting. Some people who had relatives in Canada, Australia, France, etcetera. I wrote in USA. Because that's where I had the remaining relatives that I knew they are [not understood] the USA. I wanted to come to USA.

Then they called us in throughout the next couple of months, only in '49 summer, to various Department of the Immigration Service -- health, background check. Check backgrounds whenever you honest, you didn't have any criminal records, etcetera. That's just about four or five months. Every two, three weeks they called you. Place was in Aston, which is a short ridge from Ebelsberg. Finally, somewhere in July I get a letter from my uncle that he's starting to work on my immigration paper to let me in here. Before he got my immigration paper to IRO, International Refugee Organization, I was picked -- everybody was picked sooner or later -- to the next group to leave.

So we left Ebelsberg with a stop over in Salzburg over night or two nights, and [coughs] (excuse me). Then all the way up to Bremen in very early August of '49. August 4th, we were put on boats and shipped to United States, half of the boat was American soldiers isolated from us; half of what else. And in Au-- I think in August—technically speaking August 14th, Sunday. But we were here already August 13th, Saturday late afternoon. But all the functionaries— all the people were the -- were gone home already, so they couldn't take us off. So we had t spend one night on the boat and admiring and the beauty of the Statue of Liberty -- and singing and dancing.

LEVINE: [laughs] Let's just back up a minute. What would you say about the life for over a year in that displaced person camp?

HERSKOVITS: It was normal. Absolutely normal. There's a Jewish camp. There were different camps. We were all Jews. I guess there were about eighteen hundred, two thousand of us. There was cobbler shop. Oh, by the way, the ORT had a training there where I took a training course in carpentry. More or less just to occupy myself, but mostly I worked in the kitchen. Evening we were free. You courted girls. You played soccer teams. You went to movies. It was normal life, as normally as we can start all over. We still had mental block. That no father, no mother. Some of them were lucky enough had a brother or sister, even an old mother or father left. Most of us were singles. Naturally, the single you were, the closer you were to each other. The life was pretty much normal.

LEVINE: How did people change from that sort of dog-eat-dog mentality that you had when things were so horrible? How did people—like, did they go through a transition from being that way?

HERSKOVITS: If they did in the —I'm sorry for -- to -- to cut in on you while you were talking.

LEVINE: No, no.

HERSKOVITS: Number one, you start to pick up the chips. Some of them became human beings again. But this time you're not the same guys who you were in the camp with. It's a different group. How did they behaved in their group? I -- we had quite a number of people who never went to camp. They were partisans with the Russian army and the Polish underground. There were many of those. "People, forget about -- that time period of you life you erase. You forget. You abolish. Never

happened. Nada. Never happened before." You start to be human being again.

LEVINE: Did you talk about it?

HERSKOVITS: Yes. Because some of them, unfortunately, -- a couple of people, Jewish people -- who were [unclear] to being 'capos' [overseers] in a camp and they were -- what -- couldn't kill 'em. Couldn't -- but they didn't. So they were isolated. Nobody would talk with them. In my camp there was only one guy, who ran away. We didn't have -- but now when I came this country, I heard about two other guys. They were isolated. Nobody talk with them. And you didn't kill them because you said you were -- he was a dog, he went to the lowest of the low, but the circumstances brought him to it.

Had it been a normal life, maybe he would have been a human being. So you just don't know him. Forget it. I don't know this guy. Never heard of him. This was the general life. Coming in a camp, otherwise, as I said before, was normal. If you were a horticulturist you tried to work a little garden for yourself. If you -- they had one guy who was very good in music, a violinist. One day a truck pulls in and they recorded what --what -- what he -- what he played and we were looking at it. The guy's a violin player and they use-- couple of radio showed up. So we try to have dance music from Linz or South Vienna or the international soccer games we lived by, and that was it. Basically.

LEVINE: And people were courting each other?

HERSKOVITS: Oh, yes. There was even a few—I spent a year and a half. It's enough time to meet a girl, fall in love and to marry her. And they did. They did. And as fact, one or two babies were born. And this was

taken into Aus -- the hospital we didn't have there. Then Austrian hospitals and they were so nice, so courteous to come in -- to have a baby. Or -- or -- I, while in Vienna in the three months, I hurt my eye and literally I couldn't see on through that for about a day and a half. They took me to a hospital. There's all German doctors.

You should have thi-- you should have thought that the king of I don't know who comes in. Boy, this attention 'cause a Jewish refugee, a Holocaust survivor and probably their -- their conscience were bothering them. And excellent treatment and is -- and so what is here. But otherwise were normal life. And the thing, of course, while—then we left. We put on a boat. The name of the boat I remember was General Stuart Heinzelmann. He was -- he was one of those guys in [not understood]. Was I think German origin or Swiss and came to fight for United States and got a boat for that. (laughs)

LEVINE: (laughs) And it was a troop ship?

