

**EI-762**

**NETTIE MILLER, JUDY SIMON**

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**PORT:**

**RESIDENCES:**

LEVINE: Today is June 28<sup>th</sup>, 1996 and I'm here at Ellis Island in the oral history studio with two sisters, Nettie Miller, born Natalia Ramser [PH], and Judy Simon, born Johanna [PH] Ramser, who were born in—at the time it was Poland but we'll—we'll talk about that—and came in 1923 to the United States. Nettie was two years and eight months and Judy was 13 months at that time. So this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. And we're going to start at the beginning. I'll first ask each—each of these ladies to give your birth date and where in Poland you were born.

MILLER: Me? I was born in a place called Kosjonek [PH], which I don't know how to say or spell and May 14<sup>th</sup>, 1920.

LEVINE: Okay, okay. And your birthday, Judy.

SIMON: Oh, okay.

MILLER: She was born another town.

LEVINE: Oh, another town.

SIMON: Right.

LEVINE: Where were you born?

SIMON: I was born—

MILLER: Kalami—

SIMON: Kalami. Kalami. It sounds [chuckles] like a Chinese restaurant or a Chinese menu, I should say. Kalami. K-A-L—

MILLER: C. I think it's—

SIMON: No—

MILLER: No, K?

SIMON: I think it's K-A-L—

MILLER: Uh-hmm.

SIMON: —A-M-I. Kalami. Okay. And I was born on December 27<sup>th</sup>, 1921.

LEVINE: Do you know—was Kalami near a larger town, that you know of?

MILLER: Yes, yes, yes.

LEVINE: Do you know? Right.

MILLER: Yes, I called somebody on that. That—that whole area has a name. The whole area and I've written it down somewhere. Mmm, can't remember it now but—

SIMON: See, we didn't expect this interview today.

MILLER: I didn't. But there is a particular area that it's in, yes.

LEVINE: Well, do you know where you were born? Is that near a larger town there?

MILLER: No. What it was was in—in Galizia [PH] at the Carpathian Mountain, which was a big agriculture area. And every time there was a war they fought over it and the winner took that agricultural area. And that's why the country kept changing, whoever the winner was. So it went from

Austria, which it was when my mother was born, to—after World War I. Then it became Poland. And it may even be Romania now.

SIMON: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay.

SIMON: [chuckles] A lot of changes. [clears throat]

LEVINE: Yeah.

SIMON: Okay. Now, you did tell before that you were born in the same bed.

MILLER: The same.

SIMON: And room.

MILLER: Yes, I was born in the same town, the same bed, the same everything as my mother. But she was born in Austria and I was born in Poland.

LEVINE: Okay.

SIMON: Okay.

LEVINE: Now, do you—you don't remember life—

MILLER: No.

SIMON: No.

LEVINE: —in—in Poland.

MILLER: No, were too young.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything that was—is kind of part of the family legend now, that maybe your mother or father said to you?

MILLER: A lot of things. First, my father had to remain behind because he had been in the Austrian Army and he had to have bullets removed. So my mother comes to America with Judy and my sister. We—my mother called her Clara. [unclear] another passport was, we don't know. You know, because—and with me. So she comes to this country. My mother's a young woman with the three children. She's seasick so she can't lift her head up. This good child couldn't walk yet, Judy, so she was—you know, and the four-year-old was a good little girl. She didn't do anything. But I was at that age, a two year and eight month where I was

all over the place. And my mother was a very attractive woman and so the porter liked her. And he was chasing me. And that's about—my mother told me the story. And she said—till we got to this country she said—and hit land, and that's—and then my father came about six months later.

LEVINE: Now, why was it—do you know why it was that your mother came at this particular point in time?

MILLER: Yeah.

SIMON: Yeah, because her sisters—

MILLER: Her sisters—

SIMON: Yeah.

MILLER: —and brothers se—sent the money. But they [unclear] at that town. They—[unclear] was a farm. The farm was razed and burnt to the ground. But they got 3,000 American dollars for it because it was rich land, even though now had burnt out everything that was there. And so they had enough money and they came to this country. And, you know, people—

SIMON: They came with \$3,000?

MILLER: They had. That's what they got for the—for the land.

SIMON: Who got it?

MILLER: I would guess Mama would and—would—would have gotten it and whatever preparation and things they had to do, and leave some for Papa. But—but that's what they got.

SIMON: Three thousand American dollars?

MILLER: Three thousand American dollars. There was a [unclear] on there [unclear] like a mill—a saloon, which they had [unclear]. They had the farm and things like that. So anyhow, and the—and in Russia the Cossacks and the peasants in Poland were out, you know. I have to tell you what they used to do. They used to hunt Jews.

SIMON: They would have pogroms.

MILLER: Po—and we were—

SIMON: Yeah.

MILLER: —in the cellar there. My mother said she couldn't—nothing to eat for us because she couldn't feed us. She couldn't breast feed, even. She didn't have any milk. She said I used to drink the w—drank the wine that somebody would leave over because was hungry. That's why we're so short. Our older—our other sister's taller than we are. My mother was taller than we are. So anyhow, and that was one of the reasons we had to go. So her sist—her sisters and the brothers, they sent whatever necessary and we wouldn't be a public charge. And we came to America.

SIMON: Yes, but they had a sister that they left behind that was Victor's wife.

MILLER: There are two sisters that were left behind—

SIMON: Two sisters.

MILLER: —who died after in the Holocaust.

SIMON: Okay. But the two sisters that were left behind must have shared in that money.

MILLER: I have no idea if they [unclear].

SIMON: They had to because we didn't—we weren't in a good financial position when we came here.

MILLER: But, Judy—but [several words unclear]. That's what—why they sold the land because they got this money. The division of it, I'm not—not familiar with.

SIMON: Okay.

MILLER: So they did leave the two sisters behind.

LEVINE: I see. Now—

MILLER: And—and families.

SIMON: Okay.

LEVINE: Judy, do you know any other stories that—that pertain—

SIMON: Well—

LEVINE: —to real life there that you've been told or you—

SIMON: Well, no. But I just want—I wanted to tell a very strange thing that happened because we were—my sister, Nettie, and I were citizens on my father's papers all those years. And I don't know about—

MILLER: From '29.

SIMON: About when did we decide to get our own citizenship papers?

MILLER: Must have been in the—must have been in the '60s or something.

SIMON: Well, we decided that we wanted to get our own citizenship papers.

MILLER: To travel. We wanted a passport.

SIMON: We went to wherever it was that we had to get them. And it turned out that on my—although, that—that was my father's papers. Oh, okay. I don't know whether—at that time, whether I discovered that my name—they did not have my correct name, although that was on my passport that they didn't. They had me on my mother's maiden name. Instead of having me—so it appeared as though I were illegitimate.

MILLER: But you [unclear] third child.

SIMON: But I was the third child. So what it fin—Nettie said that what had happened was the—a friend who had to—

MILLER: Or relative, whoever.

SIMON: Or someone who went to register me after my birth for some reason could not remember our father's name. So she put down—

MILLER: [chuckles] My mother's maiden name.

SIMON: —my mother's maiden name as Geffner. And when I went to collect—to register for Social Security my husband was very concerned [chuckles] because I didn't have the right name. And I said, "It doesn't matter. I have school records to indicate that I—you know, when I was here, that I went all through school in this country. So—and he was—he was really disturbed. And I said to the young man in the Social—in front of the young man at the Social Security office—I said, "I'm sure he has heard stranger tales than this," because there were people who lied about their ages. And then when they reached the [chuckles] age of 65, I guess the wanted to collect Social Security.

MILLER: Maybe they were 55. [chuckles]

SIMON: And here—and here they were registered as being 50 or something—

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-hmm.

