EI-75
MAX SCHNAPP
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- **ROMANIA: VIZHNITSA, BUCOVINA**
- **US: NEW YORK, NY EAST 9TH STREET**

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Monday, August 26, 1991. We are here at Ellis Island with Max Schnapp, who came from Austria-Hungary in 1923 when he was nineteen. By the time he left, that part was Romania. Good morning, Mr. Schnapp. Can you please give me your full name and your date of birth.

SCHNAPP: My name is Max Schnapp, spelled S-C-H-N-A-DOUBLE P. I was born on

June 18, 1904.

SIGRIST: And where were you born, sir?

SCHNAPP: I was born in the city of Vizhnitsa, which was part of the state of Bocovina, part of Austria-Hungary.

SIGRIST: Could you spell the town name, the city name, please?

SCHNAPP: Vizhnitsa was W-I-(Z)-T-Z-T-Z again.

SIGRIST: Okay. Can you tell me a little about the town?

SCHNAPP: The town had a population of five thousand. It was in the heart of the Carpathian mountains. It was close to the boundary line of Hungary, close to the boundary line of, at that time, Galicia, which was Poland, close to the boundary line of Romania, and it was surrounded with a rural Ukrainian population. But it was actually, and it was on the River Cheremosh. The River Cheremosh was a mountain rivers which flowed into the River Prut. From the River Prut it flowed in the River Dniester, and from the River Dniester it flowed into the Black Sea.

SIGRIST: Was this an industrial city?

SCHNAPP: It was not an industrial city. Only it was a lumber city because from the Carpathian mountains they would use the lumbers, put it together, and let it float down all the way to Bessarabia, they did business. But it was a,

actually could be called a lumber city.

SIGRIST: I see. Can you just kind of describe for me what the city itself looked like?

SCHNAPP: The city itself was mostly Jewish. It was, the population, it was separately from the Ukrainians. The Ukrainians had their own schooling, which dealt mostly with making different things from wood, and they had a special school for that, which has nothing to do with the Jewish population, the Jewish population.

SIGRIST: You said there was a large Jewish population.

SCHNAPP: Well, there was. The city was constantly Jewish, but, and it was, being that it was so close to different boundary lines, especially that years growing up, there was constantly fear of an outbreak of war because it was right during the Balkan War of 1912. Therefore it was a war atmosphere constantly.

SIGRIST: Let's talk a little bit about that. What was it like being a kid growing up in that kind of an environment?

SCHNAPP: (he pauses) Being, as a kid, naturally it was very pleasurable. Being it was in the mountains and we had a river, it was very pleasurable there to be a child. But due to the fact the emphasis was mostly on Jewish education, very much so, there was a constant pressure on the child for education, mostly Jewish education.

SIGRIST: Did you attend Jewish schools?

SCHNAPP: I attended Jewish school and German school. Schooling was mostly, in fact, we would have schools in the Jewish and German, and very hard to accept it. There was a patriotic feeling. We had to have the patriotic prayer every morning. But in general it was of enormous worry due to the fact of that constant fear that we didn't know when war would start. So it left, more or less, youth or older people, that constant feeling of not being very peaceful like you have here in America. You don't have to worry about it.

SIGRIST: So it was something maybe your parents felt more than you did.

SCHNAPP: My parents felt more, but I participated. There wasn't such a thing, paying attention to their discussion constantly, every morning you didn't know that tomorrow, it was a question is that the Balkan War, the question, might throw in Austria any moment, so we never knew when. Naturally, I listened to all that. And by listening to all the different discussions it more or less, as a young child, it more or less left me with a certain knowledge, that you American kids don't need it, but we did need it, and we learned. We would read papers. We were developed much further than any ordinary American child would, due to the fact, and it did happen. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Sure. As a child did you ever play war in the streets?

SCHNAPP: Constantly, constantly we played war. That was the main thing. There

was always suspicion, being that Russia was a powerful country, there was always a suspicion that against Russia there wasn't nothing. Because the Russians were very closely related to their religion, to the Russians, even though the Russians is different than Ukrainian. Therefore little by little, you know, that developed. You know, and a certain antagonism between Russian-speaking and between German-speaking. My father, because naturally, Austria was a German city, you know that. So it developed more and more.

SIGRIST: As a child, did you ever witness any kind of altercations between these different groups?

SCHNAPP: Yes, we did have. We did not dare. The minute we left on a Saturday to have a little, going out in the country. And the minute those Ukrainian boys would see us, there would be a fight right away. There would be a fight. But we got even with them. No, on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday they would deliver milk, because they were rural. So we would go, and had to go, even we were going to beat them up for that. During the school they would also go to the, they had to go the German school too. They were very poor. They would steal lunches from each other, you know that, because they didn't have enough to eat. They were poor. And it was a very unpleasant situation as it was.

SIGRIST: A lot of friction between different groups in this town.