HERSKOVITS: Half. We -- we know, but we didn't see them. We had our own game. We had a ping pong tournament. We had chess tournament and they showed us movies. And this is the first time I heard about and I saw about baseball. The life of Babe Ruth was played by, if I believe correctly, William Bendix. I think he was the -- he was Babe Ruth. We were standing there like a bunch of nuts. Baseball. You threw a ball. You hit the ball. If you need it, why you throwing it away? If you don't need it, why you run after to catch it? Go figure this crazy ball. So we were sitting there and watching it. This was the first time I heard about baseball. Later when I came here, I met my cousin. I told him about baseball. Said, "You know about baseball?" Said, "I don't know about baseball. I tell you what I know," and I told him -- which took about three seconds and this.

Otherwise it was -- as I said, we had the chess tournament. We had a lot of --this was by the way an interfaith group. Not only Jewish people. We had a couple of Russian guys who were very good in chess. Beat everybody in chess. And we had a ping pong tournament that was very interesting because the ping pong ball fell under the couch. We had to wait till the boat shift other side for the ball to come out. (both laugh) You know , boat because it was -- and we got seasick the first day. We took the --from the a -- all people -- all places, the English Channel had the tremendous. After that, the sea were calm and we had the eight or nine beautiful day -- like I call Love Boat. (both laugh) We had the Love Boat.

LEVINE: In August.

HERSKOVITS: In August. Food they gave us. Those of us we were strictly kosher, we were limited. 'Cause they didn't have a -- we were a handful of us. They didn't have kosher food, per se. They had a couple of cans. So we did eat fresh fruit. This is August. Orange and banana. Orange, banana? What the heck you see this in Romania or Hungary?

LEVINE: Had you ever seen that before?

HERSKOVITS: Seen it, yes, but when he -- I tell you an interrupting thing. I never forget. This is -- this I tell over. My bar mitzvah, which is thirteen years old, one of the nicest presents I got -- a grapefruit. And if I tell this, people laugh. "That's a bar mitzvah present?" But 1938 in Romania in March to get a grapefruit. There was a friend of my mother's, may she rest in peace, Aunt Rose. We called her an aunt. She wasn't a relative. Where the heck she got that grapefruit in 1938, March in Romania, I don't know till today. But you know what that

means? It's like I saw th -- this friend of mine eating a green pepper in January. We were in the first or second or third grade. I mean, it's unbelievable. Incomprehensible. A green pepper? A grapefruit in March in 1938 in Romania. This I never forget. Was the nicest b-- bar mitzvah present I got.

So on the boat, yes, we knew about fruit. If you were very wealthy, you bought fruit more often. Once in a while, my father, may God avenge his soul, would be bring home oranges, tangerines, figs, dates. Not so much bananas. This I remember -- bananas not so much. But tropical fruit -- yes, we had. Never grapefruit. Only this is only time. So we know.

So on the boat we had bread, we had butter and the fresh fruit and a few cans they had kind of a meat or whatever. It was kosher, and that was our ration and food. Those who ate everything, they had the good stuff. They had good meat and get scrambled eggs in the morning. We couldn't eat it because the oil or the fat was fried. It wasn't kosher, etcetera, etcetera. So why is that? We can't and we're here to talk about it.

LEVINE: (laughs) How did you feel coming to America?

HERSKOVITS: Wonderful, excited, hopeful for the future. What is the word I'm looking for? Good, okay. There's a word I'm looking for. I know whatever relatives I have, I'm going to find them. At that time I didn't know yet that my uncle, who was instrumental in this whole thing, was died six weeks before I got here. He died July 2nd; I got here August 14th.

LEVINE: So you were en route, when he—you were actually probably on the boat?

HERSKOVITS: No, no, no, we started August 4th. I was still in the DP camp. And there was another uncle who came and my aunt. We don-- and she wouldn't tell me until we got home. So I came here and was wonderful and I'm in America and I looking around and I see this crazy tall buildings that only you hear before. You only heard about that before. And you have a plan and hope. Hope, that's the word I'm looking for -- hope for the future. At least, you gonna be free man. You can do certain things. And with God's help, you'll be honest (drinks) and -- God's help -- you gonna make it.

LEVINE: Tell about when you came into the New York Harbor and you couldn't come into Ellis Island that first night.

