

**EI-893**

**HYMAN [PH] COHEN**

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**INTERVIEWER: PAUL SIGRIST**

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**RESIDENCES:**

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Tuesday, May 27<sup>th</sup>, 1997. I'm at the Hebrew Home in West Hartford and I'm here with Mr. Hyman Cohen. Mr. Cohen came from Poland in 1919. He was approximately nine years old when he came. Mr. Cohen, can we begin by you giving me your birth date, please?

COHEN: October 3<sup>rd</sup>, 1910. That was date of my birth.

SIGRIST: And can you tell me where you were born in Poland?

COHEN: It's a little town known as Amastudawer [PH]. You have to— Amastudawer. I—I couldn't help you on spelling it. It—

SIGRIST: Can you say it—

COHEN: It—approximately two miles from Warsaw.

SIGRIST: Can you say it very slowly for me?

COHEN: Amastudawer.

SIGRIST: And you said how many miles from Warsaw?

COHEN: Two [unclear] from P—Poland. I mean—

SIGRIST: From Warsaw.

COHEN: —Warsaw, yeah.

SIGRIST: What—what do you remember about the town that you were born in?

COHEN: Oh, going swimming and with the girls on one side of—of the lake and—the river and we were on the other side. Yeah, I remember that.

SIGRIST: [chuckles] Can you describe the house that you lived in when you lived there?

COHEN: Our house was single home with a—a store built in. My mother sold groceries before the war broke out.

SIGRIST: Before World War I broke out.

COHEN: Yeah. Then she—they—the people took it away from her and made a prison out of it. When they had prisoners they kept them in there because it was solidly built. But the partitions between the rooms were made out of pinewood. Then you could—there was knotholes so we could look into each other's rooms [unclear]. And spending the nights in the field when there was artillery. You know, [several words unclear], we spent the nights there. One of my brothers [unclear], young brothers, died on the field there, not through fire. Just died, I guess. And—

SIGRIST: Was he hit but artillery? How did he die?

COHEN: N—he just died a natural death.

SIGRIST: How—

COHEN: I had said, not by fire. No. And what else can I remember?

SIGRIST: Tell me more about World War I and what you remember about your experiences during the First World War.

COHEN: Well, my experience was going to this country. We landed in [unclear]—

SIGRIST: Be—no, no. Before you got here. Talk to me about in Europe during the First World War.

COHEN: That's what I'm trying to say. It took us two months to reach Liverpool in England because everything's on a quota then. And we had to wait for our quota so we were in—part in Sandstone [PH] and maybe a week or two with the city of Warsaw, also maybe a month. I remember mostly about the outdoor market. We—we used to have great times. I used to ride on the trolley there all the time. That's where I got my mark here. Incidentally—

SIGRIST: What—what mark? You're pointing to your—

COHEN: Just a li—

SIGRIST: —little finger on your—

COHEN: —little scratch, that's all.

SIGRIST: Well, how did that happen?

COHEN: Well, trying to jump off the trolley. I didn't know how to stop it. So—but you had to pull the cord. I didn't realize that. My brother and my sister were—they stayed on to the—to the—I guess that the trolley stopped. I'm short of breath too.

SIGRIST: That's okay. Take your time. You mentioned that—that your house was taken over as a prison during the war.

COHEN: Oh, for the—for the store. We were allowed to live there in a couple rooms. It was a big house. And the officers took the other rooms and they started [unclear] prison.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about—about the—the people who were i—kept in—in the store?

COHEN: They were prisoners of war. And I remember looking through the knothole at night and they—whether it was Poland or Warsaw, was whipping the hell out of them with a strap. I can't say who was [unclear] because I don't remember. I remember they—they—all the officers had their wives with them. And as these people are being spanked, they're laughing, having a hell of a time. Can you imagine a man laying on—on two chairs with his bare ass hanging out? Well, that—you know what else hangs out. So, well, that's all right. I remember that.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how the war affected your family in terms of getting food?

COHEN: Well, my father left the—the country to avoid going into the drafts, and I was a year old, or less. I don't know—I don't know exact times because I never thought I'd have to remember it. And I didn't meet my father till we came here to this country. And what else can I remember?

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

COHEN: What?

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

COHEN: Morris.

SIGRIST: Boris?

COHEN: Morris. M-O—

SIGRIST: Morris.

COHEN: M-O-R-R-I-S.

SIGRIST: What did he do for a living in Poland?

