**EI-775**
**EMILE WEICHAND**
**BIRTHDATE: JANUARY 22, 1911**
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**AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 85**
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**INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE**
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**TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE**
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**HUNGARY, 1914**
**AGE: 3**

**SHIP: THE GEORGE WASHINGTON**
**PORT:**
**RESIDENCES:**

LEVINE: Today is July 29th, 1996. I'm here in Maywood, New Jersey at the home of Emile Weichand, who came from Hungary when he was three years old in 1914. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service.

Would you start the tape, Mr. Weichand by saying your birth date?

WEICHAND: My birthday is January 22nd, 1911.

LEVINE: Okay, and where in Hungary were you born?

EM: Temesuar. [PH]

LEVINE: And that's T-E-M-E-S-U-A-R.

EM: That's correct. Today it's called Temesora.[PH] It's in Romania. That portion of Hungary became Romania after World War I.

LEVINE: Okay, great. Now, I know you were three and a half, so that's very young to have any memories. Do you have any memories of Hungary, of life in Hungary, anything?

WEICHAND: Hungary itself, no, very little. Nothing at all, really, except what my mother told and, of course, sometimes you mix that up as memory.

LEVINE: Of course, yeah. Yeah. Are there any things that your mother told you that you particularly remember regarding Hungary and life there?

WEICHAND: Well, not too much. I know we had some chickens in the backyard and stuff like that. Other than that, I remember very little.

LEVINE: What about your mother, what was her name?

WEICHAND: My mother's name was Marie.

LEVINE: Marie, and do you remember her maiden name?

WEICHAND: Gumber.

LEVINE: How do you spell it?

WEICHAND: G-U-M-B-E-R.

LEVINE: Gumber, and your father's name?

WEICHAND: My father's name was Michael.

LEVINE: Okay, and did your father come to America at the same time you did, or did he come earlier?

WEICHAND: We all came together.

LEVINE: So who was the family? What was the make up of your family at that time?

WEICHAND: Well, my mother and father and my sister, Ethel and myself.

LEVINE: And Ethel, was she older?

WEICHAND: She's younger.

LEVINE: Younger, yeah.

WEICHAND: She's a year and a half younger.

LEVINE: Oh, she was really a baby when you came.

WEICHAND: Right.

LEVINE: Why was it that the family decided to come to this country at that time?

WEICHAND: Well, my father, of course, realized there were great opportunities in the United States and all of our family had preceded us over here. We were the last ones of the Weichand family to come over here.

LEVINE: So your father had brothers?

WEICHAND: Yes.

LEVINE: Who had already come over with their families?

WEICHAND: Yes, he had two brothers and two sisters who were already here, and my grandparents had preceded us, too.

LEVINE: So did you have any contact with your grandparents when you were in Hungary?

WEICHAND: Well, I guess my father did. I had no contact.

LEVINE: They were here, but the other set? Did you have any contact with any grandparents?

WEICHAND: No. On my mother's side, no. I know very little about my mother's side, except what she told me.

LEVINE: I see. I see. Well, did your mother ever tell you how she met or married your father? Was there a family story about that?

WEICHAND: Nothing too much, except that they all played together, the kids. When they were kids, they knew each other.

LEVINE: So they grew up in Temesora?

WEICHAND: Yes.

LEVINE: Both your mother and father were from that area?

WEICHAND: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, I see. Okay, so they thought there was better opportunity. Did your mother or father ever mention anything about the fact of World War I was pretty much about to start when you—when you came to this country? Was that a factor at all, do you know?

WEICHAND: About what?

LEVINE: Was that a factor, that World War I was really on the horizon?

WEICHAND: I don't—I don't believe so. I never heard them mention anything about that, although I always tell people the best thing my father ever did for me was when he brought us over here. Because only a short time afterwards the war broke out.

LEVINE: Right, yeah. Do you have any recollection of your trip over here?

WEICHAND: I have a couple. I remember in Bremerhaven, the first argument my mother and father ever had. My mother was carrying my sister and I don't remember the location, but it was between the train and the ship some place. A long flight of steps, and my mother was trying to get my father to hold my hand, and he was very stubborn. They disagreed, and I liked the idea and I took off, and the next thing I knew, I tumbled down these steps and I broke my nose. So I broke my nose in Bremerhaven and I had it fixed in New York.

LEVINE: Was that a fear then, that somehow you wouldn't be let in?

WEICHAND: No, not really. No, no.

LEVINE: Well, so, you took the George Washington.

WEICHAND: Yes.

LEVINE: Which you have since recovered a picture of.

WEICHAND: Yes, I have a couple of them.

LEVINE: And you landed in New York and do you have any recollection of coming into the New York Harbor?

WEICHAND: No, I really don't. I do remember coming across. I remember my mother was seasick all the way across. I remember that very well because I remember she stayed in her bunk, and I remember my father taking me up to the upper deck and he had a brand new hat on, and the wind just took that hat and sent it out into the ocean. He was very unhappy about that. And that's about all I remember of the actual trip itself.

