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RENEE MINTZ
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- **Germany: CHARLOTTENBURG, BERLIN;**
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LEVINE: Today is February 24, 1997, and I'm here in Hallandale, Florida, with Rene Mintz, who was born Rosie Kahn. She was born in the United States, but the family returned to Germany -- when you were three months of age.

MINTZ: Not even. Not even.

LEVINE: Not even, okay. And because of World War I, you stayed in Germany and returned to the United States in 1922.

MINTZ: December, '22. That I remember. It's clear because my brother—in fact, I just spoke to him, my brother Zig, the older of my two brothers. My sister was born when my father—you know, my mother didn't have a husband

all those years he was in the army - so when he came home, she became pregnant and my sister was born. But the age difference is about six years and my brother was born right after that and when we came to America, back again, my youngest brother was born.

LEVINE: Okay. So you were the first child.

MINTZ: Yes, I'm the oldest. Yes.

LEVINE: Okay. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Okay, if we could start, if you would say where you were born and your birth date, just so it's on the tape.

MINTZ: Well, I born in the USA in New York at the Manhattan Women's Hospital. I believe so. Is that correct? I haven't got my glasses. Just tell me. I think it's the Manhattan Women's Hospital.

LEVINE: Borough of Manhattan.

MINTZ: Or just the Women's Hospital in Manhattan, Lower East Side.

LEVINE: Oh, okay.

MINTZ: Yeah, just on the Lower East Side. Where else did people go then? They came off the boat and they went to the, of course, Fifth Avenue, forget it. Madison Avenue, forget it. It was the big department stores and a couple of—who were the rich people then? The Astors? They lived there, I mean. You know, we, as we came off the boat, we went straight to—in fact, we didn't come in. My parents were in the Argentine. They got married in the Argentine. As a matter of fact, they were married; and at that time, Argentina in Buenos Aires didn't even have a marriage

bureau. They want…my father went first. He opened up a small bank, a German bank for the German people that had gone there to re-settle. People that had a few dollars heard that there was good property and nice, big land, inexpensive, in South America; and the climate is good, which it is. Reverse, of course, here we have summer; there they have winter, visa-versa. And they bought up a lot of land and they went there, and they didn't have to be Spanish or anything. They just went there as landowners. They staked out like we did here with the covered wagon. They did that.

LEVINE: I see. So they were given tracts of land?

MINTZ: Oh, they bought it. They bought it from South America, sure, from the Argentine. And Papa went there to open a small bank office from one of the German banks, and he worked there. He was engaged to Mama, maybe six or eight months prior to his leaving; and, finally, he wrote her a lovely letter asking her to come to the Argentine. He wants to marry her, if she would join him. So she had him write a letter to her parents, that she could present it to her parents, to make sure her father and mother would agree to that, you see. And of course, he was a very; not just educated, but charming, as charming as he was with his beautiful music. He played the piano, and as charming with his eight languages that he spoke, and all his nice ways. His writing was the same. So it was very intriguing. He could write poetry. He used to write Mama poems and stuff like that. I don't have a good picture. My daughter has all the pictures of Mama as a young woman. She was a typical Viennese beauty. Nobody looks like, like papa's side of the family except me and the boys. The rest of them have small noses and they're just—I'm going to show you my granddaughter. Show you my great—[tape off/on]

LEVINE: Resuming now.

MINTZ: All right. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be rude. I just wanted you to know.

LEVINE: Okay, your mother went to the Argentine and joined your father and they were married. [Tape hum obscures words}]

MINTZ: Montevideo, Uruguay; and the most beautiful story that I've ever —[tape hum for a long time] --mother went to get married, they couldn't get married in Buenos Aires. They had to go to Uruguay to Montevideo, and going there, about six o'clock in the morning, it was a very big ride. Mama got up; it was just about getting light. Summer is—they went February. So summer is in the winter and winter is in the summer. All right, and the roses were so gorgeous and these were real, natural roses. Not hybrids like we have here, with aroma and beauty and everything and no disinfectants, no sprays, no DDTs, nothing like that. So when Mama got up to go out, she looked out and there was a coach with four horses, stately horses, and the entire—they worked all night, the natives to make a blanket out of roses for each horse. Can you imagine entwining those roses, and the back of the coach—it was just a wagon, although mother called it a coach, and they had to ride about—to get to Uruguay, must have been a ride from—they were in a town called La Capilla but they had to ride about six or seven hours, prac-tically the whole day to get to a bureau where they would marry them. She was so shocked. It was the most beautiful thing that she could remember happening to her. That people were so nice. But we would say, "But momma, you worried about them. Everything you cooked, you made enough for them." She says, "Especially the kindelakh, the little ones." You know. You wanted them to have a little extra food, a little this, a little that. So they really thanked in her that way, you know.

LEVINE: Well, let's—tell me why the family returned to Germany when they did, when you were a baby?

MINTZ: Well, it happened this way. Papa wanted to stay in South America, but mama became pregnant with me and there were no doctors. There was just nothing. The people that came there, were forty, fifty year olds, mature people that had raised their families and they wanted to invest their money. So they were really no, you know, they had their medication, whatever was available. Aspirin, you know, whatever was available in those years. They may have had a doctor, one doctor, but she was too frightened to have a baby there because it was so away from the world. In the meantime, that same year her two sisters and a brother came to New York from Austria. They came to New York to settle. Like all, you know, aliens, they came in. And she said, "I want to be with my family when I have a baby." She was type of woman that the minute she was able to get away from the house, nine children—there were more children, but some didn't survive. And she was not sold into slavery, but at age ten, in order for her older sister to get married, her father rented her out for a year and took some money for her, he should have money for her older sister. She was the maid. She remembers getting two walnuts for dinner or something like that. She starved; she was, was starving, just to help raise somebody else's child and clean up and do things, at age ten. Like you have here. You have little Mexican girls coming down, this little, dried out, and they hire them for maybe a dollar a month or something like that.

LEVINE: This was in Germany, that your mother was hired.

MINTZ: Yes. Now, I'm talking about here in this building.

LEVINE: Yeah, right.

MINTZ: This was in Germany—not Germany, this was in Austria.

LEVINE: In Austria.

MINTZ: You know, in the countryside of Austria, going towards Czechoslovakia. You know, it was already like, not in Vienna. They didn't live in Vienna. They had a farm and they lived out in the country. Europe—European countries are very small. There's Germany. There's France. There's Austria. There's Switzerland. You know, they're one on top of the other. You can go through the whole thing in one day, you know.

LEVINE: So she wanted to be with her family when she had the baby.

MINTZ: Yes, because she was mature, although she was very young then. And when she came to New Y.., she came to Berlin and coming to Berlin, she learned to cook and she loved to cook because she was hungry. So she had to make good things that she should eat and make for them and everything. She became a *pension* in German. I'll tell you, a *pension* is like a—not a nursing home, but a retirement home for wealthy women. Women that were so wealthy they never lifted a spoon and when they had a lot of money, every Monday and Thursday they wanted to see a doctor. He should just go like this to them; you know what I mean? And everything is, "Regina, get me this. Regina get me that," but she was very forgiving for that. She says, "Thank God I'm not like they are. I can do things." So she cooked there and she became very able and very respected and the people that she worked for were a couple that owned this place and they made her like a daughter. They treated her like a daughter. They gave her a good salary. In fact, I had a story that I started to write about her life. Some day I'll finish writing about it, about Gina.

LEVINE: We should go further, because I really want to hear your life, and we're going to have—

MINTZ: I realize that. Well, anyway, I was born in New York, 1913, November 18th, 1913 and it was a very bad winter. I remember mama telling me, as I was four, five years old, that papa used to hold me. When I was so little, he used to hold me up to the gaslights for heat. My uncle was so worried; he didn't know what to do. If I cried, he took his handkerchief, put a sugar cube in it and put it in my mouth. Try that today.

LEVINE: So this was on the Lower East Side?

MINTZ: Yes.

LEVINE: And then why did the family go back to Germany?

MINTZ: Well, I was the firstborn grandchild and in Berlin, from Poznan — that's where my father was born, which was then Prussia. He was born in Prussia and Prussia was torn apart. Germany took half; Poland took the other half. Whichever, you know, may not be half exactly, but Germany made sure they got their part of it, and since they all spoke many languages—they do in Europe. People speak a lot of languages. They spoke German fluently and they said they wanted to go to Germany, since Poznan was still a little backwards. Poland was not—it was a beautiful country and for many centuries they had kings and rulers. They were a very wealthy company [sic] at one time, until they were invaded through the centuries by the Tartars. You know, by the different. The Khans invaded them. They go back a thousand years or so as being a nation of kings and such, but then the whole thing dissipated and they became very poor people, depending on the land. Like, what else was there to depend on, you know. Anyway, so they spoke—they were more educated in a

sense because their families were affluent. They owned [*getreide*], well, rich, rich growing areas and they owned lumber yards and they had their own train for the lumberyards. They had their own car for the lumberyards.

LEVINE: This was your father's family?

MINTZ: Yes. Yes. And his father was in the tobacco business. Siegfried. Siegfried Cohn. In fact, my brother's named after him, Siegfried Cohn, and they were affluent in the sense that they were educated. See, money, when you live in an environment where there's so and so and so and so and this, you know, where you have everything you want, children never got any money. There was no such thing as "I'm going to give you a nickel." No, no, no. Money was never handed to children. They were educated. They got a violin, a piano, important things, you see, and children were very appreciative and they were decent. They were taught to be respectful at all costs. That was the first thing. Papa, Mama, you had to stand back and "*Ya, nein*." You know, you had to be very polite, and when they loved you a little and really showed affection, it was a wonderful thing because it was not a world of affection. It was a world of obedience and strict, strict obedience. It was like that.

LEVINE: So he wanted to bring you—

MINTZ: He wanted to bring me back to Germany to show me to his family. At that point in time, the year prior to my birth, my grandfather Siegfried had died and had left my grandmother Francesca—beautiful, beautiful lady. If you could see my sister, picture of her and my sister standing next to me, it's like one and the same person. The only one in the family, they both had blue eyes, the same shape face, very tall and *klutzy*. You know what the word *klutz* is? They were clumsy people, but they were very good at

heart. But whatever they did was like, it's hard to explain. I was the agile one. I could do everything on the spot, where she always was the *klutz*. Anyway, when she was born, she was a miracle baby. She was born in Berlin right after the war, in 1920, before we came back. We came back 1922. Papa was home about a year. He didn't come home 1918 when the war ended. No, no, no.

LEVINE: But you mentioned on your questionnaire that he brought—he wanted his parents to see you.