COHEN: In Poland? Well, I think he—oh, he was running the store with my mother. But he was the only son of a rabbi and I think he was going to go to be a rabbi, but that came [unclear]. Then all those plans were spoiled and then they came to this country.

SIGRIST: Do you remember your father's parents?

COHEN: My grandfather.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about your grandfather?

COHEN: I remember him sitting in the garden and telling us to take his—bring him his slippers, "Bring me a cigar. Bring me a glass of water." We didn't dare say no because, well, we—we—we appreciated the [unclear] to do something alone.

SIGRIST: You said that your grandfather was a rabbi? Your father's father was a rabbi?

COHEN: Was a rabbi, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember anything about him being a rabbi when—

COHEN: No, I only remember him in his old age when he was [unclear]. I remember going to the synagogue all the time and this—this, I got kicked, a horse, at the synagogue.

SIGRIST: You're pointing to your head.

COHEN: Right here.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

COHEN: The horse went gr—grazing in a pasture and so I took a stick at him, poking at him, and he kicked me right here.

SIGRIST: It's right over your right eye.

COHEN: Yeah, right here. You—you can see the markers.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

COHEN: But evidently it didn't affect my health because I [several words unclear].

SIGRIST: Did—what was your mother's name?

COHEN: Sarah.

SIGRIST: Sarah. And do you know what her maiden name was?

COHEN: Bernstein.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

COHEN: Bernstein. B—

SIGRIST: Bernstein. I see.

COHEN: B-E-R-N-S-T-E-I-N.

SIGRIST: Well, what do you know about your mother's family background?

COHEN: That's about all. That's all.

SIGRIST: Did she—

COHEN: I—I remember her brother used to have a house right across the street from her. He was the wealthy one.

SIGRIST: And what do you remember about being in that house?

COHEN: Oh, I remember my grandmother (I don't know her name but was the—the wife of the rabbi, I guess) milking the cows. And she—my brother, my sister and I would gather together. She would go like this. Poom! Hit you right in the face.

SIGRIST: Oh, she'd squirt you with it?

COHEN: Yeah, with—with the [unclear].

SIGRIST: [chuckles] What kind of food did you eat when you were in Poland, growing up?

COHEN: Black—black [unclear] and—and water [unclear] time. That's the end of the war. But we had chicken occasionally. Egg—if you weren't feeling too good, you'd get an egg. But everything is hazy because I—I tried to put it out of my mind, I guess. I don't know.

SIGRIST: Well, it was a long time ago.

COHEN: Yeah, it's a long time ago.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about the grocery store that your mother and your father kept in the house.

COHEN: Well, it wasn't exactly a grocery. They had everything in there.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things did you sell there?

COHEN: Oh, she had eggs, maybe bread but there was no such thing as canned goods, so mostly all vegetables, I guess. I paid—paid little attention to my mother in the store there. She usually would stay there.

SIGRIST: Did—did you ever help out in the store as a child?

COHEN: No, never did.

SIGRIST: What did you do as a child growing up in Poland? What—

COHEN: You'd go to cheder [PH].

SIGRIST: Can you describe what that is for me?

COHEN: A cheder is a school and this, you know, to get ready for your bar mitzvah, wh—and other time too because I was young and I was—I didn't have my bar mitzvah until I came to this country.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things would you learn in—at the cheder?

COHEN: Mostly Hebrew and—and the small print on the bottom. That's the ultimate. But as much as I learned, that's how much I lo—I forgot, I guess.

SIGRIST: Did—were—were boys and girls allowed to go to the cheder?

COHEN: It was only boys as far as I can remember. I can remember at noontime the rabbi, his wife would bring in a bowl, soup. The rabbi had a long beard. He was eating it and it was dripping down there, you know, on his beard. And he would—wouldn't let us go till he finished. We were sitting there with our tongues hanging out watching him eat, was hungry. And that made you hungry at any time. So we were sitting there [chuckles] [unclear] on his beard.

SIGRIST: Did—what about—how did your family practice your religion at home?

COHEN: My mother and father were very religious. [coughs] Me, no. I was [several words unclear]. That's it.

SIGRIST: Well, what about when you were growing up in Poland? Were there certain ways—certain—certain—

COHEN: No.

SIGRIST: —observations that you made, religious?

COHEN: You—you—you went to cheder but al—everybody does—went to the same cheder, same school. And there wasn't too many Jewish families in that town. But it was mostly Polish families with a p—with a big orchard on the side. That was the—again, that was the industry there. All—

SIGRIST: And the Polish were gentile?

COHEN: Gentile.