LEVINE: Well, now, were you in steerage? Were you in like a dormitory or were you in a cabin?

WEICHAND: We had cabins. We had cabins.

LEVINE: And do you have any impressions of Ellis Island?

WEICHAND: About what?

LEVINE: Ellis Island.

WEICHAND: Ellis Island, yes. I don't remember how we got to Ellis Island, but the one impression I do have, and this is about the only impression I have. The reverberation of sound in that enormous hall was absolutely awesome, and I don't remember going through any process or, you know, anything like that, but I do remember this enormous hall and this sound of babble of voices. It was awesome. And I don't remember when we left Ellis Island, either. I have no recollection of that.

LEVINE: Well, you must have been in pain. I mean, you had a broken nose when you were in Ellis Island, right?

WEICHAND: My mother never mentioned it. I do know that they took me to the hospital in New York. I think it's still the Manhattan Eye and Ear Hospital today, and I do remember when they worked on my nose, they also took my tonsils and adenoids out. At least my mother told me that later. But I do remember going up in an elevator and they used to have those old fashioned elevators inside of a cage, and I remember screaming, "I want my mama," as I was going up and I saw her down there.

LEVINE: Was this in the hospital?

WEICHAND: In the hospital. And then again, it faded away again. You know, all these little things, they come back like little vignettes.

LEVINE: Do you have any recollection of being treated there for your nose and your tonsils?

WEICHAND: No. I remember them putting something over my face and that's all.

LEVINE: Yeah. So where did your family go when they left Ellis Island?

WEICHAND: Well, we went to Yorkville because my family, all our relatives were living in Yorkville at that time. They were scattered, oh, anywheres between East 72nd Street and East 87th Street, and mostly we lived between First and Second Avenues and Second and East End Avenue. What they called—they used to call it Avenue A and Avenue B in those days, but it was East End Avenue. But we moved a lot.

LEVINE: How come?

WEICHAND: Well, that seemed to be in the custom. We lived in the old tenement houses, you know, and of course we didn't have much money, and we lived mostly in basement apartments. Some people called them English basements, where you walk a couple of steps down, but you're actually in the basement. Usually, the people that lived in those basement apartments served as janitors.

LEVINE: Oh?

WEICHAND: And you were able to live rent free, but you had to clean the hallways and the stairways and so forth, and that's what we did. My parents did, anyway. Of course, my father, he started working in a bakery. Rockwell's Bakery on East 75th Street, which was a wonderful place and had a wonderful smell coming out of it, but one of my uncles worked there. Yeah, I think two uncles worked there. Not his brothers, but two uncles by marriage that my two aunts married, and they got him work. Of course, I guess one of the reasons—one of the things you have to do when you immigrate like that, they expect you to have someone to sponsor you, which is what the Nagy family did. N-A-G-Y.

LEVINE: That was your—they were the men that your father's sisters married?

WEICHAND: Right. My father's two sisters married two brothers. So they had the name Nagy and so he was able to get work, too, at that time. I understand that in Europe my father was a printer. He had a

couple of trades and never stuck to any one, I guess. But in looking at the ship's manifest that I got from the National Archives, they have on there as occupation—oh, I forget the word they used, but it would be like typesetter. So I guess he was a printer of sorts.

LEVINE: Yeah, did he ever do that kind of work here?

WEICHAND: No.

LEVINE: In this country?

WEICHAND: No, he worked in a baker and he was a pretty good musician, too. He played the accordion. He was quite talented.

LEVINE: Now, would there be gatherings of people from Hungary in that neighborhood?

WEICHAND: Oh, yes, one thing about New York, though. That was a real melting pot, especially that area in the 70s on the East Side. You had Hungarians, Germans, Czechoslovaks, some Russians—a few—and some Italians. As a matter of fact—and Jewish people. The Italians were usually the coalmen and the icemen. Every corner had an iceman or a coalman because that's what we used in the ice boxes.

LEVINE: When you say 'every corner,' would they be like there? Would they somehow be stationed on the corners?

WEICHAND: Well, they'd have usually a basement. They would rent a basement and they'd have a sign sticking up, "Ice and Coal," and that's where the people in the block would go and buy and their ice and coal because we cooked by coal, too. As a matter of fact, the first few places we were in, we didn't even have electricity. We had gas for lamps, for lights in the hallways.

LEVINE: Can you describe the apartments? Was it a tenement building?

WEICHAND: Yeah, they were what they call railroad flats. You would come in a hallway. You usually had two on a floor and you'd share one toilet in between two apartments. Your bathroom was a tub in the kitchen. [Laughs] And the railroad flat used to run from the street into the backyard, straight through. You would normally come into the kitchen and walk through into one of two or sometimes three bedrooms and then what we call a front room, a parlor. That's what they really consisted of. A kitchen, no bathroom and

two, three bedrooms, depending on the size of the apartment, and a front room, parlor. That was—generally they were all the same.

