EI-801
ESTHER KLAUSNER RUDNER
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CZECHOSLOVAKIA, 1920
AGE: 8

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CANTON, OH

LEVINE: Today is September 15th, 1996. I'm in here in Canton, Ohio, with Mrs. Esther Rudner, who came from what was Czechoslovakia after World War I in 1920, when she was eight years of age. Today Mrs. Rudner is eighty-four years of age and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service.

Okay, if we could start at the beginning. If you'd tell me where you were born.

RUDNER: Well, I was born in a small village called Hnusovce. Now, I have that written down. I'll go get that and I'll spell it for you.

LEVINE: You've got the—you've got the mike on.

RUDNER: Oh.

LEVINE: I'm going to have to unhook you. I'll--

RUDNER: Oh, well, all right. Go where my telephone is in the kitchen. There's a little red [unclear – tape off/on] --where I came from.

LEVINE: Okay, we're resuming here.

RUDNER: The town I was born in was called H-N, H-N-U-S-O-V-C-E and it was pronounced Hanna-shev-ska.

LEVINE: Okay, and did you live in Hnusovce until you left for America?

RUDNER: Right, uh-huh. Always lived there and my grandparents lived there and in a village not too far from there called B-Y-S-T-R-A. My paternal grandparents lived in that village. So we were like maybe six or eight miles apart.

LEVINE: I see. Did you have a lot of contact with those grandparents?

RUDNER: Well, until I was eight years old, yes. Until I left there, uh-huh. When I left that country, that—in fact, during World War I, my parents' home was taken by the government to billet soldiers and we lived with my grandmother. My grandfather was gone by then. My grandmother's name was—um, Hausner, H-A-U-S-N-E-R. Her name was Sally.

LEVINE: Sally Hausner, okay.

RUDNER: And that was my mother's mother.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and why don't you say your birth date for the tape? Your birth date.

RUDNER: There are different dates on which my birthday is because when we came here on my passport was one date, but anyhow, I have been using March 17th.

LEVINE: Oh.

RUDNER: Three, seventeen, twelve.

LEVINE: And why were—why the mix up? I mean why the—

RUDNER: Because when I started school in Canton, Ohio, my father gave them one date and then later on when I sent for some information to Czechoslovakia—I wanted to know some stuff, so they—the immigration office in Washington, DC, gave me the name and place where I can send for information, which I did. And they were—at that point they were Communists. So they sent me all the

information that I wanted for different dates and they had a different date for my birthday, see.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

RUDNER: So we're on middle ground, so-to-speak. I'm still in the same month but—

LEVINE: In the same year.

RUDNER: Yeah, in the same year, but somehow or other the dates got confused. It was a holiday time for the Jewish people and I knew that when I was a little girl they used to always say I was born in this holiday and that's why my name was Esther. Because it was the day before Purim. The day was called Esther Tonas [PH], see. It was named after Queen Esther, this holiday. So that always came in March. So therefore, I know that the birthday is the right birthday, but maybe not exactly the right date. So in order to change everything, it was a hold bit to-do, so I just kept the birthday that I started school with.

LEVINE: I see, uh-huh.

RUDNER: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Maybe you can talk a little bit about where you came from was Austria-Hungary when you were born.

RUDNER: Yes, I was, but see, when the World War started in 1918, I was six, right? From twelve to eighteen is six.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, actually it started—it started in 1914, didn't it?

RUDNER: Yeah, it did. Uh-huh. I'm trying to think. It started in 1914. I was two years old.

LEVINE: Right.

RUDNER: And I can't remember stuff from when I was two, but I can remember our family talking about this because in 1914, my father, who was Edward Klausner, immigrated to the United States.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

RUDNER: Okay.

LEVINE: So you were just born practically.

RUDNER: Yeah, I was two. I was two years old, so I couldn't remember him at all, except from a picture. And during the war, as I said, my mother had five children to take care of without a husband because my father came here and he used to get mail from the Hungarian Army to come back and serve because he had served in the army, you know. Everybody had to—was conscripted at one time or another but he would not leave the United States at that point and come back.

LEVINE: Now, why didn't—do you know why it was that your father left for the United States?

RUDNER: Yes, because he had brothers in Akron and sisters here in the United States and my mother's—several of my mother's brothers were here in Ohio and they encouraged him to come. And at that point, he decided he would go and see how things were and then bring out family. But then the war came, see?

LEVINE: I see. So, he—when he left, was part of his reason for leaving to avoid going back into the Hungary Army, do you think? Or the war hadn't really—

RUDNER: No, he—no, I think what he—that was before the war broke out.