SIGRIST: Were they all gentiles?

COHEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit about the relationship between the Polish people and the Jewish people in town?

COHEN: It was on the edge. It w—[unclear] anytime. So you try to [unclear]. I remember one incident. I don't know whether it was a Polish soldier or a Russian soldier. My mother wanted to save her parina [PH]. You know what a parina is? A parina is a—something you cover yourself made out of down, warm as toast. And the Russian said, "You give me that or I'll stick a bayonet [unclear]." I remember screaming, "Mom, let him have it!" She did.

SIGRIST: You're saying a parina [PH].

COHEN: A parina.

SIGRIST: Parina, right.

COHEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Like a comforter or a quilt.

COHEN: Well, the—maybe t—10 times as big as that. It'll cover your whole body because my mother and my sister and I would sleep on top of the stove, and the stove was almost as big as this room, not as—quite as wide. And, you know, you're baking in a—and on top, there was a shelf and it was warm as toast. And we slept there every night in the cold weather.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit about what the weather was like at that time?

COHEN: I thought it was very cold. I—I [unclear]—I talked to a couple of people that say it couldn't happen. The horses were going by and then they relieved themselves, and the horse relieved themselves [unclear] like that. [several words unclear] the then all of a sudden it'd go boom! I told my people there. They don't believe it. It did happen.

SIGRIST: Do you remember there being a time when you were a child in Poland when you got a huge amount of snow?

COHEN: I remember so-so but not as good as I should. Oh, that's when I—I asked my mother, "What about those boom, boom?" I was scared. She told me what they was.

SIGRIST: And that was the horse manure exploding?

COHEN: Yeah. Well, they—they [several words unclear]. Then it freezes on the outside. The inside is expanding and all of a sudden, pop, pop, pop.

SIGRIST: Oh, that's interesting. I've never heard that.

COHEN: Yeah, it's logical.

SIGRIST: Oh. Tell me about—you mentioned the house with the store. Did you have a garden in the back of the house?

COHEN: We raised our things, the back of my grandfather.

SIGRIST: Oh. Do you remember anything specific about that?

COHEN: That—that—that's all I remember.

SIGRIST: Yeah?

COHEN: I think that's the way—we used to have to roll it too for him and when—when he was—the urge to smoke we'd roll it for him.

SIGRIST: [chuckles] Tell me, did you have family in the United States before you got here?

COHEN: My father was there.

SIGRIST: That's right. You said you were just a baby when he left or [unclear]—

COHEN: Yeah, back, only a year old.

SIGRIST: Where did he go in the United States when he came here?

COHEN: He went right to Hartford.

SIGRIST: To Hartford, Connecticut.

COHEN: He landed in Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: And—and what—do you know anything about his trip over when he went?

COHEN: No, he didn't—wasn't very talk—he was a quiet man, small man, very quiet. Yeah, I remember one incident in this country. I don't know whether it's—relates.

SIGRIST: That's okay. Go ahead.

COHEN: When the first day—day we got—second day we got here, my mother and I went outside. [unclear] there are greener. You know what greenies are? Yeah.

SIGRIST: Explain it.

COHEN: And my father says to me after [unclear], “What’d you learn?” I says, “One word.” “Well, what’s the word?” [unclear]. I said, “You slapped me.” I said, “What for? You asked me and I told you.” I—this is all in Jewish, of course. And Jewish is as good as it used to be.

SIGRIST: When your father came to Hartford, what job did he get?

COHEN: [chuckles] Salvaging soda bottles and all kinds of bottles. He worked there in a bottle shop on Plainfield Street. Plainfield Street, yeah, way down at the bottom of the ra—railroad track. Are you familiar with Hartford?

SIGRIST: No, I’m not.

COHEN: Anyway, he had to s—sort bottles of—he got by but when we got to this country, he c—he had to make more money so he peddled ice, coal, oil, anything he could get a hold of. And then there’s one time where he peddled milk for a dairy.

SIGRIST: When—when you were in Poland and your father was in the United States, how did you envision your father?

COHEN: Had no vision at all. I always thought that he’d be a big man. But I was very—well, [unclear] to know, I—I was a little wild. I told him. I said [unclear], I says, “Don’t he me anymore, Pa.” All in Jewish. “Because I’m not going to take it. I’ll hit you back.” So he never—he never hit me again. He—

SIGRIST: Before you got to America to see your father, did you have a photograph or a picture of him? How did your mother talk about your father?

COHEN: Oh, he was a great man. After all, he sent for her and the three kids.