LEVINE: Did you have a fireplace?

WEICHAND: A fireplace? No. No.

LEVINE: And do you remember what the air shafts between the building you were in and—

WEICHAND: Oh, yes. Those were the windows in your bedroom were the air shafts. [Laughs] That's right. Very, very interesting.

LEVINE: Now, would the coal and icemen deliver or did people pick it up and bring it up?

WEICHAND: They would deliver it. They would deliver it. They'd carry the ice on their back and carry the coal up. Milk would be delivered at your door. The milkmen used to have that job, too.

LEVINE: And was that a time when bakery things were delivered, too, or not?

WEICHAND: Bread?

LEVINE: Yeah.

WEICHAND: Not really. There were bakeries all over the place.

LEVINE: Hungarian bakeries?

WEICHAND: Hungarian bakeries, Czechoslovak bakeries, Russian bakeries, we had them, and delicatessens by the bushel basket. Of course, they would—and they would supply all these ethnic foods for the different nationalities, you know.

LEVINE: Did your mother cook Hungarian? Did she continue to cook—

WEICHAND: My mother cooked a combination of German and Hungarian because while we came from Hungary, it was like a German enclave. They were all Germans in there and everybody learned German in school. So we spoke German and Hungarian at home.

LEVINE: I see, and like when you started learning English, you and your sister, how did you—did your mother and father keep up, or did

you and your sister out pace your mother and father, as far as learning the English language?

WEICHAND: That's a very interesting question because we eventually out paced them. My mother and father, first of all, they separated a couple of years after we came to this country, which was a very traumatic experience. But that's another story. But my mother, she had—she was very proficient in language. She never got past the sixth grade in school, but I think women have that talent.

LEVINE: Some women.

WEICHAND: For language, and my mother spoke five languages.

LEVINE: Wow.

WEICHAND: She spoke German, Hungarian, Romanian, English and she could converse in Italian. She understood Italian. She used to talk to these Italian icemen on the street and I couldn't—as a kid, I never could fathom this, where she picked up Italian.

LEVINE: She just picked this up?

WEICHAND: And she said that—well, she told me it was easy for her because she spoke Romanian and Romanian is a Latin language, and that similarity helped her with the Italian. So she would converse with these Italians. I'm sure she spoke a dialect, as far as the Italian iceman was concerned, but she did very well. But what she did was the *Daily News* at that time, the *New York Daily News* was a big help because they came out as almost strictly pictorial, pictures, and my mother made up her mind if she was going to live in this country, she was going to speak English, and that was a big help to her. She learned English by reading the *New York Daily News* with the pictures, and later on in years, she was the only one of my whole family, my aunts and uncles and all of them, that spoke without a dialect. She spoke English like a native.

LEVINE: Wow. Did she ever go and become a citizen?

WEICHAND: My mother?

LEVINE: Yeah.

WEICHAND: Never got there. My father died in 1919, so he never made it. I was the first one to get citizen papers.

LEVINE: Oh, yeah. I don't think I asked you your father's name.

WEICHAND: Michael.

LEVINE: Oh, Michael. Yes, I did. When would your father—on what occasions would your father play his accordion?

WEICHAND: Well, he played at family gatherings and parties, and sometimes he would get paid for it, you know.

LEVINE: And would people sing?

WEICHAND: Hmm?

LEVINE: Would people sing?

WEICHAND: Oh, yes. Yeah, they'd sing mostly in German. They did speak—oh, they sang some songs in Hungarian, too, but when my sister and I started school, that was the first thing we forgot was the Hungarian. We spoke German at home. As a matter of fact, when I first started school, I went to a parochial school, St. Joseph's in East 87th Street, and the Catholic Church there, they were predominantly German. As a matter of fact, the priest was German, Bruder. Father Bruder. He was tough, but when I started school, I didn't understand a word of English, but by going to that school it was the best thing because—and I still have the books. The reading book, each page was divided. On one side was German, on the other side was English, and if it hadn't been for that, I'd a just sat there like a dummy and never know anything. But when I first started, I didn't even know what they were talking about.

LEVINE: Well, you really didn't even know how to read because you—

WEICHAND: No. No.

LEVINE: Yeah.

WEICHAND: Yeah.

LEVINE: So you started kindergarten in Yorkville.

WEICHAND: Yeah.

LEVINE: Kindergarten was where you began in Yorkville?

WEICHAND: I never went to kindergarten.

LEVINE: Oh.

WEICHAND: Never went to kindergarten.

LEVINE: So then you started first grade, St. Joseph's.

WEICHAND: St. Joseph's, yeah.

LEVINE: And you went—how far did you go in that school?

WEICHAND: I only went two years there because we then became involved with the Baptist Church because at that time we lived in—we lived on 87th Street, right adjacent to the church. So I just had to walk to the school. Later on, we moved to 80th Street. We were always moving around. We moved to 80th Street and across the street was a Hungarian Baptist Church and of course my mother still spoke Hungarian, so she went to the Hungarian Baptist Church and they were very helpful because we needed a lot of help with food and clothing and so on and so forth, and they were just great. My mother just gravitated to it, and of course when we got older, the more Hungarian we forgot, the more lost we became at that church, and we went to an English speaking Baptist Church in East 83rd Street.