MINTZ: Yes, he wanted his parents to see - the family, also, the aunts, uncles - the first grandchild. It was a big thing. My grandmother, should rest, was a very sweet and wonderful woman. Was a very sweet and wonderful woman, and she had a large family. Many sisters and one brother was already in America, Uncle Adolph. Their name was Goldberg, their family name, and Adolph was a very prominent businessman and they lived—we went to visit them when we came back. They lived in one of the brownstones on Madison Avenue, somewhere like that. As a matter of fact, I'll tell you a story about that.

LEVINE: Well, tell me—tell me—

MINTZ: Yeah, so now we went to Germany and when we got there, they had tickets to come back 1914 in August. And papa was not a citizen of America because they had just come there from the Argentine, and it never dawned on anyone you have to be a citizen or this or that. But as soon as he got into Germany, and in the winter of 1914, they drafted him. They took him into service because in Europe, when you come into Germany, you have to register at a police precinct. You cannot take an apartment without, I don't know what it is today, but in those days you had to go there and give your name, your address and "I just came from so

and so," and I'm going to live here. They controlled—they controlled you without you realizing it, you see.

LEVINE: How did you get along during the war years?

MINTZ: Well, Mama went to work. She had to because she came here hoping Papa would come back with us, you know, come back to America. He had a job here. We had an apartment on the Lower East Side with a piano for papa and everything, and they left it, going away for a period of about six or seven months, you know. Actually, only six months. Or, eight months at the most. Because they had their tickets to come back and they had no intention of staying there. But because he was Prussian and that part of Prussia that he was in became Germany, he was considered a German citizen and they immediately drafted him. Of course, I didn't know Papa at all. I was an infant in a crib, you know, and I didn't know I had a father until he came home from service, which was the early part of 1919.

LEVINE: Can you remember just sort of the memories that stand out in your mind of those years before you were nine and you left to come back here?

MINTZ: Yes. In my home were Grandma Francesca, my two aunts and a cousin and Mama. We were all women and we lived [*Neun und Dreisig*] 39 Goldstrasse in Charlottenburg, which is a suburb of Berlin. It was a very, very beautiful street. We lived up on the second floor and we had a terrace, a small terrace and on that terrace grew beautiful edible grapes, green grapes. That was my very favorite place, and this came from the foyer into the dining room. There was no such thing as a living room. There were seating areas or libraries, but not—there was a dining room, a tremendous table and an entire wall covered with a mirror, the length of this big room, which was longer than this, much longer. We had a china

cabinet. Actually, it was not a china. It was a cabinet. You could have put anything you wanted in there and on the cabinet, believe it or not was a Guttenberg bible, which we never, ever took with us. Can you believe this? I didn't know until years later while father and I were talking. It was an object, not just art, antiquity, but beauty. It was leather bound and I'll never forget it. In the Guttenberg bible were dates of all the births and different things, but we also had our own bible, a Hebrew bible. You know, there are different bibles. The Guttenberg bible wasn't even before Luther King. Before Martin Luther—look at me, Luther King. Sorry, very embarrassing. Anyway, but this was there. This was an art object. The girls, my father's two sisters were both single. The older one, Lucy, was much older than Papa. They were redheads. Papa was a redhead, too. His father had red hair, and Lucy had a child, Lottie, which was my cousin, Lotta. I adored her. But I never understood why they treated her so poorly. She was not wanted, and one of those things and they tolerated it. Lucy was an apothecary or a pharmacist. Very tall, very attractive, but also she was in the arts. She loved beautiful things.

In our sitting area we had a chandelier. Of course, everything was gas, gaslight, and I was allowed at night to stand on the table on a mat and take the lighter, which was a long stick that they lit, and I would light the gaslight. Hanging over this magnificent chandelier, they had to go — they went to Paris. Of course, this goes before the war. They were much older than him. You know, if they lived today they'd be maybe a hundred thirty or a hundred and forty. They'd go to Paris to get pure silk tops to go over this. That had a dome, but over the dome they would put this beautiful silk, it was like batik, beautifully painted silk, and one day when I did that, it caught on fire. But they never bought one. They always bought two, just in case, and they never were the same. They always were similar, but painting like that, you see, was unique. I'll never forget that. I was

frightened out of my head, but no one hollered. They never yelled at me because I was a very loving child. I loved everybody.

I was happy to be with them, and I didn't even know my mother, because she went to work every day. She felt she was living with her in-laws and she had no money. She brought me. My father was supposed to go for a visit. He had a job in a bank, in fact, in New York; right on the Lower East Side, Delancy Street, when the banks first started to come up, and he wanted only to show me off. So whatever money he saved, he didn't have enough for my mother, he wanted to go alone. So my mother's older sister, who was here then, that came here with her youngest—the older and the youngest came here, and an Uncle Nathan, she said, "I'm going to give you the money. You have to be with your husband. Don't stay here with your child. Go with your husband." That's how she was able to get passage. My father was very upset because he really wanted just to go to see the family, and then when my mother said, "After all, it's a new baby." So he said, "Oh, yes, we'll show them the new baby." That's how it really was. So she was stuck there with no money. It wasn't like today where women were—you know. She had spent most of her money to go to the Argentine and buy clothes and things like that. I mean, it was different. It was a different world.

LEVINE: What did she do for work when she was there?

MINTZ: When she was here—

LEVINE: While your father was in the army?

MINTZ: Oh, you know something? She had a terrible, terrible job. She was able to work in a vegetable place, where there wasn't much food during the war

in Germany. In fact, I'll relate that to you in another way. She worked in a vegetable place, where she used to come home; she was this thin like a toothpick. And she was never that thin, but she had, there wasn't—she was only worried that we should have enough and gratefulness to her in-laws and my grandparents and the older aunts. You know, the older in-laws that she was a nice girl. You know, she was pretty young. She sorted vegetables and fruit because everything would come in. Germany is not a very farming country, just in the outskirts, because there's so much water surrounding it. They were—in the heart of Berlin was a canal that used to bring in fruits and things. In the summertime we went to a resort right on the water. It was always surrounded, and the whole country isn't that big. Of course, there was the eeler's place, where people did nothing but smoke eels. I can tell you stories about eels. They were made in such a way; they were grown in such a way that they were fat. German people liked all smoked foods and all that.

They would do two things in Germany. They would eat until they busted. Then they'd get up and walk around the table and sit down and eat some more. I'm not joking. This was it, but we couldn't be kosher, but we tried not to eat anything that was unkosher. You understand because we're COHENS and the families were religious at one point, until all this was destroyed by Germany and Poland ripping apart Prussia, which was a very beautiful country with a lot of artists and such. Anyway, papa they sent to Heidelberg to study music, to the university. He went to school for two years and he studied music and then he came back. He was the youngest. No, there was a younger child, a daughter. I forget her name. I didn't know her. She died before I was born.

LEVINE: Do you have any other memories of World War I, besides the food was scarce and your mother worked?

MINTZ: Yes, I went to a little private kindergarten that I used to walk in a place called Vableasser [PH] Platz. Vableasser [PH] was a German hero and a platz is a place. It was a circle where they had this marvelous fountain and statue of the well-beloved Vableasser [PH]. What's her name? Jane Fonda made a movie called Vabelasse [PH] many, many, many years ago when she was young. She was probably about, oh, close to her sixties now.

LEVINE: Yeah, she is.

MINTZ: Yes, and she made a movie in Europe, as a matter of fact, and she was married to one of the producers there, a snappy European. He was married I think once to Bridgid Bardot and then he married her. It was one of these, "Come to France. France is free," you know. Anyway, Vableasser [PH] Platz was around the corner from our house. We lived on *Goldstrasse zweite etage, erste etage*; first floor, not *zweite* , *erste etage* and you could see out and see people. Since the family was very educated, they had many books in the house and one of my most fascinating books was Dr. Atezum [PH] in Africa, when he found the scientist doctor in Africa, when the two met. I had an oblong book that showed Africa and the inhabitants.

I was so fascinated; I've never seen people that weren't my color. How do they—do they paint that on? Do they make that on? I used to ask questions constantly. So one day around New Year's time—New Year's was a special occasion, everyone ran to the window and this is what they said, "*Ach, ein neger vas macht er den hier*?". A neger is a Negro. "*Ich habe das nicht gesehen*". I've never seen this, you know, and I was frightened. You know, I didn't understand anything, but I ran to the window to the side and I looked out, and there was a Black man beautifully dressed with a bowler hat, the old-fashioned bowlers, looking

and walking and looking at addresses. We were all fascinated, you know, because that was such a rarity because we knew that these people lived in the Congo or in Africa, to come all the way here. So then one aunt, the smart one, explained that those own the countries and that rule the countries are wealthy people and they send their children to England to study and they go on trips, and perhaps this young man downstairs—there was never such a thing as racism. It was just surprise, you understand. We were never taught. We didn't know anything like that. That word never came up because there was no such — it was just fascination because looking at those books with the women going practically naked, and I was ashamed to look at it, you know. "*Uchh, das kann man nicht sehen*", You know, all this would come. I haven't spoken German, you know, in how many years? But you see, it comes back to you like this.

LEVINE: Yeah, right.

MINTZ: Thank God my mind is sharp.

LEVINE: Yeah. Now, is this during World War I when you saw this Black man?

MINTZ: Yes, this was during the war years, yes. All this happened during the—listen, I came there '13. '14 was the war. I didn't remember anything then, I was an infant, and '15, '16, '17, '18, '19 was all the war years now. Grandma would take me during 1916 was I think—I was three years old—was the worst year in German history for that war. There was no food. All food that was in Germany went to the army. They were very aggressive. The Kaiser was stupid, simply because inter-marrying so much made them dumb offsprings. They were not sharp, same as the Queen today. Her oldest son, Charles, with Diana, he's an idiot. He paints. He's got a girlfriend that's like his mother. He needed a mother and she was never a mother to him, because she was raised for one

thing, to be a Queen some day because Uncle—what was his name? The one that ran off with—the one that was never crowned? You know. Well, you're too young for that. Those were in my years. Anyway, the one that—the Duke of Windsor. She became the Duchess of Windsor, you know, the American that was twice divorced. A real tramp. What can I tell you? You know, I don't have to tell you. She ran after money and she was the ugliest thing you ever saw. Tall and ugly. Did you ever see a picture of the Duchess of Windsor?

LEVINE: Yeah.