HERSKOVITS: We were on the boat. We were having fun. We has a singing party and everybody nice to each other. Then I would assume the relatives were notified because next morning they started to take us off by ABC. On a Sunday, I guess it started about ten o'clock.

LEVINE: You slept on the boat --

HERSKOVITS: [Superposed] We slept on the boat --

LEVINE: -- you didn't -- slept at Ellis Island?

HERSKOVITS: No, no, no, we were on the boat. They didn't let us in. And not only was this room where we are right now, but we brought in a huge room. A huge room overhead langing [sic] the huge letters, ABC, etcetera. So you go with your last names. I go under the letter H. They didn't tell me to go to H -- but under the letter H and waiting there until my name is called. And Unc-- instead of Uncle Bernie, may he rest in

piece, Aunt Fanny shows up, and it was strange. So she signs and she says something in English (I spoke a few words, English -- nothing to understand) and signs up, and an uncle -- uncle my father's side, my uncle's brother -- was waiting outside.

So then we go outside and my uncle tells me in his broken Hungarian that Uncle Bernie died a few weeks before. It seemed he had a severe cardiac arrest and he was suffering for one week. And a week later he died -- on Friday, July the 2nd. And then we went to the uncle's house where there was a few more of the immediate relatives were there and it was a feast. Eat, did he see that? I don't know what I'm eating, but it was good. So that's how it was and I stayed with my uncle for a few weeks.

LEVINE: Before we leave Ellis Island—

HERSKOVITS: Yes.

LEVINE: Is there anything else that you recall about Ellis Island?

HERSKOVITS: To me it seemed chaotic. By the way, there eight, nine hundred people come in and the letter H working, the letter F working, the letter G -- F --or they calling out names and shouting. I think if this—I'm not sure, but I think one person was taken off a ship bed. Fo-- I -- they -- they said something about his health. Which I -- I question because everybody was examined so many times about health questions while we were over there: before you board, with two days before, a week before, and then -- I don't know. But I think one come to my mind. Maybe I'm just dreaming already. There was chaotic. I didn't get out until about one thirty, two in the afternoon -- standing there from ten o'clock in the morning, which was okay. I'm here. I can stand it. I

stood over there for -- for the twenty-four years on this side, on this side of the pond and now I'm here. So finally we got in, too. Otherwise in the -- yes, they ask me questions at that thing. My name, and there were quickly interpreters. And what language. I said, "He can speak either this Yiddish or Hungarian." Went to-- so I think I got to a Hungarian or a Yiddish. Not Romanian, that's for sure.

What's my name? (Aside: The [not understood] is there) This is my name. Do I have any money, American money?. "No, I don't." I was lying. I had two single dollar bills. I didn't tell them. Do you have any jewelry. Yes, I found, my mother, may God rest her soul, a ring of hers and I found it and this conversation I never forget because my aunt started to laugh. And says, "How much is this ring worth?" I said, I don't know--" And the interpreter -- "I don't know what is your -- worth to you, to me it's worth a million dollar." I didn't know any higher number than million. This was my mother ring. So they all started to laugh. And that was it. And then the uncle came in. I had one crummy valise and they took us to the [not understood] to pick us by cab. Otherwise, I don't rem- remember anything particular about Ellis Island.

LEVINE: So how did you feel then when your aunt told you your uncle had died?

HERSKOVITS: How you feel when somebody hits you over the head with a sledgehammer? He is the one who corresponded with me for the last three and a half, three, three and a -- four years and you look forward. And as I mentioned to you, my father's mother died when he was -- my father was five years old. This Uncle Bernie was original from the first four boys, four brothers. This one, another one and the third one who lived in our town and Uncle Bernie. Uncle Marty was from the second wife, which you would never known. They were very close to each

other. But here is an uncle who is a real uncle and he -- he decided to check out before I got here. I felt terrible. I remember today I had tears in my eye. I'm not supposed to cry, I'm a grown up man. My tears in eye, and Aunt Fanny also was crying.

To where was only six weeks and it was terrible, and -- and -- and I remember thinking, "Oh, my world is over." For Uncle Bernie I knew. Uncle Marty I never heard before -- till about maybe a month before I came here. And says, "Oh he -- I don't know who he going to want me, gonna ship me back or what will happen." And he happened to be a wonderful guy, may he rest in peace. A heart of gold. Such a darling of a man. And -- and he was very nice. Compensating for Uncle Marty—oh, for Uncle Bernie and for my father, may he rest in peace. After a while it's like you get used to it. And he had -- has -- he left for-- they both passed on, he and his wife -- two children.