SIMON: —which they really weren't. So they had—I don't know how they proved it. But anyway, they—it turned out there was absolutely no problem.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SIMON: But what—what really instigated us to come up here was the fact that we saw this little play downstairs. And [unclear] it was something that meant a lot to us. And when the young lady started to tell the story about the fact that—in other words, this was—it was really real life but she was telling it. It was fictional. And she started to tell the story about when she was on Ellis Island, she ended up with a mastoid operation. And her sister—

MILLER: A younger child, a boy—little boy died.

SIMON: Yeah, and—and a sister had chicken pox or—no, what—what did she say?

MILLER: Scarlet fever.

SIMON: Scarlet fever.

MILLER: The little boy, that's what he died of. The little boy had scarlet [unclear].

SIMON: Had scarlet fever.

MILLER: Okay.

SIMON: And we just looked at one another. We could not believe it because—

MILLER: Ours had measles.

SIMON: —we lost our sister.

MILLER: And she got the—the pneumonia [unclear]. And that's—she died. Now, what [unclear] Morris Schwatren [PH]?

SIMON: Okay, now, an uncle of mine, Morris Schwatren, used to tell me this story. He said that he had come to Ellis Island to see what was happening with my sister, Clara, who was so ill with measles. And he said he walked in and there she was in a little crib or something right in front of a window.

The window was wide open. The curtains were blowing. She was completely undressed. And he said that was why she contracted pneumonia and that she ended up dying, because there wasn't any care at all of—I guess under the circumstances, things were so busy and hectic here. They just could not get any care.

MILLER: But there's—there was a sequella then after that.

LEVINE: Well, first tell me when did you—when did you realize that you had this mastoid problem?

SIMON: Oh, when I—as soon as I was in a position to find out. They told me because I have the scar behind my ear.

MILLER: My—my mother told us [several words unclear] this and that.

SIMON: Yeah.

MILLER: Now, this is where the story came in. My mother—my aunt told me—my mother. When we were so sick with that—with the ears and my sister had died, they were afraid we were going to die. So my aunt came with a physician and got us off Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Did you have mastoid before you left Europe?

MILLER: No.

SIMON: No.

MILLER: Here.

SIMON: No, here.

MILLER: On Ellis Island.

SIMON: On Ellis Island.

MILLER: On Ellis Island, your hospital here. And I had something called a myringotomy, which is an ear—a bulging eardrum, which will rupture if it isn't lanced. And so they cut it and they release the pressure. So when that happened to us, they were afraid we were going to die too. And then my aunt came with a doctor and I don't know what—how they managed it but they got us off quickly before we died.

SIMON: They probably bribed somebody and managed to get us off.

LEVINE: Did your mother ever tell you anything else about Ellis Island? About that time period?

MILLER: It was—just that it was an awful time, that that was a terrible time. The death of my sister was devastating and she didn't know where she—she didn't know where she was, where they put her, where you could go to find out. They didn't know because of not speaking the language, not knowing anything about government procedure or anything. There was nobody who really knew it and they never did know. So when we grew up and we got married, we're the ones who really wanted to know where on earth our sister was so that we could get her and take her and bury her somewhere. And my younger sister had been to Ellis Island and she was told about mass graves with the three major religions being at them, because so many people died at one time. And so that they said it was not possible that they could get her grave.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SIMON: I mean, Ellis Island now is beautiful. But Ellis Island at that time—

MILLER: Was not.

SIMON: —must have been awful, awful place. Yeah.

LEVINE: Did your mother—they took your sister from your mother?

MILLER: In the hospital when she died.

LEVINE: And took her to the hospital?

MILLER: Yeah.

LEVINE: So your mother wasn't with her—

MILLER: Maybe she went to visit her—

LEVINE: —that you know of?

MILLER: —but I don't think more than that.

LEVINE: Right, and then—

MILLER: Because she had two of us besides.

LEVINE: Right.

MILLER: And we were being operated on. We were sick.

LEVINE: Right.

SIMON: Yeah.

MILLER: So it was—where do you run first?

LEVINE: Yeah.

MILLER: So it was a kind—my mother got that straight to me, anyhow. I never got it straight because I don't really think she could remember where all that.

SIMON: Yeah, under—under such circumstances.

MILLER: Yeah. Here she—three little children. All three sick, one dies and the other two [unclear]. You know, so never could—able to tell us. But many years later I saw my mother with the French doors. She took something out of a drawer—[several words unclear]. When she went out of the room I went to see what it was. It was my little sister—my sister's apron. My mother kept that—

SIMON: Clara's apron.

MILLER: —all those years.

SIMON: Yeah, I remember having seen that.

MILLER: But I never knew who—who, what, when.

SIMON: Real old, yeah. [unclear]

LEVINE: What was your mother's name?

MILLER: Ester—E-S-T-E-R.

SIMON: Yes, she spelled it differently from all the other Esthers.

MILLER: Ester Erna—E-R-N-A.

LEVINE: E-R-N-A was her maiden name?

MILLER: No, her name was Ester Erna Geffner.

LEVINE: G-E-F-N-E-R?

MILLER: F-F—F—

SIMON: Two f's.

LEVINE: F-N-E—

SIMON: N-E-R, right.

LEVINE: Okay, and your father, his name?

MILLER: Sigmund—Sigmund Ramser [PH].

LEVINE: And your father—can you say anymore about the fact that your father was staying in Europe to have gunshot removed?

MILLER: Bullets.

LEVINE: Bullets removed.

MILLER: Bullets removed from World War I.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MILLER: As I said, he was in the Austrian Army.

SIMON: Right.

MILLER: And he had these bullets in them.

SIMON: He fought—he fought against the United States with the German Army.

MILLER: Austrian Army and—

SIMON: Well, okay. And then he told that story. He told they ate—

MILLER: He was [unclear]—

SIMON: He was starving.

MILLER: And then he ate a horse.

SIMON: He said they ate rats.

MILLER: They were terrible, terrible.

SIMON: They—they had no food. It was a very, very terrible war.

LEVINE: As a Jewish person, was he—was he treated well in the army compared with everybody—I mean, worse than others?

MILLER: He was a tough kind of a man. No one would start with him.

SIMON: And of course, he was in the Austrian Army.

MILLER: In the Austrian Army.

SIMON: At that time—

MILLER: And you know something else? If you looked at him—you know what an Irish policeman looks like? That's what my father looked like.

SIMON: Yeah, he was a strong man.

MILLER: He had auburn hair, bright blue eyes and a ruddy complexion, well built.

SIMON: I don't know whether he was a carpenter in Europe.

MILLER: No, but he came to America and was a carpenter.

SIMON: He was a carpenter here.

MILLER: And cabinetmaker.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SIMON: Yeah.

MILLER: But no one would start because he would take over [chuckles], you know. So anyhow—

SIMON: Yeah.

LEVINE: So do you remember when your father arrived here?

MILLER: I would say about six months after we did, after the bullets were removed and it was healed.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MILLER: Then came the sad [unclear]. I—we don't know if he knew about the sister dying until he got here. See, we don't know that.

SIMON: Yeah, yeah.

MILLER: But he told me that when he found out she was dead he followed little girls of that age for about a year to see their faces. He just couldn't fathom it.

SIMON: Yeah, couldn't believe it. Yeah.

MILLER: It just didn't make any sense to him and her, a beautiful, well little girl.

SIMON: The first born.

MILLER: And, yeah—

SIMON: The first born has a special spot, yeah. [unclear]

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-hmm. Do you—so do you—you were too young when he came because, like, you were just about three so you don't remember—

MILLER: I—I never remember his arrival, no.

LEVINE: —seeing him when you first came. But wh—okay, so you and your mother lived with your aunts?

MILLER: And uncle.

LEVINE: And uncle.

MILLER: Yes.

SIMON: Didn't they get us an apartment?

MILLER: They had an apartment for us but the single aunt and uncle lived with us, so all of us lived together in Harlem.

LEVINE: Now, who were the aunt and uncle? How were they related?

MILLER: Sister, brother.