SCHNAPP: This was. In fact, I would say it was a typical example of the whole, that's why Austria broke down. It's a typical example that Austria was torn apart.

So many different nations, different languages, and we were a part of it. And later on, we will go, there was a question that, Wilson was President, spoke about fourteen points. And that finished the war, because when he spoke about fourteen points that means they will be independent of each country, people were very, very happy, and there was independence, you know that. It fell apart, and each one formed their own country on account of that.

SIGRIST: Right. I'd like to talk about your parents. What was your father's name?

SCHNAPP: My father's was Adolph, Adolph Schnapp.

SIGRIST: And what did he do for a living?

SCHNAPP: He was, he had, he was in America in 1901. He worked, he was in (?). There were no typewriters there. He worked as a clerk in the, uh, what do they call it, which today, which would be called, um, hmm. (?), but (?) was equal like a Sheriff, you know that. So he worked in the Sheriff's office. His job was that he would go up in the mountains to notify people when they had to go to war, when they had to go to army. There was no mail. So he had to go out there to notify. When he comes to Vizhnitsa in order to present himself before the commission to take him to war, he also, there also was law in Austria that if you owed money and if you didn't pay for it that they took it away from you, they took something worth, a sewing machine, you know that, which America had the poll tax, which America had abolished. But that was on certain income. He was in America in 1901 and he lived one year.

SIGRIST: Why did he come to America?

SCHNAPP: He came to America, first that was before I was born, first of all. But I did know he was looking for something, for a better world. But he was not commercial. When he came to America and he realized, most of them would peddle. Because the Jewish population at that time had no trade. There were two types. Some types who had to go to the army who didn't want to go to the army, so they came to America. So they had no trade. There was no industries, so they would peddle. He wasn't a peddler. He was an educated person. He was a musician, a self-musician. Himself composed as much as he could. But when he realizes it was not, he was not working, he had no chance to travel. If he would have left New York and gone midwest he might have changed. He didn't. So he decided, then he went back.

SIGRIST: I see.

SCHNAPP: One year is all he remained.

SIGRIST: And so he continued, when he came back he took the job in the sheriff's office?

SCHNAPP: No. He kept on working in the sheriff's office all the way to the last day of 1914, because then I was born. He worked till the last minute.

SIGRIST: I see. Let's talk about your mother. What was her name?

SCHNAPP: What?

SIGRIST: Your mother.

SCHNAPP: Sabina Schnapp.

SIGRIST: I see. And did she work in Austria?

SCHNAPP: No, she was a housewife.

SIGRIST: I see. Was she from that town?

SCHNAPP: She was from that town.

SIGRIST: And did she have a lot of family in that town?

SCHNAPP: Yes. We had to find them. My grand, her father, there was a grandfather, he was like the Chief of Police. We were quieted down there.

SIGRIST: Talk about your grandfather.

SCHNAPP: My grandfather was a chief of police. He held, he held this power there. The power of his was such that if for some, that every year a commissioner would come to examine people to go to the army. If somebody didn't behave they did not arrest him or do anything to him, but he was earmarked to go to the army. My grandfather, there was a doctor

that would come, we would stay in his place because there was no hotels. He had his name, and that doctor would more or less make sure, took a look at him. (German) means (German), "Taulich" Army. This way he got rid of all the rowdies, you know that. They had, they went into the army. But at the same time it also was bad because it took away the breadwinner from some of the people who needed the boys, and they didn't, he wasn't very popular for that.

SIGRIST: I see.

SCHNAPP: But it had to be done. On top it was that some of the peasants from the mountains wasn't very happy either. When my father had to let them know, my father always was armed because when he told him he has to go and he loses his son, and not only that he also had to deliver a horse for very little money for hardly anything, because that made up the army, what it is. So that situation, you know, is, it wasn't a very happy one.

SIGRIST: Can you describe your grandfather as a person, what was he like? What was his temperament like?

SCHNAPP: His temperament, number one, first of all, he was ambitious. He loved music. He loved music. He was a little composer. He played the flute. He played almost every instrument. He wanted his children to be educated. My oldest brother, who was killed in the war, my oldest brother, my oldest brother was my mother's darling. He was the oldest one. My father wanted him to be a doctor, but he didn't have the ambition to be a doctor. He simply wanted a plain job. He went, he was killed in the army,

went to the army in 1914. He was killed on the 21st of November 1916. He was killed in the battle of, in Italy on the Isonzo River he was killed. He is buried somewheres in the city of Ljubljana in Yugoslavia. The oldest sister, he wanted her to be an opera singer.

SIGRIST: What was her name?

SCHNAPP: Her name was Dora. She's ninety-two years old, and she lives with my niece in Wilmington. She didn't have the voice to be an opera singer, but my father was very ambitious. Another sister, he wanted to be a violin, a piano teacher.

SIGRIST: And what was her name?

