

EI-894

SYLVIA EFFRON DASHEFSKY

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RESIDENCES:

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Tuesday, May 27th, 1997. I'm at the Hebrew Home in West Hartford, Connecticut and I'm here with Mrs. Sylvia Effron Dashefsky. Mrs. Dashefsky came from Poland in 1920. She was six years old at that time. Thank you for letting me ask you some questions. Can we begin by you giving me your birth date, please?

DASHEFSKY: I was born May 13th, 1914.

SIGRIST: And where were you born?

DASHEFSKY: In Narewka, Poland.

SIGRIST: Can you spell Narewka.

DASHEFSKY: Nare—N-A-R-E—E-W-K-A. Narewka.

SIGRIST: Where is that in Poland?

DASHEFSKY: In Poland? It's—it's—

SIGRIST: What's it near?

DASHEFSKY: It's near the—Bialystok is the big city of Poland. And we were in the ri—river across the r—road. My grandfather—was in my grandfather's house. We were living—my mother, my fa—father left for America because he was afraid they were going to take—the Russians would take him to the army. And they were—the Russians were taking children off the street, s—six years old and making them [unclear]. They—they—they called them [unclear]. And so my husband went to the United States—

SIGRIST: Your father.

DASHEFSKY: My father.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

DASHEFSKY: He went—he had a sister in—in the—outside Syracuse, New York. They're the—they're one of these five lakes. He had two brothers—two sisters in—in Brooklyn and—and he had a—a—a brother in—in Syracuse, an older brother. He went to them and they—

SIGRIST: What work did he get when he first got to America?

DASHEFSKY: He was working—he didn't—he was working for—he was—went to Syracuse and he was working for the—the—it's—it's a very famous name—o—on the fa—factory.

SIGRIST: What kind of a job was it?

DASHEFSKY: It was a—I can't think of the name of the factory. It was a well known—

SIGRIST: Was he making something?

DASHEFSKY: Then he—well, he—then he decided that he would become a peddler, and he got a horse and wagon and he—he went around. He bought things that were u—used—used yet. He sold them. It was—that was his j—job. And we came—my mother and I came in 1920.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

DASHEFSKY: Itzach [PH]. Isaac. Isaac Dashefsky.

SIGRIST: Isaac Efron.

DASHEFSKY: Efron.

SIGRIST: Efron. E-F-F-R-O-N is your maiden name.

DASHEFSKY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Right.

DASHEFSKY: Yes.

SIGRIST: Do you know what he did in Poland for—for a living?

DASHEFSKY: He was working—he—he had—his father had a—a—a—

SIGRIST: Is that your roommate who's trying to get in?

DASHEFSKY: I don't know.

SIGRIST: Wait. All right. [tape off/on] All right. We're—we're now resuming.

WOMAN: [unclear]

SIGRIST: And Mrs. Dashefsky's roommate has come into the room.

DASHEFSKY: Yes.

SIGRIST: Should we stop again? [tape off/on] Now resuming. And we were talking about your dad.

WOMAN: [speaking in foreign language].

SIGRIST: I should say for the sake of the tape that Mrs. Dashefsky's roommate is behind the curtain here also in the room and may make some noise. We're talking about your dad and, I'm sorry, can you say his name again for me?

DASHEFSKY: It was—

SIGRIST: Itzach, you said.

DASHEFSKY: Itzach Efron. That—

SIGRIST: Effron.

DASHEFSKY: But his English name was Isaac.

SIGRIST: Isaac. Do you remember what he did for a living in Poland before he went to the United States?

DASHEFSKY: He worked for his father. His father was a—was a—had a—a—a store. W—I don't know if they called it a—

WOMAN: [unclear]

SIGRIST: We're going to pause again. Just for a second. [tape off/on]

DASHEFSKY: And the other thing [unclear] father.

SIGRIST: Do you remember his parents at all?

DASHEFSKY: No, I don't remember—the father came to see me before we left but the—the mother was dead. His mother—the one I mar—I'm named after was his mother and her name was Shana [PH].

SIGRIST: Can you spell—is that your Yiddish name? Shana.

DASHEFSKY: Yeah, Shana.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

DASHEFSKY: S-H-A-N—Shana, Shana, Shana, Shana.

WOMAN: [unclear]

DASHEFSKY: It's going to be [tape off/on]—

SIGRIST: Okay. We're resuming again. We're talking about your dad. You said that you remember his father coming to visit you before you left for America.

DASHEFSKY: Yes.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about that?

DASHEFSKY: Well, he was a—I don't remember a great deal because I only saw him. He was a—he had a beard. He was—I don't have a picture of him.

SIGRIST: But in your mind, what do you see when you remember?

DASHEFSKY: Nothing much. Just that he had a beard.

SIGRIST: Why did he come to see you before you left?