The older one, Helen, a girl who's still in [unclear],I have to call her. Tomorrow is her birthday. She was up until about twelve, one o'clock at night to teach me the English language. Helen. I came here with a language of maybe ten, fifteen words. Six of them you cannot work -- use in a girl's high school. That's what you hear from the American soldiers. By the way, while we were in DP camp, we had contact with American soldiers, so we were —. Yeah, they was --- not in our camp. Different camp, but illegal *shef-- gesheft* [business]here and there. You know, they sell some cigarettes. They want some other thing. And she was up like twelve, one o'clock every night.

LEVINE: How did she do it? How did she try to teach you?

HERSKOVITS: According to Hannah and my Aunt Fanny, may they rest— may <u>she</u> rest -- with Helen to long life! In six weeks I spoke a passable English.

I still speak with an accent. I know that. Especially when I listen to my tape, my accent is worse then in --- naa.

LEVINE: (laughs)

HERSKOVITS: But I -- in six weeks I could -- I was traveling all by myself through the sustem [sic] -- the bu-- subway system, the busses. She was very good. Of course, she taught me the elementary words. I go. This is soup. Give me bread. Shoes. And we never read Shakespeare in the original.

LEVINE: (laughs)

HERSKOVITS: But she was up and God bless we still remember 'em when we think about this for [not understood]

LEVINE: So did you stay with your Aunt Fanny then?

HERSKOVITS: Then, no. With Uncle Marty I stayed, but Aunt Fanny I went every weekend. Like Friday from work I went to her house (clears throat) has a son, Bobby—today's already Robert, and who was closer from all the cousins in age. And he was serving in the -- in -- in the army during World War II and so he tried to show off the little German knowledge he knows. So we kind of scrambling, he's speaking in German, I'm speaking in English. I used to spend a -- for about good couple of months -- weekends. I stood with my Aunt -- Uncle Marty for about six, eight weeks. Then I met—then --then he got me a job. Fellow who -- who was -- I was working with the company, was fellow I was working with had an empty room in Brooklyn. I moved in, thus I was independent.

LEVINE: Okay, this is—we're going to pause here and we're going to change to another tape. Okay.

END SIDE B, TAPE 1 BEGIN SIDE A, TAPE 2

LEVINE: This is the beginning of Tape 2 and I'm speaking with Mickey—

HERSKOVITS: Herskovits.

LEVINE: Herskovits.

HERSKOVITS: Not gonna -- not gonna learn it.

LEVINE: (laughs) I'm hopeless.

HERSKOVITS: No.

LEVINE: Anyway, this is the beginning and we have been talking about the trip to America and when you arrived, finding that your uncle had died. And tell about how you went—your Uncle Murray than got you your first job?

HERSKOVITS: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay, tell about your first job.

HERSKOVITS: He knew somebody who knew somebody who knew somebody, etcetera, who heard about a job. There was a company here down on Lower Broadway manufacturing window shades and Venetian blinds. Name of company were Weiss and Klau. Mrs. --Mr. Klau died so Mr., Weiss married the widow -- so became Weiss and Klau.. I got a job

there. Naturally, had to put me in a -- in a department where the foreman neither spoke Yiddish, Hungarian, Romanian or what. So they put me in a place where the fellow spoke German. And this is a fellow who had the empty room. When I moved out from my uncle, I moved in with them. I was working then as a stock clerk or shipping clerk, whichever is more appropriate.

I was wor -- I started to work there —this is interesting story, even if I -- even if I have to say so.

LEVINE: (laughs)

HERSKOVITS: I started to work there September ’49 and I got paid sixty-eight cents for the hour. How they ever come to this figure, I don’t know. After three or four weeks, I got a raise, phew, seventy-five cents an hour. Now, these were the days when a new immigrant still needed First Papers. You probably never heard of this. Regardless, today is—today would be a green card. That time you were here -- after a short time, you had to go to a certain place. I had to go to Whitehall Street and present yourself and you’re taking on First Papers. That’s what they call them. A picture, etc. First papers cost three bucks in those days, so they gave me the three dollars to pay for it. First papers is -- is like acknowledgement you are here and you member of the big family United States of America and you’re waiting for after a certain time elapses to become a citizen, etcetera, etcetera, etcetera.

Then the spring comes up and I’m still working diligently for seventy-five cents an hour and the manager, not the foreman, the manager was a Mr. Reichman. A very nice man, a Jewish guy and he had a little sympathy for me that I’m a Holoca [sic] survivor -- Holocas [sic] survivor. And I came to -- *chutzpah* [cheek] I had --I came to me one

day and I said, “Mr. Reichman, I want to ask you a favor. I have a cousin of mine who owns a small hotel up in Catskill Mountains. I could go up there and be a waiter for the summer, but I’m sure I’m going to make a hell of a lot more than seventy-five cents an hour. Give me permission to do it.” So he talked to a higher up, make a long story short, I got the permission and end of June I left and I went up to the Catskill in Woodburn.