MINTZ: She had a puss like a dog. I mean, she wasn't even feminine, nothing, but then I don't think he was a hundred percent—you know what I mean? He had the baby face. He always—it was his mannerism that was not manly. The same with Charles. Marrying cousins so close is not a healthy thing to do, you see. So the Kaiser was not a particular strong person, and—

END OF SIDE A, TAPE 1
BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE 1

MINTZ: --doors, as I was growing up, five and six. First I went to a kindergarten that was in a storefront on Vabelasser [PH] Platz, and there I don't remember too much, but I remember the teacher was very nice and I didn't stay too long because I had gotten a gift of a *mogen dovid*, which is a Jewish star in gold for my neck, when I was three years old, and coming out of the school one early afternoon, which was about till twelve o'clock, ten to twelve—it was only two hours that I could go there and sit with other children. Someone came over, a woman, and grabbed it off my neck and hurt me because, you know, it was a—and I had like a mark on my neck, and when I came home and I spoke to my grandma, she didn't comment

on it. She said right away, I'll fix you, "*dem hals ich wehr ab,etwas anschmieren*". In other words, she would smear something on, and we didn't discuss it, but I remember that and it frightened me. So there was a sense of anti-Semitism then. Arrogance. You see, it was more arrogance, daring or maybe they were so poor because those that were poor, were poor. Although in that neighborhood, Charlottenburg, was more or less business people lived there. It wasn't—now, all right, going back to the basics.

On our street, this was 39 Goldstrasse. The buildings were made in this way. They were like tubular. If you lived to the front, you had the bedroom apartment facing the street. There were no automobiles. There were horses and wagons. If you lived to the back—now, each front apartment went right through and you could look out the back - in the back was a courtyard with a guard that took care, and he had a goat. He once gave me goat milk to drink. Ugh. Sharp. And in the back were the people that had less expensive apartments. These were just apartments. The town was Charlottenburg and it was very nice. It was a nice town. On the street in front, downstairs we had a few shops. There was a cigar shop. Cigars were the things. Cigarettes were not—women didn't smoke, and cigars, the men liked a good cigar. So there was a cigar shop, run by a crazy woman who lived with a gigantic dog and going back through the years, my aunts used to say, "Oh, she must live with that dog, the way she kisses him and everything." This was a gigantic—used to scare the life out of me. He was twice my size. Not mean or anything, but old already. You know, like an old, old man. Anyway, this woman had hair standing out. She was Russian or something, of Russian descent. She had jet-black hair standing out. Her whole attitude. She knew her business, but outside of that she had no friends. You know, people would greet her because she was a businesswoman.

Now, on the same block coming down were the part of the apartment and then at the end of the apartment was a building that was *Hohere Tochten Schule*, *hohere* means higher - daughters school, a private school. There was a public school you didn't dare go to because if you were Jewish even then, they put on the thing, *Jude, Jude*. It was not good then. So because I was very young and very vulnerable I suppose because of having all the good care, I went to this *Hohere To…*, *hohere* means higher than usual, daughter's school. In other words, you got the money; you send them there. So I went there and my wonderful teacher became a good friend. She was one of the royal. Her name was Fraulein Von, V-O-N, *Schonebad* [PH]. She was a third cousin to the Kaiser, but because money was so—the mark had devaluated so much, and the only ones that had anything was the house, the Kaiser and his family, Kaiser Wilhelm and his family. Other than that, nobody had—the families had nothing. It wasn't like Russia where there were at least dukes and duchesses, although she was a duchess. Von, V-O-N meant that she was royalty. Von. In other words, of *Schonebad* [PH]. Her family, years ago in Prussia, before Germany took it over, had an estate in *Shonebad* [PH]. She became a teacher. She was a very elegant lovely lady and so frightened; she was like a frightened bird. I used to feel sorry for her because she was always timid. [unclear – tape skips, tape off/on]

LEVINE: We're resuming here.

MINTZ: I went to that school and I adored my teacher and immediately we learned French, as soon as you go in. You were five, five and a half years old when you start school, and across the street from us, on the corner, no — the best part was, next to the school was a grocery that was big enough, a grocer shop to go to V*abelasse Platz* because this was a building and this was V*abelasse Platz*, the place, and my little kindergarten school was right in there. I learned to skate on V*abelasse Platz* because the asphalt

was marvelous for skating. That was the best time. In the winter I learned to ice skate and I became a very, very good speed skater here, that my children have canisters. My husband took black and white movies of me skating on the lake when we came to America. We always had races, you know, racing skates. Well, that's another story.

LEVINE: We're talking now World War I.

MINTZ: Yes, World War I. So now this was the grocery and I had the job during the war when the mark deflated to buy in there—my mother would send me down before she'd go to work and say, "*Musst unten gehen und kaufen nur ein halb viertel."* An eighth of a pound of *margarine*. An eighth of a pound of oleo. So they gave me a little shopping bag, a cloth bag and I had to go down and in the cloth bag, without exaggeration, must have been a stack of bills this high, mark. It had devaluated so much that the money was worthless, but because we were a family of so many people, the grocer knew when the women came into shop. Now *margarine*, margarine was in a tub. Butter was not available. If they think margarine is something new here, no, it isn't. Saccharine was there. All these things were there. Aspirin, absolutely. Coffee was only one where you bought it in beans and in our kitchen we had a beautiful Dutch tile coffee grinder that I used to stand on a chair and grind the coffee. Milk, the ration of milk during those years, 1916 that I remember clearly, a child was permitted one glass of milk a day and the child got maybe so much of it because everybody had coffee. It was a very big thing. You want more coffee?

LEVINE: No, I'm fine, thanks.

MINTZ: Did I give you cookies?

LEVINE: You did and I ate them.

MINTZ: Oh, I was afraid I left them in the kitchen.

LEVINE: That's okay.

MINTZ: Anyway, and a child got—that was everybody liked coffee and everyone—oh, *ein tee loffel*, a teaspoon, a teaspoon and then I was left with nothing. Many times I didn't drink milk, that's why everybody was tall and I was the shrimp. Because my food was not adequate, but thank God, outside of later years when I was about eight, when we had a hotel—my mother took a hotel over—I got jaundice. Jaundice. I became yellow, ran a very high fever for a few days. Jumped up and down like a lunatic in bed, you know, but I was fine. That went away and it took about three, four weeks for the color to dissipate.

So, when I, later, in later years, when I worked already and I joined my union in New York, 1199, and I used to go to give blood, so I had to tell them that I had jaundice because they took a different—they did something chemically, or you know, they filtered or they did something to it, but I still gave blood. I felt it was important, you know. Anything to aid humanity, to help someone that needs it.

LEVINE: So when your father—

MINTZ: Bread was rationed.

LEVINE: Okay.

MINTZ: Rationed. Everything went to the army. So grandma would take me down, she had to have a coupon, like we had in America when we had the Second World War, a coupon, so many days no meat. I worked then. I

worked in Radio City Music Hall, upstairs. I know the Rockefeller's personally. I cooked for them. The one that became governor, and his father would sit on the dais in the Rainbow Room. Private dining rooms and I cooked there. I cooked there for—oh, a big restaurant that owned all those places. The kiosks in the subway station there that sold newspapers, News

LEVINE: The Daily News?

MINTZ: No, no, no, no. It was called something else. Just a little forget..I don't want to think about it. It was such hard word; I don't want to think about it.

LEVINE: Well, let's keep—

MINTZ: Yeah, all right. So anyway, grandma would take me by the hand. My beautiful grandma, she would hold my hand and go on line to the bakeshop. Well, she got a little rye bread, maybe three-quarters of a pound of rye bread that she was permitted for the week. A very small bread, and when she got upstairs she told me why—she always explained everything she did because I would watch and say, "*Warum ist das so, und warum*?"… Why? *Warum* means why. "*Warum hat man das*?" Why do we have this? She always explained it. She educated me in a round about way. If I wanted to know, she helped me. She would take the rye bread, turn it upside town and take an, *ein messer* and scrape off the bottom. They never used bottom, they used *span(en)*, sawdust to bake the bread on. They could not use flour, waste flour. They needed it for the army and my father was in the army and said he starved. The only one that ate were the big shots. Everybody else got rations that was terrible. He was drawn like this. I was so frightened of him when he came in, the first time that I see a man in the house, that I shuddered. He couldn't touch me. I ran away, I was so scared of him, and we were never

close, except that I admired his work and we became intellectually friends, but never as parent, you see, and that was very bad. He taught me a lot of things just by conversation. He painted. We paint. I paint. The kids paint. You know, this is—he left us with a lot of nice things. Mama was a wonderful cook. I turned out to be a chef in one of the biggest restaurants, and then I went into pharmacy. So make up your mind, you know. Crazy. Nutty me.

LEVINE: Maybe we should move along here to—

MINTZ: Coming back to America?

LEVINE: Do you remember coming back to America?

MINTZ: All right. Now, in 1918 papa was coming out of service. It was the end of the war. Right after the war ended in June—no, June was the Second World War. I don't remember when the First World War ended.

LEVINE: I don't know what month, either.

MINTZ: It was 1918 that it ended and momma felt that she had to do more. She didn't want as a family group, my father, please God, was coming home safe, and me, I was growing. I was a little girl. How old was I?

LEVINE: Nine.

MINTZ: No, 1918, I was five years old.

LEVINE: Oh, you were five when—

MINTZ: Five years old and she wanted that privacy because she had no privacy whatsoever. We slept on a cot. She slept next to me in this big dining room that we had. And as I was telling you about Germany, the dining room with the mirror and the veranda, as you came into it, on the wall was a half circle of a *kachel ofen*, an oven to heat the house. This was made up of tiles and each tile had a different Dutch—a windmill, a little Dutch girl, a little Dutch boy, and on top was a grill like, that you opened up and you put certain briquettes in to heat it up for the wintertime. That really kept the house lovely. In fact, I had extremely long hair and during the war years when the royalty when pthhh, we had an offer to make a few dollars, I guess for my grandmother and the girls, we took in a duchess, a countess. Not a duchess, a countess. We gave her room and board and she would only do one thing. *Pflegen meine haar*. Did you ever hear of such a thing? To groom my hair. I had extremely long hair and it was wavy and she had nothing else to do. They didn't know what they could ask of her to do, and my mother said, "*Bitte* (please),*meine tochter hat lange haar*." My daughter has long hair; my hair grew very long. I tell you about my daughter with her hair, you'd laugh. It grew down to there, so she trimmed it off. She was very agile. She had to be because no matter what their title was, royally, they had no money. They had no means. Whatever they had, during that tear up of Prussia—most of them were Prussians that came in, you see. They were the royalty but related to the Kaiser, so they were treated like pftttt..you know. It was very funny. It was a situation that was very bad. So she came in and lived in our domicile.