SIMON: Of my mother's.

LEVINE: Of your mother.

MILLER: Yes.

SIMON: But one of my mother's married brothers, Harry—

MILLER: Yeah.

SIMON: —Uncle Harry, he had a lot to do with signing the papers, because he had been in America a long time. He was married. His wife was fairly well connected financially with other things, insurance business. [unclear]

LEVINE: [unclear] did he sponsor you?

MILLER: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: Now, what were your aunt and uncle's names, the ones that you went to?

SIMON: Okay—

MILLER: Well, Ida and Harry Geffner.

SIMON: No, those are not the ones we went to. We went to Uncle Sam, so Sam Geffner.

MILLER: No, no. We went right to Uncle Harry's house.

SIMON: Really?

MILLER: Yeah.

SIMON: [unclear]

MILLER: Anyhow, what—and then later on, as you were saying, [unclear] my mother's sister and brother got an apartment for us in Harlem. They all lived in Harlem and got the apartment for us and they moved in with us because they were single.

LEVINE: Now, did you grow up in Harlem?

MILLER: I—we left when I was five years old.

SIMON: Harlem was a very nice place—

MILLER: It was [unclear].

SIMON: —at that time.

LEVINE: Can you remember it at all?

MILLER: Yes, I remember Harlem.

SIMON: Yeah. They were—they were brownstones.

MILLER: No, we lived in a tenement house.

SIMON: They weren't brown—

MILLER: No!

SIMON: Why do I have a recollection of—

MILLER: I don't know. We lived in a tenement—houses. And they were not old but they had portieres. They didn't have—no closets or anything so we had portieres. And she used to imagine it was a man with a hat on so she'd have little nightmares over it. And my father ran piping to connect, so we could have heat, because we had a potbellied stove. And my mother had one of those black stoves that you had a bla—you know, black and then put firewood and paper into—into it. And she washed red floors. The floors had, like a redwood. And she and I rocked in a chair. We rocked until we rocked on the floor into the pail practically. And I went downstairs. She let me go downstairs and I made friends with the little boy whose mother owned the candy store. And I learned to speak English really very quickly. My first recollection's a telephone booth in [unclear] Harlem in this candy store. And anybody would ask Judy something she would say, "Don't ask me. Ask my big sister. She knows." [laughs]

SIMON: [unclear] this particular subject, I have to say it again. [laughter]

MILLER: She [unclear]. And then Harlem was beautiful. There was the shopping area and everything was like in big—those bags, you know. Those—what do they call them?

LEVINE: Burlap?

MILLER: Burlap bags of peas and beans and [unclear] things.

LEVINE: Oh, [unclear]. Yeah.

MILLER: And all the fruits were laid out and all the [unclear]. And it was won—it must [several words unclear]. [unclear] whole area was shopping because I—one time I walked by and I—I confiscated a little peanuts. And my mother knocked every last one out and she said to the man, "If you see her coming, watch her. She's a little crook." [laughter]

SIMON: Terrific.

MILLER: But every peanut out of my hand because I didn't know and I'm walking by. And she [unclear]. And once she wanted to go to the movies so badly. It was "The Ten Commandments." And we took her, the two of us. Well, you can imagine how well we sat in the movies [several words unclear] "Ten Commandments." And [several words unclear] was born. [unclear] and she born in Harlem. My mother—then we moved. So we moved when she was a—she—she was—no, because we moved in—maybe she was two weeks old and we moved to the Bronx.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MILLER: And then we lived in the Bronx until we got married

LEVINE: I see.

SIMON: Yeah.

LEVINE: Where did you go in the Bronx?

MILLER: We went up to Intervale [PH] Avenue. Uh, yeah, [unclear] Intervale Avenue.

SIMON: Yeah.

MILLER: And, anyhow, we lived there a few years. And then we moved up to Tiffany Street. Then we—from Tiffany Street we went to—

SIMON: Simpson [PH] Street.

MILLER: Yeah. No, we went to Simpson Street first. Then we went to Intervale Avenue, then to Tiffany Street. [chuckles] But it was all within a three-block area.

LEVINE: How did your mother and father adapt to this country?

MILLER: They went right to school to learn to speak English, number one. [several words unclear] everything to me in English but do it in print. She said, "Because the English"—see, Polish [unclear] like English. They spoke seven languages, all the surrounding countries. They were well educated in their own thing. But you come to a new country so you—they could speak to all the neighbors who were different—spoke different languages, no problems and everything. So [several words unclear] European [unclear] to and whatever and the kids laughed. So she was a smart teacher. She said—she got up—she said—she got up [unclear] and says, "[several words unclear]." And I said, "Seven." She looked at the

children and she says, “Now, how many languages do you speak?” She says, “And you have the nerve to laugh?” Took care of that.

SIMON: Well, that was a very intelligent teacher.

MILLER: Absolutely.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SIMON: Yeah.

MILLER: So anyhow, they went to school everyday and loved it, you know.

LEVINE: Do you mean in night school?

MILLER: No, my mother went after school. [several words unclear] to night school. My mother went—as we grew up—after we—three o’clock, they had them come to school and they went.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SIMON: And that was funny. She learned to write—to read and to write. She—I remember once she went to the country and she wro—sent us a—a card. And of course, even though it wasn’t perfect English—but we were so proud that she could write to us.

MILLER: We just loved the idea of it.

SIMON: It was a wonderful thing.

LEVINE: How—how did it work out? I mean, very often when children came with their mothers and they went to school and they learned English a lot faster than the older people did—

MILLER: Yeah.

LEVINE: H—how was that with—with, you know, you probably being a little bit ahead of her?

MILLER: Well, it wasn’t her. It was my father that—that was a problem. My father learned English because he went out to the—the—to work. My father would try to teach me. And I’d go to school. The teacher would say, “Not like that.” And she would teach me. [unclear] my father would start [unclear] on that end, I wasn’t doing it right until he left me alone.

LEVINE: Was he—did he have an accent? Is that why it was different?

MILLER: Did you ever hear the Continental speak? My father spoke like the Continental.

LEVINE: Oh.

MILLER: I mean—

SIMON: They all had accents.

MILLER: [unclear] very, very handsome man. So the women would drop their packages when he would come. So he'd stop and pick them up. He would tell my mother. My mother would say, "Fool, they want you to stop and talk." But he didn't, you know. [chuckles] So, anyhow, but he was—he was a—[unclear]—they were—she was home. She went to work after World War II. She became an inspector of children's clothing and it was the first time she worked since she was in this country. She loved every minute of it.

LEVINE: Hmm.

MILLER: And my father was in defense—working in defense.

LEVINE: [unclear]. And did he find—how did he find making a living when he first got here?

MILLER: Well, he got—got a job for the government for awhile. And he worked for the government but his temper got him out [unclear].

SIMON: Yeah, he was the carpenter [unclear].

MILLER: [unclear] made us little chairs and things. And that's what happened. Somebody—he must have said something he didn't like [unclear].

LEVINE: So he worked as a carpenter for the government?

MILLER: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MILLER: For awhile.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MILLER: And then after that he—[several words unclear] he worked for and whatever. And then he [unclear]—went in with the upholstery. And he made the frames and the upholsterers did that. So that was later on.

SIMON: He had his—he had his own business at one time.

MILLER: Yes.

SIMON: He was making sofas, I think.

MILLER: It was in '37 because the unions were coming in and that really ruined him because he wasn't ready to pay that kind of money.

SIMON: I remember one day my father came home and he was in bed, and I did not really understand what had happened. Evidently, some union people beat him up. It wasn't easy to beat him up but they did. They beat him up.

MILLER: Well, there were—three or four of them could, you know.

SIMON: Yeah. And after that, I think that that was the end of his business.

MILLER: Business [unclear].

LEVINE: Hmm.

SIMON: Because he wouldn't go union.

MILLER: It was on a shoestring anyhow.