LEVINE: Okay.

RUDNER: The war broke out in July and I think he came here in April or May of that year. But however, it was in May of that year that the head of the Hungarian government was assassinated and then they started the war. Now, this I learned in American history, you know, and of course in my parents' conversations and different things like that and my aunts and uncles. Because both my father and mother came from very large families, children of nine and eleven, you know. So we had a lot of relatives.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Uh-hmm. What was your mother's name?

RUDNER: Her name was Mary Hausner, H-A-U-S-N-E-R, and—gosh, when we came here—

LEVINE: Before we talk about when—coming here.

RUDNER: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: If you could say a little bit about like how did you get along when your father was here and—

RUDNER: Well, during the war we moved to my grandmother's and my oldest brother—it was hard. I remember it being hard, what I could remember. My oldest brother was seven years older than I, so that meant at that point he was—well, I was two, so he had to be nine.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

RUDNER: And my grandmother had a home and we all lived together with my grandmother.

LEVINE: What do you remember about your grandmother?

RUDNER: I remember that she was a very kind-hearted lady in today's terms, she would look old, but she was not that old and—you know, because a very sweet and kind lady. And I know, if you know anything about Jewish life, the Sabbath is very holy and on—my grandmother used to bake what we called a challa [PH] and it's egg bread, braided egg bread. You can buy it any market today, but—

LEVINE: I've made, actually.

RUDNER: Oh, have you? Well, anyhow, and if you were sick, she would save some of the white egg bread to give you a treat. Otherwise, we—we mostly ate like a dark rye bread.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

RUDNER: And I think they had to bake all that because we were not close enough to a city to go buy those things. And I remember playing with some little girls. One of them was a cousin to my father and—and I remembered going to Hebrew school because you start at a very young age, and we had a synagogue that was not too far from where we lived. So the little children would walk with the older children and we had a regular school and after school they would teach Hebrew. See, it was a Slavish school at that point where I could remember it. So we learned Slavish and the Hebrew, and that was a—he was a Jewish teacher, so he taught both things.

LEVINE: Oh.

RUDNER: In fact, I think his name was—this teacher's name was Mr. Klein and, you know, at that point when I was four, five and six years old,

he was an old man, you know. He was a teacher. Must have been in his twenties. [Laughs]

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

RUDNER: And I do remember that and then I remember during the war when we lived at my grandmothers' house, we had some cousins who lived further down the street. Now, their house was not taken to billet soldiers because they had a family and there was, you know, a father and mother and a family and I don't know why there wasn't—they didn't ask them to move, but they did ask us to move. Maybe because my grandmother lived nearby and they needed—were for this—I guess they needed room for the soldiers.

LEVINE: Hmm.

RUDNER: And my brother, my oldest brother I know used to go to the river that ran through this town and he would go fishing, and very often our—our meals were fish meals. And to this day I detest fish. I won't touch it. Any cooked fish, I can't stand the smell of it and I think it—it did me in when I was a little girl.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

RUDNER: And what else can I tell you about? We used to play with different people.

LEVINE: Do you remember any of the games or kinds of things you did when you played?

RUDNER: Well, I think we used to play a game like tag, you know. I don't know what they called it then. And I know we used to run in the fields and play with other children.

LEVINE: Were you closest to any particular family member?

RUDNER: Well, all of my brothers were very dear to me. It's as we got older that we—they moved here and they moved there from—they lived in Canton, see, and then as they got older and wanted to work. When we came here, my father had a business.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

RUDNER: The uncle that came to bring us was my mother's brother and my father had had enough money to buy passports for five—for the five children and my mother, and my uncle, who had been in World War

I, was not allowed to go to Czechoslovakia to see his parents or his mother until he was discharged from the service. So he had to come back to the United States, get an honorary discharge and then made—made arrangements to go back to Europe and of course he had to sail because there was no flying in those—in those days.

LEVINE: So this uncle, what was his name?

RUDNER: His name was Irving Hausner.

LEVINE: And was—was he—he had come to this country earlier?

RUDNER: As he was a young boy, yeah.

LEVINE: And he had become an American citizen?

RUDNER: Right, right. Uh-hmm. See, that's what happened with a lot of our family. My mother's—some of my mother's family and some of my father's family had come maybe in 1910, 1912. They were young men. One of my uncles was only I think fourteen when he came here and never got to see his parents again, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah. How was it that they happened to settle in—in Canton, in Ohio?