The name of the place was Zucker’s Lodge. By the name of Zucker was already a relation to the big Adolph Zucker from Hollywood, but they didn’t keep exactly [not understood]. And I was working. Now, this, imagine yourself a huge hotel. They had I think sixteen rooms and just before I got there, they rebuilt it and I -- I -- I --- put in eight more rooms. Had twenty-four rooms. And this a hotel. And I was—the only entertainment there was the television at night, in the evening. No swimming pool and, if you want to, play cards. With the women, as soon dinner was over, didn't watch it --- card playing. And I was the waiter, which was good. I got everybody on my tables and her son was my busboy.

And we w-- of course, we get a place to sleep and we get food and we worked there all summer long and in the afternoon when things were slow for the dining room staff, you might go to Woodburn which was good already walking distance, see a movie or whatever, neighboring hotels. Neighboring hotels you didn’t want to go too much because you see what kind of dump you work at. But once you don’t know what other side is, then you happy what you have. This was the whole summer of 1950 and in 1950 the summer, I cleaned, I believe, six hundred fifty dollars and that was money. I was ready to put a deposit on the Empire State Building.

Now, back in -- and the Jewish high holidays came very close to the summer. You know, this periodically happens. I didn't tell the place where I work that the high holidays they are closed, but I went around and I get another job from another place which was open for high holidays. So I was working there as a waiter, too. Also, a small place. I found out the smaller things and everybody's you guests. So they tip you. And after the high holi-- when I made—I forget how much made, that was very nice. This was up in summer in Muncie, Rockland County. I forgot that -- Spring Valley, Muncie. And after that was over, I want back to the place. Mr. Reichman gave me a big welcome and I started to work back again.

Lo and behold, January 1st of '51 I get a raise and I'm making a dollar an hour. All right. Come one, where is my Cadillac? I got to buy one.

LEVINE: (laughs)

Herskovits: This goes on again and in the meantime, in June I got acquainted with somebody who knows somebody and I can be a waiter in a real big house, a big name. There was -- we talking about all kosher places. The name of the place was Pioneer Country Club up in Greenfield Park, Mountainville, that area. So I go again to Mr. Reichman. "No, we cannot do it. If you're going to leave here, we're sorry, cannot take you back." So I made a mental calculation. I heard that here they really make money. This was a huge hotel at about six, eight hundred capacity. Had about twenty, twenty-five waiters, so many busboys, etcetera. I'm going to take a chance. I know this factory job is not for me anyway. Shipping goods, what kind of future is that?

I went up there and I was working. I'm jumping one second ahead. That summer including high holidays again, I cleaned, I cleaned twelve

hundred bucks. I'm sorry, fifteen hundred dollars because twelve hundred I come back to. Fifteen hundred dollars. Now, after that you pay for your own laundry, for your own uniform, the cleaning and you take out a girl, etcetera, etcetera and I made fifteen hundred dollars. In 1951 that was moola. In the mid of that summer, I get a letter from Weiss and Klau Company that it terminated my job, but if I need references, they are -- don't hesitate. Let them call on them and they gave me good references [not understood]. A dollar an hour, I gave. We became friends -- after I married -- a bit ahead of I'm in. After the summer was over, I went back and I said thank you for Mr. Reichman. And he thought I came for the job. Said, "No, no, no, no, no. I'm not gonna come back." So then I was stay there -- and again I'm jumping ahead a second.

For the winter season, the owners of this place had a place in Miami, Miami Beach. So I went there to be a waiter with them and in two months I cleaned another twelve hundred dollars. Imagine you, two years ago you had -- came here with two single dollar bills from Europe, (clears throat) which was grand in style anyway. And all of a sudden -- and on there I meant to shift to myself -- I says, "Fine, this is a gypsy life. How long you gunna do it?" By this time you are twenty-five, twenty-six. I said, "Let's do it one more year, and we cut." After the winter season, which over there the season starts later -- about middle of December through after Passover. Through after Passover, again, you clean money and you work.