DASHEFSKY: Because we were going to America and his son was already in America, and he had the other children in America. My—my father went to his sister—three sisters and—and two brothers in America. And he was a—he was a—he went first to a—to a—to the sister in—that lived in Seneca Falls. And then he came here. Then he—they lived—they moved to Syracuse.

SIGRIST: How old were you when your father went to America?

DASHEFSKY: Well, I was an—I was an infant. I think—I think that he—she—I don't know—remember whether my mother gave birth while he was there or whether before he left.

SIGRIST: I see. So you never saw your father till you got—

DASHEFSKY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —to America.

DASHEFSKY: Yeah.

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

DASHEFSKY: Fruma. Fruma. Florence.

SIGRIST: Florence. Fuma, you said?

DASHEFSKY: Fruma.

SIGRIST: How do you think you spell that?

DASHEFSKY: F-R-U-M-A.

SIGRIST: Oh, uh-huh. And—

DASHEFSKY: Fruma. There's a—there's a woman that sits at the same table with me with—has that same name. She's Florence too.

SIGRIST: And—

DASHEFSKY: Fruma is a—means somebody that's—that's religious. Fruma.

SIGRIST: And what was her maiden name?

DASHEFSKY: Her maiden name was Goldfarb. No, not Goldfarb. Goldfarb was my grandmother's maiden name. She was a—

WOMAN: [unclear]—

SIGRIST: Please, you said that you would be quiet. Please be quiet.

WOMAN: Okay.

SIGRIST: We'll—we'll be done in a little while.

DASHEFSKY: Leninefsky [PH]. Leninefsky.

SIGRIST: Nanefsky?

DASHEFSKY: Leninefsky.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

DASHEFSKY: L-E-N-I-N-E-F-S-K-Y. Leninefsky.

SIGRIST: Leninefsky. Can you tell me what you know about your mother's background and her growing up?

DASHEFSKY: My mother knew six languages.

SIGRIST: Wow.

DASHEFSKY: She spoke Polish and German and Russian and Yiddish and—and Hebrew and when she came to the United States she learned English.

SIGRIST: How much education had your mother had in Europe?

DASHEFSKY: She went to a school that they had teachers—teachers and maybe he—they taught in houses. She went to there. So my uncle, my mother's brother was a—went through the yeshiva. He was a—the—he was a—a Hebrew teacher when he came here.

SIGRIST: Can you explain for me what a yeshiva is?

DASHEFSKY: Yeshiva is a—is a—is a—a school for—to teach the—the—the men to become religious rabbis or just t—to know the language. My uncle was—was a Hebrew teacher when he came to the United States.

SIGRIST: But primarily it's religious training—

DASHEFSKY: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: —of one sort or another. Getting back to your mother, w—were there things that your mother taught you how to do when you were growing up?

DASHEFSKY: Well, she taught me how—how to cook and—and bake and I used to take care of my sister and brother. They were twins. And my mother was busy and I—I used to sit outside with them and—and play with them.

SIGRIST: What do you remember your mother doing when you were still in Europe? Still in Poland. How do you—can you—

DASHEFSKY: She was working—and with the Germans. The Germans had taken everybody to work in the—in the—in the forest. There was a b—big forest in there, this town, Biggi Bevorna Nafta [PH], it was called. And they had a big forest and they were—they had—everybody was there. My—my grandfather went for the work, my mother—my mother's brother and the—my aunt that was one of the—my uncle's wife and the sister—and the sister of my mother's. And—

SIGRIST: And what did they do in the forest?

DASHEFSKY: They—they cleaned up—they cleaned up the forest, were so many things they had—different kinds of wood that they had there. And they had other things that the Germans took out. And the Germans were—they—my mother was—was with me at an uncle's that had a farm outside of the town. And he had a—a—they had—in those days, you had for—for Saturday, you couldn't go ride [unclear]. They had the wires that it would just shut off the place so the—the Germans came so there was something that he was sending messages to somebody. So they—he cut that down and they—they almost killed my mother.

SIGRIST: This is during World War I.

DASHEFSKY: Yes.

SIGRIST: That—what other memories do you have about that period (of course, you were a small child) during World War I?

DASHEFSKY: Other—

SIGRIST: Other things about the Germans that you remember.

DASHEFSKY: They were—they were nice to—to—my mother was staying on a porch one time crying, and a German doctor was riding in a—in a [unclear], those carts they have on a—and my mother was standing outside crying. And he stopped her and asked her and she said—she said, “My daughter is sick and I don’t know what it is.” And he went—he was a doctor and he said that I caught the stuff that the—the Germans came from the—the—the African—North Africa and the fighting that they—they had some—they got some sickness, I mean that brought that to me. And he—

SIGRIST: So you were the one who was sick.

DASHEFSKY: Yeah, and the—and then they—he helped her. He was nice.

SIGRIST: Do you remember anything about being sick?

DASHEFSKY: No, I don’t remember anything.