LEVINE: An English speaking Baptist church, uh-huh.

WEICHAND: And that's the church my wife and I got married in eventually.

LEVINE: Wow. Wow. Huh. So how did your mother—did your mother have to work or did she get along, after your father left?

WEICHAND: Yes. My mother took these super jobs, you know, janitor. That's why we lived, mostly lived in the basement apartments. Other times she worked for—she was an excellent cook and so she would work for wealthy families on Park Avenue and 5th Avenue, as their cook and housekeeper. She worked hard.

LEVINE: Was she—do you know her attitude about coming to this country?

WEICHAND: Oh, she loved it. She loved it. She was true blue Yankee all the way. [Laughs]

LEVINE: And were there a lot of children coming into your school classes who were coming from Hungary or Germany or other places when you were a little boy in school?

WEICHAND: Not to the extent that I came in. I mean, most of them had already been here long enough that they could speak and could understand. But they all came from immigrant families, most of them. And of course, East 86th Street was being in the middle of Hamburg or Berlin or some place. You know, you had all these German restaurants and German bands and all the rest of that stuff. But there were a lot of Irish there, too.

LEVINE: Oh.

WEICHAND: Yorkville had a lot of Irish people, immigrants, of course.

LEVINE: Did—

WEICHAND: But we got along great.

LEVINE: I was just going to ask that question.

WEICHAND: Oh, we—just a wonderful experience, and I think it had a big effect on my wife, too. My wife was born here, but she lived in that same area, 75th, 77th, 76th, and her father came from Hungary, but he was a real Hungarian, not like us. He was what they called a Madja, came from Budapest, you know, and served in the Hussars and everything. He was a cavalrymen, but it had a big effect on our attitude toward life.

LEVINE: That's very interesting. How—do you know—can you talk about that? What kind of effect do you think living amidst all these different ethnicities had?

WEICHAND: Well, it taught us respect for each other and while the people were predominantly Catholic because the Czechoslovaks are mostly Catholic and the Hungarians are Catholic. There's a lot of Catholic churches. About every other block was a Catholic church, but there were also Lutheran churches and Baptist churches. So we got—we respect people's faith, their beliefs, their customs and we got to do things with each other and for each other and absorb some of the culture from each other, you know. So we have been very, very open-minded and tolerant of other people all our lives and I trace that all back to that. There's no such thing as bigotry in our family, or anything like that.

LEVINE: Well, that's quite a gift, really, to have had that experience.

WEICHAND: It really is. We're all God's children. [Laughs] That's the simplest way I can put it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah. What do you think about the melting pot idea? I mean, here you were in a situation with lots of people from different places. Do you think they melted together or they retained their individual identities more than they became the same?

WEICHAND: I think that our experience in Yorkville, I think Yorkville was a prime example of a melting pot, really, although they retained something of their culture. Like, I know the Germans, for instance, they had their sport clubs. What they called a Turnferine, and the Czechoslovaks, they had these sport clubs, too.

LEVINE: What would be a sport club? What happens?

WEICHAND: Well, gymnastics. Like a gymnasium. Boxing, gymnastics, weight lifting. As a matter of fact, two of my father's brothers became professional performers in—how should I put it? In lifting. Acrobatics, that's the word I'm thinking of. They were both very acrobatic and my uncle was larger built and the youngest uncle, Peter, he was smaller. So the older uncle was able to throw him around, lift him up and everything, and they did it professionally, but they had these—they had these Czechoslovaks call it sokol, S-O-K-O-L.

LEVINE: And that' would be a sports club?

WEICHAND: That's really—yeah, or social hall. That's what they were.

LEVINE: Or a social hall.

WEICHAND: And a matter of fact, the New York Turnferine in German, on East 85th on Lexington Avenue, corner of 85th Street was very famous for turning out gymnasts.

LEVINE: Now, would these people compete?

WEICHAND: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Is that how they did it professionally, they would have competitions?

WEICHAND: Oh, yes. Yes.

LEVINE: So would people in the neighborhood go to these events?

WEICHAND: Yes. Oh, yeah. We used to go up to the dances. The Germans would go to the Czechoslovaks and the Czechoslovaks would go to the Germans and the Hungarians would go to both of them.

LEVINE: Wow. Wow. I know Hungarians are known for fencing, for being good fencers.

WEICHAND: Yeah.

LEVINE: Was there fencing going on in the neighborhood?

WEICHAND: Not that I remember much, but I would imagine since they were sport clubs, they included all that stuff. They had wrestling, gymnastics, stuff like that. I don't ever remember any of them playing basketball. We played basketball once we started to get involved in the church. In the church gymnasium we did that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and were you a basketball player?