RUDNER: Because my mother's brother, one was in Cleveland and the one that offered my father a job to work with him was in Canton.

LEVINE: I see. Do you have any idea why originally they came to Ohio, rather than somewhere else?

RUDNER: Well, I think they had family here that had left Europe many years before and that settled in Cleveland.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Uh-hmm.

RUDNER: And one family led to another family, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

RUDNER: Anyway, this one uncle, his name was Leopold Hausner and he had a business in Canton and when we came here, my father was in business with him. My uncle had a clothing store on the east side of Canton and my father had a grocery store and when we came to Ohio from Ellis Island, we came directly to Canton and my

father picked us up in a horse and buggy that he had borrowed from somebody to pick up his family and when he had the store, he used to deliver groceries and meats on a—a wagon that was a horse and a wagon. My oldest brother used to help because at that point, when we came in 1920, he was born in 1905 so he was fifteen, see. And he used to help my father in the store, and my oldest sister used to help in the house.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

RUDNER: Because she was five years older than I was.

LEVINE: What—what had your father done for work when he was in Czechoslovakia before you came here?

RUDNER: Let's sew, what did he do? His parents owned a saloon.

LEVINE: Hmm.

RUDNER: In a small town not far from us and I think he went as an apprentice to an uncle in Budapest to learn the grocery business, and that's how when he came here, I guess that—he must have had the apprenticeship and probably helped his parents in the saloon when he was a boy, because that's what children did. You know, they helped their parents, and by the time he came here, he evidently wasn't doing very well or he wouldn't have left. He probably felt he could do better here and my uncles used to write and tell him, "Come and bring your family," and "It's more prosperous here," and all that. So that's why he immigrated here, but he couldn't afford to bring his family with him, so he really came to see if he could earn enough money to send for his family, which he did.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you personally remember anything that occurred during World War I?

RUDNER: A couple instances. I remember the soldiers coming through town and with cannons. The cannons were on wheels. I remember that, and on the main street and I remember one of my uncles, who lived in—oh, I'm trying to think of the town, but he lived—it was my mother's brother. His name was Julias Hausner and he had to go to war and he was wounded and I remember him coming to my grandmother to convalesce. Yeah, so I remember that because that was a big event for my uncle to be wounded and come there, to convalesce.

LEVINE: And what was his name, that uncle?

RUDNER: His name was Julias Hausner.

LEVINE: And do you remember any experiences or any anecdotes or things that happened with that uncle when you—

RUDNER: No. No, no. He was—he came and he was just at my grandma's and everybody in the family tried to help to take care of him until he got better, and he had a wife and children, too.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Uh-hmm.

RUDNER: And later on life his—yeah, I think his children eventually one of them ended up in Israel and I think some of his family is—his daughter was the one that lived in Switzerland, I think, for a while.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, and how about your grandmother? You mentioned she was a kind woman.

RUDNER: Oh, kind, sweet lady. Very kind, sweet lady.

LEVINE: Can you remember any incidents with her? Any things maybe she did or [unclear] with you?

RUDNER: Well, you know, she cooked and she baked and she was very good to all of us, all of us children, very good. And not one particular incident stands out for myself, but I know all of our family just loved her when we were little kids.

LEVINE: Do you—how about the religious life of the family, do you remember?

RUDNER: Yes. Yes, we all had to attend a Hebrew school and on the Sabbath we went to the synagogue, uh-hmm. Everybody would get dressed up and go to the synagogue and our—some of our Jewish holidays are more like festivals. One—I remember one in particular in the spring was called Shavuot and that holiday was when there were lilacs all around our—our house and they used to bring the lilacs in the house. I remember that. Always when that holiday comes, I think of those lilacs and the smell of lilacs. I forget what they called that holiday in English. I think the Feast of Weeks in English, but anyhow, it was at a time when the flowers would bloom and we—and when that holiday, always reminds me that I remember as a little girl we always had lilacs in the house from my grandma's yard.

LEVINE: Yeah, and any other festivals or rituals that you remember from—from Czechoslovakia?

RUDNER: I remember some of the Passover holidays and then—and then in the fall—in the fall like we are now coming to it after the Yom Kippur holiday, which is next week, there's a holiday called Sucose [PH] and where they build the booths and they still do. At the synagogues they still do that and I remember that we used to eat in that—the Succa [PH], that booth. We used to eat in there every night during that week of that holiday. I remember that. My grandmother used to bring the soup tureen from the house into this succa where we all ate our meals during the holiday.