SIMON: Yeah, he wouldn't go union. So, yeah, he had a rough time.

MILLER: Yeah.

SIMON: We—we were products of the Depression.

LEVINE: I was just going to ask you, how did the Depression—

SIMON: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: —affect your family?

MILLER: Badly.

SIMON: Oh, very much. Right. At one point, why—

MILLER: Every Jewish woman had something called—all European women had something called a kniple, which [unclear], which meant that they—any money, loose money, they saved for a rainy day. Well, my mother's kniple carried us about three years during the Depression.

SIMON: Really?

LEVINE: How do you spell that?

MILLER: K-N-I-P—K-N-I-P-L-E.

LEVINE: Really?

MILLER: Uh-huh.

LEVINE: [unclear].

MILLER: Of course, I played around when I worked, told all the girls I worked with, and they were Italian and they were Irish and everything. I said, "Girls, you need a kniple," and I explained to them what it was.

SIMON: Oh, I always used to [unclear] used to tell people [several words unclear].

MILLER: [unclear] and I said, "I have one." So when the car broke and then the kid went to camp, a kniple came in very handy. It didn't pull money out of the bank because it was a separate complete thing. And it wasn't that you were saving it for yourself.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MILLER: It was [several words unclear]. And you always hoped none will come of it but it's always there. So that was the kniple—

SIMON: Yeah, I always—

MILLER: —took care of that.

SIMON: —felt that every female—

MILLER: Have you never heard that before?

LEVINE: No, I never heard of kniple.

SIMON: Oh, [unclear].

LEVINE: It's a great word.

SIMON: Yes.

MILLER: Which is really what—like, if you took—put some money in a—and knotted it, that knot would be called a kniple, a knot. But they used to put money in there.

SIMON: Yeah. In this country it's called egg money.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MILLER: It's the same kind of situation.

SIMON: Pin money.

MILLER: Pin money, another one.

LEVINE: Yes, yes. Right.

MILLER: So [several words unclear].

SIMON: Mad money?

MILLER: No, mad money's something else.

SIMON: Something else. That's to have fun with. [laughter]

MILLER: Yeah.

LEVINE: Are there any other kinds of either customs or attitudes that your mother had that you picked up and that you—that you have retained?

MILLER: Loads of them. First, I never spoke English to my mother ever. My mother and I spoke Yiddish all the time. And she—but not—do you not?

SIMON: We both do speak Yiddish.

MILLER: But she—

SIMON: And we understand it perfectly.

MILLER: But she would speak English to my mother and my mother would speak Yiddish to her. With my youngest sister, probably the same thing. My sister was afraid her accent wasn't true so she wouldn't even attempt speaking it, the youngest one. But she really has a true accent. So

anyhow—so she and I [several words unclear] the foods. A lot of the foods have remained the same, generations and generations of them.

LEVINE: Do you make some things—

MILLER: Sure.

LEVINE: —like you made that—

MILLER: Oh, sure.

LEVINE: Like what? What?

MILLER: I make soup the way my mother did with the dill and the whole bit, all the soup greens the same way she did. But we make matzah [unclear]. I make it just like my mother did and, of course—

SIMON: Dry.

MILLER: I'll smack you one. [laughter]

SIMON: No. Actually, my mother wasn't the greatest cook because my mother would cook in the morning for the—for the evening.

LEVINE: The day, uh-huh.

SIMON: Okay. But she was a great baker. It was my mother-in-law that was the better cook.

MILLER: Right, and until my mother had surgery—kidney removed, the dietitian came from—down and spoke to her. And from then on out—

SIMON: Yeah, we ate differently.

MILLER: —we ate completely differently.

SIMON: Yeah.

MILLER: We ate pink liver and it was made so you could eat. And the steak was pink and the rest. And we ate all the vegetables and everything. So it was a radical step.

SIMON: We started—learned. We learned.

MILLER: American—

SIMON: Yes.

MILLER: American style, yeah.

SIMON: She learned to make other things, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MILLER: So—so we maintained a lot of those things, the things we grew up on.

LEVINE: Do you have a trick to your matzah bri [PH]?

MILLER: I like it. Well, she likes it another way.

SIMON: Well, I married—we were Glitzianas [PH]. I don't know whether you know the difference but my husband was a Litvak [PH]. So we always said we had a mixed marriage [laughter] because he was a Litvak and I was a Glitziana. Now, I learned to cook from my mother-in-law so I would make things that he li—that my husband liked. But I learned to make stuffed cabbage from a Hungarian Jewish lady.

MILLER: Tastes like Mama's. Just like Mama's, it tastes to me.

SIMON: Absolutely delicious Hungarian—

MILLER: Yes.

SIMON: —[unclear].

MILLER: Papa sent Mama when—during World War I.

SIMON: Really?

MILLER: Sure.

SIMON: Oh, okay.

MILLER: He sent her there and Austria was—Papa sent her to Hungary.

SIMON: I learned—I learned to make Italian food. You would think that I was Italian [unclear] because my son loves Italian food. And I cook Italian food for him. And I learned to make Italian food from a Jewish lady that was married to an Italian. And I worked with her and she taught me to make [unclear]—

MILLER: And I learned from my neighbor's mother because she was a good Italian cook too. So we learned it but it [unclear] from home.

SIMON: [sentence unclear]. That's true. [chuckles]

MILLER: No, and I went to her house and I thought it was a golf ball. I really did. It was a knadle [PH]. [chuckles]

SIMON: Well, that's how my mother-in-law made it. [chuckles]

MILLER: So I said to her, "What do you do with a golf ball?"

SIMON: My children were—

MILLER: She thought that I was k—kidding but I wasn't. I make a fluffy knadle. [laughs]

SIMON: My children were brought up—

MILLER: On golf balls. [laughs]

SIMON: —on hard knadles because that's the way my mother-in-law made them and that's the way I made them.

MILLER: [laughs]

SIMON: But I learned to make fish, certain cooked fish the way they used to make it.

MILLER: I don't like it. I never made it. [chuckles]

SIMON: Sweet and sour, yeah. Well—

MILLER: So anyhow, so we ate—but we ate—but we never ate, like, the appetizer. I never ate lox till I was married.

SIMON: Yeah, we didn't.

MILLER: We never ate that.

SIMON: We didn't eat—

MILLER: Austria—where we came from didn't eat that.

SIMON: Right.

MILLER: So, I mean, she made—she learned to pickle herring. And then we would, like, whitefish or butterfish but we never ate the other stuff. I never did acquire a taste for it. [chuckles]

SIMON: Yeah, I learned that [unclear] from my—from my in-laws, from that side of the family.

MILLER: The Litvaks. [chuckles]

SIMON: Right. [chuckles] [unclear].

MILLER: And so that's about—I mean, but what other things—whatever they told us. But I was the recipient of the stories. I was brought up on—in “Once upon a time” in Yiddish.

SIMON: Oh.

MILLER: See, I know stories like that. And God forbid she made a mistake. I woke up to correct her. By the time she got to her and the other one—so our other younger sister said, “Is that our same mother she's talking about?” [chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SIMON: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. How about religion? Did you—did you [unclear] any religious observances particularly?

MILLER: Her—my mother took kosher. We un-koshed her because we weren't so careful. And—

SIMON: Well, I remember there were some holidays.

MILLER: [unclear]

SIMON: The high holy days.

MILLER: [sentence unclear].

SIMON: I never felt that we were [unclear] religious. But for the high holy days, I remember, my mother would take toilet tissue. She would tear them—

MILLER: [unclear].

SIMON: —so that we wouldn't tear any paper. And she would put them into the bathtub. [laughs] You weren't supposed to tear paper. You weren't supposed to write on the—

MILLER: Yes.

SIMON: —Sab—on the Sabbath. Okay.

MILLER: She'd light her candles.

SIMON: Yeah, my mother lit—

MILLER: You know, she lit Friday night candles.

SIMON: —candles Friday night.

MILLER: And—

SIMON: Which we have never done.

MILLER: No. And also that we—well, I still hold the high holidays because when I went to her for Passover couldn't [unclear]—

SIMON: Well those weren't the high holidays.

MILLER: No, that's still the hol—it's a big holiday, Passover. Not to eat those things and Pass—and Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, which—

SIMON: Yeah, we observe—

MILLER: —we observe.

SIMON: —the holidays.

MILLER: [unclear]

LEVINE: We're going to pause here. We need to turn the tape over and then we'll continue. Okay?

MILLER: Oh, really?

LEVINE: Yeah.

MILLER: Oh, okay.

LEVINE: So—

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

LEVINE: Okay. We're resuming now. And, Nettie, you were saying about the fact that you were a little older.

MILLER: Just that 19 and a half months is all the difference in our ages. But by virtue of that, I—I learned more stories than my sister, you know—than she told my sisters who were younger. Maybe she had more time for it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MILLER: And also, being born in the same bed with her, she said we were old friends. [chuckles] So I, as a baby in Europe, I had pneumonia and pleurisy. My gentle mother, who's the gentlest creature in the world, had the doctor there with a shotgun [chuckles] and didn't let him go until the crisis was over before she let him go. And she said to me, "Because you looked like me, I didn't want you to die." [chuckles]

LEVINE: Oh.

MILLER: That was the reason she gave me. I couldn't get over my mother! She—she wouldn't say boo to a butterfly. So anyhow, so that was, you know

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MILLER: —one of the things that—

LEVINE: Right.

MILLER: She used to tell us how she stole from the fire of the neighbor to start a fire when she was pregnant with me. And then when I [unclear] away she said, "Probably from that." [laughter]

LEVINE: Oh, it was—it was inherited? [chuckles]

MILLER: [laughs] That's why [unclear] taking [unclear]. And we had—and as I said, she told me the nursery [unclear]—bedtime story in Yiddish. It was not in English.

LEVINE: Can you remember it?

MILLER: Sure.

LEVINE: Go ahead. Say it.

MILLER: [speaking in Yiddish]. Should I translate?

LEVINE: No, say it in Yiddish and then—

MILLER: [speaking in Yiddish]. Now the translation. There was—once upon a time there was a grandmother, an old grandmother with a lot of grandchildren. So she fed them. She bathed them, put them to bed. She went out into the woods to pick little twigs. And while—she says she comes back. She doesn't see one grandchild but a big bear. So she says, "Bear, bear. Come over here. I'll give you rice with milk." And the bear says, "I don't want any." "Bear, bear. Come over here. I'll tell you a story." "I don't want any." And she says, "Bear, bear. Come over here. I'll give you a bath and I'll delouse you." He says, "I want that. I want that." And she gives him a bath and she delouses him and he falls asleep. She goes in the kitchen, gets out a big knife and cuts open his belly. She takes all the grandchildren and she [unclear] and she puts them back to bed. [laughter]

LEVINE: Now, this is the story that your mother—

MILLER: Every night. Every night. [chuckles] I wouldn't go to sleep otherwise.

SIMON: I have absolutely no recollection of ever, ever—

MILLER: That was my nightly bedtime story. And whoever I've told it was hysterical. They never heard a Jewish bedtime story.

LEVINE: That's wonderful. Now, do you remember games? Do you remember playing when you were a little girl here growing up?

MILLER: Oh, we played American games.

SIMON: This is funny because my grandson asked me that question [laughs] one day. He said he had some sort of a project for school and he had to ask certain questions. So he started to ask me. So I said, "Oh, when I was a little girl I used to play jacks—jacks and ball." I said, "I used to play jump rope, double"—

MILLER: Hop—

SIMON: —"double Dutch."

MILLER: Hopscotch.

SIMON: We used to play hopscotch. We used to play all sorts of games. Then he asked me, "What was a very important thing that happened during your lifetime?" I said, "Well, I guess the Great Depression. That was it." I—well, I remember when Hoover was running for president. That was Hoover against—

MILLER: Smiths.

SIMON: Smith. And we used to go around—I mean, I was just a little kid and we used to say, "Hoover, Hoover, ha, ha, ha. Kick him in the ass, you can't rah, rah, rah."

MILLER: "Rah, rah, rah." [laughter] We—I would say to you younger [laughter]—

SIMON: Right. So, okay.

MILLER: Papa was a Democrat. [chuckles]

SIMON: Anyway, then I told my grandson about the Great Depression and how it affected us. We used to go to the bakery and we would buy yesterday's—yesterday's cakes.

MILLER: Even—it didn't matter. It was—if you bought a bread you got a container of milk free.

SIMON: Really? I didn't remember that.

MILLER: So that I went out for bread. You went out three rolls. Rosie went out for three cupcakes, whatever. We each got a container of milk.

LEVINE: Did you each get a container—

MILLER: We each got a container of milk.

SIMON: Oh.

MILLER: And the thing was five cents and eight cents. I mean, the whole thing, but nevertheless.

SIMON: Well, I tell the stories about why we moved so many times when we were in the Bronx, because if you couldn't pay your rent, you stayed an extra couple of months. Then you moved out. When you moved to a new place they gave you concession.

MILLER: Concession.

SIMON: A couple of months concession so during the year you would pay rent for about eight months.

MILLER: Not even. So the landlords got smart and they made you bring a rent receipt of the last month.

SIMON: [laughs] Well, they were desperate. Obviously, there was more housing than there were people.

MILLER: Then they locked themselves up into the bathroom and I would go to the door and say, "My mother and father are not home." [chuckles] But you know, I'll tell you a story. When I was five years old or so, the Census Bureau came around. And I am the speaker.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MILLER: My father wasn't home, my mother. And I tell my mother what they say. She tells me what to say.

SIMON: She was the interpreter.

MILLER: And I'm interpreting. It was a [unclear]. Did you ever hear of inaccuracies? She didn't count. She was too young. I didn't mention her too much. [chuckles] Rosie, though—I didn't mention Rosie. [several words unclear] you were always there. And I told some things; I didn't tell other things. So our census is really inaccurate.

SIMON: It's ridiculous.

MILLER: [unclear] the interpreter. [chuckles]

SIMON: They had a child.

MILLER: Four years, maybe, I was. And I was telling them the—that was—so you must have had me multiplied by the many. You have these little Puerto Rican kids or these [unclear] today.

LEVINE: So the census that were taken at that time with immigrants—

MILLER: [several words unclear] 24 or something, yeah.

LEVINE: —and we're probably getting a lot of that kind of thing.

MILLER: A lot of misinformation. [chuckles]

SIMON: Yeah. Right, right.

MILLER: Whatever—if I didn't like something, I didn't tell it. If she said something I didn't want to tell my mother, I didn't know how, I didn't say it. [laughter]

LEVINE: How about the tenement you—that you remember? Was—was the tenement, you said in Harlem, but also in the Bronx?

MILLER: Yeah, we always lived in a tenement.

LEVINE: Do you remember—did it have, like, the bathroom in the hall?

MILLER: No, we never had that. We had a—a bathroom. We had—we didn't have a sink in the bathroom. So you went—there's a toilet and there was a bathtub. And you opened the door here and, if the bathroom door was open, you saw—because my aunt screamed like a [unclear] when I let a young man in and she's in the tub. Then you had to come out and wash your hands in the sink in the—in the kitchen. We never h—lived in a place with a whole—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MILLER: That was, like, in the Lower East Side they had that.

SIMON: Oh, where the bathroom—

MILLER: But we didn't. Yeah.

SIMON: —was out of the apartment.

MILLER: So we didn't have that and—and then when we moved to the Bronx, the first thing I yelled out, "There's a sink in the bathroom!" [laughs]

SIMON: Oh. [chuckles]

MILLER: Which was a big deal, you know. So anyhow, as I said, we didn't have a steam heater or anything so my father connected this pipe. And it was dangerous, really, because if that thing exploded. And they used to have—they didn't have money, so what was—they did at night. The sat around the potbellied stove in the dining room. And they peeled apple. Whoever didn't break the skin, who could go the whole apple, won. [laughs]

SIMON: Oh, my uncle, he used to do that.

MILLER: They used to sit there, my uncle, my aunt. They used to sit there. Everybody's peeling apples and Mother made applesauce. [chuckles]

SIMON: That was a form of amusement. [chuckles]

MILLER: And she used to bake—bake honey cake on Thursday. Nobody ate bread till after it was over. She baked bread. She baked everything. And she said—well, she made noodles and stuff. A kid was at the skirt, another one hanging on to her, anyway. And she's—one arm and she's making noodles. My father's sitting there reading the paper like the European men did. So [chuckles] life was not that easy. Washing clothes over the wash board, you know.

SIMON: I remember doing that myself—

MILLER: I once—I did it one time.

SIMON: —early—early on. [chuckles]

MILLER: When my mother was about—I was about 10 years my mother got sick and I came home. And I [unclear] oh, so who do you think—so I went and I did it. And my arms and my hands were swollen. My mother took one look and started to cry.

SIMON: [unclear].

MILLER: [unclear] had swollen arms and hands from washing clothes.

SIMON: Yeah.

MILLER: What was I supposed to do?

SIMON: I think I—who was the shopper?

MILLER: You.

SIMON: Was I the shopper? Can you imagine little kids? As a matter of fact, we used to dry—we used to ride on the subway with—we would go to visit my aunt. We were—

MILLER: I would take—

SIMON: We were young children.

MILLER: I was allowed to take them to Queens, to Brooklyn as the oldest—to the movies [unclear]—

LEVINE: How old?

MILLER: I—from the time I was four, five years old I was taking them all over.

SIMON: No. No, you weren't.

MILLER: No, not to the movies.

SIMON: Yeah.

MILLER: I took you to—to the—she—I—you know, in Jewish there's a holiday, Purim—Purim?

SIMON: Purim.

MILLER: And I used to take and ring the neighbors' bells and I would tell her to—Jewish—to dance.

SIMON: She was my agent. [chuckles]

MILLER: So with little fat feet, she'd dance and I would collect money they could give. And then I would take her for blocks and blocks to go to an ice cream factory where got the three-cents ice cream. [laughter] So any—yeah.

SIMON: I thought I was doing the Charleston.

MILLER: But she kicked her little fat feet around. [laughter] And when my other sister was born I rang all the bells and I said, "For a quarter I'll tell what my mother has." [laughter] [unclear]

LEVINE: So you were an entrepreneur. [laughter]

MILLER: I didn't realize I was. [laughter] So anyhow, so we used to do that. And—and, like my mother would say to me, "Watch the carriage." At five years old [chuckles] I was standing downstairs watching the carriage. They could have taken me and the carriage. She had to keep an eye on her because she was too young for me to watch also. But I could take them and go places with them because, as the oldest, you had responsibilities as well as privileges. It didn't matter that it was such a short difference but I—we could do that. So, I mean, life was different. European people, they're different.

SIMON: We used to go—we used to go to the movies on a Saturday and we used to see the Golden Chapters. Actually, what they were, they were cliffhangers. [laughs] You would—you would watch this—I don't know

how long the movie was and then it would end. It's was—it always ended—

MILLER: Shorts, Charlie Chaplin, whatever. It was—

SIMON: No, those weren't Charlie Chaplin.

MILLER: We was at the westerns. She was at the—it wasn't Pearl—what's her name?

LEVINE: Pauline—

MILLER: Pearl—Pauline.

LEVINE: "The Perils of Pauline."

MILLER: It was that type. She was tied up at the railroad, you know. And—

SIMON: Well, when they said cliffhangers it was because they were always [unclear]. And they would be hanging on by their fingernails. And it would end. We'd wait until the following week. But sometimes she would take me to a movie that was scary. For me, it was scary.

MILLER: I was scared too.

SIMON: I would get under the seat and I would stay under the seat until the movie was over.

MILLER: Well, and my other sister would put her head in my lap and she wouldn't watch it. [chuckles]

SIMON: And I never outgrew it. [chuckles]

MILLER: So that the old—but I could take them. She couldn't have gone herself but I could take her. That was the difference because I was allowed to. So at the same time, when Mama wasn't home I had to make the meals. I used to go downstairs and buy—bring up the food at breakfast and I would get them breakfast [unclear] to school. Oldest had that. So then if you had the privileges—and we all understood that that's how it was. There was never any animosity or anything like that.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SIMON: You also beat me up.

MILLER: I did once only.

SIMON: You see, she just—[laughter] habit forming.

LEVINE: So—so let's see. Wh—when you finished school—

SIMON: Yeah.

LEVINE: —did you go to work? Each of you?

SIMON: I got married.

MILLER: We all got married.

LEVINE: You got m—

SIMON: I got married right out of school.

LEVINE: School.

SIMON: Yeah.

LEVINE: And how did you meet your husband?

SIMON: Oh, he lived—oh, he lived in the same building as my girlfriend, about five—five or six blocks away. That's how I met him. And his parents also had come over. They came from Lithuania. I think that my father-in-law came over when he was—he came, I think, about 1910 and my mother-in-law probably about the same time. And each one of them had come over individually by themselves. I mean, they were such [unclear] people. They were so brave to come over from Europe all by themselves and leave all their family behind. Well, I know my mother-in-law had a sister here so she came to her sister. But my father-in-law, I don't know whether he had anybody at all here. And they met. Someone introduced them. They were married. My mother-in-law was tall; my father-in-law was short. [laughs] I—I guess it didn't matter at the time but it was—I remember when I used to see them. This was—you know, my girlfriend lived in that building. And I'd say, "What a strange looking couple." Then they ended up to be my in-laws. [chuckles]

LEVINE: And what was your husband's name?

SIMON: Danny—Daniel.

LEVINE: Daniel.

SIMON: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: And how about you, Nettie? Did you—

MILLER: Well, I got married also, like she says. And then—but I went back to school and I be—and I went to nursing school and I became an RN after I was about—in my early 30s.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SIMON: You were 50 when you became an RN.

MILLER: No. When I first went back to school I was 35. Please, Judy. Don't say that.

SIMON: But you didn't become an RN.

MILLER: I didn't say that. If you'd—

SIMON: Oh.

MILLER: —just let me do my talking instead of jumping down my throat.

SIMON: Oh.

MILLER: I was 49, anyhow. I went to—went back to school first and then I went to LPN school. And I didn't like the status. I was over trained. Why did I go to school? My husband had a heart attack at 37. I knew I'd have to work. Then after that, when they opened up—they got a little bit more liberal, I had children and everything—I went back to school again. And I went to RN school and graduated from Roosevelt School of Nursing. And I was 49, for your information.

SIMON: I've been telling everybody that you—

MILLER: You lie a lot.

SIMON: —my sister became an RN at 50.

MILLER: Forty-nine.

SIMON: I was very proud. [unclear] 50.

MILLER: '69 for me. It was '69. So anyhow, and I—that's what I did. But that was what the impetus was. You know, necessity is the mother of invention and all of that. And that was the impetus for it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MILLER: So as I said, in those days, you got married.

LEVINE: Right, yeah.

MILLER: You didn't live around. [chuckles] You got married.

SIMON: Right. You wanted to get out of the house, you got married. [chuckles]

MILLER: Married.

SIMON: That's the way it was.

MILLER: So anyhow, my husband's name was Leo.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MILLER: So anyway, they—we had American husbands; they were born here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. H—how do you feel when you look back now on the fact that, you know, you immigrated, even though you can't remember the time before that—but the fact that you came here as immigrants, made your life here, your mother and father [unclear]—

MILLER: It's like an era because I can remember when—even when we had—you had to put money in to get the—

SIMON: Gas.