SIGRIST: How old were you?

DASHEFSKY: Well, I was a baby that [unclear].

SIGRIST: Just little.

DASHEFSKY: And then I went to teach, to study when I was a—five years old. I went to study in a—in a Hebrew—by a Hebrew teacher. And I was showing the—the alphabet and I was telling him and my grandmother—my mother said, “That’s coming from the—from the—from God.” And I came to the United States and I went to a—to a public school and then I went to a Hebrew school.

SIGRIST: Who was—who was—of your mother and your father, for whom was education more important? Who—who wanted the children to be educated?

DASHEFSKY: They both wanted it. They both wanted it.

SIGRIST: Did—did you have brothers and sisters?

DASHEFSKY: I had a brother and sister, a twin.

SIGRIST: Oh, that's right. You told me. Were they all born in—in Poland?

DASHEFSKY: They were born in—in Syracuse, New York.

SIGRIST: Oh, in Syracuse. Are you the only—then you're—

DASHEFSKY: I'm the only one that's left now of that family.

SIGRIST: But—but in terms of the children who were born in Europe, were you the only child born in Europe?

DASHEFSKY: With my mother? Yes, I was the only child when my father left her. And I was born after he left.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the house that you lived in in Europe?

DASHEFSKY: Well, it was—my grandfather had a—had a house that was—I don't know how many rooms it had, that they had a dining room and they had a kitchen, and they had some bedrooms. I slept with my grandfather and he had a—a—a—a barn. We had a cow there.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the—the cow and the animals? Do you—

DASHEFSKY: I don't remember. I remember though—though if we went into a—to the—you—you had a toilet outside in a—in a—in a loo, like. And the moment you went in there, the—the—the pigs went in, so that pi—pigs weren't eaten, were—were not ea—not eaten by—but they came in. So they—and they had chickens that my grandfather had and my grandmother took care of. My grandmother was a very—was a very—very good woman and she wasn't afraid. She used to go into the—the—every time they—you woke up, they didn't know which armies were in there. She used to go to the—to the town where they entered and tell them that they should be nice to them. And she—she was a very, very strong person.

SIGRIST: I can see as you're talking about her you can kind of see her in your mind.

DASHEFSKY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can't you?

DASHEFSKY: Yes, I had pictures of her with a—with the—the wigs that they wore.

SIGRIST: Is there a name for that kind of a wig?

DASHEFSKY: It's called a shikel [PH].

SIGRIST: And—and who would wear the wigs?

DASHEFSKY: The—the married women. She wore it and some beads that she had. I had a picture of her and I had a picture of the one that I didn't know that was named after. She wasn't living in that same town as my mother and grandmother lived.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what kinds of food you ate in Poland?

DASHEFSKY: Well, we ate potatoes and fish and herring and chicken. That's about—th—that's it. There was butter that you—you made yourself, I think.

SIGRIST: Who did the cooking in the family?

DASHEFSKY: My mother.

SIGRIST: Yeah. And do you remember—what was your favorite food as a little girl? The food that you looked forward to eating the most.

DASHEFSKY: Well, to cake and Passover, we had a—a—was a—sweet things that we had.

SIGRIST: Can you actually describe for me how your family celebrated Passover in Poland?

DASHEFSKY: Well, they—everybody came for the Passover. We had a—they had the Seder—the Seder, two Seders, the first night and second night. And that's where you have the—you read the—the—the part of it of the Seder. It's a special pamphlet that you have.

SIGRIST: Who would read that?

DASHEFSKY: Well, the—the—the four questions, somebody would ask—I would ask because I was the only one that had a child. I was the only one that had a—my mother was—was the only one that had a child that was—the others were—were—were not married yet.

SIGRIST: So is it the child that asks the questions?

DASHEFSKY: Yes.

SIGRIST: Can you say what those four questions are?

DASHEFSKY: Yes.

SIGRIST: Can you do It—is it in Hebrew?

DASHEFSKY: Yes.

SIGRIST: Can you say that for me—

DASHEFSKY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —on tape?

DASHEFSKY: [speaking in Hebrew]. “What is the difference, this night and all this [unclear]?” [speaking in Hebrew]. “This night we don’t eat hummus [PH].” That’s—that’s bread. “We eat matzah [PH].” Then—and they—I have a book here. I don’t remember the third portion.

SIGRIST: That’s okay. Is there a special prayer that you would say at Passover?

DASHEFSKY: Well, you were saying—

SIGRIST: Can you s—can you do that for me? Do you remember it off the top of your head?

DASHEFSKY: Well, we used to sing—I can’t—I can’t think of it but—

SIGRIST: It’s okay.

DASHEFSKY: —I have a book.

SIGRIST: Well, no. Maybe it’ll come back to you as we’re talking. What about—what about in—what language did you speak at home—at home?

DASHEFSKY: Yiddish.