SCHNAPP: Lottie. It wasn't good, because he was an ambitious man, you have to pay money for lessons. He didn't have it. He had a good, he wanted everything. On me, he gave up. I was the youngest one. I was involved in politics all my life, still am. I was more suitable than anybody else. I was the youngest one. But it was already, he came back from, my father was in the war. From the trenches he was sick and he died in 1922. It was (?). Everything fell apart. Romania, we didn't know Romania. Our culture and everything was Austrian. It was not language. And here we were confronted in a strange city, a strange culture. There was no more life for us, that's why I'm an American.

SIGRIST: Talk about your political involvement as a youth in your town.

SCHNAPP: My youth in town was entirely different. From 1914 on my whole life changed, my whole life changed. Number one they took, they first took my brother away. He had to go into the army. He was nineteen years old, and that was already a very hard knock for my mother. He still worked for the Austrian government, but they knew it was a question of any moment that the battle will change to such an extent the Russians will come in and take over the city, and that is the end of the Austrian rule, and it happened. That was the end. The Russians came in, they took whatever they wanted, because the battle was right next to the city.

SIGRIST: Do you remember this battle specifically?

SCHNAPP: I remember it very well.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit about that?

SCHNAPP: First of all, it was a rumbling every night, a rumbling of the cannons. In those days they didn't have smooth, it was cobblestones. It was always a rumble from the cannons. We heard the shooting. We were sitting in the school class. We were sitting, we didn't know from nothing. All of a sudden we heard explosions. Everybody, the teacher, everybody was like paralyzed. Everybody was running here and running there. The parents were running after the children, "Where are they?!" Everybody, it's a terrible thing. And all of a sudden things like this happen until finally we found home. Unfortunately they were bombarding the railroad station. There was no battle in the city, but they knew they would march in the next morning, and it happened. The Austrian army withdrew, people who

had money travelled to Hungary because it was very hard. Those that had horses for hire, would drive up to the Hungarian, once you drive it does not, Vizhnitsa was the last city of the railroad. There was no more railroad. They would but those that didn't have enough money or a wagon would have to remain there and get the best donkeys. Terrible scared, terrible scared. And the Russians marched in, they were crude, they were hungry, just like soldiers. (he coughs) They said to my mother, "Have you got something to eat?" And my mother said, "I haven't got anything." He says, "All right." He went out, ten minutes he came back and he brought a sack with chickens, live chickens. He says, "Go ahead." He opened up the bag, and the chickens flew all over the house. He says, "Slaughter the chickens and feed us." My mother had never done it, she says, "I've never done it." He says, "If you are not going to slaughter the chickens I'll slaughter you." He was wild. She says, "There's nothing I can do." I had my grandmother, my father's mother was an old woman. She got so scared she was paralyzed at the moment. She couldn't move any more out of scared. But after a while, a soldier is a human being. After a while he quieted down. He says, "All right, make us tea." And he fell asleep, he was tired. And she just sat there like paralyzed. She was afraid to move. And the whole night all the Russians came in. The place was full of soldiers and they fell asleep and we just sat there. The only thing we were able to move my grandmother down where she lived downstairs, because she couldn't move. In the morning he woke up, he says, "What's going on here? Why don't you be (?)?" He was sober. He was entirely different. He was a different human being. We says, "We couldn't. You scared us." We told him the truth. He apologized. He apologized. He went there to the city. Somehow he brought food

together, you know. What he did, I don't know. He became a regular in the garrison, you know that thing. It stood there. That was the first, but the impression on me as a child, that was 1914. I was ten years old. It had a terrible nerve, terrible on my mind. I couldn't sleep. To this very moment I'm still suffering. To this very moment I must take a Dalmain, a sleeping pill. Otherwise I can't fall asleep.

SIGRIST: And this kind of scene was being played out all over the city, right? As the soldiers . . .

SCHNAPP: All over the city. The soldiers went back and forth. When the Russians visited the Austrians won. Two weeks later the Austrians won, the Russians withdrew. Two weeks later the Russians won, Austrians withdrew. And so it went back and forth. Once Austria was free for a few weeks immediately they took my brother, we didn't hear nothing. My father was forty-five years old. They immediately drew him in the army, so we were left. My sister joined the hospital. She went in the army and went to the hospital. So my one sister joined, became a nurse, my father went in the army. So I was left myself and two sisters and my mother. We had school for a few weeks. I still have the documents. When the Russians withdrew the school, the school opened up. When the Russians advanced the school opened up. Finally we came to a point that the military authorities told us, "You have to leave. There's going to be a big battle. We'll give you twenty-four hours to leave." "How are we going to go? Where are we going to go?" He said, "We don't care. Maybe you'll find a little spot on a wagon, because everybody's going to withdrew." We packed in whatever we could and we started walking. Where could we

walk? Up towards the Hungarian Mountains. They were the nearest one, there was no other way out. And so we dragged ourselves. Sometimes we got a little break from the soldiers. At that time they still had covered wagons. There were no trucks. They gave us, helped us a little ride. You know that. Well, it was dangerous. I was with my sister, and they were in danger of being raped by your own soldiers. And they claimed that I did not understand, I was ten years old. They held onto me, they clawed their nails in on me to make sure to hold onto me, and this scared me more or less, a little bit. But anyway we traveled up until a place we were safe. Where we were safe, then we were, thousands of people from all over, refugees, and the Austrian government started to distributing us in different places in Austria, over (?).

SIGRIST: So had the town indeed been badly damaged?

SCHNAPP: Destroyed is the name of it. So we lived in the country inside Germany, wherever you'd have a place to sleep among the peasants, for about a year's time, no education, nothing. But my father was released finally from the army because he couldn't serve any more. He had rheumatism, he had, he was sick man, so they let him go. He was more dead than alive. But anyway, whatever we had we went to Vienna. We didn't go to school. In 1916, in September 1916 we went to Vienna. I immediately registered at school and Vienna was starvation, starvation, really starvation. There was nothing to eat.

SIGRIST: So what did you eat? How did you get food?

SCHNAPP: How did we get? First we went to school. The authorities were able to scrape something together, which they gave us to eat. Also we used to, my mother would travel to the country to get from the peasants some kind of food, you know, that we have to eat. The apples, they would cook it and they made compote. And they had, in those days we had (?) marmalade. Austria has an awful lot of beets, which they made some kind of marmalade, something to hold together, but I got a big education. I was registered, I did my homework in the opera. I was, I had all the operas, because it was warm, I did my homework. And they had a system that every opera singer hired a club of boys who would applaud him after he got through singing. By doing that he got a big name. So little by little, being I came regular, you know, that I had a big bunch, I had about ten, fifteen boys who would applaud. And the other actors, singers or actors, realizing that this guy is getting a lot of applause they did the same thing with other boys. And so during the whole war lasted it was more or less, it was torture. Then started the revolution, then started a different time.

SIGRIST: Did you stay in Vienna until the end?

SCHNAPP: I stayed in Vienna. I stayed in Vienna, then the revolution started 19, then came out all of a sudden, came out from America, Wilson. Somehow it went around that Wilson, President of America, said there will be peace providing Austria is willing to divide, give each one their own independence. So this went like wildfire. People came back who were prisoners of war. They came back free. It was an awful revolution. They didn't listen to anybody. There was no police, there was no soldiers. People with armbands went around claiming they are guards. What they

did actually was stealing and robbing. And for about two weeks there was fighting going on. There was people, right in front of my eyes, right in front of my eyes fifteen people were killed.

SIGRIST: So again you're in an environment just like where you were before, in a way. Just as dangerous, and . . .

SCHNAPP: Right in front of me, people on horses with sabers. Right next to me there was a mailbox on the wall, and they, with sabers, you know, they were slashing people. One was coming at me with a saber, but he couldn't hit me because I hid behind the mailbox. So they didn't but in front of me were fifteen people dead, killed. That was the end, that was the end. We left there finally when the republic was broken up, each one was independent, and they told us we had no business to be in Vienna. We have to go home, because that's Romania.

SIGRIST: And your father is still living at this point.

SCHNAPP: He's still living, if you call it that. We finally went home to Chernovtsy, and that belonged to Romania. The Romania told us you didn't come home at a certain time, you lost your citizenship. So we lost everything. We were supposed to stay, come home, at a certain time, but they gave an order, and we stood, we didn't feel like leaving Vienna. We had no place, our life. So what happened? So we lost our citizenship, we lost the house, we lost everything. When my father died we had nothing.

SIGRIST: This was 1922.

SCHNAPP: That was in 1920. Meanwhile, I grew up, hired, and I was already groomed for the Romanian army. Whatever was left over from the family, everybody, most of them, were killed, but I was almost the only man left. My grandmother said, "You're the only one that's left over. You will not be in the army if it's my last penny. You'll go to America. (?)." They did everything possible.

SIGRIST: Did you have any family in America?

SCHNAPP: Yes. I had some family in America who came over here in 1911.

SIGRIST: And what relation were they?

SCHNAPP: They were, one was my father's brother. He lived here. He came here first in 1910 or 1911, during that time, and then he took his family over. They were, they were not very rich. They couldn't send us. First of all, war interrupted. Finally when the war stopped they were able to send us, I had an uncle there, aunt there, that they got money together to buy tickets for us to come to America. So finally I did not like to, because leaving my family, also Fascism . . .

SIGRIST: We'll pause just for a moment.

END OF SIDE ONE BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: I'm sorry. You said you didn't want to come to America.

SCHNAPP: No. First of all, Fascism began to come in. They called themselves, not Nazis. They called themselves Hagenkreuzlers. They started in Vienna. Hagenkreuzler was the beginning of the Fascist movement. Being a schoolboy, you know, we fought it, we were against it, because I belonged to the club of the Social Democratic, the Social Democratic Youth Committee. So there was always fights. There was a question of a time. They, right away there were knives, each one carried a knife. They were very dangerous. My life wasn't worth anything. The police that they arrested was always, it was Fascism all the way through. We had no chance. But anyway, I came to America.