I'm sure you heard about being a waiter. It's a strenuous job, crazy hours, but you have time to relax and you make money. When you're young, you don't feel the extra work because you need the money. After the Passover holiday, I even had time to take off a week or two myself in Miami. I rented a huge room for ten bucks a week. (laughs)

That's a funny -- I mean -- you laugh at me. And they went to the beach. I went to movies. I met -- met girls and so on. Then come back here and then I did some odd jobs for a couple of months. Comes June, back to the Pioneer. They start earlier because convention of Rabbinical Alliance or the Young Israel National M-- or whatever. Work another one, back again in summer of '52. I come back to the city. I forgot what I did. And one more Passover season, which is a huge season. '53 back to Pioneer. When that was over, I said, "Goodbye white jacket, bowtie. Goodbye gold buttons. This is it, baby. Now look around."

So then I looked around and for a while it was difficult. At the end of my aforementioned [not understood] I wanted to become a kosher butcher. Because in those days—it's not that today—finding work where you don't work on Saturdays, it was a little difficult. I worked it on and I worked as a butcher for while, which I didn't like. This was one morning 1957 against my better judgment, I was dragged out to Bedford, New Hampshire to more or less run a dining room. It was what we call—it was a Headwaiter with a station. I did it. I didn't like it. We didn't have anything to do. Then I did it. (clears throat)

Coming back, then I settled and I went in to ask various jobs. And finally, I went to a place where they gave me a job to somebody on 47th Street -- in the semi-precious stones. They want somebody who gonna learn the trade. What's the word for a thing you learning — when you're still learning, there's a word for that?

LEVINE: An apprentice.

HERSKOVITS: That's the one. You become apprentice and you [not understood] . So when he -- and I start with a place on 47th Street. I got sixty-five bucks

a week and they showed me this is topaz, this is a ruby and so on. I was working there, working, working and working for two years and my wanderlust took me over. In the meantime, there were two partners that were dolls -- just wonderful people. Took in a third partner for financial. He was a miserable character. He and I from first day on, we didn't see eye-to-eye. I was still struggling.

In April '59 [clears throat] -- in April '59 I had the wanderlust in me and I went and I take out a passport. Have two blocks over, passport office. Two days later I got my passport mailed to me. I went into friend of mine who was a travel agent. I want to go to Israel. In those days, you buy a ticket from point, furthest point. In between going, in between coming, you can stop as many places as you want. [clears throat] Excuse me. I got a ticket New York-Tel Aviv. Going there, I stopped Paris for a week, Milano, Rome, Venice. Another week -- I got into Israel three days before Passover. Everybody invites you. I was there --

LEVINE: You knew people in Israel?

HERSKOVITS: Sure, some of them who immigrated out from the DP camp where I was. I had one cousin and her father, may rest in --, was still alive. Her mother, who was my father's sister, was not there. And I spent quite a few weeks, on the way back. I'm just jumping ahead to tell you the two. On the way back from Israel [clears throat] I'm sorry I interrupted.

LEVINE: That's good.

HERSKOVITS: On the way back I stopped Athens. I don't remember chronologically, but among other places Vienna, Zurich, London—I forget what else.

And -- and -- the trip took me four months and two days and I stopped in nine countries. And by this time I speak English. I speak German, so I got a way in any country -- except in Greece I had a little difficulty. So I learned that glass of milk is *potiri galla* or a piece of bread is *psomee*, so I ate that for two days. I survived. And *carpuji* in the summertime is watermelon. Couldn't go hungry.

And then after I come back, I says, "Now this, okay, I really settle." Then I went back to 47th Street and these guys—the guys would take me back, but this third partner who we hated each other mutually, wouldn't hear of it. I went to another fellow and then is when on to another guy who was already more established and all with that. This place is -- yeah, for '59 to '64 I worked constantly, thank God. But wasn't steady. '64 I got a job with the opal house where I've working there eight -- '64 to '74. Then I changed for the simple reasons more money with another house. And the other house was one year, but the son of the father couldn't see eye to eye. Established his own business. He took me with him. I became vice president of the company. That's when I had to go twice a year to Hong Kong and Taipei for buying. That's when I traveled United States.

LEVINE: So when you retired, you retired from that place?

HERSKOVITS: Oh, no, I went—they had—they had some difficulties. I went to-- I went to another house. Here I'm not going to mention names, but they were partners and everything was honky-dory for four years. All of a sudden, boom! Darling fellows, but they don't acce-- don't -- don't agree with each other. They have to fight. So I got in over my head, I'm getting out. I'm not going to stay here. I went to another company where I was six years. This is where I retire from. Over there I was manager over a department and again buying, but no overseas. Just

local, but sit on the phone with France or with Taipei or with Hong Kongs -- these or Germans -- and this and that. Which were -- but this time everything is—fax wasn't in there, but the telex was, so in one hour you get back and forth. Later on we had the fax already. I could send a fax tonight eight o'clock, tomorrow eight o'clock I come in, I have a answer.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. Well, when you look back on your life, what do you feel very satisfied about?