SIGRIST: Spoke in Yiddish. Is there a prayer in Yiddish that you remember? Did you ever pray in Yiddish?

DASHEFSKY: No, the prayers were in Hebrew.

SIGRIST: So you always prayed in Hebrew. When would you speak Yiddish?
Just—

DASHEFSKY: Yeah, every day.

SIGRIST: Everything else.

DASHEFSKY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Is there a song in Yiddish that you remember?

DASHEFSKY: A lot of songs.

SIGRIST: Can you sing a—a Yiddish song that you might have sung as a little girl?

WOMAN: Help! Help!

SIGRIST: We're almost done.

DASHEFSKY: I know a lot of songs. I could—take 'em out. I have some—and sing it.

SIGRIST: But what do you—what song do you remember?

DASHEFSKY: Oh, I remember a lot of them.

SIGRIST: But I mean like right now. Without looking at a book, what can—what can you sing for me in Yiddish?

DASHEFSKY: Well, at Pesach we used to sing—we used to sing these four questions. [speaking in Yiddish]. “What’s the difference, this night from all the other nights?”

SIGRIST: That’s right, which you just recited for us. Is there a—is there a tune? Can you sing it for me?

DASHEFSKY: [singing in Yiddish]. We—we—“Why is this night different than every other night?” Every other night, we used to eat [unclear]. It was a—a green vegetable, [several words unclear] matzah. Then we used to sing—I know these things but they—they—they don’t come to me.

SIGRIST: [chuckles] That’s okay. But that was great. Thank you for doing that. Let’s—let’s sort of change track here a little bit. Your father is in Syracuse, you said?

DASHEFSKY: Yes.

SIGRIST: He's in Syracuse. What did you know about America before you got here?

DASHEFSKY: Know nothing.

SIGRIST: How did you think about America?

DASHEFSKY: I didn't know.

SIGRIST: Were y—was your father communicating?

DASHEFSKY: Yes, and then that's how we came to Syracuse, New York.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about—about the process of getting ready to leave Poland?

DASHEFSKY: Well, it was a—it was very difficult to say goodbye to the grandmother and the grandfather, that we left them.

SIGRIST: Can you—can you talk about when you had to say goodbye to them?

DASHEFSKY: Well, gee, we cried. If you couldn't say goodbye [unclear] we left them because there was a—my uncle was still there and my aunts. They were—they weren't married yet. My uncle was—had his lady friend—they were married, that—working for them at that—that thing. But they—when the—the Germans were nice and then my uncle knew German and Polish and Russian, the languages, and Yiddish. And he said to the—the—the head of the—the people that were working in the forest, he says he's going to be in—in the—the capital of Germany, the—Berlin. And he'll bring him back a—a Panama hat—

SIGRIST: A Panama hat.

DASHEFSKY: —so when [unclear] get married, so get married. I don't know the man but I did know them. But th—they were nice to my uncle [unclear], very nice.

SIGRIST: What—do you remember what your mother packed to take to America?

DASHEFSKY: She packed some clothes that she—my mother was—could sew. In fact, my—I—I met a cousin of mine in New York and she said that my mother sent for clothes from America, that it was mine af—that I outgrew. She—clothes she—she sewed my clothes. She had sewed them, nice dress, a green one with a—the—with the—with the—it wasn't blue. It wasn't—the material was a—like a—

SIGRIST: Cotton?

DASHEFSKY: No, like a—like a knit thing but not—not blue.

SIGRIST: Like a jersey knit?

DASHEFSKY: It—she's—one of them says that she sent her a green one with a green—with a—with a—embroidery on the top. And she wore 'em. There was a cousin of mine that I met afterwards.

SIGRIST: What—what do you remember about getting ready to leave? What—do you have any memories of the process of what you had to do before you could leave Poland?

DASHEFSKY: No, I don't really know.

SIGRIST: Of course, you were very young at the time.

DASHEFSKY: Yes.

SIGRIST: But in terms of, like, did you have to go to the doctor, for instance, before you left?

DASHEFSKY: Well, I I—they went to the doctor and I was all right. They—he gave me a—a shot and [unclear]. There was something on my arm.

SIGRIST: And it's just you and your mom, right?

DASHEFSKY: Yes.

SIGRIST: Just you and your mother. You said it was very sad to say goodbye to your grandparents.

DASHEFSKY: Yes, for sure is sad.

SIGRIST: Where did you go to get on the ship?

DASHEFSKY: We went to—it was the—we went on the Am—New Amsterdam.

WOMAN: [unclear].

SIGRIST: Went on the New Amsterdam. Yeah, where did you—I'm just writing that down for my own sake. And where did you go to get onto the New Amsterdam?

DASHEFSKY: We went to—to Holland and we—we were sleeping on the—the floor there, the—the ex—exit to the ship in the—that—it was called the New Amsterdam.