SIGRIST: Your grandmother wanted to send you to America.

SCHNAPP: My grandmother walked for miles to bring me a glass of warm milk to the railroad station because she knew I would not, staying there I would either have to go in the army, the Romanian army, which was certainly very bad, or sooner or later the Fascists would kill me.

SIGRIST: Did you come by yourself?

SCHNAPP: With my sister, my older sister.

SIGRIST: And do you remember saying goodbye to your mother?

SCHNAPP: Yes.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit about saying goodbye.

SCHNAPP: They came to the railroad station and they kept on telling to me, "As soon as you come to America," they said, "You save us. Work hard, save money, and take us over to America. That's our only chance. I'm here with my two daughters." And they, the influence of my mother, knowing what saving was so strong that no sooner did I come to America I start working like hell. My first job I worked to go to school. The second night I went to school.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you packed before you left?

SCHNAPP: What?

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you packed? What did you take with you?

SCHNAPP: I just took one good suit. That's about all, one suit. My suitcase, there was nothing else to pack. And the suit that I packed was sent to me from America from the Joint Distribution Committee. The Jewish societies collected old clothes and it happened to fit me. That's what I took along. The question was, but the question was I was never going to see my grandmother again, and going to America, you know, was a strange country. I learned a little bit English.

SIGRIST: Before you left.

SCHNAPP: Before I left I learned English. I was very well-acquainted with American history. I loved American history.

SIGRIST: What did you know about America before you . . .

SCHNAPP: I knew about the Civil War, geography, Civil War. I knew every one. The Battle of, all over. I knew the, because I studied wars. I knew why there was a Civil War, there was a Civil War. I knew the differences between the south and the north. Everybody was saying to free the slaves, but that was not what they taught us at school. They taught us because there was competition, because that if the slaves didn't get paid the industrial people in the north got paid, there was competition. So the question was of being afraid that if they were going to build up the industry in the south to such an extent and make a lot of money there's competition. So this way it had to be one system, you know. Such, the minister, big people in Austria who took over the government were very smart, and every night there was a lecture about something. The Battle of Antietam. Everything. We learned more and more and more. We learned about not only America but other countries, too.

SIGRIST: So you're not going to America blindly. You had a good knowledge of what was here and what to expect.

SCHNAPP: I had a pretty good knowledge, but I also had help. When I came home from school the first night I seen police walking without rifles on their shoulders. I grew up with seeing police always rifles on their shoulders.

When I seen him, he doesn't have a rifle? I mean, I had to ask questions where he kept his revolver. And the way he walked so easy. Then came the question in Vienna, if he came after ten o'clock he had to pay ten cents fine, so people had to run very fast to go home before ten o'clock. And here I run home from school and there is a light on and the door is not closed. There was such a freedom that even if you didn't like it, you know that there was, it was like taking off a heavy mantle, you know, of steel. And that itself was like a relief, you know, on your whole system. At the same time I was pressured. My people were there and I worked very hard.

SIGRIST: What port did you leave from?

SCHNAPP: I left from Le Havre.

SIGRIST: So you took a train from where you were to, how did you get to Le Havre?

SCHNAPP: I left from the port Le Havre. We went, from Chernovtsy we went to Budapest. From Budapest we went to Vienna. From Vienna we went to Zurich. Zurich, from Zurich we went to Paris. From Paris, Le Havre.

SIGRIST: That's a long train ride.

SCHNAPP: That's a long train ride. In Le Havre we stopped for two weeks where they examined us.

SIGRIST: Talk to me about that. Describe exactly what they did there.

SCHNAPP: Where?

SIGRIST: At Le Havre.

SCHNAPP: Le Havre, first of all what scared me mostly, my tear sac is closed on my eye. You know that. And they said they are not going to let you in America because it's a sickness. America is very, very careful, and they're not going to let you in, and they examine you. And, you know, people have a habit of scaring you. They examined me, they found me okay. They says it's up to the American doctor. And to my surprise when I came to America the doctor was joking with me. He took a look and he seen right away that a tear sac is not a sickness. In fact, he made a joke. He says, "It was Prohibition. Your name is Schnapps, you're not supposed to come in." But it took off such a big load off me, you know, that it made me double happy.

SIGRIST: Where did you stay in Le Havre?

SCHNAPP: When I stayed in Le Havre the boat, we slept, at night we slept on the Paris. In the morning we walked out of the Paris and walked right into the door on the long benches there. You sat down, and they gave us a number. We sat on the bench and they started calling out names.

SIGRIST: This is in Le Havre.

SCHNAPP: In Le Havre. I mean, that, no, no.

SIGRIST: I'm talking about Le Havre. Where did you stay in Le Havre?

SCHNAPP: In Le Havre we had a lager. A concentration camp, you know that. Everybody was thrown together.

SIGRIST: Were there lots of people?

SCHNAPP: Oh, yes. They were from all over. They were thrown together from all over. We ate there, everything given us. And we stood there, everybody is examined because they will not let, America will not let anybody in unless the travel agency passes first. After they pass, then they let you in. So there was simply going through a procedure which lasted, the only trouble I had, this. I never had, they had women nurses, and I had to undress for them to examine me. And I fought like hell. I wouldn't let a woman see me, because I was brought up, according to the old tradition a man does not undress himself in front of women. But I had to finally give in, you know. But once I came to New York . . .

SIGRIST: What was the name of the boat?

SCHNAPP: The Paris.

SIGRIST: The Paris. And can you talk about your accommodations in the boat? Did you stay with your sister in the boat?

SCHNAPP: Yeah. No, she was with the women. The boat was just like anything else.

Small, third class, you know. It doesn't, when you go through, from 1914 to 1923, such hardship, such everything, such hunger, nothing matters. You're hardened. You survive. You're a survivor. Up, between 1914 and 19, until we left for America, it was very hard, very hard. First of all, the language. We didn't understand the Romanian, and the Romanian treated us very bad because we were German nationalists. They had no use for us. It took away from us everything. My father's job was taken away, everything. Nothing.

SIGRIST: So by the time you got on the boat were you actually looking forward to going to America?

SCHNAPP: Yes. No. I was looking forward for the purpose, because I knew, I was very well-acquainted with Wilson's fourteen points. I was very well-acquainted with the Constitution, with the Civil War, you know. I had an idea that America was a democracy. I had a lot, which made me, naturally, happy. I could see for me a liberal life. I don't have to be afraid to come home at night from school or to carry a revolver or a rifle. But in the other way I left my mother and two sisters home, you know, and I will never see them again.

SIGRIST: Was your sister that you were traveling with, was she excited about coming to America?

SCHNAPP: No. She cried, she cried constantly. She was too close to (?). But she forgot about it. She got married. In less than a year she got married.

SIGRIST: Talk to me about what the boat trip was like.

SCHNAPP: The boat trip was a combination of past and of happiness. And also that was a joke to them. Each one tried to find out what kind of a disease the other one has in order to use it to scare them. That used to be the joke. And people were really scared. Some of them were so stupid. They took along a lot of food, which they didn't need, because the food was good, and they couldn't eat it, you know, because some wasn't kosher. But later, they changed very fast. They throw it in the water, you know. They Americanized very fast. Then the question is, they said right away, you've got to learn English. The desire to speak English was so opposite to the ones we have in Brighton Beach, that they want to speak Russian. I said something in German, they bawled me out. "Stop talking German." Because German was my language. They says, "You speak English. You're in America."

SIGRIST: Okay, wait. We're still on the boat. We're still on the boat here. Was the boat ride rough?

SCHNAPP: Rough? Not particular.

SIGRIST: Did you get sick?

SCHNAPP: The usual sickness, which lasted a day or two. You know, I was a young boy, you know, I was strong, you know. You overcame everything. Your food was good.

SIGRIST: Where did they feed you?

SCHNAPP: They feed me, the special, I ate on the table regular, regular meals, good meals. The food was good, French. The French fed us pretty good. They were not stingy.

SIGRIST: I see. How long was the boat ride?

SCHNAPP: About ten days.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

SCHNAPP: Oh, yes. We seen the statue.

SIGRIST: Describe that for me.

SIGRIST: We looked at the Statue of Liberty. When we seen it, we were surprised. Number one, who did it, who put it up there. That was the first question that came in a person's mind. We couldn't read, because we were too far away. We couldn't read it. But the outstretched, I mean, the whole thing gave you a feeling of relaxation, of something good, you know that. You know what the Statue of Liberty is built. I mean, we didn't, all our life we didn't see that. Nobody stretched out a hand to you. Nobody said a good word to you. We come from a war-torn, we come from a country that was constantly. All of a sudden we see a statue of that sort. I mean, you can imagine what it does to a person, you know, that change. For me, especially, because I was nineteen years when I came to America. I knew

all the shortcomings and I also knew the good things in America. So therefore whatever happened I would, for instance, every Saturday I would go to the Metropolitan Opera. I found out that concert, and I liked music. Mannes was the conductor. So every Saturday I was at the Metropolitan Museum of Art listening to the operas, whenever I had a chance. It didn't cost me anything. America, New York gave me all the opportunity for culture, whatever there was. I used to go every week, when I had a chance, to the educational alliance that people would lecture. The Youth Education Alliance, there was a library down there, and a lot of honors couldn't write and read. I would write for them home, you know. I did a service for them. I would write to their family, and I would also read. (he pauses to take a drink)

SIGRIST: After you saw the Statue of Liberty, then they brought you to Ellis Island?

SCHNAPP: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Okay. Talk to me a little bit about going to Ellis Island, and what was that like.

SCHNAPP: As soon as we went to Ellis Island, nobody picked us up. We got scared.

SIGRIST: What did Ellis Island look like?

SCHNAPP: It was packed with people, packed with people. And there was a table where a commissioner sat there. He was a very nice man. He was talked, anyone he talked to he tried to relax them. He made a joke with

them. There wasn't, today there is more bureaucracy and more strictness than anything else. He was very easygoing. He understand that. And anybody that comes back from him came with a smile on their face because they were all scared, scared, scared. So after I came on line, he asked me, you know, he examined me, he looked in my ears, and he made a joke. Then comes the question, "Who is picking you up?" "My cousin is supposed to pick me up but he didn't." So we were sitting waiting. It was about ten o'clock. We kept on waiting and waiting and waiting. Finally it was already late in the afternoon, so the official there said, "I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll put on tickets on you. You take the boat, and you go to Battery Park. In Battery Park it might be that your cousin is late. He will recognize you, or you'll recognize him. I mean, somebody will help you. We can't keep you here. We have no place for you to sleep. If they're not going to find you, then they will put you up somewheres." So they gave us tickets and they put us on the boat. As soon as we went into the boat in the Battery Park, my sister recognized my cousin, whom she hasn't seen since she was a kid. That was him. For some reason, you know, he was late. So he took us home in a car for the first time. We sat down, and he took us home to Brownsville.

SIGRIST: Was that the first time you'd been in a car?

SCHNAPP: What? He had a car.

SIGRIST: Was this the first time you'd ever been in a car?

SCHNAPP: Yeah. But he was busy, so he came late. But I didn't stay. There was no

room for me. I moved to the East Side. My aunt lived on the East Side on 738 East Ninth Street. I moved to the East Side.

SIGRIST: How soon after you got here did you move to Ninth Street?

SCHNAPP: The following night.

SIGRIST: Oh, the following night.

SCHNAPP: So I knew I had to, the question was money, money for my mother, to help her. So I had to look for a job. I didn't know where. But I bought a Jewish paper, I knew Jewish, you know. And I started out there. They were looking for a machinist. I knew it was between the East River and the Hudson River. There as a number, there was a number. So I figured if I start off at number one, when I start off by the water, I must hit that place. So I started up by the water and I walked and I walked all the way to Second Avenue. By Second Avenue there was the place, and he hired me, fifteen dollars a week.

SIGRIST: And what sorts of things did you do?

SCHNAPP: Machine shop repairs, machine shop. Machine shops repairs. And it came lunch time, you know that I didn't know a word. I pointed to those, there was a salami and there was bread, you know. "I want this, I want this." And they gave me, and I ate. I had a place to sleep. I worked there.

SIGRIST: You said you had a place to sleep. Where did you sleep?

SCHNAPP: The sleep was my aunt lived with some woman from my town who lived there, who came to America years ago. A simple old woman. She kept people living there because they knew her from the same town. So she charged me about eight dollars a week.

SIGRIST: And where did you sleep?

SCHNAPP: Room and board. She had a boarder. They had like a railroad flat. Each was, women. There were four, five women. I was the only man. I put my suitcase, I put it under the bed, you know. And that's where I slept, but not very long. After a couple of weeks I found myself a room with other young, a boarding room. The boarding room was on Clinton Street, but there were other boys, and those other boys started taking me around. They went out, I went with them.

SIGRIST: Were they immigrants also?

SCHNAPP: Yes. Everybody was immigrants. It was right in the territory of the gangsters, of the Jewish gangsters, down on Clinton and Delancey, you know. It didn't take very long. Sunday I would go with the boys to Prospect Park. I would go to the different places. And little by little, you know, I saved, I lent money for an organization for a hundred dollars, and I sent to my mother. And it just happened she had money, but Johnson, who was a senator in California, passed to a bill, and the bill set quotas for immigrants, and the biggest immigrants, quotas, were for Nordics and not

for eastern Jews. (he coughs) So what happened, they couldn't come over. Imagine, from 1924, according to your quota, they had to wait till 1936 to be able to come to America. But I was able to get more money, and have my mother come for a visit. My mother came to America in 1936. One of my sisters died in Europe, so she came with one sister. My mother, I lived with her in Borough Park, and she died in 1955 in Boston and she is buried in Everett, Mass.

SIGRIST: I see.

SCHNAPP: That was my mother. And my sister is already ninety-two, and she is living in Wilmington.

SIGRIST: Go ahead. Take your drink. (break in tape) I want to ask you a little bit about learning English. You said you learned a little bit before you came. How did you, how did you become more fluent in English once you were here?

SCHNAPP: First I start in Vienna I read the Neue Freie Presse. The Pressen in Vienna is like the Times in New York. I started reading The Times, believe it or not. I read The Times. From the beginning I struggled, up until about six months ago. Six months ago I stopped reading The Times.

SIGRIST: Reading the newspaper was one way that you helped to familiarize . . .

SCHNAPP: Sure. That's why I knew everything. The Times, you know, takes time. Very fluently, I knew everything.

SIGRIST: What about the other people at your place of business? Did you all speak a different language, or did you have to speak English in the workplace?

SCHNAPP: In the workplace it was mostly English. In those days the question is anybody that didn't speak English was considered an ignorant. It was a different thing altogether. English was this language that you had to know it, good or bad. Never mind what you spoke over there, English. Everybody spoke English. Today where I lived in Borough Park, there's so many different nationalities, I think I'm in Singapore.

SIGRIST: Yes, it's true.

SCHNAPP: To them it's nothing, you know, which is bad. They don't.

SIGRIST: I guess my final question to you, because we only have a couple of minutes left, is you initially were not happy about coming to America. Are you happy now that you came to America?

SCHNAPP: Not completely. If I would have to tell you the reason, it would have nothing to do with that, but it would be important to know. I'm in politics, you know. I'm the President of the Pet Owners Protective Association, the head of the animals. I received an award, you know, in the national. I received the city award, the state award and the national award for humanity, I have them. The foreign policy, I don't know if we should go any further than that. I'm not satisfied with our, I'm not satisfied with our policy, the question of the shortage of the budget, the question of the so-

called war which was not necessary. The question that those fifty-two, two hundred and fifty-two marines that lost their lives has never been solved, never been solved. The question of the Middle East, it's a big thing. Why do you want to go into that?

SIGRIST: Well, your answer is very honest, and I appreciate that.

SCHNAPP: There's a lot, but it's a long thing. I have never missed reading The Times up until about six months ago. In fact, I know it before even The Times is printed I know what's going in there. I knew the editor. In fact, I worked with The Times on the question of bills. I've been in Albany, I've been in Washington. I passed bills. I passed a city bill that no one shall be evicted for having a pet, because it used to be if you have a pet you either give it up or you move out. I got sixty-five thousand signatures and I was able to pass a law, a bill, that if you have a pet for ninety days and the landlord is not going to take you to court he cannot evict you any more. My credit. So, you see, I am politics.

SIGRIST: Sure, sure.

SCHNAPP: And a couple of more bills.

SIGRIST: It's truly a success story. You've had a very dramatic and interesting and productive life.

SCHNAPP: Very productive, very interesting. The war against Vietnam I was plenty locked up in Washington for no crime at all. Never got me for a crime, for

the demonstrations. You know, you're acquainted, about the students. At the beginning there was only a few. Later on more and more colleges were there. I was with the college boys. I was with everybody. I still, I was the chairman of my neighborhood. I still am, of the Small Homeowners Association. I mean, uh . . .

SIGRIST: You could go on and on.

SCHNAPP: I never had a peaceful day, never had.

SIGRIST: That's good. It makes an interesting life.

SCHNAPP: I have the Talmud. I study the Talmud. And one thing is in my mind, and that is when you come before God Almighty, he ask you one question, "What have you done with your life?" What have you done with your life. You must give him an answer. And I wanted to make sure that I have done with my life the proper thing. Right now there's a lot of other things. I studied Buddhism a whole year. Buddhism is very interesting, I know. In fact, they invited me to speak there on Buddhism. I've been very active in every respect. In the animals and, well . . .

SIGRIST: Well, Mr. Schnapp, I just want to thank you very much for coming out to Ellis Island.

SCHNAPP: It was interesting.

SIGRIST: Sure. And for recounting a very dramatic life for us.

SCHNAPP: Thank my daughter more. I wouldn't, it was my daughter who did it. My daughter is dragging me into certain things which, as a rule, I wouldn't do.

SIGRIST: Well, I want to say I'm very glad she did drag you in. This was a very good interview.

SCHNAPP: She lives a different life than I do. We do not see eye-to-eye. But she's my child. Now that I'm older. You know how old I am. I am seventy-seven, I mean, eighty-seven, eighty-seven. You're eighty-seven. I have seen, I want to see that I was independent. I am in the outpatient department of Coney Island Hospital. And I am beginning to see that I need someone that will look after me to a certain extent, just to show a little, which she never did before, which was not my fault. That little bit she looked after me was to me a wonderful thing. It was my daughter. In fact, before her, her eyes are better than mine, her mind is a little bit quicker than mine. She takes an interest, and I need that. That all my due knowledge, and you know I'm no dumbbell. All my due knowledge, and this is to me of great value. I appreciate it. And this is, I'm saying that's for her sake. So when she said come in here, I says, "What the hell are you bothering me? I could go on the beach swimming. What for?" But I wouldn't dare do that, because it was her request. So she gets the thanks, and not me.

SIGRIST: Well, (raising his voice to be heard) thank you. This is Paul Sigrist signing off for the National Park Service.