WEICHAND: Well, after a fashion. Today they wouldn't look at anybody my size for playing basketball. They wouldn't look at me twice. I'd be too small.

LEVINE: Really?

WEICHAND: Oh, you got to be six feet and over to be a basketball player today.

LEVINE: Oh, huh.

WEICHAND: I used to play some basketball. Baseball was my game. I used to love to play ball, baseball. Played a lot. That's all my trophies up there from coaching and everything.

LEVINE: Oh, my goodness. Did you start playing baseball in Yorkville?

WEICHAND: Yeah.

LEVINE: Where would you play?

WEICHAND: Well, we would play in the parks down near the East River.

LEVINE: Down by where Gracie Mansion is.

WEICHAND: Yeah, yeah. That was a great place to go, Carl [unclear] Park, that's what they call that. That's where Gracie Mansion is.

LEVINE: Right, and you would play baseball there?

WEICHAND: Well, not really play baseball there. There were some other smaller parks. You wouldn't think of them as baseball parks in today's terms because they were all cinders, and we'd play underneath the Queensborough Bridge and places like that. But later on, as I got older, I played on regular baseball fields. I traveled around.

END OF SIDE A
BEGIN SIDE B

LEVINE: And how about your sister, Ethel? What did she get involved in, as a girl growing up in Yorkville?

WEICHAND: Well, I always blame my sister that I met my wife.

LEVINE: Oh, really? How come.

WEICHAND: Because they were girlfriends. They got to be girlfriends and they used to go out together all the time. Of course, we all—we all joined our church choir and that's where I really met Helen, my wife.

LEVINE: In the church choir?

WEICHAND: In the church choir, yeah. We sang in that choir for about fifteen years. My cousins, who I'm going to visit this Wednesday up in Monroe, New York, he was an excellent musician. He had a good tenor voice and his wife had a good alto voice and my wife sang soprano and my sister sang soprano and I sang baritone or bass baritone. So we used to—we did a lot of singing.

LEVINE: Now, was this the church that was Hungarian?

WEICHAND: The what?

LEVINE: Was this the Hungarian Baptist Church?

WEICHAND: Well, we didn't become active in the Hungarian Baptist Church.

LEVINE: Oh, you didn't.

WEICHAND: This was the English speaking.

LEVINE: Yeah, Baptist.

WEICHAND: They called it Central Park Baptist, although it was not anywheres near Central Park.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. So—

WEICHAND: But my sister really—well, both of us had to go to work early because we were poor, and my sister went to work for the telephone company and she spent her whole career with the telephone company. I have two sisters. I have a half-sister up in Connecticut who also worked for the telephone company.

LEVINE: So then your mother remarried?

WEICHAND: Yes.

LEVINE: So was this in Yorkville?

WEICHAND: Yes.

LEVINE: While you were in Yorkville?

WEICHAND: Yes, yes. She married an Irishman.

LEVINE: Oh, also who came to this country?

WEICHAND: No, no, he was born here and I know very little about his family. As a matter of fact, he was never able to track down much of his family, either. So I know very little about him, and my sister up in Connecticut, she's been spending years trying to track down the family tree.

LEVINE: I see. So was it—was it good for you, then to have a step-father while you were growing up, in the family?

WEICHAND: Well, it didn't make too much difference to me because I was already in my early teens.

LEVINE: Oh, okay.

WEICHAND: And I have a half-brother and my sister. My brother, of course, he was killed in World War II. He was only eighteen when he was killed, but we got along great. Got along great, and I—after my mother married, I didn't spend much time at home. I was mostly out on my own.

LEVINE: So what did you do? You stayed in school and you left school early to work, did you?

WEICHAND: Yes. Yes.

LEVINE: And what did you do for your first job?

WEICHAND: Well, the first job I got was through my step-father. I got a—I got a job in Nedick's. They used to have these orange juice stands spotted all over the city, served orange juice and frankfurters. Oh, I had all kinds of jobs. I worked for Lofts. They used to have candy stores all over New York. I worked for the iceman. I'd get a day time job and I would go to school at night, and if I got a night time job, I would go to school in the day. So I got a hodge-podge of an education, you know, but I did finally manage to get most of my high school stuff, and I took some time out. I went down to the Petty School in Hightstown, New Jersey. It's a prep school. I went down there on a scholarship. Of course, that was the middle of the Depression and I borrowed money to go there. So I never got to college because I didn't have the money. So I decided to go to work.

LEVINE: How did the Depression affect you in particular in your family?

WEICHAND: Well, it was very, very difficult. My sister was okay because she worked for the telephone company and that was steady work, but I had to scrounge around to get any kind of work. I did. I worked on a garbage truck, private garbage truck and I worked in a print shop. I worked, as I said, in Loft's candy stores and different places. And then in 19—when Roosevelt became President, I got a job through an uncle, a distant uncle that worked in a brewery at the old Eiffer Brewery and he got—

LEVINE: Was that in Manhattan?