We had moved. Mom and I moved into the library area. We had this beautiful thing with the most gorgeous china. We had wood in there, wood and tables. Oh, we took nothing. We went back to America in 1922, we didn't take anything. When I was old enough to understand, and went to school [unknown], and the birth of all these wonderful things, not

even an ashtray. Porcelain from Helb [PH]. Well, I could tell you. I have dishes in there from Japan. People that I wheeled around in a basket. The first Japanese to come in here, I worked as an assistant manager in McCrory's on 125th Street, sixty-three, sixty-four years ago, all right? And I did nothing, but every store McCrory's was like a Woolworth, but they had other items. They had more expensive items. Had windows with stuff in it. Today you don't have that because they would break it through in two minutes. I used to dress those windows. I would take anything I had and I would roll it up and make rosettes out of it, like old hosiery. Torn hosiery that was on display, I would curl up and pin rosettes up, make paint leaves.

Artistic, I was, and I got to meet some of the biggest Afro American stars because the Apollo was right across the street and we had a luncheonette and they would come in. I could go over there to any place I wanted, since I wasn't behind a counter, you understand. I was part of the managing department, and I met—I don't even remember names. Movie actresses. No, not movie, stage actresses. That very famous one. Not Uta Hagen, no, no, no. She came in once, but that was the hangout and there was buildings there that had mostly stage actors living there. They didn't want to live on Broadway because they wanted to get away from the tumult of Broadway where they were in theater. So they moved to Harlem, because their co-pals, a lot of them lived there.

Harlem was only for the Black community, but you have never met a nicer most wonderful group of people that I worked with for a number of years. I became pregnant. I was married. I got married. I became pregnant with my son, who's going to be sixty-three, I guess. Yeah, sixty-three, and I had to leave. How do you work having a baby? You know, you don't do that. In fact, they offered me, as God is my judge, they offered me a position in McCrory's main office just to do layouts on counters. Just to

lay out counters. Well, while working there, I must tell you quickly, two men came in, small Japanese men, that their English was very broken. They knew enough to say “Donk you. Ya, ya, ah so.” The manager came over, said “Renee , you’ve got to help me.” “Rosie,” my name was Rosie then. Well, actually it was Renee, but not for business. This happened in high school. We had six Rose Cohens in an English class. The teacher said, “Miss C. Miss R. Miss Cohen, Miss Rove, what am I going to do?” All Quiet on the Western Front was the biggest movie then, pertaining to the war. Victor McLaughlin. The actress in that was Renee Adoree, a beautiful little bit of a French girl with a lot of spunk. I said, “Gee, if I were her and she were me, we’d be one and the same person,” when I saw that. I had to see it three times, a nickel a movie. I saved up pennies to go to the movies to see that. I raised my hand. “Mr Shaw, call me Renee.”

My friend, who was sitting next to me, we looked alike. We were like twins, except she was taller and prettier. I was short. We both had long curls. We all wore skirts and blouses, the same type of thing, you know, and we’d take our two front curls, pin them up in and back and we were—Rebecca Slatshower. How could I remember her name after so many years? 1928, to be exact. I was in junior high in PS-98, in the Bronx, which the Bronx was the Bronx. It was gorgeous. I lived here. The Lake and Park were here, Katona Park. Indian Lake. When that froze in the winter, I went to school, took my skates. No lunch hour. I was on that lake with a broom sweeping up all the mess, I should be able to skate and not break my head on it. No bobby pins, hairpins, a diaper pin, something that you could get your blade into, and bo, I used to sweep it up and clean it up. I was a speed skater. I wish you could see those movies.

Anyway, so I took these two Japanese people with a basket that the boys used to bring up merchandise in to fill the counters. Counters are not

what they have today. Woolworth's, McCrory's, all the stores that were like five and dimes, McCrory's had more expensive merchandise. They kept undergarments, brassieres. Woolworth's didn't carry that. And the counters were laid out flat with a slight incline, so anyone that came over, if you wanted to buy new stationery, erasers were here, pencils were here. It was all different and the kids would bring up, whoever them stock…—not kids, stockmen, would bring up these big what do you call this? Made out of bamboo or whatever.

LEVINE: Oh, like crates?

MINTZ: Baskets.

LEVINE: Baskets.

MINTZ: Big baskets. Not plastic like today. There was no such thing, and I took this basket one after the other and I went around with these two Japanese people and I was told that not to touch anything. They will do the touching, of all the counters, and just let them put it in the basket. I went with them and they kept asking questions of me, which I tried by suggestion to understand. I did my best. I got to show you. They sent me the most gorgeous plates you ever saw from Japan as a gift. I was so shocked I got a gift. And I, they picked one of every item in the store, and they were going to make that in Japan, you see. That's when they started. 19—when is my Irwin born? 1930—

LEVINE: He's going to be sixty-three?

MINTZ: He's going to be sixty-three.

LEVINE: About 1935.

MINTZ: ’34. I think ’34, and Myne was born the day the World’s Fair opened, the year the World’s Fair opened up in New York.

LEVINE: 1939. ’39.

MINTZ: No, no. ’39.

LEVINE: Yeah.

MINTZ: He was born ’35. She was born ’39. ’39 to seventy, to ninety is what?

LEVINE: Thirty-nine to ninety—

MINTZ: She’s about fifty—fifty-seven. Fifty-seven years ago. Do I ask my children how old? I, do I know when they were born? They have their birth certificates, I can’t tell. Anyway, to make a long story short, they bought one of everything and this is what started Japan making toys. Now, in return they were very nice. They sent a package to the store especially for me, for the lady that helped. They wrote it first in Japanese and then in English someone translated and he gave it to me, the manager. At that point in time, he wanted me—I became pregnant with my son, God bless him. Beautiful boy. Wanna see that? The statue?

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

MINTZ: You know what that is? I can’t lift it. It’s driftwood. That could have laid on the ocean for a thousand years. When he found that we lived in Manhattan Beach and there was the ocean. We were this much from the ocean. We lived there for eight years. My first husband didn’t come home. MIA, missing in action. So Renee went through enough. Right?

We moved out there because that was only for army, navy and marine personnel and we got temporary housing. 'Cause, during the war years, I had to go to work. Mama had the apartment, and we moved in with mama. Naturally, I shared everything. You know, I didn't want to be—she didn't want to be alone. Both my brothers, one was in England, one was in Scotland. My sister was in Tallaha... not Tallahassee, Pensacola. They were all in the service. Every one did their job, and my husband had no right to be in there and he ran. Young people, all right; this is what it was. Somewhere in the Pacific. I don't want to think about it. It's too much, all right?

LEVINE: Yeah.

MINTZ: We moved into Manhattan Beach right off the ocean and Irwin loved to carve, loved to paint and he found a piece of wood right on the beach and I said, "What are you going to do with that? I can't even lift it. You can't lift that. Dead wood." Tougher than steel. He said, "I'm going to take it to school." I says, "You know, you go to Abraham Lincoln High School," which from our house at the end of Manhattan Beach, which incidentally was the living quarters of the US Coast Guard, which they dismantled and the government took over their buildings that were left and recreated them. Put in wonderful appliances, repainted it and made housing, temporary housing for army, navy and marine personnel that was coming home. There was a shortage. Nobody built apartments. This was the most wonderful thing. Coming down into that area—I've never really been—let me tell you about that first. He took that to school and the teacher said, "No way, you're never going to make nothing out of it. What do you mean? It's a piece of steel. You don't have the tools for steel." Irwin took it to shop. He got a gold medal for that and what did he make? Mom and pop coming home from the farm. Take a good look at it.

LEVINE: It's beautiful. I can see.

MINTZ: Mom and pop in overalls tired and old, bent over, coming home from the farm after a day's work.

LEVINE: Beautiful. now I need, because we're going to get near the end of the tape. I want to ask you some questions.

MINTZ: Ask anything you want.

LEVINE: So we can have this on the record.

MINTZ: Go ahead.

LEVINE: What do you remember about coming into the New York Harbor on the Mt. Clay when you came back to this country?

MINTZ: The excitement was unbelievable. Everybody was startled. People came up from—we were second class, so it was comparatively nice. We had a nice dining room, but mama could not eat because coming back—papa went a year ahead of us, right after my brother Zig was born because he was born February '22 and we came December '22. So it was just after my brother was born that he left for America. He wanted to go back. We had an apartment, everything. All right. Now, the apartment of course was gone. Everything was gone, but he had connections. We had family.

Now, the people from steerage came up and I went down to steerage once. I met a girl that was going, a German girl and we became friends. We used to go into the sitting area on our level, the second class, and people would be sitting around. And, I would ..they were very quiet

people, older people and they would say to me, "*Kannst du tantzen*?" Can you dance? "*Kannst du singen*?" Now, *singen* means to sing and I know that the little I knew about music, my father in Germany would play the piano and it would just make me alive, you know, and I would ha, ha, ha and to me it was beautiful. The songs, my aunt, his younger sister, the younger of the two but older than he, had a nice voice, Clara, and she came to America via Mexico with her husband. Oy, my God. Anyway, they would sing the words and everything and I would know. "*Schonste Liebezeit"* You know, I would know all these songs and I would get up. Too much clothing we couldn't take. You know, we had to pack for the babies. That was the most important thing. And I would take a bow in front of the people, they asked me, and I would start to sing and make motions. The ham. You know the ham?

LEVINE: Can you sing a little bit of it?

MINTZ: No.

LEVINE: No? Okay.

MINTZ: "*Jungste Kinderzeit*" Maybe it was *zeit.* Young love time. Vaguely. Honey, that I can't remember. I haven't done that in years, because from talking a lot in business and raising a family, I wanted them to be the gifted ones, not me. I was just going to be mommy and daddy and the cook, chief cook and bottle washer and the worker, the drugstore lady. I never butted into anyone's life. People would come to me with things that, unbelievable. If I was thirty at the time that I started in the drug business, and women coming that are my age now, they didn't realize, not in those years anyway, the age difference and they would ask me personal questions about health, their personal this and that. Well, I also discovered that many women are very prone, "I need the doctah. I need the doctah. I

need medicine," and some of them would come in "No, it's not for me, I don't take medicine." You understand? And that made the difference between stupid and smart, I'm sorry to say it, because if you wanted to be modern and grow with the times, you knew that medication was not the best thing to take. You had to help yourself. You see?

LEVINE: Now, we should say here that you became a pharmacist. This we haven't said yet on the tape.