SIGRIST: Can you—you were three children. Can you name your brother—brothers and sisters?

COHEN: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Go ahead.

COHEN: Tillie.

SIGRIST: Tillie.

COHEN: David.

SIGRIST: David.

COHEN: And [unclear].

SIGRIST: And Hyman. Tillie, David and Hyman.

COHEN: Yeah. There was a child born in this country. His name is Max. He lives in Rhode Island. He's 10 years younger than I am.

SIGRIST: And he was born after your family [unclear].

COHEN: That's right.

SIGRIST: Well, what do you remember about getting ready to come to the United States?

COHEN: I'm sorry to say I let my mother to do all the planning. I w—I w—I wanted to [unclear] around, [unclear] around.

SIGRIST: Do you remember packing, taking—getting things together? What do you remember about that?

COHEN: Clothes mostly, some food. And—

SIGRIST: What kind of food? Do you remember?

COHEN: Pumpernickel bread was the biggest. W—during the war, my mother used to ration food to us. Her—she had a f—really, [unclear] away and the key was there.

SIGRIST: Down in her cleavage.

COHEN: Yeah. So nobody would go in there and find [unclear].

SIGRIST: Do you remember leaving your town to go to—to where you had to [unclear]—

COHEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —the ship. What do you—

COHEN: I think we went to Warsaw. From there, we took a train into France, I think. I don't know the name of the town.

SIGRIST: Does anything stick out in your mind about taking the train to France, that trip?

COHEN: Yeah. No, no. I don't.

SIGRIST: Well, what happened when you got to France?

COHEN: France, we—my mother found a place to live and she had to go to the port authorities, I guess. I find that unbelievable because we're on the quota. So you had to wait for your quota to come around before you left. You couldn't leave.

SIGRIST: How long did you stay in France before you [unclear]?

COHEN: From the time we left Poland to the time we got to the United States, I think it was six months.

SIGRIST: Oh, so it was a long time.

COHEN: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: [unclear].

COHEN: We wa—we waited a long time in Poland.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about—about being in France? Does anything stick out in your mind about that experience?

COHEN: No.

SIGRIST: No?

COHEN: No, no. Not at all.

SIGRIST: From France then, where did you go to?

COHEN: Liverpool.

SIGRIST: How did you get to Liverpool?

COHEN: W—with one of those English boats that go across.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. And then what happened in Liverpool?

COHEN: We stayed there about—I—I would at least a month. Then we got to be shipped to the United States.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the name of the ship?

COHEN: I have no—my br—my younger brother g—kept all that. No, I don't.

SIGRIST: That's okay. Tell me about what you remember about being on the ship—

COHEN: Oh—

SIGRIST: —coming to the United States.

COHEN: We went the cheapest way possible, which is in the steerage. And all night long you'd hear the bang, bang, bang, bang, bang, bang [unclear]. Being young, I slept through it. My mother never slept. And on a nice, sunny day, all us immigrants would say [unclear], they'd throw down nickels and dimes for us.

SIGRIST: Who? Who is they? Who was throwing this down?

COHEN: The—the passengers of first or second class. Yeah. I don't think they were r—refugees or immigrants. I think they was regular passage. They'd go back and forth.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how long the trip took to cross the ocean?

COHEN: I think it was 10 days, I think.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Does anything else stick out in your mind about being on the ship, like eating on the ship maybe or—

COHEN: Oh, we—we ate a lot. Mother [unclear]. And then we bought things with the dimes and nickels they'd throw down. I was very aggressive so I got a lot of nickels.

SIGRIST: [chuckles] Do you remember being up on deck of the ship for any reason?

COHEN: Yeah, on the first deck.

SIGRIST: And what could you see when you were up on deck?

COHEN: Ocean and that's all. Yeah, we got excited when we saw the land in Boston—I mean in New York and then I had to [unclear] couldn't land.

SIGRIST: Now, why couldn't you land in New York?

COHEN: Snowed in. Was one of the worst—it was one of the worst storms they ever had. A funny part of it, I do remember coming home from Boston back to New York with my father. And it was a clear, beautiful day and there must have been one day bad, next day b—beautiful.

SIGRIST: But when your ship came into New York you were snowed—it was a bad snowstorm?

COHEN: Couldn't get into port.

SIGRIST: So what did they do then?

COHEN: They went to Boston [unclear]—

SIGRIST: The ship went up to Boston.

COHEN: —open. They were open. Then—

SIGRIST: So you sort of avoided Ellis Island by going to Boston—

COHEN: Yeah, yeah. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: —during the blizzard. What happened in Boston when the ship docked?