WEICHAND: That was in the Bronx. That was in the Bronx. I live in Manhattan, and by that time I was living alone. I had a rooming—I lived in a rooming house. And I got to join the union and I liked the work. I started a two-year apprenticeship. They had an apprenticeship program in the breweries and I worked in three

different breweries. Eiffers, Grupas, Pilsner and then came the war and I was drafted, and we had—our older son was born while I was in the service, and when I came back, of course, I got my job back in the brewery and then I was elected to office in the union. I was elected secretary-treasurer.

LEVINE: So you must have been an active union person.

WEICHAND: Very much. Very active.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Could you talk about the unions at that time, what was going on with them?

WEICHAND: Well, at that time because of Roosevelt's policies, the unions really grew exponentially. All unions. All crafts. All trades, and our union was one of them, of course. Of course, when the repeal came, breweries flourished. That was in 1933. So I became very much involved. Of course, my uncles were all union members as bakers in the Bakery Workers' Union, which was a very powerful union at that time. So I got quite involved in the labor union movement, and this was a full time job.

LEVINE: Oh, this is what you did then, for the brewery?

WEICHAND: Yes, for the last—until I retired, for the last twenty-five years I was a full time officer of the union, and I spent a lot of the time doing lobbying in Albany and Washington DC for labor legislation, you know, and was quite involved in that, and very active in the industry-wide blood bank, of which I was the chairman. All of these different facets that the unions became involved in. So I was in it up to my neck.

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you remember any strikes or any instances of events that happened with the union?

WEICHAND: Yes, in our union in particular we had the first strike that the Brewery Workers ever had in 1949, and the reason we went on strike at that time was we wanted to get a pension. We had no pensions, and we wanted to get welfare insurance. You know, health insurance and also seniority. Those three items. We had no seniority. We had no health insurance and we had no pensions.

LEVINE: What did you have? What did the union provide for you that—

WEICHAND: Well, initially what the union provided for us was protection. You know, grievances. If you had problems at work, and this was part of the work that I did later on, as an officer, enforcing the contract. Serving the membership in solving grievances and contract negotiations. I was very active in that. We went on strike in 1949, the first time and only time that the Brewery Workers ever went on strike and we were out for eighty-two days with no income. And we moved into this house on April 1st, 1949 and we called the strike on April 1st, 1949 and the officers voted at that time that since the men were getting no pay, we would get no pay. So my poor wife, she had to scrounge to make ends meet because we had no income. We did get from the international union we used to get fifteen dollars a week strike benefits, and of course fifteen dollars in those days was worth a lot more than it is now.

But as a result of that, we got pensions and we got the grievance procedure and we got the seniority.

LEVINE: Oh, so you got everything.

WEICHAND: Yeah, we got everything but we had to go eighty-two days for that.

LEVINE: But you didn't get back pay, you just got that fifteen dollars.

WEICHAND: This union—that's the one bad feature of any strike is you never make up what you lose. So you have to be pretty sure of what your aim is when you go out on strike and you got to be pretty sure that you want to see this thing through and know what you're doing and not just be frivolous about it, which we never were.

LEVINE: Wow.

WEICHAND: So we had two sons because had our second son after I came back from service. So we moved into this house here, which wasn't even finished, and we used our fireplace for heat in April because we had no electricity. [Laughs] So it was quite a go, but the timing for us personally was not too good. April 1st the strike and April 1st we moved in here.

LEVINE: Oh, wow.

WEICHAND: It was quite an experience. It's something that strengthens you eventually.

LEVINE: Were those eighty-two days, were there—was the union—oh, how do I want to say this? Was there a lot of conflict during that time when you were—

WEICHAND: Well, there was no physical conflict. I mean, we didn't believe, our organization didn't believe in violence or any of those kind of tactics. We took economic measures like allowing products that the New York brewers were competing with to come in. We didn't stop that and things like that, you know. And we did continue to negotiate the whole eighty-two days. Sometimes I wouldn't come home for three, four, five days. We'd negotiate around the clock at the old Commodore Hotel. I remember that very well. We used to sleep on the carpets. We couldn't even afford to get a room. We'd sleep on the floors or the chairs in the lounge in the hotel, but we'd be on the go day and night.

LEVINE: Can you comment on the difference between the union then on that strike that you're talking about and today?

WEICHAND: I think the major difference is today that the union members, they don't have the dedication. First of all, I don't think they have the background of the developmental stage of the unions, as they grew. They were they for them. They didn't sacrifice anything for them and some of them are quite irresponsible. They'll take some kind of action at the drop of a hat without talking things through first, or something like that. And the union members, I think they expect everything to be handed to them and unfortunately, and I'm talking as a dedicated union man, that it grieves me to say so, but some of these people, they want everything but the key to the lock in the factory. They want to get paid for not working. See, of course, we grew up in a different era. We believed in a fair day's work for a fair day's pay. You don't hear that today anymore. Today it's every man for himself and get as much you can get and give as little in return. Unfortunately, that's true. No, we came up with a different philosophy.