MINTZ: Well, I became a junior. I'm ashamed to say it, and I better not say it. I worked so hard when I first got there and I learned very quickly and I had a wonderful, wonderful—Sam. Sam Balen, he was my mentor. The owner of the store was a young man, a captain that came out of the navy and he was sick with colitis constantly. He used to—we had a very—we had the store in Manhattan Beach was the mess hall of the Coast Guard and he and another fellow—this is crazy. Absolutely crazy. I was in the food business. I was with Schraft's. Schraft's owned the concessions and the kiosks of the newspapers, the candy, everything. They also ran the restaurant, Schraft's restaurant where you go the wonderful ice cream. They went into Radio City and during the war years they shut down the 64th and 65th floor, which was the Rainbow Room, and they made private dining rooms out of it. My diners were the entire, what was left of the richest family in the world.

LEVINE: Rockefellers?

MINTZ: Rockefellers. All the Rockefellers. On the dais—this is the dining, the night club in there on the 65th floor. This is the dais where the music would play. This is the Rainbow Room. This was made into tremendous tables. This is what it was. Mr. Rockefeller and his secretary sat in the dais on a table. Slim man with a tremendously blotched face. Black suit,

very shy. He was the head now. Not- his father was John D. that gave out the dimes in the early part of the 19th century. I remember seeing him downtown New York. I mean, I'm going back a long time. Once you hit eighty, boy, you know it. Now, the table below, the few steps below the dais was a big long table. There was Lawrence in uniform. Who was the governor of New York?

LEVINE: Nelson.

MINTZ: Nelson at the end. Lawrence in uniform. John, Jr. What was the other one? About five Rockefellers, all his sons and a little guy with a big head who looked like out of a comic book. And sometimes they scribbled and finally, if they needed more paper, you scribbled on the tablecloth. I'm sorry I didn't save it. Those were the years, during the war years—these were the war years, the Second World War years, when the Rockefellers took over the state of—well, the state was con…

END OF SIDE B, TAPE 1

BEIGN SIDE A, TAPE 2

LEVINE: Tape two.

MINTZ: All right, I met Helga onboard ship.

LEVINE: Of Renee Mintz.

MINTZ: Yeah, she was about my age and she was going to California with her family and she came from the low countries in Germany and she spoke *Platt Daitsch*. That's like a country German, where we in Berlin spoke *hoch Deutsch*, the way I would speak it now if I were to speak it. She spoke; for instance, if you say "*Die kuh rennt um die see arum bis sie fall"* the cow was running around the sea till she fell. She would say it this way

"*die kremt demsee um bissifal"*. Do you understand? It was *Platt Deutsch*. We called it *Platt Deutsch* and it was hard to understand her, but just as again—

LEVINE: What's the word for *Platt*?

MINTZ: *Platt Deutsch*. Country German.

LEVINE: Country German.

MINTZ: Country German. What else could I say? To my knowledge, you come from the country, that's country Deutsch.

LEVINE: I see.

MINTZ: You know, we spoke *Hoch Deutsch*. We went to school there. We spoke the way you might hear it, but some people, I noticed they don't realize that I understand German. Many time you're somewhere and they're speaking German and you know right away whether they come from a big town or from the country. They talk a certain way and immediately I'll say, "Umm, *Platt Deutsch*." You know, back woods, in the back of my head. So I met this young lady. I believe her name was Hel..—[static, noise for several minutes, no voices]. ….{*Ich muss die Mutter fragen – I have to ask my mother}* … {hum and static for long period}….
A lot of Russians down there that were coming in. Russian immigrants, and they were standing there with their pickled herring. The smell was delicious, but it scared me. What is this, you know? And then very hard bread. I guess the ship provided as much as they could for the ethnic people of what they could eat. Well, anyway—

LEVINE: Were they eating down in steerage?

MINTZ: Yes, yes, they were eating. That's, they had a plate. It was like a buffet. To make it exactly, I couldn't think then what it would be in German, but I can tell you now it was a buffet where they took a plate and they helped themselves and they sat down where they slept and they ate it.

LEVINE: And there were women in one area?

MINTZ: Women, children—no, no, no. Families.

LEVINE: Men in another? Oh, families.

MINTZ: And those that weren't men by themselves, I didn't ask. I didn't know enough to ask, but I saw a few men standing. Now, many of the people in the third class—now, this was steerage. That was about the lowest price to come to America. Maybe equivalent might have been maybe fifty dollars to make a trip at the most, in American money. What it was in European money, I don't know because, like a flight. I was the first one in the family to fly to Florida, during the Second World War I came. My husband needed—he was very sick, my second husband and he needed sunshine and stuff. So he went down and then I took a few days, shipped my children up to mama. I lived in Manhattan Beach, up to where she lived in the Bronx, and I flew down. Round trip then was sixty dollars; you know what I mean? Six people on the plane. The plane was not a jet, prop, and I remember flying going down it was freezing. It was in the winter. Flying down, going directly over Washington and seeing all the monuments. I was sick all the way. I couldn't control myself. I was afraid mostly and when you have fear, your stomach turns, yeah. Coming back was different. I went twice. Once I took my daughter to grandma when she was first going to kindergarten and I went down. I don't even know

what year it was. It was right when the war was over, ’42, ’43, ’44, yeah. I took her by train.

LEVINE: So you were saying about steerage—

MINTZ: Anyway, so coming off--

LEVINE: And then third class—

MINTZ: And third class was mostly a very large contingent of religious Jewish people with beards, and when I walked in there I was very awed because they had their prayer shawls for two reasons. They had a *Minyan*, which is a service in the morning and at night, and they wear their prayer shawls and their skull caps or hats, whatever it was. They cover their head, and then I looked at their dining table was also all boarded up and I used to say, “how could those poor people eat?” At that age I felt sorry. I mean, I was a concerned person. I don’t know why. This was me, all right? But it was fascinating to see all that. Then I realized, when I went out, that someone was talking and I listened. Never questioned, just listened. They were so frightened of the bad weather that they made prayers all day long, you see, because of the terrible storm that we encountered. I remember that. We had about four, five days. It was a two week voyage coming back on the Mount Clay and it was so bad , the latter part when we were hitting the Atlantic, the North Atlantic. The icebergs, we didn’t see them, but they were—the ship announced there a distance of icebergs and we have to go south. So the ship veered south. Maybe how far could they have gone from New York? Maybe as far as Virginia, a little further south, just to get away from that onslaught in the north sea of icebergs, coming from the North Atlantic. So we came in, actually instead of ten days, it was about fourteen days. So we were four days late.

LEVINE: And when you came into the New York Harbor, what do you remember?

JM: It was the most wonderful thing that I could ever remember. The first that came to me, "I'm an American." "*Ich bin ein Amerikaner*" I couldn't speak English. We were never taught English and no one spoke English. They spoke French, German, Russian, Polish. They spoke everything and some of the words I still remember. I did something I shouldn't have done and grandma wanted to yell. My aunt would holler, {"*dayaspoke, dayaspuke*"}-which means, "Don't hit her. Don't hit her." You know, they always watched over me. Not that grandma would have hit me, but the word ["*dayaspoke"*] meant leave her alone, she's a child. You understand? That I can remember hearing. I did things. I loved to crayon. I loved to cut out paper dolls. Child—you're a child; you're a child.

LEVINE: So did you see the Statue of Liberty when you came in?

MINTZ: That was the first thing that everyone ran to see. I was afraid the ship - I was so little and I remember like today. The ship [*das schiff wert gehen in wasser*]. That ship will sink. ['*untergehen"*] *Alle menschen sind gekommen* to the front. Everybody came to see it as we were going by and it was not tilting or anything. It was a very big ship. It was Hamburg - American line and it didn't tilt or anything, but in my mind, so many people on one side of the ship, the ship will go in the water. We'll drown. So I tried to stay in the distance on an end and just watch from the distance. Everybody was {sound of kiss} throwing kisses, waving handkerchiefs and crying. It was a wonderful, wonderful feeling. I knew there was no *krieg*. The word *krieg* used to stick in my throat. *Krieg* meant war. Now, the war was not there and that we're coming to family that love us, and we're coming to my home and mama's going to be happy. She's going to be with papa. That always worried me. That there was no tension or

anything, obvious, but she was sad and that bothered me. She was so beautiful. And it was seeing the people rejoice to such an extent, Russians that came out of a Russian Revolution with nothing. I could tell you stories that I saw.

1918, at the end of 1918, the beginning of 1919, mama went to Oranienburger Strasse. That's where the *tor*, the Arch of de Triomphe that you have in Paris, well Oranienburger Tor is an arch made after maybe a couple hundred years ago, a big battle that they won. They put up this tremendous arch and that was like Madison Avenue, Fifth Avenue. It had shops. In fact, our family owned—I don't remember the name. [bell ringing in background]. Oh, you'll have to go down with me.

LEVINE: It's a fire drill? Oh, my goodness. Okay, we'll pause this here.

MINTZ: [tape resumes] --so elated, they didn't know what to do, but when we got into Ellis Island and we finally disembarked, they looked at all our passports, you know, and I don't think two people got the correct name on their American agenda.

LEVINE: How about you?

MINTZ: Well, Cohn was very easy. We could rel.., we spoke, you know, C-O-H-N, Cohn. C-O-H-N. So they couldn't write it. We wrote it out for them, but many people couldn't read and write. They came from the back woods of Russia, you know, and when they gave a name like Sabinski, Koplitski and things like that, they would not be able to—that's why many people—a very famous artist, she was one of the big singers of all times, she changed her name. Not because she wanted to; because at Ellis Island coming in they didn't spell her name correctly, so she became that. I can't think of her name. She was very famous.

LEVINE: How did you get from K-O-H-N to C-O-H-N?

MINTZ: K-A-H-N. Kahan. How did I get there? I'll tell you very easily. As they were modernizing coming to America, the name Kahn was too stiff because at that time a lot in the telephone, they were Cohens. Those that had a telephone. So everyone changed it to Cohn.

My name wasn't Renee. My name was Rose, but in English class, as I told you, every (unclear) says "Call me Renee," and my friend Rebecca. I explained that, that looked like me. We were good buddies. Her name is Rebecca. She says, "I'm Renee, too." So we became the two Renees and the teacher misinterpreted and called us Weenie, until we had to go up there and say, "Mr. Shaw"—I don't remember his name exactly. You know who was in that school? It was the first year that James Monroe High School was built and the head of the French Department was Dr. Mankowitz, the father of the famous Mankowitz directors. And his daughter, Miss Mankowitz, was an English teacher and he came, sat down and talked to us in the French class because we took French and German in high school, also. I wanted to make my three years of this and three years of that because those days in junior high, you could take Spanish or French. You couldn't take German. Junior high was like already a year of high school. Going into Monroe, I was in my sophomore year—not freshman, sophomore and then I stayed three years to graduate. All right.