LEVINE: Do you remember how the succa was decorated? What was on the—on the walls of it or was anything else brought into—

RUDNER: Yeah, they used to have leaves and flowers and whatever vegetation was in the area. I used to decorate that succa with that.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, and how about the Jewish community in the village where you were? Was it all Jewish or partly?

RUDNER: No, no, we had a lot. We had a lot of gentile people around us. Uh-huh. No, it wasn't all Jewish at all, and we had lots of gentile neighbors. Some were very friendly and I remember before I left, somehow or other, I remember that they used to tell us that some of those young people didn't like Jews. You know, not to befriend them or not to be friends with them. They didn't like Jews, but what their names were or anything like that, I don't remember. But there were a lot of gentile people that were very good friends with our family.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So did you personally experience any anti-Semitism?

RUDNER: No. No, not—not that I remember.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

RUDNER: I experienced more here as a little girl.

LEVINE: Oh, okay.

RUDNER: Than I did there, uh-hmm. Because then I was old enough to remember, but I didn't remember. If I did, I don't remember. Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Right, and how about food that you remember from a little girl in Czechoslovakia? Do you remember any particular kinds of dishes? Well, you said the challa but—and the rye bread. Anything else that you recall?

RUDNER: Well, they used to make chicken and they would make a roast, but I don't remember too well just what they were.

LEVINE: Fish.

RUDNER: And the fish. We had lots of fish because, see, during their war years you could hardly buy I guess meat because everything went to the army.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm, and do you—

RUDNER: But we did have chicken. I know on the Sabbath we generally had chicken and soup.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

RUDNER: And everybody made your own noodles. You didn't buy anything like noodles.

LEVINE: Do you remember the—how do—were there—was there a market place or were there shops or do you remember anything about that?

RUDNER: No, I don't remember but there evidently were places where either they had like a farmer's market somewhere. But I don't remember because I—I don't think I ever went. It was the adults that went to get the food. Uh-huh.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

RUDNER: And I—to this day, I often had thought about that and I should have asked one of my uncles who would remember or my oldest brother remembered a lot, too. But now my oldest brother and my sister are gone, who would remember more than I would, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

RUDNER: And—but I don't remember. There evidently had to be a place and a lot of people grew stuff in their yard, had gardens. Because I remember having green onions that were picked out of the garden.

So I guess we must have had a garden around the house somewhere.

[END OF SIDE A, TAPE 1]

[BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE 1]

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, and you spoke—what did you speak at home? What language did you speak at home?

RUDNER: Ah, Hungarian and Yiddish. And our Yiddish was more like German because that's—that part of the country, that's the way they spoke. When I was a little girl, I could speak Hungarian, Yiddish, German and Slavish.

LEVINE: Hmm.

RUDNER: But, see, when I came here, my father said, "You children have to learn English. So when you talk to me, you'll have to speak to me and I will answer you in English so you know what—what language you're talking about," because he thought that was very important for us if we were going to live here, that we had to learn to read and write in English.

LEVINE: So initially you were speaking to him in whatever you knew.

RUDNER: We—well, not—well, yes. Sure.

LEVINE: And he was returning it in English.

RUDNER: Right, uh-huh, and it wasn't too long. You know, I was eight years old in the first grade. I was put in the first grade. It wasn't too long you pick it up, you know, and I never went beyond the eighth grade in high school. I mean in school here because at that point, I went to the—as a freshman in high school, I was going on age sixteen and my family needed help at home and my sister had been helping at home and so I had to—I went the freshman year in high school in Canton and then after my freshman year, I had to drop out of school and help at home. So I learned how to cook and bake at a very early age and my younger brother, the one that was younger than I—we were a year and a half apart. He went to high school here and my youngest brother, who was born here, went to high school and college and became a doctor. Right, and everybody who was working in our family, my sister, my older brother, everybody helped to keep our household going so that my

youngest brother, Joe, could go to college. See, that was an achievement.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Uh-hmm.

RUDNER: In 1939 he went.

LEVINE: Hmm. So let's see. Do you remember when the family was getting ready to come to this country? Do you remember preparations to leave? What things were packed? Any of those kinds of things?

RUDNER: Well, she packed our clothes, whatever we had, you know. My uncle helped her to bring whatever we had and you know, I was too little to really look and see what she was bringing. As long as I had a dress to wear and shoes to put on, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, and do you remember before you left—I mean, do you remember saying goodbye? Do you remember—

RUDNER: Oh, yes, that was very—that stuck in my mind for a long time. We left to go to a larger city that was not too far from us where we got on a train. I had never been on a train before and the goodbyes to my aunts and uncles, who were in the area, and to my grandmother was a very sad thing. And when we got to this town, it was called Eperiyes [PH], but I don't know what it would be called now. It may not have the same name. That's where we boarded a train and on this train we went to Antwerp, Belgium to pick up the boat that we were going on and we—that night on the train was very sad. My younger brother cried for his grandmother on the train. I'll never forget that. [beings to cry] Just thinking about it.

LEVINE: This is the one who was a year and a half younger than you?

RUDNER: Yeah, he and I were very close in age.

LEVINE: Hmm. Hmm.

RUDNER: We—

LEVINE: Was the feeling that you would never see them again when your—when the family left? Was that—

RUDNER: Probably. Probably was.

LEVINE: Yeah. [pause] Did—did you stay a long while in Antwerp or were you—

RUDNER: Yes, when we got to Ant—well, first we had to go to Prague.

LEVINE: Oh.

RUDNER: And the first time I saw a mannequin was in Prague in a big department store window. I had never seen that before and I think later on somewhere along the line I had—I had read about this department store in Prague and then from Prague we got a train to go to Antwerp.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

RUDNER: And, yes, we had to stay in Antwerp I think about three weeks before the boat came for us, and my uncle, of course, who was an American citizen and he spoke many languages because he had learned them as a boy, was able to—to help us, direct us to everything. You know, he knew what to say and he knew what to do, and I remember being on the waterfront in Antwerp and he took us to a coffee shop and I have—I have never smelled anything so delicious like the pastry in that coffee shop. That's a memory from when I was a little girl. And he bought us, I don't know, some little French pastries or whatever they had. I can't remember what it was anymore, but I remember the smell of this place was wonderful.

LEVINE: And then were you examined at all before you boarded the ship?

RUDNER: I don't remember that. I don't remember that at all and we evidently must have been because I think we had to have vaccinations and stuff before we could get in the boat, on the ship. So I think we—either that, or my uncle had arranged all that before we left. I don't remember that.

LEVINE: Do you remember—why don't you say the name of the ship and anything you remember about that.

RUDNER: The New Zealand. I remember being very sick to my stomach when it started to sail, uh-hmm, and I do remember that—I'm trying to think. I don't know if it was called steerage in those days. I don't really know, but I remember lots of evenings the families of the people who were on this boat were in one great, big room like—like an auditorium type thing and everybody was either playing guitars or violins or whatever music that they played, and people were dancing around and trying to be happy on the voyage because it took us—oh, we were on the ocean at least three weeks. Yeah.

LEVINE: Where the dancing and singing was going on, was that the same area where you were sleeping then or was that a different—

RUDNER: I don't remember that. See, the sleeping had to be nearby because how far can you go, you know?

LEVINE: Unless you were up on deck for the—for the singing and everything and—and down low for the—

RUDNER: I don't remember whether it was down below or on deck, but it was a big room where everybody seemed to be happy and looking forward to their new adventure in the United States.

LEVINE: Do you remember your mother? How—any—anything about how she felt leaving her family and coming to this country or—

RUDNER: Well, but, see her husband was here, and she was looking forward to that. uh-hmm. Oh, I'm sure she had feelings like—like I'm having now.

LEVINE: Yeah. [pause] So do you remember when the ship came into the New York Harbor?

RUDNER: Vaguely remember. The ship came in and I think some kind of a small boat took us to Ellis Island and I remember Ellis Island was a huge place. Never saw anything that big, with lots and lots of people. And we all must have been vaccinated or something before we got on that boat because when you come in to Ellis Island, you—each child had to be checked out and my mother had to be checked out and my uncle, who was an American citizen, had to be checked out. I have to tell you a cute story about my uncle, who came to get us. He met a cousin of my father's who he fell in love with and after he brought us to the United States and we were settled in Canton—he lived in Cleveland—he went back to Czechoslovakia and married this cousin of my father's, who became my aunt. Lived in Cleveland for many years. Charming lady. Very charming lady. As I grew up, I remembered more and more about her. I didn't remember her so much as a little girl because she was a young woman, you know, and I was six years old. You don't pay attention to those people that much.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

RUDNER: But she became my aunt and she was a very sweet, charming lady and lived in Cleveland. They didn't have any children, so when I

would go to visit some of my relatives in Cleveland, I always visited her, too. Uh-hmm. And this uncle played the violin and he also had a good voice and he used to do—he was a cantor in one of the synagogues I Cleveland. [sniffling]

LEVINE: Oh. Is there anything else about Ellis Island? Do you recall how long you were there?

RUDNER: I think we were just there overnight.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

RUDNER: Yeah, and I think we were shipped out the next day.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about the accommodations or food or how you were treated?

RUDNER: I think on Ellis Island—I think my uncle brought us—bought us some ice cream cones. That may have been the first time I ever tasted ice cream. And it was like a treat for the children, you know, but I don't remember too much about it because it seemed like just all I can remember is loads and loads of people. It just seemed like they were all over the place, but I don't even know if we had spent an overnight there. I don't remember that at all, but I know—I remember coming to Canton not too long after we got to Ellis Island. So it may have been that we got there one evening and then the next day, after we were all processed, we might have gotten on a train to come to Canton.

LEVINE: Do you remember you—you went to Penn Station, apparently and then—

RUDNER: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about that—that part of the voyage, the going to the Penn Station and then the train ride?

RUDNER: Uh-uh. I remember the train ride, but I don't remember the station at all. You know. I guess there were just too many things to observe when we came in and little girls, you know, at that point you're maybe afraid or maybe, you know, you just hung onto your family.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

RUDNER: But I remember getting to the station here and getting off the train and meeting my father for the first time.

LEVINE: What was that like?

RUDNER: I remember that.

LEVINE: What was it like?

RUDNER: Well, this was a strange man that I never knew, you know. And, of course, after—after a while we just loved him. He was very good and sweet and kind and—but at first it's I think when you're eight years old and you first see your father for the first time, I—I can't exactly remember my feelings, but my brother remembered my father. My sister remembered my father because they were older. Because I was two when—when he left. You know, I couldn't remember him at all and I didn't remember any of the uncles that immigrated before until I lived here for a while and then little by little from Cleveland and I had an aunt in Indianapolis. Little by little they all came to Canton to see this—these little greenies that came here, you know. [Laughs, Sniffs]

LEVINE: Do you remember that? Do you remember being considered a greenhorn?

RUDNER: Oh, yeah. Sure, I remember that. We used to joke about it in later years. We thought it was a big joke, but I remember when they came to see us and this aunt would give you fifty cents or a dollar, you know, to go buy candy or whatever. And then for years when they'd come and you were a little girl, they would give you a dollar when they came to visit, you know. And I remember I had aunts in Akron and an aunt in—two aunts in Akron and an aunt—two aunts in Cleveland and then some of those cousins were my age, see. so then as a girl, before I got old enough, I used to go vacationing there, but by that time I could speak a little English and they could understand me. And then as I got older and into my teens, my cousins used to fix me up on dates and stuff, you know, because they were girls. One girl was a year younger than I. Another one was two years younger than I. So—and then the older cousins were friends with my sister and my older brothers, you know, and we had relatives in Pennsylvania. The sister to my father and those girls, as we got older, those girls used to come and visit and my brother and sister would fix them up on local dates here. So I would say that mostly we were a—a close knit family because, you know, we used to keep in touch. To this day, I keep in touch with—I just—the one—I have a cousin in Israel. I just sent him a New

Year's card and when my children went to Israel about eight or nine years ago, I had his address and they—they looked him up. He lives in Tel Aviv and I wrote him and told him where my children were going to be, at what hotel, and my daughter-in-law, who's been married to my son for about—over thirty years. Thirty-two, I think it's going to be this year or thirty-three. My daughter-in-law said when she saw this cousin come into the hotel, he resembled one of my uncles so much that she could have picked him out that he was the relative. Because these people were first cousins whom I had never seen, you know. They lived in a different part of Hungary than I did and like, you know, I was—through the war years you didn't see anybody.

LEVINE: Hmm. When you—did you ever—did the family ever consider themselves Hungarian or Czechoslovakian or—

RUDNER: Well, they always said Hungarian because, see, when my father came here, he was a Hungarian. It's when I came here that it became Czechoslovakia at that point. But the grownups were all came from Hungary, Austria-Hungary it was called at that time.

LEVINE: Do you remember any other experiences when you first arrived, like coming here to Canton? Did—did you start school right away? Did you—

RUDNER: Not too long afterwards, yes. We had to start school and I had, you know, some aunts and uncles in Canton. One of them had real little children. This aunt was like twelve years older than I. You know, as I got grown up, I thought she was an old lady when I came here. She had two little kids already. You know, she was an old lady and I used to look at her when I was in my teens, you know. This aunt was old, but when I got married, she wasn't old anymore. It's funny how your attitudes change.

LEVINE: Can you think of any attitudes or values or things that your mother and/or father told you that were things that had to do with how you should be or how you should live?

RUDNER: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Yes. I remember when my brother—my oldest brother, when he would go out, my father would tell him to be home by twelve o'clock. You know, when he was old enough to go out on a date, and I remember that my dad used to sit on his bed and wait for my brother to come. And if he was late, my brother would take his shoes off so the steps wouldn't creak on the way upstairs and my father was standing in the hall and saying, "Where were you all this time?" And when my sister was dating—you know, when I was

twelve, she was seventeen. I wasn't dating, but she was. I remember my father would say, "Good girls don't stay out late at night," you know, and she would say to him, "Pa, if I wanted to be bad, I could be bad in the morning. I didn't have to wait until at night." That was one of the expressions she always used to tell my dad. But, yes, they taught us values. Sure, they did.

LEVINE: And how about the religious life in the family, did it—did it continue here?

RUDNER: Yes. Oh, yes. We always belonged to a synagogue and all my brothers were—the one—my younger brother that I remember his Bar Mitzvah and I think Leo was the first one. He—he must have been—when I was eight, he was twelve and I think we were here a short while when he was Bar Mitzvah. But in those days, your father took the family to the synagogue and the day that they read from the Torah was the day you were Bar Mitzvah. It was no big deal, you know. So my brother Leo was a Bar Mitzvah. My brother Albert I remember on a Thursday morning and—but my baby brother, for him we were more advanced by that and we did what the custom was. They had the Bar Mitzvah and it was on a Sabbath and we I think served some kind of a—a little lunch at the synagogue, which at that point got to be what you should be doing.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. In the old country, your oldest brother was Bar Mitzvah.

RUDNER: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

LEVINE: And was that the same kind of thing, the day he read the Torah?

RUDNER: Yes, the day he read the Torah, uh-huh, was the—then when they took him up to read the Torah, they—I think in most—at that point there was no Conservative synagogue. It was Orthodox.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

RUDNER: The day he read the Torah was the day he became the Bar Mitzvah boy and you were thirteen years old then and you became what they call "Today I am a Man," you know. But he was still a young boy. But by the time we came to the United States, he was fifteen years old.

LEVINE: Yeah, and how about the girls, was there such a thing as a Batz [PH] Mitzvah or--

RUDNER: Oh, no. Batz Mitzvah is within the last twenty-five, thirty years. Nobody—

LEVINE: So the girls really didn't have a—a ceremony.

RUDNER: No. No, no, no. That was unheard of. That was started in the United States. I remember the first Batz Mitzvah I went to I was already married and I would be married sixty-one years if my husband was living because I got married in 1935. The first Batz Mitzvah I went to, I'm trying to think how old I was. [pause] I had to be. I got married when I was twenty-three. I had to be in my thirties the first Bar Mitzvah—Batz Mitzvah that I went to for a girl. So it could have been sometimes in the late '40s.

LEVINE: How did you meet your husband?

RUDNER: Oh. Well, he was a Canton boy and I used to go to the Jewish Center a lot as a little girl, you know, in my teens. I belonged to some things there and I met his sister first. I knew his sister for a number of years and—one of his sisters. And that's how I met him but actually he was a friend of a boy that belonged to a club of young boys, you know, and I just knew for about five—five or six years before we got married. I met him through the young kids around town, you know.

LEVINE: Were there a lot of people who had immigrated in your—in your community, besides [unclear].

RUDNER: There were some. Yeah, there were some but nobody came from Czechoslovakia at that time. Some of them came from Poland. Some came from Russia, but my husband was born in Cleveland and his family ended up living in Canton when he was eleven years old. And his sister and I—his sister, who is a little older than I, we belonged to a club together and I got to her know her and then I met some of her family and Sam was one of them, but we didn't even look at each other at first. And then as I started to date more, he was a very handsome fellow. Very good looking man, and he read. By the time I married him, he had gray temples and his hair was just beautiful and curly and gray, but as I said, as a youngster we used to date fellows from Akron and Cleveland and Youngstown, and then these boys from Canton used to date the girls from those towns. And when I met Sam, he was going with somebody. You know a girl—a girlhood friend, but then little by little I guess we started dating more and more and one of the fellows in his club was dating one of his sisters and then another fellow was dating a girlfriend of mine and, you know, as you go

along, you start this is your boyfriend, you know, and you start going with him more and more.

LEVINE: And how many children did you have?

RUDNER: I had—I have two living children. I had a miscarriage of twins. Then I lost a little girl when she was twenty-two months old, but my—I had the miscarriage of twins right after I was married and twins ran in my husband's family, too, and in my family. I have twin—twin aunt and uncle and he had a twin brother and sister that was younger than he. So I had—would have had a set of twins. They would have been, oh, about—they would have been born about nine or ten months after I was married, so they would have been about sixty. And now my oldest child is fifty-five and a grandfather.

LEVINE: What are your children's names?

RUDNER: Oh, William and Sharon. Sharon was a name—William was named after an uncle whose name was William, my mother's brother, and Sharon was named after an aunt.

[END OF SIDE B, TAPE 1]

[BEGIN SIDE A, TAPE 2]

LEVINE: And when you think back about—upon the fact that you came here as an eight year old and lived the rest of your life here, how—how do you think about that—any effects of that or the fact that the family immigrated to this country? Do you—do you—

RUDNER: Well, I think as I got older, we were very grateful to be here with all the trouble that was in Europe, you know. Because we lost an awful lot of people in our family during the Hitler period. An awful lot and, oh, I remember an incident of one cousin who used to write my father after the war and she wrote him and told him that the gentile people in that town hid her and her brother in the barn so that the Nazis couldn't get them. So, you know, there were people who you knew all your life when you lived there, and they were the kind that liked you as a neighbor and they didn't want you to get killed, so they helped you out. Those were stories that came from our cousins in Europe, as they emerged from all this terrible period and a lot of them ran away to other places.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Was there any—ever an effort before it was too late to bring the family members—

RUDNER: Yes. Yes, we had several. We had an uncle, my father's sister's husband, who came here short—before the war broke out in Europe. Before World War II broke out. He was here for about a year and he had brothers in New York and he had us in Canton and he left his wife and children in Europe. And he was so lonesome, he could not stand it here. Could not, and he had to go back. He just could not stand it here. My—our family begged him to send for his family and bring them here and he said, "No," he could never live here, it was so different. He went back and sure enough, that whole family was wiped out, uh-hmm. We always think about that and—but some of our relatives managed to escape and as I said, they got to different parts of the world. I had some cousins in Budapest who came back from the work camps. They were beautiful young women who sent us pictures because my father used to correspond with his sisters in Budapest. And these girls sent—used to send pictures and then they were forced to go to a labor camp, but thank God they survived and I guess the labor camp wasn't as bad from Hungary as it was from some other places. I guess Poland and—and some places were terrible. So these—some of these young women, when they came home from the labor camps, they would not stay in Hungary and live under Communist domination. They—some of them married and they went off to Australia. Had a couple cousins in Australia. Now these people are in the United States. Their children are here and I have a cousin living in Pittsburgh that I never knew in Europe. He's about—about my age. Didn't know him as a boy, child, and he came to Pittsburgh after the Hungarian Revolution when the—they were trying to overthrow the Communists in Hungary. Came here then.

LEVINE: Hmm. Okay, well, it's just about an hour. Is there anything you'd like to say before I close.

RUDNER: Well, I don't know what else you want to know. I have enjoyed my life in the United States and every—for every day I've had here, I have always been very grateful that I didn't have to go through what my family did in Europe. Really, and it's—I don't think that people realize what those people really went through. Nobody, unless you're living in those small villages—there were some terrible people in those small villages, too, that were—were very anti-Semitic, but on the whole I guess it sort of—how can I say this? It gains momentum, you know. When one family starts disliking another family, then the—his relative and his cousin and his relative dislike him and that gains momentum in a small village particularly because look what they did in the big cities in Germany. How

they—the neighbors allowed this to happen, you know. It's unbelievable that people would allow this to happen to people who were their close associates in a school, in a university, as a neighbor that they would allow this to happen. And forever grateful that I came to the United States when I did because I've had a wonderful life here.

LEVINE: Okay.

RUDNER: You know, even with pitfalls on things and with deaths in my family and—I had a very kind-hearted husband and, you know, we just together pulled through whatever things happened to us. We just somehow pulled through it all.

LEVINE: Okay, we're going to have to close here. I want to thank you so much.

RUDNER: Oh, you're welcome. I'm glad you came for the interview.

LEVINE: Me, too. I've been speaking with Esther Rudner, who came from what was Czechoslovakia at the time in 1920 when she was eight years old. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. It's September 15th, 1996 and I'm signing off.

RUDNER: No, I want to—

[END OF INTERVIEW]