MILLER: —incandescent lighting. Yeah, I thought it was my bank until the man came and took my money. So—and I told my mother I liked the things—I mean, it was a hard time for them. See, we, as children—and I think we lived through a most wonderful thing from that era to see the man on the moon. So we've really covered a good, good deal of [unclear].

SIMON: I remember—I remember the iceman coming with ice. You know, those things that they use—

LEVINE: Prongs, like?

MILLER: Prongs, yes.

SIMON: —to pick up the ice. And he would carry it on his back and carry it up to the apartments. And then, well, we finally—we got a refrigerator. When my husband went into the service and he was stationed in Oregon, and I

went out to Oregon and I went back to an icebox [chuckles] and they brought in ice. I went right back again. I had an oil stove right in the middle of my little living room. I used to have to go downstairs and fill it up with oil. And I would bring the oil up, put it into the stove. That was my little potbelly stove right in the center of the room. So—

MILLER: You know, [unclear] we used to move around. You know, she told you we moved around. I went to school. My younger sister went to school. She stayed home and helped with the—with the moving, for some reason.

SIMON: Yeah, I would wash the floors. I would help to clean up.

MILLER: We all did. The cleaning up, we all did. We did—[unclear] boyfriend was coming.

SIMON: I don't mean that.

MILLER: So, anyhow, [chuckles] but the—we—we—we—you cleaned. You helped cleaning and all that. So anyhow, I would come home and until I opened the refrigerator [several words unclear] things that I—then I knew we lived there. But she stayed home to help with all the things that we—I don't know why it was your job.

SIMON: I don't know.

MILLER: Nobody ever said anything.

SIMON: I always remember washing the bathroom floors—

MILLER: Well, so did we.

SIMON: —when we moved—when we moved into a new apart—

MILLER: Oh.

SIMON: But making sure that all the old things [several words unclear].

MILLER: [sentence unclear]. After that, you would be cleaning and doing whatever.

SIMON: We had a beautiful dining room set, a real old, magnificent dining room set. I don't know where—

MILLER: I know.

SIMON: —our parents bought it.

MILLER: I could tell you all the furniture.

SIMON: Yeah, yeah.

MILLER: There was a couple, a young couple, well—pretty well off and she died. And he didn't want anything. So Mama and Papa—

SIMON: You can speak a little louder.

MILLER: So Mama and Papa bought all the furniture and that's where we got all the nice things from.

SIMON: Okay. And I remember we used to—you said, where did we play? We used to play under the dining room table. That was our tent or our house. We would put something around it and that. We didn't have any television.

MILLER: Your sister played. I didn't do that. I read books.

SIMON: There was no television. That was where we played, under something like that.

MILLER: I used to read while they—

SIMON: We invented.

MILLER: —played under there. But [several words unclear]. I don't know. You and Rosie played already. But I didn't do that with you.

SIMON: You don't remember playing?

MILLER: No.

LEVINE: What do you feel particularly satisfied about that you've done in your life?

SIMON: I—I really—I can't tell you at this point but in my later life, since retirement, I've become very active in organizations. As a matter of fact, I call myself a professional volunteer.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SIMON: And that's what I have been doing.

MILLER: Not only that, she volunteers me whenever I'm around.

SIMON: [chuckles] Right.

LEVINE: Where do you volunteer for?

SIMON: Well, I am a past president of—have you ever heard of ORT—Women's American ORT? It's an organization for rehabilitation through training.

LEVINE: No.

SIMON: And I've become very active in that organization.

MILLER: I've heard of New York ORT.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SIMON: I've been their program chairperson for the past 10 years and I'm a fund raiser for them. And [unclear] the past president. I also—I volunteer at a theater as a ticket taker or an usher. I volunteer—well, I take—

MILLER: At the Fringe?

SIMON: Oh, yes. We have a very—it's—what—what do we call the Fringe?

MILLER: It's a cultural—a cul—

SIMON: Yeah, a multicultural experience.

MILLER: Cultural event—

SIMON: Right, an event that we have in Orlando. It's something that is done in several places in this country. I think it's—

MILLER: Seattle and Chicago, I think.

SIMON: I think it started in England or Canada. And anyway, I became very active with this Fringe.

MILLER: Volunteers me too. [chuckles]

SIMON: Right. And last year I was on their poster. I was part of—yeah. And as a matter of fact, for perpetuity, on the button—my picture is on the button.

MILLER: And I offered people her autograph—her autograph if she would—they would give something.

LEVINE: [laughs]

SIMON: Well, we had posters.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SIMON: I was on the poster with some other people. And we were—my sister came over to visit me.

MILLER: I was volunteered immediately.

SIMON: Yeah, I made her a volunteer. And she offered to sell the—when we were trying to sell the posters, she offered to have me—

MILLER: Autograph.

SIMON: —autograph them.

MILLER: Listen, a manager's a manager.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MILLER: So—

SIMON: Oh, yes. She's still trying to [unclear].

MILLER: So, how women were saying, "Oh, what do you do when you get home?" I have my place what I do because I'm a Brandeis volunteer and I work with Brandeis in the libraries and stuff. So I have my own thing. I used to vol—I used to do volunteer blood pressure readings and, you know—and medical—what—whatever they needed, a questionnaire and whatever [unclear]. So anyhow, we have our own kind of a lifestyle.

SIMON: Right, yeah.

MILLER: So I said, "Ladies, with this, I'm busy at home. I came here. [unclear] with her but [unclear] my own thing."

SIMON: I've been taking—

MILLER: [unclear] things.

SIMON: Theater—I've been tak—having groups go to a theater, a dinner theater—dinner [unclear].

MILLER: And I didn't know what she did all—I called up my other sister. I said, "We've got some strudel that she's involved in." [chuckles]

SIMON: I've been very much involved.

MILLER: So we didn't know until she men—mentioned to me. So I had to call my other sister to tell her.

LEVINE: So is there anything else about coming to this country that you can think of that—

MILLER: Oh, yeah. You think we'd a gotten where we were if we hadn't of come to this country? Who knows what we would have done if we were there.

SIMON: Well—

MILLER: Although my aunt, my father's sister, was a dentist. My father's mother was a widow and she remarried. And she married a physician. So she had a child with him. That dau—the daughter, who became a—

SIMON: The dentist.

MILLER: The dentist. And she married an architect and, anyhow, so that it was a different kind. But she died in—in childbirth with that—with a daughter. So anyhow—so my father's upbringing was a little queer too because he didn't have any—really, somebody to take care of him, whatever. He was a wild young man and until he went into the army. And his grandparents, I think, were—apprenticed him out to a carpenter to get him, you know. So he used to take himself on a trip himself from—leave—run away from home to his brother in the army. And then his brother in the army didn't know what to do with him till he sent him back. So he would sweep floors and do things, grab a broom and—and, like, to eat till he got there. And then they shipped him back again. And this would go with—he told me his missed his mother all his life. He didn't feel good—Ma. I bet she loved her because she looked like his mother.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MILLER: You know, so I mean, we did a lot of rough things. They didn't have such a bed of roses there.

LEVINE: How did your mother and father feel about being here? Did they—did they want to come and stay?

MILLER: Oh, did they ever! Oh!

SIMON: Absolutely.

MILLER: It was the Golden Land.

SIMON: They loved this country.

MILLER: Oh, yes. Because they didn't have pogroms here right away. That was number one on the hit parade, no pogroms and, I mean, people lived—they were very formal. You didn't—you didn't call your next door neighbor by her first name. No kids did. They were Miss—Mr. and Mrs., always, to friends. And they had a nice—very nice kind of a lifestyle. I mean, and friends. My mother was very friendly, my father also [unclear] with her but not on his own. So [unclear] they played cards. They talked. It was not [several words unclear] money on [unclear].