LEVINE: Just one point. You came second class. Now, how was it that you even went to Ellis Island at all?

MINTZ: Oh, everybody had to go to Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Well, usually it was steerage and third class, but you mentioned on your questionnaire that you—

MINTZ: We went second class.

LEVINE: Right, but you said the whole ship went. There was something contagious going on among the passengers on the ship?

MINTZ: No, they were—

LEVINE: Normally speaking, second class wouldn't have gone to Ellis Island, so there must have been—

MINTZ: What do you mean second class? I don't know.

LEVINE: Unless there was—

MINTZ: All ships landed at Ellis Island then. Honey, this was 1922.

LEVINE: I know. It landed at Battery Park and the third class and steerage went to Ellis Island. The only ones from second or first class who went, there was a problem. Either a physical, you know, sickness or a contagious disease.

MINTZ: Not that I remember. We landed at Ellis Island and I remember all the people standing there coming up from steerage that I recognized by their clothing and their baggage. Paper, you know, almost like nothing. They didn't have paper bags in those days. It was just sackcloth, all right?

LEVINE: Okay.

MINTZ: No, unless they were taken by boat elsewhere because who stayed? I couldn't watch it. I had to be with my mother. When we got into Ellis Island, we were stuck there over night. A whole day, a whole night and the following most of the day. Then we finally got a boat to take us into pier, into New York.

LEVINE: Manhattan, uh-huh.

MINTZ: Yes, into Manhattan, and from there we went in a subway that took us uptown because the family lived in the Bronx. Who picked us up? Uncle—Uncle Sam picked us up. Uncle Sam was my Aunt Bertha's husband, and he picked us up at Ellis Island. He came there twice. First the day we landed, he couldn't get us, and the people in Ellis Island were very nice. They gave us like a buffet, take something to eat, and they were very nice. Then the men that checked us as we were going off the boat, to check us in who we were and where all the names came in, you know—Sophie Tucker. That's the actress, Sophie Tucker. Her name was Tuckerchinski or something and they made—I must get a tissue. I get so excited. [pause] Excuse me, I don't have a cold. [tape off/on]

LEVINE: We're resuming here.

MINTZ: That's the actress whose name changed for—[tape off/on] --live long enough, *barukh hashem;* thank God, that I was able to live long enough to know the old days and the new days, you see. And my delicious middle grandson, Gary, always says to me, "Grandma, tell me about the old days." There were days that I took him—my day off from business was usually a Tuesday. During the summer I—well, they lived on the island and I lived in Queens. And they would, naturally everybody had keys. My children all had keys to the house and the minute I knew somebody was there, when I walked in and I found a towel draped over my kitchen chair

or my living room chair. "Ah, I wonder who it is?" you know. And if I knew the bed was—I'd go over and give them a kiss. They'd be sleeping on my big bed. Right there, they'd be sprawled out on it. Who am I to say no? I was delighted, and immediately called my daughter and told her, "So and so is here. Don't worry," you know.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. Let me ask you this. When you first left Ellis Island and you started up to the Bronx to your aunt's house, do you remember initially or the first few days or weeks, things that struck as new and different that you were unused to?

MINTZ: Oh, everything. I looked for the friend. I wanted to say goodbye to my friend Helga from the boat, but it was so mobbed, I couldn't see her. But I knew that seeing the family for the first time, my mother's family that was here. My Aunt Bertha who was married and had two children, two boys. One boy, the older one; the second one wasn't born yet. My Aunt Lee was just married and my beautiful cousin Marsha, what an artist. Was she gorgeous. She died recently. It was like taking a piece out of me. She was like my little sister, also. She was four years younger than I was, and my Aunt Lena was absolutely the most adorable young woman you ever saw. She was the prettiest of the lot, and she was tiny, very, very pretty and she wore the most dramatic clothes. She could sew. She could wash. She could knit. She could embroider. Everything, but all her good things, more or less, I didn't copy, I just came naturally.

LEVINE: So what were the things you saw that were different?

MINTZ: And we stayed—we stayed in Minford Place, New York, 1461. How did I remember that? 1461—oh, God, I remember. Thank you, dear God. 14—and how many years? This is '22. How many years is it? Seventy years.

LEVINE: Seventy. More than seventy, seventy-five.

MINTZ: 1461 Minford Place. They lived up on the fourth floor and she had Marsha. Marsha was five years old. She was just starting school, and when I walked into the house, the first step into the house—she had four rooms. An extra bedroom that she gave to her oldest sister, that was mama, and for us and all of us, papa, mama and the three children had to stay in that room, which was fine. We managed. You manage. If you have to, you have to. And as I come into the kitchen, this was the most wonderful thing that I can ever remember about coming into New York, Aunt Lena kissed us and hugged us and right away ran to the icebox. There were no Frigidaires. There were iceboxes. And took out whatever she had. Some fruit and some baked - she was a wonderful cook - cake that she made for the occasion, and she told mama that—she spoke Yiddish and momma understood. She didn't speak German, but they spoke English and Yiddish and mama understood Yiddish. Of course, I didn't, but by listening, I could catch it, that she was expecting other people, her friends to come over that want to see us and meet us. Mama was frightened in a way. She didn't want to impose upon her and it was really scary. So in the kitchen—this was a large kitchen. There were no living rooms in those years. People had dining rooms, you see.

LEVINE: Dining rooms.

MINTZ: And in the dining room was here and the kitchen was immense with a table and chairs and a window and everything. In the corner is standing, without exaggeration—I'm not lying to you—a little girl, which in my eyes was a china doll and I wanted to go over and go like this to see whether it's porcelain. I was used to porcelain dolls with porcelain faces and the first thing I wanted to see, "Where did you get this *kommt wie das schone*

puppe?" A doll is a *puppe*. Big blue eyes, jet-black bangs, short hair. The dress was hand embroidered white, white cotton. They used to take blue embroidery thread and embroider it. My aunt, should rest in peace, used to make kitchen windows like that and for her room. And she stood there like this, and I thought she was a doll. I've never seen a child so gorgeous in my whole life, and I went over there and I wanted to touch her face. So she looked up at me. I got startled. I thought she wasn't real and I said to my mother, "Mama, *das ist ein kind*" That's a child. She was four years younger, so she was maybe a year older than my sister—two years older than my sister. Nein, she was five and Fritzie and wasn't five yet. No. They were born one after the other. My mother was pregnant with my older brother and didn't know she was pregnant because she was nursing my sister.

My father was in a hurry, he couldn't spare her. But all right, look, happens. Well, we became—I became the older sister to this Marsha. She turned out to be a beauty contest winner. Very tall, very pretty and a fantastic artist, but her children and I are very close. For argument sake, her son will be in the subway and I'm going somewhere, he could spot me three cars away and he missed me going into the subway. And I see someone tearing down and I'm holding on—I'm not joking—holding onto that, and as he's coming into the third car, "Renee! Renee!" and he runs over. A big grown man. He's got a beautiful daughter today. She's going to be married soon. Grabs me around, "Renee, Renee!" This is cousins, first cousins.

LEVINE: This is when you first came?

MINTZ: No, this is I'm just saying how—

LEVINE: Yeah.

MINTZ: This is Marsha's son.

LEVINE: Oh, okay.

MINTZ: Her oldest son. She has a beautiful daughter, Hennie. She's adorable. They're all artists. Just runs in the family, I guess. I don't know. Anyway.

LEVINE: Is there anything else that was new and different—

MINTZ: About then—

LEVINE: When you first arrived?

MINTZ: Yes, it was going to school, PS-40. I had a little Irish teacher. She had red hair and she was as Irish as can be, Miss Riley. She was absolutely sweet, and the first thing that I remember, going to auditorium. I was in third grade. In those years school lasted a full year, each grade, and you didn't change classes for a year. There were no—there was A and B. First A and then B of the same grade, and she was very nice. She explained to me—she said she was going to give me a note to give to momma. Momma couldn't read English. "Please buy a midi blouse and a skirt." A navy blue skirt and a midi blouse and two ties, a red one for auditorium and a blue one—yeah, a blue one for every day. And that is how everybody dressed. It was uniform. Of course, I brought it home and I gave it to my mother and she says *sehr gut, sehr gut*, and she put it down. She couldn't read it and no one translated it for her. So I wore German clothes that I had as a child and that I brought with me, a dress with a high collar, velvet, high button shoes, things like that and I felt very awkward.

And I couldn't—I tried to speak English, but I mixed German and French. I thought maybe they would understand me, and then the teacher kept insisting, "You must speak Aynglish!" English, and to me it was Aynglish. She gave homework and she picked the smartest girl in the class, who happened to live on the block that I lived on, Minford Place, 1461, and she says—what was her name? She had a very long name, a funny name. "She is going to come over and help you do homework." Now, in Germany in school all our paper is not lined. It's graph paper. We did all our work on graph paper, especially mathematics. I was very good in school, the little bit I had of it, and I knew. We could speak language. We did everything according, and in school in Germany, Saturday you were not off. You had to go to a gymnasium. A gymnasium are two things. It's either a college or it's a gym area. We had to go to a gym area from the same school and there we had all kinds of appliances, with teachers, that taught us how to jump on a leather horse. How to climb a rope, to do all this, and you learned to be athletic and you were very good.
So here I was off. Saturday was like a holiday, no school on Saturday. Now, she came to my house to do homework with me—what the heck was her name? I used to remember that so well, her whole name. You know, she had one of these funny long names. Anyway, we were, you know, Sarah Rose Marlee You know, things like that.

LEVINE: Right.

MINTZ: She had a different name. So she sat down with me to do homework. That was my first night. My Aunt Lee took me immediately to PS-40 to register me in school. That is when I had to get a birth certificate, my first birth certificate because what they sent me to Germany, and the name could not be found. I sent to America for a birth certificate to come in, and the one you saw is not the one. I had to get a second one. It said no one

by that name is registered here because the name, instead of being Kahn was Cohn, you see, and they couldn't find it. When I took that, at the immigration when they looked at it, they didn't even know the difference. They just, "Quick, quick. Schnell, schnell. Hurry up, hurry up," you know, and when I took that to register school, the teacher looked at me—in the office. Not the teacher, the officer worker. She says, "This is not a birth certificate." I says, "*Das ist mein. Ich bin geboren hier*." You know, I'm born here. "*Mein*," and she says, "No, no," and she explained that it said "cannot be found." You see? I was horrified. I said, "Who am I?" you know. I had to go—not I didn't go because I didn't know enough to go into New York and I believe my father then at that point went to New York to the bureau and got a birth certificate with the proper name where the error was and then I was able to get that, and I gave it into school. They kept it and this I got when I had to go, when I went overseas, you see. So there was always some reason to get that.

LEVINE: Well, tell me what you feel really—

MINTZ: Oh, I've got to tell you what was so proud.

LEVINE: Yea.

MINTZ: The proudest moment, coming into Ellis Island seeing the Statue of Liberty and knowing about it because I read up on it. Everybody was interested. The fact—and I married a Lazarus to begin with. That was my name, Rose Lazarus, when I married the first time.

LEVINE: What was your husband's name? His first name?

MINTZ: Louis.

LEVINE: Louis.

MINTZ: And he died wherever. To make a long story short, the name Lazarus struck me as being very wonderful. Emma Lazarus, she des.. wrote the wonderful—

LEVINE: Poem.

MINTZ: Poem, you know. I used to know that by heart, like I remember trees: I think I—I think I will never see a poem lovely as a tree. A tree who looks at God all day and lifts his leafy arms to pray. Kilmer. Joyce Kilmer's poem.

LEVINE: Kilmer.

MINTZ: "A tree whose hungry mouth is pressed against the earth's sweet flowing breast." The final stanza on that was, "But only God—fools are made by poems like me, but only God can make a tree." By Jiminy Cricket, I can remember that.

LEVINE: You learned that in grade school?

MINTZ: No. Yeah, in grade school when I came in. The first thing we learned were poetry, which was wonderful. Can you imagine, I can remember that? Anyway, so for an eighty-three, eighty-four year old bag, it isn't too bad. You got to work at it. You got to read. You got to write. You got to study. You got to read everything you can get. From everybody, you need opinions.

LEVINE: How do you think coming here as a nine year old—

MINTZ: It was the most—

LEVINE: Changing your culture, how does that—

MINTZ: Now, I'll tell you. Now, we lived there and everybody in those days was called a greenhorn, so many immigrants—[static], it wasn't too bad, but then we moved. We got an apartment through a cousin of my mother's on third avenue and I attended—I changed schools from 41 to Public School 4, which was right on Katona Park. This was across the park from one area to—and we used to walk that. In fact, when my son was born, when I got married I lived nearby. Family lives in the Bronx; you live in the Bronx. The Bronx was beautiful.

LEVINE: I think we better pause here because the tape is about to end.

END OF SIDE A, TAPE 2
BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE 2

MINTZ: --and have you read all my stories. Popcorn, etcetera, etcetera.

LEVINE: You're welcome to give me or send—

MINTZ: Yeah, but I have to—but I have to have them typed over.

LEVINE: Okay.

MINTZ: I have the originals and Dianna gave them to the family, my granddaughter. She typed up four or five. She can't too much. She goes to business. She works for the organization of staff analysts on 23rd Street. My daughter is an assistant in charge and my granddaughter works there, also, and my adorable Lauren goes to a private school, a

special school, thank God, for bright children, also there. A specialized school, and she writes poetry and she's a whiz. She does artwork. She does sculpting.

LEVINE: Okay, you were saying about how coming here made an image on you.

MINTZ: Now, when we moved—in Minford Place we were very sheltered. I didn't speak too well. I was glad to go to school. Now, the girl that came to me—I've got to finish that—to do homework, was very bright and she was a very sweet girl, but she took the book and showed me what I had to buy, and she took papers out of her book for me to do homework on. And it was math homework and she took that lined paper and I was used to—

LEVINE: Graph paper.

MINTZ: Craft paper, you know the—

LEVINE: Graph.

MINTZ: The—I just had the word for it. The box paper. Graph. Graph paper. Graph paper, and she went down, Zero, aught, aught, whatever, blah, blah, blah, whatever, and she ran up and down and I didn't know what she was doing there. And of course, at the end of the time, she did my homework for me completely. She did what she did, without even suggesting that I look in. She didn't know. She was a little girl. So I thanked her very much over and over again. My Aunt Lee gave her a nice big cookie that she made, some kind of baked goods, and she went home. And I was just as dumb as the day I got here, I didn't know.
Now, the first week in school was very difficult. However, we had assembly. I still didn't get clothing because I tried to explain to the teacher, "Mama *kann nicht lesen*", read, read English, and bitte, please be

patient. What else could I say? I was a nine-year-old. She said, "It's all right. Sit down. Sit, Rosie, sit." I sat. We went to auditorium and they had color guard. I'm going to cry. They had color guard and I said, "I'm an American. I want to be with that. I want to carry a flag." At the end of the class, I went to the teacher and I said, "Please, auditorium nice. Good, good," you know, but "I want to go in there. I'm American. I'm born America and I want to be with the flag." Do you know, that this teacher let me go, with my European clothing into that organization about two weeks later, until I was able—my aunts had to go and shop for me. Mama didn't know where to go shopping. I mean, it wasn't that she was stupid. She spoke only German, a little Polish, a little Russian, and it was hard for her.

In Europe, she was a big shot. She could go to the best department stores. Teitz, one of the biggest departments, like Macy's here. Teitz, T-E-I-T-Z. were first cousins in the family and they own the most gorgeous expensive shops that when I was a year old, mama—I always remembered. Mama said I was a year. She took me in a carriage to Teitz and they gave me a hat. Ten little children's hats, the most expensive ones. She said I picked out the most expensive one," and they started to laugh and tell her, "She's all right. She has good taste." *Sie weiss genau was sie will."* In other words, she knows exactly what she wants and she said it was the most gorgeous bonnet in the world and it had pansies on it. My pansies up there, always had a flair, and my little farty one, my granddaughter, pansies is her favorite. Purple, everything with purple. If I buy dishes, I have to get purple dishes for her, you know, little whatever it is. She has a dog, too. Bandit, oy a—a long eared little one that's absolutely adorable. He sleeps in her bed. He crawls under her bed. I can't wait to go to New York to see it. She got it recently. Anyway.

LEVINE: Okay, so you were saying how your aunt bought new clothes.

MINTZ: I went ahead—I went ahead and I got into the auditorium through this wonderful teacher, and I was able to go with this group of girls, and nobody tittered and nobody laughed because there were many European children at those days. But I had very nice clothes. The clothes were made in Goldstrasse. In Goldstrasse where we lived. A floor above us were cousins, two old maids. There were a lot of old maids because of the war, and in general there weren't that many—there were not good times prior to the war because the Russians and the Germans, who were first cousins, hated each other's guts because the Czar was a very proud man and a very rich man and the Kaiser was an idiot. So there was always one thing, "I'll fight him. I'll fight him." You know, it was always that—I didn't learn this until many years later. I said, "Well, why did they hate each other? They were cousins?" We all are cousins. There was always jealousy. Stupidity above all.

To make a long story short, they used to make all my dresses. In fact, when I was three years old, they made me a present at three of a little brown coat with a hat to match. It had a little velvet collar and they had a long, narrow mirror in their apartment. That was my birthday present in November for the winter months, a winter coat. In those years there were no plastics, no imitations. Everything was pure wool. To make a dress, you had to go to a dressmaker. There was no such thing as to buy a dress. You bought fabric, yes. If you wanted special fabric, you went to a shop. You bought your own fabric, you took it to your dressmaker. Then you looked at styles and whatever was the fashion. High necks, a train. All my mothers dresses were like that, made by people, you know.

The families, also, you couldn't—in the spring in Germany, 1917, we had a milliner coming from *Die Sweiz,* Switzerland, and every spring thereafter, as long as.. the years that I was there, she would come in in the spring, bring in lace from Switzerland. We couldn't get Irish lace but they made

beautiful lace and from the *Schwarzwald,* all these areas that were just very beautiful, they made all kinds of handmade crafts. And they would buy it and bring it in and we bought linens and she would sew. We had a sewing machine and she would sew all our sheets, our pillowcases, covers for the quilts and everything was lace trimmed, and what was left over, she would make little doilies or she would make us *dirndl–kleider* for the children. Little criss-cross, a string with beautiful floral patterns and a little velvet vesties, and we used to take that in the spring into the summer, and take it to the country with us. We'd go to the mountains, Schwarzwald, depending where we were going for the two-month summer season.

LEVINE: Are there any attitudes that your mother or father passed onto you about life, about who you were or about the philosophy—

MINTZ: Well, my father—mother was very shy. She was interested in one thing. Her husband and her children and to cook. She was so interested in helping people, as I say, when she was young she worked in a pension, this type of home, a retirement home for very rich people. She had to make very wonderful French dishes and cook all kinds of things. Now, this thing was a strictly kosher place because she wouldn't cook otherwise. She came from a strictly kosher—not fanatic. It's like yesterday, I went to visit. I was two years old. My mother wanted to see my father in the army and the army was marching towards Czechoslovakia and they had to go through parts of Austria. So she dropped me off at my grandparents' and my father Samuel had a pure white beard and mama Khana was in the kitchen. They had a cow. She would take the milk and I'd stand there and watch her. She'd put - let it stand. Then she would take it and put it into a cheesecloth and make farmer cheese out of it. The water would drip out and the milk would be for the children, and in the morning grandpa would take me by the hand. I'd

get up very early. I wanted to see everything and we'd go outside in back of the house and he would shake the soil off scallions to bring them in to mix with the cheese, and as we'd stand there, he'd go like this and you could hear in the distance from the trees, "Cuckoo, cuckoo, cuckoo." Cuckoo birds.

Next door—now, this is, these were very, very nice people. Quiet, good people. He worried about that his animals should have food before he had. When he sat down at the table, he wouldn't touch food and he made sure there was enough for everybody, you know. Next door was a lot of gentile farmers, but there was no such things, Jew, gentile. In those years, my neighbor; If, God forbid, something happened to him, Samuel was there to help him. Anything to the family. They all had horse and wagons, you know, and if a horse and wagon broke down, then "Take mine." You know, they were friends. There was no such thing as racial thing. There wasn't such a thing. You're a Jew. You're a this. There was no such thing. Germany was inclined that way because for some reason or other they were Nordic people. They had a name for these people. They were always fighters. They always hated everybody else. They were the cave people that you can picture living up north, when they built the stone hedge in England, that came and marched in the Kahn, some of those, that would destroy everybody just for the sake of destroying them. So they had to put a name on them. Was a different thought, a different religion. You see, that was wrong. It was very wrong and the small countries, the regular soft, beautiful countrysides in Europe, and they were plenty of them.