SIGRIST: That was a big ship.

DASHEFSKY: Yes.

SIGRIST: The New Amsterdam.

DASHEFSKY: Do you remember how you got from Poland to Holland?

WOMAN: [unclear].

DASHEFSKY: We went—

SIGRIST: Please be quiet.

DASHEFSKY: —by train. And my uncle was with us because they—the J—the—the Polish people were killing Jews. They—they—when they r—ran the train they were in a—in a small room. I—just laying under the—the—the couch and my uncle was standing at the door. And he didn't have any beard so the—the Poles were [unclear]. The y—the [unclear]—my uncle said, "[unclear]." He says, "Go away." They were after Jews.

SIGRIST: Do you remember there being conflict between the Jews and the gentiles in Poland before you left?

DASHEFSKY: No. We didn't—I didn't know many Polish.

SIGRIST: I see. But—but you—you did experience that on your way—

DASHEFSKY: Yes.

SIGRIST: —to Holland.

DASHEFSKY: That—by that man, was looking for Jid [PH]—Jid. It's a Jew.

- SIGRIST: Did it—does anything else stick out in your mind about that train ride, going is Holland?
- DASHEFSKY: Well, it was a long ride and we were in—in a small compartment. And it was very crowded.
- SIGRIST: How long did you have to stay before you could actually get onto the ship?
- DASHEFSKY: We—the ship was—was delayed and we were there two weeks, I think. Then we went on and I was—
- SIGRIST: What did you do during those two weeks?
- DASHEFSKY: We were staying at—in the—in this place that they had for the people. We were sleeping on the floor. And—
- SIGRIST: What did you think when you saw that ship that you were going to have to get on?
- DASHEFSKY: I was—I was flabbergasted. I was young, very young. And I used to—I was the only one that was walking around. Everybody else was sick and they—I remember I was in—on—on top of the—the—the boat. And there was a—a—some [unclear] the water. He was a whale. They said he was a whale. That, I remember.
- SIGRIST: Can you describe for me where you slept on the ship? What did it look like where you slept?
- DASHEFSKY: Well, my mother slept on a—on a mattress, like, and I slept there, not in a bed in the ship.
- SIGRIST: And where did they feed you on the ship?
- DASHEFSKY: I don't remember. Don't remember. I was the only one that was around walking. Everybody else was laying sick from the—the ride.
- SIGRIST: Did you see anything on the ship that you had never seen before?
- DASHEFSKY: Well, I saw the whale out there. And—and the—the—we saw [unclear] people riding around, just took a long time for us. It took two weeks, I think, to get there.
- SIGRIST: Two weeks. And then—
- DASHEFSKY: My father was in New York to visit—pick us up.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when the ship came into New York?

DASHEFSKY: I don't know. I don't know. I've seen it so many times that I don't know.

SIGRIST: Right. And did you have to go to Ellis Island?

DASHEFSKY: Yes, we came to Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about being at Ellis Island?

DASHEFSKY: We were there a while. We had to wait for my father to come to get us. It was crowded there, very crowded. And we didn't know any English, was—my mother knew Polish and Russian and German. So she spoke—

SIGRIST: What did you see at Ellis Island?

DASHEFSKY: Well, was crowded. Was crowded. It wasn't very [unclear]. We were sleeping in beds that were—my mother and I slept in the same bed, I think.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how long you had to stay there before you—

DASHEFSKY: We were two weeks on the boat.

SIGRIST: On the boat. What about at Ellis Island? How long did you have to wait before your father came to get you?

DASHEFSKY: He came for us right away.

SIGRIST: Oh. So you decided to—he just had to—

DASHEFSKY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What did you think when you saw your father for the first time?

DASHEFSKY: I didn't believe it. I knew that he was there in America but I didn't see him and I didn't believe he was my father. It was—took a long time till I got used to it. And we—we—he took us to Syracuse, New York. And my mother was—made friends with neighbors. She became the secretary of a—the Yiddish club, women's club. She was selling—selling dresses, things, doing some work. And then

she had the—my brother and sister. And I—the summertime, I was taking care of them in the summer.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

SIGRIST: Wh—when your father came to New York to meet you, did he bring any gifts to you?

DASHEFSKY: I don't remember.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you were wearing, as a little girl when you got off the boat?

DASHEFSKY: Well, one of the—one of the dresses that my mother had made.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what it looked like?

DASHEFSKY: No, I don't.

SIGRIST: It was a long time ago.

DASHEFSKY: Yes, it was.

SIGRIST: [laughs] But you're doing a great job. You've got a good memory. How did you go from—from New York to Syracuse?

DASHEFSKY: By train.

SIGRIST: Does anything stick out in your mind about that train ride?

DASHEFSKY: Well, the train ride was—was a different thing and it was different. Everything was closed. The—the—the—the European trains, they didn't have doors for—for cabins. That was different but we got there.