LEVINE: Did they tend to have a social life with other people that were coming from Austria, Poland and—

MILLER: The neighbors, was mainly the neighbors and all—all the people. You came over on a boat with—

SIMON: Yeah, those were the lansmen [PH].

MILLER: They were the dearest to your heart.

SIMON: Yeah.

MILLER: They didn't have parents. And those—so those people want—[unclear]—with me, the lansmen, you know—and those people were dear to your heart till the day they died.

LEVINE: Do you remember your parents remaining friendly with people that they came over with?

MILLER: I knew some of my aunts and uncles being friends.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MILLER: Yes, we did know and they—their friends were their friends. You know, all those people were. But yes, I thought they were family when I was young. But they weren't. They were people who came over on the boat together. It's like the guys in the army, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MILLER: So those are the people and they were friends for always. [unclear] and Sam's—all their friends were. Yes, because they didn't have—none of them had parents. So they were very—

SIMON: Yeah.

MILLER: —dear with these other people.

SIMON: We never knew our grandparents.

MILLER: No, we never had any. They were dead before we were born. So anyhow. But yes, we wouldn't be where we are, doing things we are or whatever it is. Our life would never have been this way if we hadn't come to this country. I doubt it for a hu—really.

SIMON: If we hadn't come to this country we would have been in the Holocaust.

MILLER: Yeah.

SIMON: We lost.

MILLER: We [unclear].

SIMON: We lost—

MILLER: The two sisters that remained there and their children—

SIMON: Yeah.

MILLER: They—

SIMON: One of—one of the sisters—her husband was brought over to this county. And he was going [several words unclear]. And before he could he got word that they were killed.

MILLER: I came home from school. I was 17 in '37. I hear screaming. I walk upstairs. I hear it in my house. I can recognize the voices. The letter came back marked "Tot" which means dead. His wife, his children, dead. And [unclear] said appendix. Their appendix was taken out many years ago. And that was in '37 before anybody knew about it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MILLER: So we don't have any pleasant memories. I wouldn't go to Austria. I wouldn't go at the Germany. I wouldn't go to any of those countries. [unclear] from an incinerator.

SIMON: Yeah, uh-hmm.

MILLER: Have very hard feelings; I must tell you.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

SIMON: By the way, when we were downstairs and we were reading some of the writings, the quotations from people, and we saw this Jewish—Polish, Jewish immigrant and she said that she came with a betgevant [PH].

MILLER: Yeah, her bedding.

SIMON: What did she say?

MILLER: Her bedding.

SIMON: Yeah, she said she came with the bedding and she said a quilt that was made out of feathers.

MILLER: Down, not chicken feathers.

SIMON: Right, right.

LEVINE: Goose, uh-hmm.

SIMON: Right. Right, because we said, “Oh, a betgevant.” [laughter] We had recollections—

MILLER: Sure.

SIMON: Because we had—

MILLER: We had some [unclear]. My mother brought them to this country, pillows and the feather beds.

SIMON: Yeah.

MILLER: And we used them.

SIMON: Yeah.

MILLER: I loved my featherbed. [chuckles]

LEVINE: So is there anything else you can remember that your mother brought with you [unclear]?

MILLER: Oh, I really know the feather beds and the pillows because they were down.

SIMON: You said she came with pots and—

MILLER: Pots and pans. I don't remember which pots and which pans, though.

SIMON: Oh.

MILLER: Your mother-in-law—

SIMON: But that's—that's what she brought. [chuckles]

MILLER: Yeah. [laughter]

SIMON: My mother—

MILLER: She had little pots of all sizes and shapes. I never saw anything like it in my life.

SIMON: But I don't know whether she brought them from there.

MILLER: Who knows? They don't look American—

SIMON: Yeah.

MILLER: —to me. So anyhow, but that's what the betgevant—bedding, that was the thing. So we used to wrap each other up in these feather beds and [unclear] off the bed. [laughter]

SIMON: [laughs] What a way to play.

MILLER: You want to know how we played? [laughs]

SIMON: Right, right. Television. [laughter]

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SIMON: That—that was what we did for amusement.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, we just have a couple minutes left. Maybe if each of you could say if you have children.

SIMON: Yes.

MILLER: Oh, sure. We both have children.

SIMON: Yes, I have—

MILLER: [unclear]

SIMON: This is Judy. I have two children. I have a daughter, Darrel—Darrel Pallins [PH], who is married to Peter—Peter Pallins. And I have a son, Jay—Jay Simon, who, unfortunately, is divorced. And he has two children. He has Scott—is the older one, who is 16 and Brady, who is 14. And that's my family.

LEVINE: Hmm, and you?

MILLER: I have two daughters, Carol Linda, who's married to Herb Rosenblatt [PH]. They have no children, five cats and two dogs. And I have a daughter, Wendy Erna, named for my mother—Martin, married to Joe Martin. They have no children either.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MILLER: And they live on a farm up in the West Virginia—

SIMON: But we—but we have a sister, Rose. Rose Wiesenthal [PH].

MILLER: Laura Rose. Laura Rose, her name is. Birth certificate.

SIMON: And she lives in Manhasset here in New York.

MILLER: Manhasset.

SIMON: And she has a daughter, Andrea.

MILLER: Andrea.

SIMON: And—

MILLER: And a son, Lenny.

SIMON: Right, and a son, Lenny. And—

MILLER: Leonard.

SIMON: Yeah, and each one—

MILLER: And they each have two children.

SIMON: They each have two children.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MILLER: And we have these gorgeous greats.

LEVINE: Greats?

MILLER: Great grandchild—great nieces and nephews from—

SIMON: Them.

MILLER: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

MILLER: And, like, her grandchildren are my greats.

SIMON: [unclear].

MILLER: And my other sister's and they are very loving, wonderful children.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SIMON: So Rose is—Rose is married to Ben.

MILLER: Wiesenthal.

SIMON: Ben Wiesenthal.

LEVINE: Well, just before we close, maybe you could say what it's like for you to come back here to Ellis Island today.

SIMON: Oh, it was—

MILLER: Déjà vu.

SIMON: Yeah. Well, but—

MILLER: When I heard that story, that was our family history I was listening to.

SIMON: Yeah, it was.

LEVINE: This was the play.

MILLER: It was the family history. I couldn't believe it. She could—we looked at each other. We couldn't—

SIMON: Yeah.

MILLER: —believe it.

SIMON: I found it—the film, I found very heart-wrenching.

MILLER: Oh, it was—

SIMON: Yeah.

MILLER: —terrible.

SIMON: Yeah. It was—I could just picture all of—

MILLER: I remember the stories that [unclear].

SIMON: What happened, yeah.

MILLER: You know?

SIMON: Yeah.

MILLER: Like my—my husband's uncle was—a nine-year-old kid was sent back. But his mother—the—the sisters and the mother stayed. And the father was already here. And they sent this nine-year-old kid home to nobody, back to—again. And his mother—my husband's mother was a beauty, the long blond hair and everything. So they were afraid even to look to see if she had lice. He said to her, "Go." She was a beautiful girl. He didn't even want—want to say anything, just told her to go.

SIMON: Yeah.

MILLER: That's a man for you.

SIMON: Hmm, yeah. A man. [laughter] [unclear].

LEVINE: Well, I want to say that it's really been delightful. I'm so happy that we made this connection and—

MILLER: [unclear].

LEVINE: —I was able to—to get your story on tape.

SIMON: Oh, thank you.

LEVINE: And now it will be here at Ellis Island.

SIMON: Oh, [unclear].

LEVINE: And I want to thank you.

SIMON: Yeah.

LEVINE: I've been speaking with Nettie Miller and Judy Simon, who came in 1923 on the S.S. Rotterdam—we forgot to say that—when Judy was 13 months, Nettie was Judy was two years and eight months. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm signing off.

MILLER: Oh, thank you.

SIMON: Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]