All—we've traveled all through that. And it was—when we went away for the summer, it was the most wonderful thing. Nobody knew from a word Jew, Christian. There was no such thing. You did what you wanted to do. We respected them. They respected us. In fact, when I was very young, I

had gentile friends. They asked me to come to the Fifth Avenue Cathedral to come in for Christmas Eve services and I went, and I would behave beautifully. I mean, I did all the right things, and I thanked them. Irish, Clancy her name was. Helen Clancy. It's just like yesterday. God, almighty.

My mother never said, "Don't go with the *goyim* ". There was no such thing. We were taught that Christ was Jewish and everything he did was in the sense of God and he was very misunderstood. When he said, "I am the Son of God," do you know what he meant? Maybe he was a little bit inflated. Maybe he was a little—maybe he felt he had a right—all right, he had a right to be pompous. That he said, "I'm the Son of God." We are all God's children. Where would we be if there wasn't a heaven and earth or even a molecule that never existed? If you want to go scientifically, the whole thing is a washout. Bible is strictly people that lived in those years and the recorded, but they did try to do the right thing. Now, Moses's brother, Aaron, after Moses got the Ten Commandments, built the first temple, and the only people that could be priests that could enter there, they were completely interviewed in the sense that they had to be so pure and smart because there was a lot of work to do, reading and they had to write. They had to know everything. And they were called—nobody had a second name. People had a first name. So they were called Cohanum, Kahn. That is family. We come from that generation, all through the thousands of years. We do because that's been the name and we've had—of course, I didn't know them. I never had the chance to know them. I wasn't born. Lots of Hebrew Rabbis and counselors and priests, all through the years from father to son, from father to son.

If I remember correctly, in the bible that we had, that tremendous bible that we had in Berlin, there were pictures from the olden days. You could see the women with their hairstyles going back to 1700. Oh, I wish I had all

that today. We left everything. My mother was so glad to come back. She had such a tough life there, living with them in-laws. She liked them and she respected them very much, but she wasn't used to them. She was used to her home life in her country, which was altogether different. They were not uppish, they were plain like we live today, you know. You come in; you're a guest, sit.

It wasn't like you had to stand on ceremony and in Berlin everything was very ceremonial because maybe if the farmers had money in one way by having stock and a lot of children and a lot of things; in Germany when they had money, they right away got servants in and they were not motherly or fatherly to the children, which is very wrong. Which is in England, that's why the Queen of England today is so distant from her children. She does them a favor when she goes like this, "Hello." Do you know what I mean? She was never a devoted mother to them. Her mother was more devoted to her and her sister than she was to her children because she had a tremendous task to perform, which is true, when her uncle—her uncle was retired from not taking the crown, you know, and he went to live in France and Bermuda, wherever they lived. First in Bermuda. Then they lived in France at a Château, {french} in the garden, you know. Big deal. He was a creep. He really was. He looked like a fag and he probably was because she lived around with everything and everybody, aside from divorcing two husbands. She had to go to—she had to—[static, tape off/on].

LEVINE: We're really reaching the end now of this tape and we probably should—

MINTZ: All right. Come on, please, ask me.

LEVINE: Is there anything that we haven't covered that you would like to say before we close—

MINTZ: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: About coming back here and—

MINTZ: Coming to America was like so - that it was very difficult because of the language, but if you want to apply yourself, you can. My first thought was to learn English properly and luckily there was a library very close to where we lived, and I would go there. I asked my mother for money and she says, "*wieviel kost es?*". I said "*Ich weiss nicht"* I don't know, how much will it cost? They figured you had to pay for everything, and went there. The first time I went there and I asked, "How much do I have to give you?" She said, "No, no, no, I give you a card. Free." I knew the word "free" was frei, which meant nothing, and I was thrilled, and I started to take out books. Now I was in fourth grade. My work was wonderful because I skipped from fourth to fifth, the whole year. When I got in the first few months, I was put into fifth and from fifth to sixth and from sixth to seventh, because I was so advanced in language and knowledge of math and everything. I applied myself. I wanted to learn, and I would take books out and I told the girl at the desk—she was a very nice lady with gray hair. She wasn't a girl. She was a gray-haired lady, but a young face, and I said, "I don't speak English. German, but I want to speak English. Please. Ich bin hier .. I'm born here".

You know, I tried the best. I'll never forget that, but how else can you explain, and she showed me a group of books that I could refer to, and do you know, that I would take the books home, go into the bathroom in front of the bathroom mirror. It wasn't really a cabinet. They just had a mirror. There were no bathroom cabinets in those days, and I would open the book and I would read out loud. The difficulty was that German sentences are reverse to English sentences, and so I had to think twice before I

finished it to say it properly and I would stand there and look at myself, look down and then smile, and speak properly.

How well could I remember Joyce Kilmer's 'Trees' if I didn't go through that, and by God, I'm telling you, as I'm sitting here, I should live so long as on a bible, that I said it in the auditorium. They asked me to recite this in the auditorium and I stood up there with all the pathos of a real ham and I got the most wonderful applause. And I was so proud because to me, thinking of what the poem meant and who wrote it. I had to ask, everything. I think I must have been the most—I wanted to learn. Who is Joyce Kilmer? Where does he come from? He comes from England because he wrote about England. Why was he so sad? Why? Why? What? You know, how did he do this? He had a heart. He had a wonderful feeling. That a man like that could write such a poem, he was just milk and honey. That's what we used to say in Germany*, "Milch and honig*." You know, very soft hearted. That's what.

LEVINE: Maybe this where we should end.

MINTZ: Huh?

LEVINE: Think that's a good note to end on?

MINTZ: Yes. I want to note one more thing. The only thing that irked me when I went down the street to play rope or something, when I first came in—we moved into an area on Third Avenue where there were cousins where they had eight children, and everyone was sweeter than the other, and every one took to me, and they had—the husband was a carpenter, a home builder, a wooden home builder and they were well-to-do and we didn't have too much in that time. And the mother was always pregnant, it

seemed, but she was wonderful. She was a cousin to my mother from the old country and she was able to get her this little apartment with gaslight, overlooking Third Avenue where the El ran. You know, every time you wanted to yawn, the El ran and the kids would holler, "Greenhorn, popcorn, a nickel a bag. Greenhorn," and I was very aggravated and I would go over and say, "I'm born here." I used to fight that like anything. "I came on a ship." I used to explain everything over and over and over again, and then I told them. "Have you been to Ellis Island?" Now listen, this was my punch line. And they would say, "Ellis Island?" I said, "Ah, I saw the Statue of Liberty. Beautiful. Beautiful." You know, I was so proud. "Oh, you came on a ship?" [fire alarm sounds again] Someone's playing with that. Oh, no. That's a test. And I tried to explain and then they were fascinated and they wanted me to tell them more stories. So story telling became my thing, and in order to make friends and entertain my sisters and brothers, I would tell them stories. After all, I was much older, and to teach them the value of money, we had to have a piano. For five dollars mama had a superintendent bring up a piano that someone threw out. Papa took it in and he tuned it.

LEVINE: Tuned it.

MINTZ: He tuned it to get the tone back in, and he took care of it. He knew how. He was a pianist all the way, and we had that piano and I would tell them all the different things, stories. And we had the piano stool, which was a stool with wooden spaces, and I would turn that around, get on a cushion—not even on a cushion. Get on my knees and I would sit for hours and make stamps and money. Money was paper round with numbers on it, and stamps would be square and I would play post office.

When my brother and sister started school, the two older ones, they could write and read. They knew how to make change. Do you understand?

When they went into—[someone sneezes] So *zu gezunt*, sneezing on it. I'm telling you the truth. I was the one. [sneeze] God bless you. Live and be well. I'm telling you the God's honest truth. It's like yesterday. I'm sitting there, hiding behind that chair and they would come over with a stamp, was a penny. One stamp or two stamps and they would get the change. If they gave me a nickel, I would say, "Three, four, five. Five. One, two is stamps, and you get back three, four, five. Three." How then could you learn? So they were able to read and write and they all did very well. They all became college graduates and the youngest one, my favorite, he lives in Virginia. He worked for one of the most difficult situations. Ach. The ABC Commission in Washington, I don't even want to mention it because it's secret.

LEVINE: Why don't we close this off?

MINTZ: Yeah, go ahead.

LEVINE: Okay. We're terminating—

MINTZ: I want you to hear this, what he did—

LEVINE: Okay. This has been an interview with Renee Mintz, who was born Rose Madge Rene—Renee? Was that—

MINTZ: Rose Madge.

LEVINE: Rose Madge Kahn.

MINTZ: Yes. Why was I named Madge? There was a movie actress by that name Madge. Not Madge Evans. Later on we had a Madge Evans, years later

in the ‘20s. She was gorgeous, a beautiful southern girl, but Madge, at that time in the early 1900s, my God am I that old? Really? Come on.

LEVINE: No, I don’t think so.

MINTZ: Janet, give me a break. I can’t believe it sometimes because I walk out, you know. I don’t want to say it. I play tennis. There’s all my tennis gear. A fellow stops me, he says, “Why aren’t you playing?” I look at him, I says, “Do I know you?” He says, “Well, you don’t know me, but I see you playing with your husband all the time. What happened?” I says, “My best tennis partner,” because we never played doubles. We always played singles, you know. And he said to me, “How come?” I says, “Well, unfortunately, I’m not in the mood right now, but I have all my equipment.” He says, “You play so well.” I says, “Well, that’s one of my sports. I love it. There are many sports that I like and tennis happens to be very nice in our age group because we can move all over.” He says, “Oh, you sound like a doctor.”

I didn’t answer him. I didn’t go further. I mean nobody has to know my business, but I didn’t want to go into a big deal with him, and I just said, “Well, thank you very much.” He says, “ Come down. Bring your gear. We’ll try to get you in.” I says, “No, I don’t go where I have to be put in. I go where I make the appointments.” You understand? I pick my team. Maybe it’s being snobbish, but I don’t like to be doing a favor because if you ever played with the older people that play tennis, you would walk away. They stand there; hoping a ball hits their racquet. They’re not waiting for it. They’re hoping a ball they could hit. You understand? They don’t know how. Very few of them, especially the women. They go—

LEVINE: Still playing now?

MINTZ: Of course. Why not.

LEVINE: That's good.

MINTZ: I play with my great granddaughter. She comes down, the first thing we do, go down to our special court. I got her a special racquet there. I bought her a beautiful racquet and I have about four of them. I gave one to another nephew. I had two brand new ones, beautiful. Are we finished?

LEVINE: Yeah, let me just say, this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. It's February 24th, 1997 and I'm here in Hallandale, Florida, speaking with Renee Mintz who is eighty-three years of age at the time of this interview, and I'm signing off.

END OF INTERVIEW