HERSKOVITS: I tried to be honest and I made it. I'm by far not a rich guy. I don't own a home. I don't own summer home. Cars I had, but every *schlemiel* [jerk] has a car, so it didn't [unclear]. I got married. I had three wonderful children.

LEVINE: What was your wife's name?

HERSKOVITS: Oh, Jesus. Oh, you mean the maiden name? Hoffman.

LEVINE: Maiden, Hoffman.

HERSKOVITS: Hoffman.

LEVINE: Hoffman and her first name.

HERSKOVITS: Frement, but she prefers to use the name of Fran.

LEVINE: And your children's' names?

HERSKOVITS: My children -- chronological a girl, Gracey. Second girl -- second a girl, Sharon, and my son David. Gracey and David, may they live happily a

long happy life, named after my parents. My son --Father—the girl -- second girl named after my mother's mother.-- and that. And they are grown up already, adorable pain in the butt, but they wonderful and they charming and they beautiful and -- and I just love them. Maybe I'm partial, but I still love them.

LEVINE: (laughs) And what ever happened, did you find out about your sister in any definitive way?

HERSKOVITS: No. No, never. A friend of mine gave me an address, it's about three, four, five years ago. American Red Cross stationed either Copenhagen or -- or -- or Stockholm where they tries to they -- oh, I'll come back in a second to details. They try to find people. I wrote to them. Every two years I hear from them, "We still on the case." but I never heard anything. By the way, my sister, I followed her after liberation. She was, of course, in Auschwitz. Then she was in Stutthof. This was established by the -- by the HaShoah people. From Stutthof to here I lost her. She went to places called in -- Northern Germany whatever -- Praust or Tort [ph] or Tort or Praust. Now, in those sections -- which is well known -- the Russians after the war was over, they just grabbed group of people to come into Russian for slave labor. I don't know if she is dead. I never heard anything from her. I still have the -- her story, her— her -- this thing what I wrote in for the questionnaire, quote, open and active, unquote. I didn't hear anything. Just abouts figuring by the time of the years, soon I should hear from them something. They - it's -- pursuing it or whatever, but otherwise I don't have anything. I never had.

LEVINE: And how is this time in your life, your post retirement?

HERSKOVITS: It's bo-o-o-o-ring. The first two, three, months were beautiful. Now it's boring. I'm looking for something to do. Money wouldn't hurt either, but mostly to occupy myself. And I'm definitely active reto-- looking for and speaking with people. General business conditions over all are not so good. Of course, I can get a job for a McDonalds or whatever for five, six dollars an hour. Sorry, that ain't for me, and I'm unwilling to do.

LEVINE: Right. How about looking back on your decision to come here and living your life here since you came to this country, how do you feel about that?

HERSKOVITS: Not sorry at all. I'm happy. Probably the only decision that I really made wisely. Usually I always goof, but this was made wisely. (clears throat) The opportunity one gets here, is it --it's unbelievable. If you're willing to word hard, and I worked hard. When I was working for this Weiss and Klau company, I used to took weekend jobs in [not understood]], and I started the first -- on the first weekend, I was a dishwasher. Then I got a huge break and the next weekend, a party, a waiter didn't show up and the Mr. -- the owner comes in to me, "Do you know how to be a waiter?" If you were [not understood] to -- how to know what [not understood]] wouldn't have said, "Yes, of course. I'm experienced waiter."

So became a waiter. From then on, it was a weekend job. When you were making—[clears throat] excuse me —seventy-five cents an hour, your regular job is thirty dollars a week, less taxes and whatever you take home, twenty-two, twenty-three dollars. Here you make on Saturday and Sunday thirty dollar, plus your food. You eat and you get something to take home. And I did that for a while until his business

got—those days had only certain amount of kosher caterers. Today it's more than -- more caterers than guests.

I'm not sorry I came here. I tried to be honest and I believe I was honest. And I don't—and, of course, the relatives. Had I gone anywhere else—in Israel I had one cousin and an uncle who passed away since then. In Canada, Australia, Germany, France, you name it, I didn't know a soul. So this was the, not only best, but the logical way to come. Whatever left here relatives, here they are. [clears throat] And it's so I'm definitely not sorry I came here.

LEVINE: And how has the experience of the Holocaust changed in your mind, in your thinking about it and reflecting on it over the time since it's passed? Do you think you've healed in some ways or do you—

HERSKOVITS: Actually, yes. Totally, no. This Holocaust remembrance -- the Holocaust experience, the survival, the struggle, the whatever -- gonna stay with me until they put me six feet under ground. You cannot do this. A bad dream you can forget, perhaps temporarily, but this is more than a bad dream. This is in you. This a part of your system. I remember the beginning of our marriage sometimes I would sit and be morose or moody, and my wife would look at me. She wouldn't say a word, just get out of the room and leave me alone. Especially, as I mentioned before and now -- late or early June when my *Yurtzayt* [death memorial] days are coming over. You cannot do it.

My younger daughter, she wants me—I should do it. I should write down my memories. I'm looking for a ghost writer. I know how it works out, how much it costs -- whatever. Because I told her, "I'm no Scott Fitzgerald, I'm no Hemingway and I'm no Grisham. I don't know how to write." She said, "Don't worry. I'm going to edit it, Daddy." But,

and then to put it in proper—let's face it, to put it in proper perspective -- the con-- the flow, the continuity of the story; I -- I - I shouldn't jump from -- from -- from playing soccer in -- in -- in Ebelsberg to being a waiter in New York to going to school in Oradea.

It must have a continuity and a co-- sequence. So I -- I did try a little bit, which I have some notes. Far from being -- not even beginning of the beginning. But I should do. And just recently, I wrote to the Austrian government, what they can give me about these camps. They were very nice, cooperative for Melk. Of course, I can really talk about that. Auschwitz is in Poland, but others -- places I was -- was only in Austria. They were very nice. They sent me a map from Melk. I want have for Mauthausen and Ebensee. I should do it. But to answer your question, no, you never leave you. It never leave you. I don't know if when you were a kid you had a fight with your girlfriend or a boy beats your face. You may forget it, but occasionally still pops up in your mind. It's there. It's engraved in your memory. It's part of you. Ditto. I have it.

LEVINE: Do you think you—do you think being a father and having had that experience, do you think either consciously or otherwise passed along something to your children that somehow stems from what happened to you?

HERSKOVITS: I hope definitely not. In fact, if they want to talk about it, they have to pull it out of me. I happen to be one of those, as I grew up as a kid, I was loved very much. Everybody gootchy-gooing with you, hugging you and too, I love kids. I go in a synagogue Saturday and I see the kids. They run away from me, know I'm going to bite their cheeks and pinch them, and that's what I gave to my kids. And I tried not to convey to them the suffering and the misery I had. I don't want they

should grow up in a shadow that their life is somewhat mentally or physically black. I—it was my lucky draw to get that life. You no part of it.

As matter of fact, I'm gonna tell you something. Perhaps it ties in. As recently as two months ago I was in Israel for a visit. I usually go there once a year or two. I love that country. And I went to Masada. I'm sure you heard of that, Masada, and I met there a young couple, German couple, and they offered me back a ride from Masada to Jerusalem. And in the car he talk, a young man and a young girl. Not married, but that's not my business. And they start talking and "How come you speak such a fluent German?" I said, "You're not gonna like the answer but I learned in a concentration camp," or as the German call it *ka zed* [KZ]. So the girl, more outspoken the fellow—the girl was about twenty-three, four. She said, "What's your feeling about the Germans?" And I told her, "About you – you generation, I have no animosity whatsoever. You weren't in this world. You weren't born. You're not responsible. Your father generation, which is now in the sixties, early seventies, not too much. They were in those days school kids, early twenties. I'm sure they were Hitler J*ugend* [Youth] because they couldn't help it. They have to be. But you grandfather, I will kill every one of those bastards with my bare hand." So the fellow looks at me, doesn't say anything. Marina says, "You know, I understand you."

So I'm sorry, excuse me. The father generation would be now in the seventies or late seventies. The fa—the parents -- the parents which around the forty, fifties, they were just growing up. They were the Hitler *Jugend*, but they couldn't help it. They had to go to school, but the grandparents I would kill every one of them without remorse, without feeling. It would give me a pleasure. It wouldn't do me any good, but at least—and that's how my feeling about all these years.

LEVINE: Well, I think that's a dramatic and good place to stop this interview. I want to thank you so much. It's been a real pleasure to have you here.

HERSKOVITS: Thank you for asking me. At least I get it off my chest, which also means a lot.

LEVINE: Good, good. Okay, so I've been talking with Mickey Herskovits.

HERSKOVITS: Herskovits. You're gonna learn.

LEVINE: And it's February 20th, 1996.

HERSKOVITS: Janet I think you have to go back for Europe for three months to learn my name properly. But if you go, I'll give you itinerary.

LEVINE: Okay, and we're at the Ellis Island Oral History Studio and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I want to thank you very much and I'm signing off.

HERSKOVITS: You're welcome, and thank you for having me.

END OF INTERVIEW