LEVINE: The developmental stages of the union that you actually lived through.

WEICHAND: Yeah.

LEVINE: Can you say anything about that?

WEICHAND: Well, of course, the unions—when I came in, the unions were all established. So as far as the developmental angle of it, it was more expansion than anything else when I came in, as a result of

President Roosevelt's policies, you know, and Senator Wagner, who was a major force in granting much power to the union organizations, you know.

LEVINE: When you were on strike at the brewery, did the management—were they producing?

WEICHAND: No. We shut them down completely because, first of all, in those days—today it might be a different story. Today the breweries were all mechanized and automated and, you know, the workers, they sit at a console like at NASA. You know, all lights and blinkers going and buttons to push and stuff like that, and when I was working there, you had to learn each phase of the trade. It was a trade, and we had apprenticeship programs, but they don't have that today anymore. Matter of fact, I don't think they even have brewmasters anymore. I think they just have the laboratory.

LEVINE: Oh. Now, what would a brewmaster do in the days when you were—

WEICHAND: Well, the brewmaster was the head honcho. He was the fellow that decided what kind of formula was going to be used, what kind of products were going to be used, what kind of yeast culture was going to be used, and he was the man responsible for having us produce the product. Just what the word implies, brew master, which was a very—in Germany, for instance, the brewmaster was a highly honored position. It may be today in Germany because Germany still has dozens of small—every town has their own little brewery.

LEVINE: Now, would a brewmaster work his way up or would he have some special kind of education or training to be that?

WEICHAND: Well, you got—the brew master himself?

LEVINE: Hmm.

WEICHAND: Oh, they had a school that they went to. What they call the Brewer's Academy, and they had textbooks and everything, you know. And they had to graduate from a Brewer's Academy to become a brew master.

LEVINE: I see.

WEICHAND: And they usually worked their way up from Assistant Brewmaster to Brewmaster. So usually by the time a man became a

brewmaster, he was a fellow well up in his fifties and sixties already.

LEVINE: Now, was he a union man?

WEICHAND: No, no, management. That was management, strictly. The foreman—most of the foremen were union. The working foremen were union and up to that level. Beyond that it was management.

LEVINE: I see.

WEICHAND: Anything that had to do with hiring and firing, that was management. But we had an apprenticeship program. You had to serve two years before you became what was known as a journeyman brewer, and I'm proud of that, that I was able to get in early enough to go through that program. You had to spend six months in every department, and then the brewmaster would decide whether you were capable of assuming any of the responsibilities of actually brewing the beer or working in the fermentation or any phase of the production or finishing of the beer. And then he gave you—he'd follow you around and examine you, or assign you to a specific thing that you had to do it all by yourself with no help. And then the union had a program. They had a committee from their executive board that used to give you a verbal examination. You'd get into this room, it's something like a doctorate. You'd stand in this room and these guys sit around and fire questions at you. You had to do that before you'd become a journeyman brewery.

Incidentally, our union was always proud of one thing. That anyone who became a union officer, came up from the ranks. We had no outsiders. You actually had to be a brewer in order to become an officer in the Brewer's Union and you had to run for election every couple of years, which became a rat race, too. Interesting experience.

LEVINE: Yeah. Did you have to—what's the word I'm looking for? When you were a candidate to be an officer in the union, did you have to go out and, you know, try to muster votes?

WEICHAND: Yes, although on the local union level—on a national union level or international level, it became almost a must to campaign, and on the local union level like that I worked on, you really didn't have to do much of that because everybody knew you. So you just had a list of candidates and everybody knew who they were.

LEVINE: I see.

WEICHAND: There was no publicity or fliers, anything. That was never involved. They knew you.

LEVINE: How many people were in the union, roughly?

WEICHAND: Well, my local when I joined had over six hundred members.

LEVINE: Wow.

WEICHAND: And we had seven local unions in the metropolitan area, New York, which later on we consolidated. In 1963 we consolidated it into three local unions. The production, that's the fellows like myself that made the stuff. Then you had the packaging like the bottling and stuff like that, and then you had the delivery. Three main sections. We had sort of—after a while, we had a—after repeal, we had sort of a ridiculous setup. We had too many segments. We had more local unions that we had breweries. No, not really. New York City at one time, and I'm talking about the eight counties radiating out from Times Square out, when I joined had thirty-three breweries. Today there are none. None. They all moved out, and the complexion of the industry changed, anyway. They became these national brewers built regional breweries around and the local brewers couldn't compete with that. So you had three or four major breweries just controlling the whole market and even the breweries that were left in New York, they were gobbled up by these big corporations, too, and it became prohibitive to a run a brewery in the City of New York, anyway, because with the taxes involved.

The value of the real estate and unfortunately, I would say the union was partly at fault, too, because our contracts became so good—

LEVINE: It was too expensive.

WEICHAND: That they just couldn't compete.

LEVINE: Do you remember prohibition?

WEICHAND: Yeah, sure. That's when I struggling. That was during the first part of the Depression, sure.

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you remember anything in particular about that, either speak easies or anything related?

WEICHAND: Oh, yeah. Not from personal contact, but I knew they were around. But it was the kind of a place that, first of all, I couldn't afford to go there. I was too busy trying to make a living and jobs were scarce. It was really rough.

LEVINE: Now, I don't think I asked you your wife's name.

WEICHAND: Helen.

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

WEICHAND: Her maiden name, I'll spell it for you. It's C-S-A-P-O double S. Now, it's pronounced Say-poss, but the Hungarian pronunciation is Cha-poch.

LEVINE: Okay, and how about children? Did you have children?

WEICHAND: We have two boys. Two sons.

LEVINE: Their names?

WEICHAND: Roy is the oldest one. He lives down in Mississippi, and Ralph is the younger one and he lives up here in Oak Ridge, New Jersey. Now, he's a teacher. He teaches in Midland Park.

LEVINE: And when you look back on having come here as a small child, and you really have lived your whole life here pretty much, how do you think about that? Of coming to this country changing your way you live and I assume you severed your ties.

WEICHAND: Oh, yes. We consider ourselves very, very fortunate to be here. We're grateful for it. We're happy about it and everything we have, we owe to this country. Of course, we have no ties to Europe at all because we have no more relatives over there. As I say, most of them—all of them preceded us over here. My mother's family went to South America. Her sisters, that I know of, went to Argentina, Buenos Aires and her brother—her brother was a pastry baker and he became very wealthy down there because that's a highly specialized trade, pastry maker, and of course, coming from Europe.

LEVINE: Right.

WEICHAND: But this is our land. This is it. I'm proud to be in it.

LEVINE: I have a question about what you feel very satisfied about in your life. That you feel proud of having done?

WEICHAND: Well, I feel proud that I was able to—I always considered my work in the union as service, which it was. Working on behalf of the membership. Making life a little better for them, if possible, and to help them in any way, any problems that they had. I also became very much involved in my community out here. I served on the Board of Education. Those trophies you see up there, I spent—I'm one of the founders of the Maywood Boy's Club and I served as an officer, secretary and president and you name it of the Boy's Club and I was a coach, baseball coach for twenty-five years. Even when my boys grew up and moved out, I still coached. Most parents, once their kids get out of the program, they leave but I didn't believe that. I love to work with young people because I remembered when I was small how much I appreciated for anybody that would give me a lift or have an interest in what I was doing, you know. And I never forgot that, and there were a couple people.

You see, when my mother was working—that's another experience we had. When my mother had to work, and being alone she couldn't watch us, and at that time she was working in a restaurant as a chef. So through the church, she got us into a home up in Valhalla, New York, and that home is still there, but it now belongs to the New York City Welfare Department, I believe, but at that time it was a private home for orphans and semi-orphans like we were. So my sister and I were up there and we spent our early up there. I spent seven years up there and my sister spent almost nine. She was up there before me, and that was a great experience because it was a farm. The boys all worked on the farm and the girls all did housework and laundry and stuff like that. We had our own cows and milked the cows. I used to milk cows every morning and every afternoon, and all eggs. We produced all our own vegetables. We grew everything up there, and milk.

LEVINE: So you had people who took an interest in you at that time.

WEICHAND: Absolutely.

LEVINE: And you returned it.

WEICHAND: Some men who came to work up at this school or home, whatever you want to call it, college graduates that got us interested—that's where my interest in baseball really started. The first baseball uniform I ever got was up there and through the efforts of this

young fellow that was our coach. I learned how to play soccer up there. I learned how to do a lot of hard work, tending furnace, shoveling coals in the furnace and everything else. Learned a lot of things up there.

LEVINE: Well, that's wonderful. Well, it sounds like you paid back what you were given.

WEICHAND: Well, this is the way I feel about it, but even with this work I've done in Maywood, I have always felt—they gave me all kinds of plaques and stuff like that, but I always say that those young people that I work with, they gave more to me than I could ever hope to give them.

LEVINE: Well, I think that's a perfect place to end. I want to thank you so much for a really interesting, interesting interview.

WEICHAND: It's my pleasure.

LEVINE: I've been speaking—let me just close up—with Emile Weichand, who came in 1914 at three years old from Hungary. Emile?

WEICHAND: Yes.

LEVINE: Do you want to say anything?

WEICHAND: Well, it was just a pleasure to be able to talk to you and it was nice to reminisce because some of these things I like to talk about every once in awhile, and my grandchildren all like to hear me talk about these very same things that I've just talked to you about.

LEVINE: Well, wonderful, and they'll have a copy of the tape. We'll send you a copy of the tape.

WEICHAND: Oh, that would be wonderful. That would be wonderful.

LEVINE: Okay. Thank you so much.

WEICHAND: I'll let you see that—I'll let you see that manifest before you leave.

LEVINE: Right. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service on July 29th, 1996 and I'm signing off.

END OF INTERVIEW