SIGRIST: Who met you in Syracuse?

DASHEFSKY: My father met us in Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: And—and when you—

DASHEFSKY: Took us [unclear].

SIGRIST: When you got to Syracuse, was anyone waiting for you there to meet your father and you and your mother?

DASHEFSKY: Well, my aunt that was—lived in Seneca Falls came to Syracuse and the—the children. My—she has a daughter that's five years older than I am, still living in—in—in Florida.

SIGRIST: Do you—do you remember how you spent that first night in America?

DASHEFSKY: No, just—I didn't know anything.

SIGRIST: Where did your father take you to live in Syr—Syracuse? Can you describe the house or the apartment that—

DASHEFSKY: I lived in—we lived in a—in a—in a—a—a forced—four-apartment building, two downstairs the two upstairs. We lived in—in one section. Then we moved to a—another section where we had two houses, a four story, four people living in the—four families living in the two houses. And then there was a—a—a ca—a—a cottage. We lived in the cottage. Then we moved to the—one of the buildings that was—where they—where they had a porch in the b—front and in the back. And there were other people living in the building, that were my—my age.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about playing with—with children in America? How—

DASHEFSKY: Well, I was—I was every—I was in the fifth—first grade—in the second grade and I had a teacher, Miss—Miss—Miss Welch [PH] and Miss Utter [PH].

SIGRIST: Lutter.

DASHEFSKY: Utter.

SIGRIST: Utter.

DASHEFSKY: They were maiden—mai—maiden and they were—Miss Utter was the first teacher when—when—when—when I started. And I apparently must have been talking a lot because I sat under the desk every day. And—and if—I went to the—to one—went to Mrs.—Miss Welch and I didn't—still [unclear] say that I talked and I had to stay under her desk. I stayed under her desk all the time, the—the—the [unclear] desk. And—but I—I did well in school.

- SIGRIST: How did the other students treat you? Because you—you, of course, had come from Europe.
- DASHEFSKY: Well, I—I had friends that—there was one girl that was—called her name Sylvia. She was—she was a—a pupil in the public school with me and the Hebrew school. And I went to Hebrew school and—and the—the public school and helped my mother with—in the summertime with the children.
- SIGRIST: How did you learn English?
- DASHEFSKY: I went to public school.
- SIGRIST: And how—do you remember how they went about trying to teach you English?
- DASHEFSKY: Well, they—they didn't. They—they—they just told us this is the words on the board and they were talking in English. They didn't talk any other language. They were—they were Americans. But they were—they were old maids.
- SIGRIST: Can you tell me how, as a child, it made you feel to hear everybody speaking a language you didn't understand?
- DASHEFSKY: Well, it didn't take me long and I learned. I was talking all the time. I was talking. I must have been talking in Eng—in Yiddish, since I [unclear] un—stepped under the desk every day.
- SIGRIST: And that was their way of punishing you—
- DASHEFSKY: Yes.
- SIGRIST: —for talking too much?
- DASHEFSKY: That's right.
- SIGRIST: Get under the desk. Can you tell me how your mother, if she learned English—did your mother attempt to learn English?
- DASHEFSKY: She became—she learned English. My mother spoke seven languages. She spoke—
- SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little about how she learned English?
- DASHEFSKY: Well, she—she knew Polish and Russian and German. So she knew the—the—the alphabet already. She—she became a

secretary in a Yiddish club and she was talking English to some of the people. She learned.

SIGRIST: Did your father speak English?

DASHEFSKY: Yes.

SIGRIST: Who spoke better English? Mom or Dad?

DASHEFSKY: Well, my father spoke better English. My father had a nice voice. He used to sing prayers in—in Hebrew and they thought it was a—one of the Hebrew—one of the—there was a—a cantor that was very well known at the time. I can't remember his name. And they thought that it was he that th—were singing, that he was playing a record and singing. [knocking sound]

SIGRIST: Oh, we're going to pause. [tape off/on] Okay, we're resuming. We were talking about your father. You said he had a very nice singing voice.

DASHEFSKY: Yes.

SIGRIST: Was your mother musical at all?

DASHEFSKY: My mother could sing.

SIGRIST: What—what was the hardest thing for your mother to get adjusted to in the United States?

DASHEFSKY: Well, she didn't have many friends. Took time to get friendly. She was busy with a child and then she became pregnant. And we had two children, and I used to go out with them in the summertime and stay with them so she could do her work. And—

SIGRIST: Did she ever get a job in the United States outside—

DASHEFSKY: No, she couldn't have a job. She had a—like, she had a house and there were three children.

SIGRIST: What were—when you were growing up, what were your chores around the house? What—what were the chores that you were responsible for? You talked about watching the kids. What else did you have to do?

DASHEFSKY: Well, I had to w—stay sometimes if they had to go for a meeting at night. I had to stay with the children.

SIGRIST: What kind of a meeting would they have gone to?

DASHEFSKY: Well, to a—a Zionists meeting.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit about—about their—their belonging to the—to the Zionist movement?

DASHEFSKY: Well, I belonged to the Zionist movement when I was 16 years old.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me what that is, first of all? What is the Zionist movement?

DASHEFSKY: Well, the—there was a Zionist organization. There were the older people and then were the one—the younger one. I was in the younger ones in the [unclear] Zion.

SIGRIST: And what—what—what does that mean? I don't—I don't understand what it—

DASHEFSKY: Well, we were—we were studying Hebrew in—in the school that we went to, the—to the Hebrew school, Hebrew and Yiddish.

SIGRIST: That was part of the Zionist organization or—

DASHEFSKY: That was a—they were—I was a—a member of a Zionist organization. It was 60 years old. I was—I'm a life member in now in—in the Pioneer Women.

SIGRIST: W—were your parents mem—members of any other kind of organization when you were [unclear]?

DASHEFSKY: Well, my father was a member of the Arbetaren [PH], the Arbetaren, the Workmen's Circle.

SIGRIST: Wh—what is the first word?

DASHEFSKY: Arbetaren. Workmen's—

SIGRIST: What is—

DASHEFSKY: —Circle.

SIGRIST: What is Arbetaren?

DASHEFSKY: Worker's Circle.

SIGRIST: The Worker's Circle, I understand.

DASHEFSKY: Arbetaren.

SIGRIST: Is that just the name of the—

DASHEFSKY: W—W—W—Workmen's Circle.

SIGRIST: Workmen's Circle.

DASHEFSKY: I was [unclear] and my mother belonged to the—to the Pioneer Women. I belonged to them. I—I'm a life member of Pioneer Women.

SIGRIST: Is that a Jewish organization?

DASHEFSKY: That's a—an organization that is for women that are Zionists.

SIGRIST: Oh, I see. I see. And what kind of work do they do? What—what—what do you do if you're a Pioneer woman?

DASHEFSKY: I have it right here in the [unclear].

SIGRIST: Well, here. We can look at that when we're done, but I was just wondering if you could just tell me what kind of activities you do.

DASHEFSKY: Well, we were active in the—in Jewish things. We—we had meetings. We r—we raised money. We had affairs. We played—I—I went to Hebrew school and we played—I played in a—in plays.

SIGRIST: I see. So—so it's like a social organization but it also does charity work and—

DASHEFSKY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —different things. I see. Did—tell me about the first job. Did you ever get a job—

DASHEFSKY: Yes.

SIGRIST: —when you were young? What was the first job you got that you got paid for?

DASHEFSKY: Well, I—I was a—I was working in the—I went to—to a high school that was a vocational high school. And—

SIGRIST: Was it in Syracuse?

DASHEFSKY: Yes.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

DASHEFSKY: And I worked in a five and ten.

SIGRIST: Five and ten cent store.

DASHEFSKY: Yeah. And I worked Saturdays and—and—and weekdays [unclear] afternoon. And—and then I got a job as a—as a Hebrew teacher in a—in a reform s—synagogue. And I—and I spoke in—in—in—in—I taught in a—in a conservative synagogue. And I spoke He—Hebrew there. I taught them Hebrew. I went to the—to the Volksschule [PH] and I had Hebrew and Yiddish and I was good in it.

SIGRIST: Tell me about when you got married. What year did you get married?

DASHEFSKY: Well, my husband, Shama [PH], was a—was born in Europe too. He was born in the—in Bessarabia.

SIGRIST: In Bessarabia.

DASHEFSKY: And he came to New York and he went to a—to a school that they taught H—Yiddish and Hebrew. And he graduated. He spoke in—in Yiddish. He gave the valedictory in Yiddish and they were—they—the people there were mocking him because he spoke in Yiddish. He was a Hebrew teacher and a—a Yiddish teacher.

SIGRIST: What was his name?

DASHEFSKY: Leo Dashefsky.

SIGRIST: And when did you two get married? What year?

DASHEFSKY: Got married in 19—I forgot already. I'll get some—[unclear]. I was 20—22 years—24 years old. He was six years—he was 30. I was 24. I came when I got—1914, I was born.

SIGRIST: Born in '14 so you were 20 in 1934. Right? '14—

DASHEFSKY: Twenty. I thought I was 20—25.

SIGRIST: Twenty-five.

DASHEFSKY: Twenty-four and he was 26—he was 30—30 years old.

SIGRIST: Uh-hmm. And did—did you have children?

DASHEFSKY: Son and a daughter.

SIGRIST: And what are their names?

DASHEFSKY: My son is a professor in—a doctorate in sociology in UConn and the head of Judaica [PH] Department. He just made a—a department in honor of my husband, Judaica. My husband was a Hebrew teacher and he was a—a Yiddish teacher.

SIGRIST: But what was your son's n—what is your son's name?

DASHEFSKY: Arnold Dashefsky.

SIGRIST: Arnold, okay. And you said you had two children who was—you said two children, you have?

DASHEFSKY: That's my daughter up there.

SIGRIST: And what's her name?

DASHEFSKY: Her—her name is Beth Esther.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. And did you ever go back to Europe for any reason? Did you ever want to go back to Europe?

DASHEFSKY: I was in France.

SIGRIST: But did you ever go to Poland?

DASHEFSKY: No.

SIGRIST: No. Did you ever want to go back to see where you were born?

DASHEFSKY: No. Poland was not very good to the Jews.

SIGRIST: What about your parents? How did they feel about—did they ever want to return to Europe for any reason?

DASHEFSKY: No.

SIGRIST: No. Did—did you become a citizen?

DASHEFSKY: Yes, my mother became a citizen and I was a citizen.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit about the process that you had to go through to become a citizen?

DASHEFSKY: No, it didn't take long.

SIGRIST: But what did you have to do?

DASHEFSKY: I really don't know. I had a—I had a thing that w—that showed I was born in Poland.

SIGRIST: I see.

DASHEFSKY: And—

SIGRIST: Well, if we—if we stop for a minute and—and we give you one of your books, will you sing for me in Yiddish?

DASHEFSKY: Yes.

SIGRIST: All right. Hang on. Let me just put this on pause. We're going to stop for a minute and we're going to get you a book to look at. Okay. Mrs. Dashefsky's going to sing a song. This is in Yiddish or Hebrew?

DASHEFSKY: Yiddish.

SIGRIST: This is in Yiddish. And what's the title of the song?

DASHEFSKY: [unclear] on the—on the—the—the—the—they had a—a wall that had a table [unclear].

SIGRIST: Okay. Go ahead and sing.

DASHEFSKY: [singing in Yiddish]. You want to know what it says?

SIGRIST: Yeah, sure.

DASHEFSKY: "On the—the—pupichek" [PH] is a wall that has a—a—

SIGRIST: A table, you said.

DASHEFSKY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

DASHEFSKY: Bentafilus [PH] is a fire burning and the—and the rabbi is teaching little children the nalifase [PH], the alphabet. [speaking in Yiddish]. “Remember kids, children. [unclear] the [unclear] dear ones what you’re learning here.” [speaking in Yiddish]. Again, [unclear], that’s [unclear] in [several words unclear]. [speaking in Yiddish]. “Learn, kinder. Learn, children. Don’t be afraid. Everybody’s—is—beginning is—is hard.” [speaking in Yiddish]. “The—the one that’s learning the Torah is—is [unclear], is—is very good.” [speaking in Yiddish]. “What do we need more?” [speaking in Yiddish]. “Your children will get older. You will understand.” [speaking in Yiddish]. “How much in the alphabet l—lie the tears? How much [unclear] the cry?” [speaking in Yiddish]. “Learn, children, with a great need.” [speaking in Yiddish]. It was [unclear] Hebrew but will get it, a flag.

SIGRIST: I have—I have enough time, actually—we’re almost out of time but I have enough time to sing one more song. Is there another one—

DASHEFSKY: Okay.

SIGRIST: —that you would like to do? What’s—find one that you like to do. Tell me what the title is first.

DASHEFSKY: [unclear] when there’s—

SIGRIST: I should say for the sake of the tape that we’re looking at a—at a book of songs, a book of songs. And you—it looks like Hebrew to me but you—you said that you sang in Yiddish.

DASHEFSKY: Yeah, the Yiddish and Hebrew is the same alphabet but it’s—in Yiddish, it’s different.

SIGRIST: I see.

DASHEFSKY: I’m trying to—

SIGRIST: Is there one more short one that you’d like to do?

DASHEFSKY: [unclear]. I will sing a song that they—they—they sang in Yiddish and that they sang—and the Jewish sang that they’re—the—the Poles used to—I want to give a—a Hebrew song that—

SIGRIST: This—this looks like—got one?

DASHEFSKY: [singing in Yiddish]. Elieolavis [PH] must be one of the—the prophets, Eli—Elijah. He was in a [unclear]. He was from [unclear], the song of [unclear].

SIGRIST: [unclear].

DASHEFSKY: [singing in Yiddish]. “In the—in the hurry in our time he will come came with meshia [PH].” [unclear] meshia is a—is a—one that will come to help you.

SIGRIST: Great. Well, I—I think that’s—that’s—that’s good. I—I want to thank you very much for letting me sit down with you and, despite all the interruptions that we’ve had, [chuckles] but for sitting down and letting me ask you these questions. Thanks. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Sylvia Dashefsky on Tuesday, May 27th, 1997 at the Hebrew Home in West Hartford, Connecticut. Thank you very much, Mrs. Dashefsky.

[END OF INTERVIEW]