

EI-747

ROSALIND [PH] ROSENBAUM

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INTERVIEWER: PAUL SIGRIST

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RESIDENCES:

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Thursday, May 16th, 1996. I'm in Teaneck, New York.

ROSENBAUM: Teaneck, New Jersey.

SIGRIST: I'm sorry, thank you. Teaneck, New Jersey, with Rosalind Rosenbaum. Mrs. Rosenbaum came from Russia in 1920. At that time, she was five, almost six, just a month shy of her sixth birthday, or so. And you may hear clocks in the background. We're sitting in a—in a dining room so it may be a little echo-y and there are several clocks. So a lot of that will be picked up on tape. Mrs. Rosenbaum, can we begin by you giving me your birth date, please?

ROSENBAUM: It was October 13th, 1914.

SIGRIST: And can you as—

ROSENBAUM: And the way I determined it was because we had the Jewish date and we had to work backwards because there were no certificates of any kind to tell us when we were born. And we knew that I was born right on Succoth Toro [PH], which is a Jewish holiday in, usually, September or October. And so we worked backwards and this is what we determined, October 13th, 1914.

SIGRIST: Can you spell the name of the holiday for me, please?

ROSENBAUM: Succoth—S-U-C-C-O-T-H.

SIGRIST: Thank you. Where in Russia were you born?

ROSENBAUM: In Timkovich [PH], which is in the Minske Guberna [PH], Guberna meaning, I guess—ah, what is Guberna? The—the name of the—the larger group than Timkovich, right.—

SIGRIST: Well, [unclear]. Can you spell the name of the town for me, please?

ROSENBAUM: Yes, T-I-M-K-O-V-I-C-H or T-Z; I'm not sure.

SIGRIST: Do you have any recollections yourself of this town as a child?

ROSENBAUM: I don't know if it's a recollection or whether it's stories that were told to me by my parents. But I know it was very cold, and the story goes that you could wake up in the morning and the snows would be so high that you couldn't open the door. So my brother—he's the—I had an older brother and a younger brother. We were three that came. He would climb through the window and shovel us out so we could get out the door. Otherwise, the memories are pleasant. I can't say that I remember anything difficult, except what I heard later from my parents as to what was difficult for them.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the house that you lived in?

ROSENBAUM: I think it was one big room, a tremendous room. And there was a—a stove where cooking and baking could be done. Also, there was the top of the stove, which I think we used to—the—maybe climb up as children and—and warm ourselves on that. It was very high and it wasn't hot on the top. I think I remember that.

SIGRIST: Tell me what your father's name was.

ROSENBAUM: He was a rabbi, at that time a young fellow. And his name was Moses Aaron Paleyev—

SIGRIST: And can you spell it?

ROSENBAUM: —which is a Russia name.

SIGRIST: Right.

ROSENBAUM: Which now—the ending of which now you can hear all over in the newspapers and every—everywheres. And it is spelled now with an e—the ending of it. I'll spell it for you in a minute. It's spelled now with an E-V, because the name is Paleyev. But when we came to America somebody interpreted it a little differently and spelt it P-A-L-E-Y-E-F-F. But that E-F-F should be in—should have been an E-V.

SIGRIST: I see. And that is, of course, your maiden name prior to your marriage.

ROSENBAUM: Right.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you know about your father's family background.

ROSENBAUM: My father's family, I don't remember much. He was an—an orphan. I think he lost his mother and then his father. And then he got married when he was about 20, 21. And he had no other family. I think he had two sisters. It's all in the—in his memoirs. But I don't remember them.

SIGRIST: But I'm just wondering what you know about his background and his—

ROSENBAUM: Not necessarily that I—

SIGRIST: Not that you'd necessarily remember it—

ROSENBAUM: —remember them—

SIGRIST: —yourself.

ROSENBAUM: But if I know, yeah.

SIGRIST: But what you know about it.

ROSENBAUM: He had two sisters and they lived not—not in Timkovich. They were married. They were older than he. He was the younger one and then his mother died. His father was a teacher also. I mean,

well, being a rabbi is being a teacher. And his father was a teacher and my—and my father went in his footsteps. Then, teaching was a very different thing. I mean, you had—you had one rabbi, one teacher in a room. And children from different households would all come. They would pay whatever the minimum amount [chuckles] was that they could afford to pay. And then big and little and everything, and they'd sit around the table and he'd be teaching this one and that one and the other one. And that was my grandfather's livelihood. My father, of course—we went to America after that. So when he was—he was 20, 21, 22. Wait a minute. He was born in 1888. We came to the United States—

SIGRIST: 1888. 1888. [chuckles]

ROSENBAUM: 1888. And we came to America in 1920 so he was 20—30—32.

SIGRIST: Thirty-two years old.

ROSENBAUM: Yes, because we were born already. And I'm not the oldest.

SIGRIST: What—what can you tell me about your father's personality?

ROSENBAUM: He was very quiet to the last day when—even here in the United States he was—he never imposed himself on anybody. He made his own way. It was quiet and it wasn't very much. But it was enough for us. My mother, on the other hand, was the one who would look around and make sure that my father was paid properly and that we lived in the proper house, although there was—what did we have anyways when we first came?

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

ROSENBAUM: Rachel Hoffman.

SIGRIST: Can you spell Hoffman, please?

ROSENBAUM: I'll give you the English spelling for it but it's not the right—it was—it's a different name. Her name in—on the papers everywhere says H-O-F-F-M-A-N—Hoffman. However, it's a German name, a German derivation. And the name is Hochman, which means tall man.

SIGRIST: And how would it be spelled?

ROSENBAUM: H-O-C-H.