COHEN: We stayed overnight. Now, where we stayed I don't know but I think it was Immigration Services [unclear] cots. That's what I think. And then the next day we had to go back to—New York. My brother—my father was with us that time. It's the first time I ever saw a black man.

SIGRIST: What did you think when you saw—

COHEN: I thought how—"Pa, Pa! Ma, look! [unclear]." My father said, "Ooh, [unclear]." Then I learned, you know, it doesn't take that l—long to learn.

SIGRIST: So the ship went up to Boston. You stayed overnight. You came back down. Then your father met you in Boston or in New York?

COHEN: No, [unclear] Boston [unclear].

SIGRIST: You went through Boston but you went back down—

COHEN: Yeah—

SIGRIST: —to New York [unclear].

COHEN: And checked out at Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: Oh, well, what happened then?

COHEN: Well, I just [unclear] and then we came to the houses.

SIGRIST: So you went back to New York and then you—you think you had to go through Ellis Island [unclear].

COHEN: Yeah, through Immigration Services.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Do you have any memories of that at all?

COHEN: No. I was somewhat distracted because those people that [unclear] sent us to Ellis Island weren't very thoughtful or reasonable or sympathetic to us. They were talking and laughing. Of course, I didn't understand but I had the—a [unclear]—the feeling that they didn't give a damn one way or the other. Well, well, this is—

SIGRIST: Do you know how that made you feel?

COHEN: Huh?

SIGRIST: How did that make you feel?

COHEN: I don't know. Sort of depressed but I—I—I was very flexible in those days. I could do anything.

SIGRIST: You were just a kid.

COHEN: That's right.

SIGRIST: [chuckles] All right. So once you were released from Ellis Island, where did your father take you?

COHEN: He took us to Hartford.

SIGRIST: And can you describe for me where he brought you to stay?

COHEN: What he bought us?

SIGRIST: What—what—what—where did he take you to live?

COHEN: Fairmont Street.

SIGRIST: Fairmont Street.

COHEN: That's now—it's the north end of Hartford, the rundown end. And the Foremans [PH] who—who owned the house [unclear] cousins so we stayed with them until my father got a better job. Then we moved into our own house.

SIGRIST: He was doing the soda bottle thing when you first got—

COHEN: Well, after a little time he might have been doing something else but he was always active. And—

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me where he brought you to live, the actual structure?

COHEN: Three-family house. We stayed, I think it was empty the first [unclear]. Yeah. And it was like all those houses to th—that time. There were row houses but there was three families, most of them. Fairmont Street. I can remember it to this day. Then I—then I went to the school [unclear] school.

SIGRIST: Tell me about your first day of school and your experiences going to school as an immigrant child.

COHEN: Well, I—I don't know if you remember, in those days they had special teachers to teach and grade the kids. So I had a Mrs. Gross [PH]. See, I remember her name.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Rosa?

COHEN: Gross. G-R-O-S-S.

SIGRIST: Oh, Mrs. Gross.

COHEN: So we went to our class and it was composed of all foreign people. Then she rated us and they put us in a grade. I remember going to three grades in one day, almost. That's the way it was, you know. They put you at a level that they thought you could handle. And then when we wanted a little—we bought a house on Worchester Street.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me a little more about school. Did you—did you ever experience any kind of hostility from the other students that [unclear]?

COHEN: Well, mostly from the black people.

SIGRIST: From the black people.

COHEN: That's right.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. What—well, how would—how did—

COHEN: Well, th—they'd throw sticks at us and they wanted to fight. So one day I said, "All right." The twins took me on, the twin boys. But as I said, those days I was strong as could possibly be. And I just stood back of them, ah—ahead—ahead of, and I got up against a fence, I remember, [chuckles] and they—they didn't know how to attack me, except for the front. And after that, I guess they didn't bother me anymore, although I went to Winger [PH] High. First, I went to [unclear] School, then Northeast, then Winger High. That's as far as I got.

SIGRIST: How did you learn English?

COHEN: The school.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the process of how they taught you English?

COHEN: No, no. I don't remember the process that it was.

SIGRIST: You already told us what your first words were.

COHEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: [chuckles]

COHEN: I'll tell you. I think whatever there was [unclear]. And now they—you got to teach the kids the—the language that they're born in, you know, like Spanish or whatever it is. And Mrs. Gross had the answer.

SIGRIST: Tell me about how your mother adapted to the United States.