- SIGRIST: I see. Well, what do you know about your mother's family background?
- ROSENBAUM: Her family I know because they all came to America. There—she was one of 10 and they—I think they all came to America.
- SIGRIST: What do you know about her life prior to her marriage with your father and, you know, her—her background?
- ROSENBAUM: She was very pretty. You want to see a picture of her?
- SIGRIST: Well, we'll see one afterwards.
- ROSENBAUM: Yeah. [chuckles] I think she was the prettiest of the sisters. There were six sisters and four brothers. And—and of course, getting married in those days, you didn't just meet somebody at the theater. You were—it was a shivuch, which means a prepared marriage planning. What do you call it in English?
- SIGRIST: Like an arranged marriage.
- ROSENBAUM: Exact—exactly.
- SIGRIST: Can you spell that term? Is that a Yiddish term?
- ROSENBAUM: It's a Hebrew term.
- SIGRIST: Hebrew term. Could you spell that, please?
- ROSENBAUM: S-H-I-V-U-C-H. A shivuch.
- SIGRIST: And—and how—describe the process for me. How did that—
- ROSENBAUM: Yeah. Well, my grandfather, my mother's father—my father's family, you can hardly count in any of this discussion. My grandfather looked for a—a shivuch, a young man for his daughter when she was of marriageable age. So where did he go? He went to the yeshiva. You want to spell that?
- SIGRIST: To the yeshiva?
- ROSENBAUM: Yeah.
- SIGRIST: Yes, Y-E-S-H-I-V-A.
- ROSENBAUM: S-H-I-V-A.

SIGRIST: Thank you.

ROSENBAUM: That one that was in—this one was in—you know, I don't remember where. But it was not—not in the town. There was none in—in Timkovich. Oh, I think in Slutsk—S-L-U-T-S-K. In Slutsk there was a yeshiva and that's when my father was learning. And he came there and he asked the ra—the rabbi that was the head of the—of the school, "Which is a young man who is suitable for my daughter?" A very learned man they want, y—a young man. And the age, I guess. I guess they—these shivuchen [PH] were made all between the ages of 17 to 22, so my mother was 19 and my father was 21 when [unclear]. And he asked me—anybody who would fall into a category where my fa—where my mother would have been a suitable mate. And they—he met one or two or three, whatever. And he—he selected—my grandfather selected the one that he felt would be suitable. And it didn't take long. There was no, "I'll go out with them for two or three years, see what's doing." [chuckles] No, they—I think it tells me in here how long he knew—how long the time ca—was between the time that he—that he met my mother and the time they were married, which was in 1910—I think springtime.

SIGRIST: I should say for the sake of the tape that you're referring to memoirs—

ROSENBAUM: Memoirs of my father, yeah.

SIGRIST: —that your father wrote. Yes, and we have them right here on the table with us.

ROSENBAUM: Right.

SIGRIST: You said that there were other children.

ROSENBAUM: My mother's family [unclear].

SIGRIST: Well, I meant—

ROSENBAUM: My family?

SIGRIST: Yes, in your family.

ROSENBAUM: We came three to the United States, an older brother and myself and a younger brother.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the older brother?

ROSENBAUM: Himan [PH]. And he died a year or two ago.

SIGRIST: And then the name of the younger brother.

ROSENBAUM: Abraham.

SIGRIST: Do you—do you have any memories of your younger brother being born?

ROSENBAUM: I remember that—being born, I don't know. But I know that he was—we—he was born in 1918. We traveled in 1920. He was two years old. He was born in June. And he wasn't walking yet. And my mother always said that this was the—the method—the solution to that problem. She found herself among the other women who talked about such things in—in applying saliva, her saliva at the knee—at the knee bend of both feet of this child. And after a spell, he started to walk. Now, of course, I can't tell you that that's what did it or whether time alone did it. But that was my mother's story, that she used her saliva from her mouth to help my brother start to walk. That's the older brother.

SIGRIST: That's a great story.

ROSENBAUM: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you [unclear]—

ROSENBAUM: And maybe it's even true. Who knows.

SIGRIST: And maybe it's even true. Do you know anything about your own birth? Did your mother or father ever tell you anything about the circumstances around the day you were born?

ROSENBAUM: Yes, because I was born in Succoth, as I told you. And the particular day of Succoth that I was born on was Simchas Torah, the giving of the Torah. And at that time—you know, in that day, those days are happy days, simcha [PH] meaning happy.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that too, please?

ROSENBAUM: Are you Jewish?

SIGRIST: No.

ROSENBAUM: Okay.

SIGRIST: Neither are my transcribers either. [chuckles]

ROSENBAUM: Yeah, right. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: That's why I'm asking to spell everything.

ROSENBAUM: Okay. S-I-M-C-H-A-S—that's Simchas. And Torah is T-O-R-A-H.

SIGRIST: Got it. Thank you very much.

ROSENBAUM: And—and my mother said that, when I was born, the whole house lit up. But that's my mother and she's telling it to me, so—no, otherwise, I—I—I don't know. I think—I think that my grandfather died around that time. No.

SIGRIST: Around the time of your birth?

ROSENBAUM: Yeah—no. No. It was when my—no, I'm not sure.

SIGRIST: Okay.

ROSENBAUM: I'm not sure.

SIGRIST: In Russia, do you have any recollections of food that you ate?

ROSENBAUM: No, I only know we ate and were not hungry. At least, the children weren't. I don't know how skimpy my parents, how they worked around it. But I don't remember being hungry. [unclear]

SIGRIST: Do you have any recollections of practicing your religion in Russia? Things that you remember, maybe ways that you did at home, pray or something like that?

ROSENBAUM: My memory doesn't carry me back that way. I can assume some things. I can assume that there was a Sabbath table where we ate a little bit different foods than we—than we ate all week long, to differentiate the Sabbath the other days. I think I remember something about clothing too. I think my mother used to say, "Two dresses are enough. One is for the weekday and you wash it everyday and you patch it, if there are holes, and there are going to be if you're going to wear one dress for five years. And then there's one special dress for the Sabbath." Food, [unclear], no.

SIGRIST: Do you have any recollection of celebrating a religious holiday in Russia prior to coming here?

ROSENBAUM: I don't. But everyone else will tell you though, what they did do was hidden. I mean, they didn't do anything—there was a shul at the synagogue. I don't know whether it was in operation when I was born or whether there—there—there are the—the map there and it has—it has a picture of where this synagogue was, and where that one, and how the streets crossed—

SIGRIST: [unclear].

ROSENBAUM: —and where the river was, yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember a toy that was yours?

ROSENBAUM: My mother made—and I don't remember whether it was in Europe or whether it was here, but she made a doll for me that was a sheet of cloth. You hold it up in the middle, I suppose, and poke that—and poke stuff into that and tie it. That will be the head. And then you cut two sleeves, like, and you stuff those in the—those are two arms, and then the belly. And that's the dr—it's a long—a long thing. And that's your doll. No, that's the only toy that I remember.

SIGRIST: Do you remember being taught anything by either of your parents? Something—

ROSENBAUM: Yes.

SIGRIST: —that they could teach you to do when you were a small child?

ROSENBAUM: Not things to do. I think we automatically must have—whenever my mother asked us to do, if we were of the age where we could, we probably did it. But I don't remember it. The only thing I remember being taught is sitting at the table with—with—with a prayer book—that's what you would call it—with a sitter—is the proper way. And—and then you would learn A—ABC, the [unclear]. But I was on—I was young and I was a girl, and that was something too.

SIGRIST: Well, could you talk a little bit about that? What—what were the differences between educational—

ROSENBAUM: [unclear]

SIGRIST: —potentials between girls and boys?

ROSENBAUM: In a religious family, which is where I came from, the on—the only thing that the—not the only—the main thing that a girl had to know was how to read in this siddur, this prayer book.

SIGRIST: Can you spell siddur, please?

ROSENBAUM: S-I-D-D-U-R.

SIGRIST: Thank you.

ROSENBAUM: That would do it. But the boys had to be geared already for learning more. So they learned the siddur and the Bible. And—and so time was spent, as far as learning those things concerned, with the father and the son. Of course, you sit on the side. You're a little sister and you—you're watching and you're hearing. There's a certain amount of absorption. And then later on the boys are taught differently too. However, since my mother's family—this is not my father's family—my mother's family was involved with more commercial things, the boys in my mother's family—there were four brothers and six sisters. Those four brothers was taught—were—followed my grandfather and they worked, I think, in what they called a wald, a woods. They chopped—they handled trees and they sell the wood—lumber. That's what it was. And so they—they were more on the commercial side, my mother's family. My father's was more on the intellectual side. They learned. Well, there was only one. They—just the one child, outside of the girls. I don't know. That's—

SIGRIST: Could your—

ROSENBAUM: —about what I remember.

SIGRIST: Could your mother read and write?

ROSENBAUM: My mother was an unusual person. Usually, women were not taught that much, as you realize. You can listen in and you can learn the [unclear], ABC. But few of them knew interpretation of words, which is a step higher. My mother—I don't know where she absorbed—well, she was—she was the youngest. Not the youngest. She was the last one in the household who got married and stayed around my grandfather's house. So she was—they were—as the others, they're were three brothers. No, two brothers and one sister who came to America in 1904, so that there was—there wasn't much there. But my mother stayed around and she was married in 1910. And she learned how to read and to interpret

and to learn—as a matter of fact, to teach. As a matter of fact, when she came here to the United States, my father having—not making much of a living at the time—she would—she would—this was in Brooklyn. She taught other women from the neighborhood in Brooklyn, who did not know how to read and didn't understand the translations of the prayers that they were saying. And my mother would teach them for 25 cents, I think for—who knows—for a month. And she would be arou—in the middle of the table and she would be teaching all these older women who were here—other women who were here in America who didn't know—needed to read in order to understand. My mother, for her time of the—of the—[unclear]—for her times, she was very—she was very—not—intelligence is not the right word. She was very learned in that way, even though it wasn't the regular learning like they have now with girls with schools and colleges and all that.

SIGRIST: Right. Well, those were different days.

ROSENBAUM: They were different days.

SIGRIST: Tell me why your family wanted to come to the United States.

ROSENBAUM: Well, it was getting more difficult. All the answers are in there. [chuckles] You'll have to check them out. It was getting very—

SIGRIST: Right, but the interview is something different than—

ROSENBAUM: Right.

SIGRIST: —than—than the memoir. So—

ROSENBAUM: Okay. It was getting very difficult for them to—from my father—you—if you're talking about my mother's family who came in 1904 and 1905 and 1908, that's a different thing.

SIGRIST: Well, I mean really, your mother and father.

ROSENBAUM: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Why they wanted to bring their children—

ROSENBAUM: Went with us, yeah.

SIGRIST: —right, to the United States.

ROSENBAUM: We were—they were the mar—my parents with the married children who were left in Russia when the rest of the Hoffman family were already in America. So we came. So we went along. We came because my father was not—the land that they had left that my father was working on, who went in with his brothers-in-law when they left, so that he took care of the—of the—the logging and the—and the lumber and the—what they call the wald, the forest that they [unclear].

SIGRIST: Oh, it's like in German—W—

ROSENBAUM: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —A-L-D.

ROSENBAUM: Yeah, right. So—and it was getting very difficult. They wouldn't—they wouldn't—they wouldn't pay the—the people that were buying these things wouldn't pay. And you can't go to court because you're—if you're Jewish, you're not going to get a hearing anyways. And if you're going to get—even before they hear you, you're—you're—you can't win. So things were getting very difficult that way. That was in—economics. And in—and in religious things too—this was all when the Bolsheviks were in. It was after Koranski [PH]. And shuls—synagogues were not—were frowned upon. You couldn't build any. The old ones, they took away or they closed them and you couldn't teach the children. There was no place to teach the children for my father—for my—well, I guess for most Russian Jews that was a big problem.

SIGRIST: Do you have any personal recollections of the Russian Revolution that—that—

ROSENBAUM: No.

SIGRIST: —sort of post World War I period?

ROSENBAUM: Nothing at all.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

ROSENBAUM: Memory is a blank. It just happened. I was a child. I knew nothing.

SIGRIST: Oh.

ROSENBAUM: Well, I—at that time of that, that was 1917. I was born in '14.

SIGRIST: Right.

ROSENBAUM: No.

SIGRIST: But of course, there were, you know, all sorts of disturbances that went on [unclear].

ROSENBAUM: Yeah, and these were the things that—that caused them, without me being part of it, you know, intellectually knowing why they were doing things. But I do remember the trip.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about leaving the town first? Do you have any recollections of what it was that you took with you—the family took with you?

ROSENBAUM: Yeah, bedding, we took with us. And there's a story that all the children repeat about the—the word is—in—in—in Russian or—it's not in Russian. M—yeah, Russian. It's sumavar [PH], which is a teakettle. But, of course, a sumavar is a big thing. And when you didn't use the big thing, then there was a small thing that's ca—that—we called it a teakettle. And I—I can't say I remember but I know that my father would—on Saturday afternoon, he would have his tea. And so therefore, when they were leaving, it's one of the things you have to take. Who knows what's in America? [chuckles] Maybe they don't have them. So we—it was in a big wagon and mostly I would figure clothing was taken and bedding. Bedding. And some—

SIGRIST: When you say bedding, what do you mean specifically by bedding?

ROSENBAUM: There—there is some thing that is cool and—and now it's called a featherbed. We used to call it a perena.

SIGRIST: Spell it.

ROSENBAUM: P-E-R-E-N-A. Perena. That's it.

SIGRIST: Thank you.

ROSENBAUM: And it's a—it's like a big pillow, a tremendous pillow over the bed so that in the cold weather, which we anticipated, since that's where we came from, you had to be covered to be warm. And that was very important to us at that time. So I guess that's what they took. I don't remember what else they—what other bedding they

took. But the perenas they took and the teakettle they took, and they took us kids. That's it.

SIGRIST: Do you have any recollection of having to say goodbye to anybody—

ROSENBAUM: No.

SIGRIST: —in that town or family members [unclear]?

ROSENBAUM: I don't. No, well, all our family members were—

SIGRIST: They were all here.

ROSENBAUM: —here already and my father's family, there wasn't any. I think his two sisters must have gone, lived somewheres—yeah, his two sisters lived far away. So you don't go to visit. You don't take the car and drive. No, I don't remember that.

SIGRIST: Where did you go—when you left your town—

ROSENBAUM: Yes.

SIGRIST: —and you said you traveled by wagon.

ROSENBAUM: We went with this wagon, a horse and wagon.

SIGRIST: Where did you travel to?

ROSENBAUM: Across to Poland, to Varsha [PH]—Warsaw.

SIGRIST: Warsaw.

ROSENBAUM: And then that driver had to leave. He had to go back. He had to cross the border and he didn't want to get caught bringing refugees away or what are they? Exiles—no, what are they called? Runaways. So we left—let him go back and we got, I think, somebody else. You had to pay for all these things. I don't know what we paid with. Then we got to Denmark. Denmark.

SIGRIST: What do you remember—

ROSENBAUM: Or Antwerp. Antwerp.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. What do you remember about this ride in the wagon to Poland? What things stick out—

ROSENBAUM: [unclear]—

SIGRIST: —stick out in your mind about—

ROSENBAUM: The traveling.

SIGRIST: —about the traveling?

ROSENBAUM: Well, I know that when we stopped in the next big city—maybe it was in Varsha, in Warsaw where they examined us to see if we'd be able to get through the Immigration on account of health. So we had to have a total examination. My brother and I—my older brother and I had some illness of the eyelids where there are little pimples on the eyelids on the inside. It was called trachoma. Trachoma. Trahoma, which is the way they pronounced it.

SIGRIST: Trachoma, sure.

ROSENBAUM: And we—they said, "Either you be operated now before you go further on your trip or else you're taking a chance of—of being sent back." So then, being no option, my brother and I went to the hospital and we had the surgery. And in a day or two we had to leave because the whole thing was a trip. So we left with our eyes bandaged but that was—it healed okay. There was no problem, you know, after that.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how you felt as a child having to undergo this operation?

ROSENBAUM: No.

SIGRIST: Or do you remember any of the details of the operation?

ROSENBAUM: No. No, I was a very unnoticing five, six-year-old. [chuckles] Very bad. I don't remember. And then we went on to Antwerp and then we went on the big ship, which was the Finlandia.

SIGRIST: Prior to getting on the ship, do you remember—do things stick out in your mind about being in these cities?

ROSENBAUM: No.

SIGRIST: Like Warsaw or Antwerp? Nothing?

ROSENBAUM: [unclear].

SIGRIST: Something that maybe you saw that you had never seen before?

ROSENBAUM: I don't remember that I noticed it but I understand that my parents saw things that they'd never seen before. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Did they ever speak about that to you?

ROSENBAUM: No, but I—I read about it so I know about it.

SIGRIST: Well, what did your parents see that [unclear]?

ROSENBAUM: I think—and not—they were riding in a train or something, which they had never ridden in before, even—I don't know. There were cars, I imagine, in 1920. And they had never seen those before. But I don't remember for myself.

SIGRIST: I see. All right. Well, let's get to you on the Finlandia.

ROSENBAUM: Yes. Where we were sick. Course, we were down at the bottom of the hold and we were nauseous all the time. That is, the—the—the two children—the three ch—two children, because my older brother somehow managed that very nicely. And he used to go up on top of the—in the deck one, whatever. We were down in the cheapest. [chuckles] And he would bring us lemon and the taste of lemon is with me to this day. When I smell a lemon—not the taste, the smell—smell of lemon gives me a feeling of cleanness, of—of rejuvenation. I don't know. It was a very good feeling and he got it for us. I don't know what else he brought us down but that was the worst part. We w—we were nauseous. We were nauseous and vomiting all the time.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

SIGRIST: What about your parents? Would—did they have a similar reaction or was it just you and your brother?

ROSENBAUM: My younger brother. I don't know. I—I don't—well, you know, my older brother was little. He'd scamper around and pick up whatever he wanted and no one would stop him. [chuckles] I don't know if my parents could have done that because the—you know, you—if you belong downstairs, you don't belong upstairs. So I don't think so.

SIGRIST: Do you have any recollections of what the area looked like where you—

ROSENBAUM: No.

SIGRIST: —slept?

ROSENBAUM: Not at all. I don't know if it was a big room or a tight little cubby.

SIGRIST: Well, you were probably sick through most of it.

ROSENBAUM: [laughs] It wouldn't have mattered.

SIGRIST: Do you know how long the ship took to get across the Atlantic?

ROSENBAUM: Yes, it took 14 days. I could verify that, 14—13, 14 days.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Do you have any recollections of ever being up on deck?

ROSENBAUM: Yeah, when we landed. When everyone said, "There's America," and everybody ran up on deck [chuckles] and—and I—and I thought that if we'd all stay on one side to see the Statue of Liberty the boat would go over. So I, myself, stood on the other side to balance it. Yes, that's the only thing I remember about arriving, that everyone said, "Here's America, the golden land."

SIGRIST: Now, when the ship arrived in New York, were you taken to Ellis Island?

ROSENBAUM: Yes, I guess so. That's where we landed.

SIGRIST: And what do you remember about that experience?

ROSENBAUM: Except that we were waiting for my uncle. My mother's family was here. They were supposed to pick us up. I think that they did pick us up. Oh, wait. We had to go through—we had to go through the health—the—the health examination that—I know that we—that the two of us, who had this eye surgery, got—everything was okay. My father had bad eyes, not from anything like that, but from nearsightedness. So he was detained. And they said to him, "What will be your—who's guaranteeing your—your subsistence in the United States?" And just saying that his brother-in-law'll help him, that won't help very much. He had to—he had to know they weren't taking in just—just anybody who would be a—a burden to the United States. So—and so they stopped him and they said his eyes were bad and what would he do with such bad eyes? He

can't—what his—what his capacity—but of course, he had been working in the—in the—in the wald, in the—in the forest, but that he couldn't here in the United States in New York. There was no place like that for him. So they said, "Well, can you do anything?" Well, he said, "I—I don't know what there will be here. My brother-in-law will help me." So they said, "Well, can you read?" He said, "Well, of course I can read. I can't read English but I can read." "And what can you read?" So he said, "Hebrew." He says, "After all, I'm a rabbi." So they said, "Oh, well, why didn't you tell us that in the first place?" He said, "Well, I don't know you wanted to know that," because he didn't know just what they were looking for. Anyways, with that he passed. They let him through and that's what my father's first employment was, as a rabbi. And that's what he did all his life.

SIGRIST: Were you—did you have to sleep overnight at Ellis Island?

ROSENBAUM: I think so. I think the HIAS [PH] is involved in this too. Besides my uncles and, you know, the others, I think that's—yeah, I think that they did help him. If I slept over, it was in that big, tremendous room that I just saw when I went there in 1994, and since 1920 is a long stretch.

SIGRIST: Yeah, long time. So you said it was your uncle who came and took you off the island?

ROSENBAUM: Yes. And it might have been two uncles because that was my mother's—

SIGRIST: And whose brothers were these, your mother's?

ROSENBAUM: My mother's.

SIGRIST: Your mother's brothers.

ROSENBAUM: All of my mother's family.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. So they were Hoffmans.

ROSENBAUM: They were Hoffmans.

SIGRIST: They were H—and where did they take you?

ROSENBAUM: Well, after we got off, I think that they—we went to one of their houses. My uncle—my uncle—my Uncle Jack is the younger one. My Uncle Charley. And they took us to their house in Brooklyn.

And then they found us an apartment in Brooklyn, which had no bathroom in the apartment. Well, n—not—a lot of them probably didn't. [chuckles] And—and no bath, and for the bath, which we had to take every—before Shavez [PH], before the Sabbath, we had to go to my aunt, who lived in Brooklyn, about 20 blocks away. We would bathe there, come back and use the bathroom in the—in the hallway. That's where we lived for about a year.

SIGRIST: Before you moved to that apartment, you said that you spent a little bit of time with your uncles.

ROSENBAUM: At one [unclear], yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you have any recollections yourself of that first night staying overnight in America? What they fed you—

ROSENBAUM: No.

SIGRIST: —or—

ROSENBAUM: What did I see that was different?

SIGRIST: Or any—any kind of thing that stuck out in the mind of a—of a little girl spending her first night in America, where you slept in their apartment, maybe?

ROSENBAUM: Maybe on the floor. [chuckles] I don't know.

SIGRIST: Probably was the floor. [chuckles]

ROSENBAUM: No, probably. Here the people from Europe are coming to our house and we have to make room for them. That's—always the one that was here had to make room for the one who was coming, because that was the whole process at that time. You came to family, if you had family.

SIGRIST: And your family was really the last of the family to come to the United States.

ROSENBAUM: Yes, the last. Right.

SIGRIST: Um—

ROSENBAUM: Of that family, of the Hoffman family.

SIGRIST: So how long did you—you were just there a week or two with your uncles?

ROSENBAUM: I don't even know if that—as soon as they found us an apartment, and they were looking for it before we came. Oh, my Uncle Joe, I forgot to mention him. He's older than my un—my Uncle Jack. Uncle Charley, my Uncle Joe and—and my Uncle Jack. And then there was one already [unclear].

SIGRIST: When you got your own apartment where you stayed for a year, did you have electricity in the apartment?

ROSENBAUM: I don't know why I think I didn't have. So maybe I did have. What else would I have had in 1920?

SIGRIST: Gas lighting.

ROSENBAUM: This would have been—gas lighting. I don't remember.

SIGRIST: Okay. Tell me about—you mentioned your father did finally get a position—

ROSENBAUM: Yes.

SIGRIST: —as a rabbi. Tell me how he went about getting that position and where it was.

ROSENBAUM: He didn't do anything for that. His brother-in-law did. My Uncle Jack—Joe—Uncle Joe knew somebody who was involved in this yeshiva. And he told him that he had—a brother-in-law was coming from Europe, a very learned man and they would like—he—he would be a credit to their school. So no more than maybe a week or two after we arrived, my Uncle Joe with—took my father to—at that time was called Yeshiva College and it was in Lower Manhattan. And we lived in Brooklyn. And he introduced him to the president, the principal, whatever they called him. And he was hired. He was there for 46 years.

SIGRIST: My goodness. His first job and he stayed there all those years.

ROSENBAUM: Different category but in the same school.

SIGRIST: That's interesting. Were you put into school?

ROSENBAUM: Yes, in the public school, which was not far from where we lived—I and my brother and we both went to the same class. I—I was at

that time already six and my brother was short of eight, and so we went into the same class. And, well, in no time at all he went up—no, you know what? I think we graduated together. [unclear]

SIGRIST: What—what do you remember about being registered for school or that first day at school? Some of the—some of the observations or difficulties that you had right at the beginning?

ROSENBAUM: You know, we learned—the children learned the language very quickly. I came here knowing Russian and Yiddish and that's all, neither of which language was any good in Public School 174 in Brooklyn. However, I don't remember being upset or being—that there were any problems with that, with the teachers or with the students. I think most of the—the fellow students there were—were just like me. I mean, a lot of them had come over just yesterday, like, so that maybe that was one of the reasons. And the teachers had been used to handling these newcomers. I didn't feel at all out of place. I don't remember feeling—feeling out of place.

SIGRIST: Well, and indeed, if it was, indeed, a school that dealt with immigrant children on a regular basis—

ROSENBAUM: Yeah, in that area.

SIGRIST: It was probably geared—

ROSENBAUM: Right.

SIGRIST: —along towards that. Is there a teacher that sticks out in your mind from your early first couple of years here? One that was particularly helpful or particularly mean?

ROSENBAUM: Not in—not in public school. That only happened in high school so that doesn't really count.

SIGRIST: That's a little bit later, yeah.

ROSENBAUM: Doesn't count.

SIGRIST: Tell me about how your mother adjusted to this country. What were some of—what were some of her successes and—and—

ROSENBAUM: Yeah. Well—

SIGRIST: —failures at adapting?

ROSENBAUM: We—we stayed here just about a year. Then we moved to another street where we had an extra room. And what do you do with an extra room? An extra room means extra income—extra expense but extra income. So we rented the room out to what we called at that time boarders—B-O-A-R-D-E-R-S. They are people, again, usually single men—men who were married but when they came to America alone, and they needed a place to be until they could get themselves set up. And so they would rent one room. So my mother put one room aside, even though at that point we were four already; my sister was born. And she put one room aside and she rented that out. And she was the—she was the—she handled the finances of the household, not that she knew—was better in—in mathematics or anything like that than my father, because he was. But she was the one who was spending the money, and she had to know where it came from so that she would know how much to spend for whatever. And so s—they rented the room out to a boarder in the—in the second—in the second house—apartment that we were in. And of course, she started to teach these women, as soon as she found out that they don't know how to read and write and understand. So she would have them gather around the table and she would make that small amount of money that she would get. But it was—it was an income.

SIGRIST: And in what language was she teaching?

ROSENBAUM: In Yiddish.

SIGRIST: In Yiddish. She was teaching in Yiddish.

ROSENBAUM: Yes.

SIGRIST: So these are Jewish women and she's teaching in Yiddish—

ROSENBAUM: Right, right.

SIGRIST: —to read—

ROSENBAUM: And to read Hebrew.

SIGRIST: And to read Hebrew.

ROSENBAUM: Right.

SIGRIST: I'm just curious. Did your mother—and you may not know the answer to this. Did your mother ever suffer any criticism for doing this from the community at large?

ROSENBAUM: At that time, no. There might have been some—no, I don't think any criticism but there was a story that they tell. My mother, I told you, was very pretty. And my father had a beard so he looked a lot older than she. And she would be going with us and I was then, let's say, like, 18 years old. I was a big girl. And I had the other little children. Somebody would meet—she says someone met her and said, "Who's children are these?" And she said, "They're my husband's children from his first marriage." And some of them didn't understand. He never had another wife but her. [chuckles] She was a—a forward woman. She—

SIGRIST: That's a very progressive thing to do—

ROSENBAUM: Yes.

SIGRIST: —for that time and place.

ROSENBAUM: Right, as I say. Right.

SIGRIST: And I can see that people might be a little wary—

ROSENBAUM: Right.

SIGRIST: —of that.

ROSENBAUM: Maybe envious even. I don't know.

SIGRIST: Yes.

ROSENBAUM: And she was the rabbi's wife so that was also a position that she had, and a position that should not—should have kept her living in the background rather than the foreground. [chuckles] But that was my mother.

SIGRIST: Tell me about the birth of your sister. How—you were in the first apartment when your sister—

ROSENBAUM: No, my—

SIGRIST: —was born.

ROSENBAUM: No, my—before my—wait, I—and then [unclear], then Aby, then Sary and Ezra [PH]. Sary was born—

SIGRIST: What was her name?

ROSENBAUM: Sara [PH].

SIGRIST: Sara.

ROSENBAUM: We called her Sary for short—

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

ROSENBAUM: —for diminutive. She was born in Williams Avenue, the second house. That was the year after. She was born in 1922. We arrived in 1920, late 1920. She was born in March, '22. So we were already in Williams Avenue, the second apartment. Well, we had a little more room there and we maybe had a bathroom in the house, and we didn't have to go to my Aunt Bella [PH] for a shower. So that was good.

SIGRIST: Things are getting better. [chuckles]

ROSENBAUM: Things are getting better.

SIGRIST: What—what do you remember about the actual birth, if anything—

ROSENBAUM: No.

SIGRIST: —or your mother being pregnant?

ROSENBAUM: No, no. No, I only remember that my father had to bring up—it was a coal stove that we had to heat the house in the kitchen, and that my father had to bring up the coals from the basement. Remember, they used to have chutes and the coal—the coal truck would come and the chutes—would be put into the basement window. And then the—the coal would go down into your bin or somebody else's bin or whatever. And then you had to pick up [unclear] coal, bring them up, set up the fire to warm the—the house—the kitchen, which was where you all lived. The rest were cold rooms because what could heat everything? And—

SIGRIST: Is this tied into the birth of your sister at all? Is there—

ROSENBAUM: No.

SIGRIST: No.

ROSENBAUM: No, it's just that I remember the stove and—no, I don't remember when she was born. I remember when my younger brother was born. He was born in 1928.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

ROSENBAUM: And he was born in the next house, also in Brooklyn. We lived—we stayed in each apartment, moving one step higher. But one year, two years—three years was a long time.

SIGRIST: Uh-hmm.

ROSENBAUM: We kept moving up and then finally we landed in the Bronx and then in Manhattan.

SIGRIST: It was the—

ROSENBAUM: So—

SIGRIST: —second apartment where your mother took in a boarder.

ROSENBAUM: Yes.

SIGRIST: What are your own personal memories of living with a boarder in the house?

ROSENBAUM: I was then six years. What did I remember? Nothing. But I hear stories about it. But no, there was no—no memories. As a matter of fact, they would often say, "This man lived with us for six months until he could bring his family from Europe." But I remember nothing, except that that room was closed. That's all. And it was cold in there because the only heat was in the kitchen.

SIGRIST: So you actually had very little interaction with these—

ROSENBAUM: Very little.

SIGRIST: —boarders.

ROSENBAUM: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Where did they eat? Did they—

ROSENBAUM: I don't know. Maybe my—maybe part of the deal is that they would eat us or—I don't know. I don't really know. Well, there probably was some place—I don't know.

SIGRIST: Hmm. Who had a harder time adjusting to the United States of your parents, your mom or your dad?

ROSENBAUM: Well, my father was settled right away. Within two, three weeks he was in his—in his milieu. He was with—with a yeshiva. He was teaching. He was with a—a—the—this—the whole setup was not the way it was there in Russia, because at that time he was doing the commercial works that his brothers-in-laws had been doing with the [unclear]. But this was what he was geared to do. This was what he was studying to do when he was in the yeshiva, to be a teacher, a rabbi in a school. So he was immediately put there and he was quite happy there. My mother had to adjust because she had to make sure that whatever my father brought home in—in pay, which was very minimal—and even minimal, it wasn't paid on time. Teachers always had that problem, being underpaid and not paid on time. Anyways, so my mother was the one who had to watch the—the out-go. So my mother had a harder time. She was—she would make our clothes. I mean, we were—at that time I was the only girl. The other one was so little that she didn't matter but I had to go to school with clothes, and she would make them. The boy's clothes, she didn't make. But—

SIGRIST: Is there a dress that sticks out in your mind from your childhood that your mother made for you?

ROSENBAUM: No. No, except that I know she knitted a lot. She did a lot of knitting and so she knitted a lot of clothes, knitted, sewed.

SIGRIST: All produced at home?

ROSENBAUM: Yes, everything.

SIGRIST: When you were of working age, were you expected to get a job?

ROSENBAUM: Yes.

SIGRIST: And what was the first job that you got?

ROSENBAUM: My uncle's. Where could you get a job [unclear]? [chuckles] Sure, I was—I kept his books for him out of high school.

SIGRIST: So how old were you when you got the job?

ROSENBAUM: Sixteen.

SIGRIST: And what did you do with your money that you made?

ROSENBAUM: It all went home, every bit of it, except that I—by that time, silk stockings were a—this was way—remember, now going up to 1920, 1930, about. And silk stockings were—we used to wear—that was the thing to wear. But silk stockings were very expensive. They were a dollar a pair. And who could afford that? So out of six dollars that I earned when I first started to work full time, nine to five, six days a week—Saturday I didn't work—I would get six dollars. It'd be a dollar a day, six dollars. I would take one dollar to buy myself stockings. And the next week that one dollar went for a blouse and the next week it went for a skirt. That was all. And the rest went to my parents. And they had [unclear]. But when I got married—when we got married, the money that I had earned between the time I went to school—went to work and the time I got married, which was five to six years (I'd have to figure it out for you), my parents had take—he had put the money aside, my father. He put the money aside in some other way—not at the time, maybe. Maybe he saved it up more recently and he gave us all that money back as a wedding gift. That was the time when I was working. My brother, of course, was working before me.

SIGRIST: That's right. What was—what was his first job at the time?

ROSENBAUM: [unclear] uncle. This—my uncle, the one I worked for, was in the paper—in the paper business. Paper and twine, the—you know, wrapping paper. And my older—my—my brother was—went to work for a clothing company, the Roxy [PH] Clothing Company, which was my uncle's company. They had one in Jersey City on—what's that big street near—there was a—it's a big—okay [chuckles]—

SIGRIST: There's a lot of big streets in Jersey City.

ROSENBAUM: No, but an intersection. Yeah—no. Okay. [chuckles] I've forgot where it is but it was there until about 10 years ago.

SIGRIST: And was your brother also contributing his money to the household?

ROSENBAUM: Yes, I think for awhile. Yes. And then he got married and that was—and then—then he was on his own.

SIGRIST: Did your parents attempt to learn English?

ROSENBAUM: My father didn't have to. My mother, absolutely. She went to night school.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little about what you know about her experiences in night school, if anything?

ROSENBAUM: Oh, she would come home and we'd go over her lessons. We learned—we learned English in—in no time. I guess in a few months and we were speaking English. The—I was six, seven. My brother was nine. And—and we would help my mother with the conjugations, with the words, with the meanings. And my father didn't need it as much. He was in a different milieu. He—he spoke Yiddish. He spoke Hebrew. He spoke whatever he needed.

SIGRIST: So, am I to believe then that he really didn't have an interest in—

ROSENBAUM: No.

SIGRIST: —in learning English?

ROSENBAUM: No.

SIGRIST: Whereas your mother—

ROSENBAUM: My mother needed it and she was generally a more aggressive person who would want to be—to go on the streets and know what she's reading on the signs and know whom she's talking to and what they're talking about.

SIGRIST: Do you remember some of your mother's attempts—early attempts to—to speak English and maybe some of the mistakes she might have made?

ROSENBAUM: [chuckles] I'm sure she made them but I don't—and—and nothing would faze her. I mean, she would go and make mistakes and that was okay. That was okay.

SIGRIST: Did your parents become citizens?

ROSENBAUM: Yes. My father, first thing he did after a certain length of time, whenever he could, he applied for his citizenship. And of course, he had to study English then, [chuckles] which was—it wasn't hard for him. He just never did it. But when he had to, he did it. And he learned that whole book. I remember there was a booklet that they

had, they gave you when you applied, I guess, for citizenship. And you had to know all the—you read it and know all the answers and everything. He did. I think my mother became a citizen on his papers, if I'm not mistaken, and we too.

SIGRIST: What year was that?

ROSENBAUM: I think it was five years after we arrived. I think that's how much time you needed.

SIGRIST: Is—there were, like, a series of papers that you got? I mean, what was—

ROSENBAUM: No, it was a booklet

SIGRIST: —what was the process?

ROSENBAUM: Oh, you m—when we—

SIGRIST: What—when—when—when your—when your father first came—

ROSENBAUM: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —what was the actual process that—

ROSENBAUM: I don't know.

SIGRIST: Because I was just trying to—

ROSENBAUM: [unclear], no.

SIGRIST: Maybe for the sake of the tape.

ROSENBAUM: I haven't any—

SIGRIST: I see.

ROSENBAUM: —idea how it was done. But I know that he became a citizen right away because he didn't—he wanted to be a citizen. He wanted to leave Russia. He wanted to have nothing to do with it. And later on when we—I was grown already and then we'd talk about something, "Wouldn't it be nice to go back to see what's doing in Russia?" He said, "No, never." That was—

SIGRIST: Did your mother feel the same way?

ROSENBAUM: I don't know. She would say—she would tell us more about the nice things that were there, the trees and the grass and things like that. But for him it was “out.”

SIGRIST: They had very different perceptions of—

ROSENBAUM: Yes, of what—what they needed.

SIGRIST: Right.

ROSENBAUM: What each one needed.

SIGRIST: What year did you get married?

ROSENBAUM: '36.

SIGRIST: 1936. And your husband's name?

ROSENBAUM: Aaron Rosenbaum—A-A-R-O-N.

SIGRIST: And did you have children?

ROSENBAUM: Yes.

SIGRIST: Could you name them for me on tape?

ROSENBAUM: The oldest one is Ann. The next one is Edward. The Jewish name is Yitchak [PH]. We don't call him Edward anymore. At that time, when my children—being born, we were still—Jewish people were still giving American—what they call American names. Now, [chuckles] of course all these names are American names too but—

SIGRIST: How do you spell Yitchak?

ROSENBAUM: That would be Y-I-T-C-H-A-K—Yitchak. And we called him Edward. [chuckles] When he got older, he said to me, “Where did you find a name like that for me?” I said, “In the English books I found it.” [laughs] And then there was Heshy. He's not here with us anymore.

SIGRIST: And how do spell Heshy?

ROSENBAUM: H-E-S-H-Y.

SIGRIST: Thank you.

ROSENBAUM: And then there was—then there is Esther and then there is Juda [PH] . And you'll notice that the names became more Jewish and more Biblical as the time went on.

SIGRIST: As time goes on.

ROSENBAUM: Right.

SIGRIST: Well, that leads me to ask you, growing up the daughter of a rabbi, how do you think that influenced your life?

ROSENBAUM: Oh, I guess it did. My friends were of a certain kind. My outlook was different. I couldn't go anywhere on a Sabbath. I didn't want to go because I wasn't supposed to go, so I didn't. And all sorts of—then I didn't consider them restrictions. They were just that I didn't do those things because it wasn't what I was—I wasn't supposed to do and so [chuckles] I was being a—a Jewish daughter, not necessarily a daughter of a rabbi, but someone who's following the tenets of Judaism very closely. Those are the things that I did or didn't do, whichever it happened to be.

SIGRIST: If you were to give some advice to a young person about how to lead a full and satisfying life, what kind of advice would you give them?

ROSENBAUM: Standing on one leg. You know the story about Hillel [PH]?

SIGRIST: You've got three minutes to tell me.

ROSENBAUM: Okay, someone came to Hillel and asked him to give—to tell him the whole—the essence of Judaism. So he says, "While I'm standing on one leg." So he says—he says, "Love thy neighbor as thyself." So you [unclear] [chuckles] standing on one leg, what is all this about? What did you want me to tell you again? What should I [unclear]?

SIGRIST: Advice to—to a young person about how to lead a long and satisfying life.

ROSENBAUM: Well, you have to be interested. You h—you have to live comfortably and satisfactorily with your husband. That's the first thing. Criticism is not the way to do it and, if anything is wrong—is not going right, then you have to see whether—that you have to be the one that has to make adjustments and allowances, because you only can change yourself. You can't change anybody else.

You can only make adjustments with the situation. As far as the children are concerned, I don't know. Maybe as a mother-in-law, I tell them what I think. But I think they should know what I think because they might be making big mistakes. At least, they'll know later, after they say, "That interfering mother-in-law," that maybe she was a little bit right. So I take my chances.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Rosenbaum, thank you very much for letting me come over on this—

ROSENBAUM: Okay.

SIGRIST: —rainy afternoon [chuckles] and ask you about—your whole life. I think we got—

ROSENBAUM: Yeah. [chuckles] I think so.

SIGRIST: —through pretty much. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Rosalind Rosenbaum on Thursday, May 16th, 1996 in Teaneck, New Jersey.

ROSENBAUM: New Jersey.

SIGRIST: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]