COHEN: She just went down to work, got down to work.

SIGRIST: What job did she get?

COHEN: Well, running her family. That's all she did. We lived on the same house. We—then we went to Worchester Street. Then we had—went to [unclear]. My father bought a house with a partner until the '29 crash came, and then he lost the house.

SIGRIST: Tell me what was the first job you ever got that you were paid for?

COHEN: I was peddling papers, "Hartford Courant" and the "Hartford Times."

SIGRIST: The "Hartford Courant" and the "Hartford Times."

COHEN: That's two papers but now they only—o—one.

SIGRIST: That's right.

COHEN: The "Hartford Times" went out of business.

SIGRIST: How old were you when you—when you became—

COHEN: Well, I was in the age of, oh, say, 10, 11, 12, in that area. I remember getting up and, for me, a—a youngster, a snowstorm, it would be up to here. Getting up at two, three o'clock in the morning, going to the "Hartford Courant" to peddle their paper, go home and go to school, then come back and peddle the "Hartford Times" at three cents a paper. You could make—make a half a cent.

SIGRIST: And what did you do with the money that you earned?

COHEN: Gave it to my mother.

SIGRIST: And what would she do with it?

COHEN: House. She'd use it. She'd use it well.

SIGRIST: Do you ever remember buying something for yourself with money that you actually earned?

COHEN: Well, I—I bought a suit. I think it was for my bar mitzvah. I don't know the occasion. I was \$9 for the whole suit. The first time I wore it, they ran up my legs that far.

SIGRIST: About six inches—

COHEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —too short.

COHEN: No. They were—they—they shrunk afterwards. But I—I was bar mitzvahed and then I never saw it again.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about your bar mitzvah?

COHEN: Ah—

SIGRIST: How old were you, first of all?

COHEN: Thirteen. You got to be 13.

SIGRIST: Thirteen. And what do you remember about that experience? Because that happened here in—

COHEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —the United States.

COHEN: Well, very for—formidable. You know what I mean? All the rabbis were sitting at the table with their little pews. And you had to s—say—not to them but with a reader, you had to repeat. That's about all I remember, except we had a little party afterwards. Then my father went to work for Miller [PH] Dairy.

SIGRIST: To—for—to Miller Dairy?

COHEN: Dairy, yeah.

SIGRIST: A dairy.

COHEN: They had a—they used to be in [unclear] houses. And I remember helping him out. I used to have to get up at three o'clock in the morning and helping him peddle milk because I was the biggest and the strongest. I'm bigger than my father.

SIGRIST: What—did you become a citizen?

COHEN: Oh, you—in those days, you became a citizen automatically through your father. That's how I got my papers.

SIGRIST: Wh—when did your father become a citizen?

COHEN: As soon as he came to this country, I guess.

SIGRIST: Okay.

COHEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So it was before you got here then.

COHEN: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. And what about your mother?

COHEN: I think the whole family became citizens.

SIGRIST: Under your father's papers.

COHEN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Have you ever gone back to Europe?

COHEN: No. My s—one of my sons traveled and I said, "No, I don't want to. I got—it took me a long time to get here. They might keep me over there [unclear]. [sentence unclear]."

SIGRIST: How do you think of yourself in terms of nationality?

COHEN: [sighs] I'm a Jew but I'm not a—a [unclear] Jew that fig—figures there's only Jews and other people. But there's—all people are alike, as far as I'm concerned. Because when we were on Worcester Street it was [unclear] a black neighborhood. We had—and went to school with them and we dealt with them through my mother's—well, [unclear]. I don't know just how but we dealt with them. I dealt with them constantly because in 1933 after the crash I—I got a gas station [several words unclear] a lot of time. And—and it was in a black neighborhood and had no problems. No problems.

SIGRIST: How did—how did it make you feel to have your own gas station?

COHEN: Good. I felt good. I—I have five kids. I put three of them though college, two of them. One of them quit. And they're all successful. None of them g—none of them had any trouble.

SIGRIST: How do you think your life would have been different if you had stayed in Poland?

COHEN: I—I—I wouldn't have met my wife anyway. That, I know—would have been [unclear]. My first wife. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Good. Well, Mr. Cohen, I want to thank you very much for letting me ask you [unclear].

COHEN: Well, glad to help you. You know where I am. I'm not going anywhere.

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SIGRIST: [chuckles] Okay. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Hyman Cohen on Tuesday, May 27<sup>th</sup>, 1997 at the Hebrew Home in West Hartford. Thank you very much.

COHEN: Okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW]