

**EI-921**

**MARGARET ZELEI**

**BIRTH DATE: AUGUST 7, 1909**

**INTERVIEW DATE: AUGUST 2, 1997**

**AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 87**

**RUNNING TIME: 41:12**

**INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.**

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**TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: JENNA CIACCIO**

**TRANSCRIPT REVEIWD BY: CHARLES MITCHELL, 6/2007**

**HUNGARY, 21**

**AGE: 11**

**SHIP: THE AQUITANIA**

**PORT: CHERBOURG**

**RESIDENCES:**

- **HUNGARY: MEZOKOVESD, BORSOD MEGEYE**
- **US: [PH] MASSALON, OHIO; PIGEON RUN, OHIO**

LEVINE: Today is August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1997. And I'm here in [ph] Massalon, Ohio with Margaret Zelei and Margaret's sister, Betty, is here with us today. Margaret came from Hungary in 1921 when she was eleven years of age. At the time of this interview Mrs., Ms. Zelei is eighty-seven years of age. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. If we could start at the beginning with you saying your birth date and where in Hungary you were born.

EI-921/ZELEI

ZELEI: My birthday is August the 7<sup>th</sup>, 1909 and I was born in Mezokovesd Borsod Megeye its spelled M-E-Z-O-K-O-V-E-S-D B-O-R-S-O-D M-E-G-Y-E.

LEVINE: And did you live in the same place, up until...

ZELEI: Til, til...

LEVINE: ...you left for America.

ZELEI: Yes, yes, we did, ah-huh.

LEVINE: Now, the place that you gave me, you gave me the name of the town?

ZELEI: Town and the state.

LEVINE: The, the...

ZELEI: Ah-huh.

LEVINE: ...okay the bigger area.

ZELEI: The area.

LEVINE: That town, was it a big town, a small town.

ZELEI: No, at that time there was seventy-five population.

BETTY: Seventy-five thousand.

ZELEI: There was a pretty good size.

EI-921/ZELEI

LEVINE: Seventy-five thousand?

ZELEI: Seventy-five thousand.

LEVINE: Oh well that is...

ZELEI: Eh-hm. That is a good size, eh-hm.

LEVINE: Right, and what was your father's name?

ZELEI: Mike Zelei.

LEVINE: And your mother?

ZELEI: Mary Zelei.

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

ZELEI: It was Mary Elek.

LEVINE: Can you spell..?

ZELEI: E-L-E-K.

LEVINE: E-L-E-K?

ZELEI: Ah-huh.

BETTY: Takacs

ZELEI: Eh-hm.

LEVINE: Takacs?

ZELEI: Takacs.

BETTY: [not understood]

ZELEI: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Takacs was her maiden name?

ZELEI: The, Takacs was her maiden name.

LEVINE: Could you spell that one?

ZELEI: T-A-K-A-C-S.

LEVINE: Okay, and Elek, was that some other name of, in the family or?

ZELEI: No, that, that's all just...

LEVINE: Just Takacs.

ZELEI: Taka-Takacs.

BETTY: Her mother's maiden, her stepmother's maiden name was Elek.

ZELEI: Yeah.

BETTY: Her mother's, I'm sorry we should s-

ZELEI: Now, now that, I got that, [not understood]

EI-921/ZELEI

LEVINE: We're resuming here and Elek was your mother's...

BETTY: Mother's.

LEVINE: mother's...

ZELEI: Mother's name.

LEVINE: ...maiden name. And Takacs was your mother's maiden name.

ZELEI: That's right.

LEVINE: And was the family going back that far to your mother's mother, were they also in the same place?

ZELEI: Yes, they were. Eh-hm, yeah.

LEVINE: So the family had been there for some time.

ZELEI: For years, yes. Eh-hm.

LEVINE: And your father's family?

ZELEI: His family too.

LEVINE: Ok.

ZELEI: They've been there, all, all their lives.

LEVINE: Okay, so...

EI-921/ZELEI

ZELEI: They were all born there.

LEVINE: Okay, so your family was there for...

ZELEI: Yes.

LEVINE: ...quite some time.

ZELEI: Eh-hm, yes.

LEVINE: Okay, we're resuming here and just by way of saying that the family had dated back for centuries in that place. And that the, on your mother's side had, the house was the oldest house in town and was used as a museum.

ZELEI: Yes, eh-hm.

LEVINE: So that's, that's quite...

ZELEI: Eh-hm.

LEVINE: ...quite a bit of history. I hope you have that written down somewhere.

BETTY: I do.

LEVINE: Yeah, okay. [Laughs] Okay, now, [clears throat] your grandparents, do you remember them?

ZELEI: I remember them, Ah-huh.

LEVINE: Now, your mother's parents or your father's parents.

ZELEI: Both, both.

LEVINE: Both.

ZELEI: Eh-hm.

LEVINE: Do you remember as a little girl, in Hungary?

ZELEI: Yes, I do.

LEVINE: You remember them.

ZELEI: Eh-hm.

LEVINE: What were they like? Or what did you do? Or what did they do in relation to you that you can remember.

ZELEI: Well, I have a girlfriend. And she was my age. And I had a lot of toys. I was only child in the family. Everybody was buying me toys all the time. And her and I used to play all the time. We used to serve tea and things like that. And we had a lot of fun. But, there wasn't too many at my age around our neighborhood, other than her. And then, then we went to school together. And then the war broke out. And they closed the school. And our aunt lived with us because her husband was in the war. And she taught me. I had to have lessons every day. She was like a school teacher, you know. And...

LEVINE: What was your aunt's name?

ZELEI: Her name was Katie.

LEVINE: Eh-hm.

ZELEI: And, she was real cute. And I learned to read and write. I only went to school three months. That's all the, the time I had, cause then they filled up the schools with soldiers. And we couldn't go to school. So that's why she took over and taught me.

LEVINE: Now was she teaching just you alone?

ZELEI: Just me, alone, yeah. She lived with us, ah-huh.

LEVINE: Ah-hah.

ZELEI: And I had to learn my lessons every day. If it would have been up to mother I don't think I would have. [Laughs]

LEVINE: Now this aunt was your mother's sister?

ZELEI: Yes, Ah-huh.

LEVINE: Eh-huh.

ZELEI: Ah-huh, mother's sister.

LEVINE: And, what, what else do you personally remember about the first World War?

ZELEI: Well not too much, really, that's all I remember, seeing the soldiers. But then they didn't stay too long. But they still didn't reopen the schools while we were there. So...

EI-921/ZELEI

LEVINE: Were they living in the school?

ZELEI: Yes, eh-hm, for a while, eh-hm, yeah.

LEVINE: And did they live with families instead?

ZELEI: No, no they didn't. They all lived in the, in the school there.

LEVINE: Did you have any personal encounters with soldiers who were in your town?

ZELEI: not really. No, they didn't bother anybody really, no.

LEVINE: Ah-huh.

ZELEI: We didn't have any.

LEVINE: Now, well, which soldiers were they? Do you know?

ZELEI: I don't, I don't know. See I didn't pay that much attention, being young, you know. And I just remember them being there.

LEVINE: Okay.

ZELEI: But...

LEVINE: And what was your father doing for work in Hungary?

ZELEI: Well they had a farm. They worked on a farm. And then they took care of a lot of cows for the neighborhood, you know. That they, they had them out in a field. And he used to help out with that, but they did farm work.

EI-921/ZELEI

LEVINE: Ah-hah. And did you have like food from the farm? Is that..?

ZELEI: Oh, yes. Ah-huh. Yeah. We had, just like they have here, you know there wasn't too much difference in what it was here at that time.

LEVINE: I see, so you had your own food, and then plus you sold...

ZELEI: Eh-hm.

LEVINE: ...from the farm?

ZELEI: No, every, I don't think they sold their food. I remember them, putting them in a separate room they had on the end of the house. And they used to put wheat in big sacks. And apples in big sacks. And, walnuts, and that, stored them away for the winter. But I don't remember them ever selling any.

LEVINE: I see.

ZELEI: Unless I didn't pay attention, even as a little girl.

LEVINE: And how about the livestock? Did you, was that for your own..?

ZELEI: Yeah, that was for, yeah, ...

LEVINE: And...

ZELEI: ...yeah, just for our own, ah-huh. They had pigs and chickens and all that. And then they butchered, eh-hm.

EI-921/ZELEI

LEVINE: And so your father would sort of, take other people's livestock...?

ZELEI: Yes. And watch them, eh-hm. During the day.

LEVINE: Ah-huh.

ZELEI: Eh-hm.

LEVINE: And, it's sounds like your mother must have been from a prominent family.

ZELEI: Yes, she was. She, she really, see her mother died when she was an infant. And then a friend of, of the family took them over. And this lady, that took her, raised her, they used to have a restaurant in Budapest. And she was very wealthy. Then, when she married to the, to her, oh her, I don't know how that was now. She married to this man, and then he lived in our town. So she had to move in to our town. Then they bought a home, and made a home. And, and her, this man was a related to mother, and he was a ,mounted police. He had a good job. And so she was, she was the only child in her household. And she was well kept and raised, you know. She had a nice life. She had good parents.

BETTY: Father was too.

ZELEI: And her, and she was.

BETTY: Father was well off.

ZELEI: And she lived with them till she was sixteen years old. Her father wanted her to move home. And he got married again. But she did

go home and she didn't like it. She cried all the time. So then she ran back to those people. And she lived with them, ah-huh.

LEVINE: Okay, we're resuming here.

ZELEI: Okay.

LEVINE: Do you want to talk about your mother's father.

ZELEI: Yeah, he was a watchmaker. And he made brushes. And everybody brought watches and clocks to him. I remember he had a room, and he used to hang up the clocks on the wall. He had hundred of them, you know, belong to people. And then one time, he, he set all of them at once and they strike all at the same time. It was just like a big bang. [Laughs] We had such a big kick out of it. And he did a lot of, he was a mechanic too. And people used to ask him to fix machines, you know, farm machines and stuff like that. And then there was two, two men, that they were we-, wealthy. And they came to the, and he worked for them for a while, doing machine work. And they came to this country. And when they arrived here, they asked Grandpa to come over and he wouldn't come. And one of them even went back to Hungary to bring him over. He thought he could coax him to come because they needed a good mechanic in the factory. They opened a factory, but I never did learn what kind of a factory that was. But he wouldn't come. He said he's happy where he's at and he's family's there. And he said, he's making a good living where he's at and he didn't want to come.

LEVINE: Do you remember your, that grandfather?

EI-921/ZELEI

ZELEI: Yes I do, ah-huh.

LEVINE: Being with him at any time?

ZELEI: Yeah Oh yeah, A lot of times. I knew the year that we were planning on coming to this country. He came over to our house and he planted some trees. And he said, when you come back, these trees will have fruit on them. And here, I never did get to see him, I didn't go back. And he passed away after we got here. He didn't live too long after we arrived to this country.

LEVINE: Eh-hm.

ZELEI: And Grandma, died before we left. A week before we left my Grandma died.

LEVINE: Oh.

ZELEI: Eh-hm.

LEVINE: Now were you a religious family?

ZELEI: Yes, and we're Catholics, eh-hm. That's all there was in our town, just Catholics and Jews, Jewish Church and a Catholic Church.

LEVINE: Ah-huh. Do you remember any ceremonies, or..?

ZELEI: Oh yeah, a lot, a lot of them I do.

LEVINE: Was there anything different...

ZELEI: Well...

EI-921/ZELEI

LEVINE: ...about the Catholic..?

ZELEI: ...not really, it was the same, the same.

LEVINE: And how about the practice of the religion as far as either births, or deaths, or marriages? Was there anything about the way, say a wedding was..?

ZELEI: Well, yeah, they had big weddings. I remember that. But there wasn't too much difference. It was just about the same as it is here, you know.

LEVINE: Eh-hm.

ZELEI: But...

LEVINE: And how did you celebrate Easter?

ZELEI: Oh, well, they, I remember the fellows used to come to sprinkle the girls, with a bucket of water, pour it on them. And then they had to give them Easter eggs. [Laugh] That was fun.

BETTY: That must be the fun part in the afternoon.

ZELEI: Ah-huh.

LEVINE: Ah-huh, and, and...

ZELEI: I think they had a lot of baked goods for Easter on the table. And all kinds of food after we come home from church and we're celebrating. Well...

EI-921/ZELEI

LEVINE: How about Christmas? Do you remember..?

ZELEI: I remember that. That was the same we had Christmas tree and everything. And, and people visited each other, just like we do here. Eh-hm.

LEVINE: And how about, how did the catholic population and the Jewish population get along?

ZELEI: They got along real good.

LEVINE: Ah-hah.

ZELEI: They got along real good.

LEVINE: You didn't know of any..?

ZELEI: Later on, after the war, they had trouble with them. And, let's see, they put the sugar away and matches and things that had salt. They, they wouldn't let us, that's the only kind of a store we had was Jewish, you know, stores...

LEVINE: All the shopkeepers

ZELEI: ... and shopkeepers. Ah-huh. And so then, they all got together and they said we're going to open a big wholesale grocery store all together, the whole town. And that's what they did. So then the Jews had to all move out. They couldn't make a living, nobody would buy from them.

LEVINE: Well, not did they move out while you were still there?

ZELEI: Yeah, eh-hm, Eh-hm.

LEVINE: So then it was, they were gone.

ZELEI: They were gone. Eh-hm, eh-hm. So that was a good way, you know they didn't hurt anybody. They just fixed them that way, that they wouldn't buy from them.

LEVINE: Ah-huh, ah-huh. And, and, and that was, the impetus behind them moving out was that they weren't selling?

ZELEI: That is, that they weren't selling, yes. That's why they had to , they had to go and make a living, cause that was their living, you know, keeping stores. They were all store keepers.

LEVINE: Okay, we were just getting some background here from Betty that the grandfather was a college graduate...

ZELEI: Yes, he was, oh yes.

LEVINE: ...which must have been quite unusual at the time. And that the Jewish people in the town, up until World War One, were very, everything was very harmonious...

ZELEI: Yes.

LEVINE: ...between the Catholic and the Jewish population. But, when the war broke out and things became scarce...

ZELEI: Yes.

EI-921/ZELEI

LEVINE: ...they were saving certain food items...

ZELEI: Yes, away from the Catholics.

LEVINE: ...for the Jewish people alone and so...

ZELEI: Eh-hm.

LEVINE: ...that's when...

ZELEI: That's...

LEVINE: ...the Catholic people formed a...

ZELEI: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...Co-op, I guess.

ZELEI: That's what it was. Ah-huh.

LEVINE: Okay, now, do you remember, were you, you didn't go to school.  
How about foods, do you remember any kinds of dishes, any kinds  
of foods that you...

ZELEI: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: ...ate there, that you remember?

ZELEI: Chicken, Sundays we always had to have chicken noodle soup.  
And a lot of times stuffed cabbage. And a lot of pastries they used  
to make, with poppy seeds and walnuts, and cookies. And, but the  
food was real good.

LEVINE: Was your mother the one who made the food?

ZELEI: Yeah, and she made, yeah she cooked. And she was the best baker. She made beautiful strudels and noodles and all that kind of stuff. And it was real good.

LEVINE: Well, now as a little girl, did you, did you help her at all or just..?

ZELEI: No, sometimes, ah-huh. She allowed me to help her, eh-hm.

LEVINE: Ah-huh.

ZELEI: Yeah.

LEVINE: And, do you remember as a little girl there the kinds of games you played or..?

ZELEI: Well, marbles usually, we played a lot [laugh] of marbles and ball. And that's about all I can remember.

LEVINE: Ah-huh. And how about, like you your mother, just, just the washing and that kind of thing, how was that taken care of?

ZELEI: Oh.

LEVINE: Did you have, you didn't have running water?

ZELEI: We didn't have running water. They had to go and get the water from a well, in buckets and then they had washboards like we had in here that time too. When we came here we had to use

washboards. It was the same as it was here. There wasn't too much difference af-, from here or there.

LEVINE: Oh.

ZELEI: So, eh-hm.

LEVINE: Now, why was it decided at, in 1921, that, that you would come to this country?

ZELEI: No, dad, dad always wanted us to come but we couldn't because the war broke out. See...

LEVINE: When did your father come here?

ZELEI: In 1913.

LEVINE: And, why did he come at that time?

ZELEI: Well, because he didn't want to go into the war.

LEVINE: Eh-hm.

ZELEI: See, he would have been chosen to go to war, and he wanted to avoid that. And he said that he wants to come here because he didn't want to raise children in Europe for war, because we had so much war going on all the time. So he said, if, if once he gets here, he's not going back. So, he, mother wanted him to come back, but he wouldn't come. So that's why we came then.

LEVINE: Was there communication between your mother and father during World War One?

EI-921/ZELEI

ZELEI: No, because there wasn't any. There was no mail to be had. For ten years we never heard from him.

LEVINE: Then how did you and your mother get along?

ZELEI: We got along. My mother worked and she, she made a good living.

LEVINE: What did she do for a living?

ZELEI: Well she used to sew and all that kind of stuff for people. And, and then she worked out in the field sometimes during the summer, but not too often, to help the people, and they paid her. But mostly she sewed...

LEVINE: Eh-hm.

ZELEI: ...you know, for people.

LEVINE: I see.

ZELEI: She made a good living out of sewing.

LEVINE: So, during the war, were times hard for you and your mother?

ZELEI: Not really.

LEVINE: Not particularly.

ZELEI: No, we had everything. I can't say it was hard. We had a nice, we had nice home and everything.

EI-921/ZELEI

LEVINE: Ah-huh.

ZELEI: Mother bought a new home.

LEVINE: Could you describe the new home?

ZELEI: Eh-hm. It was a real pretty home. Well...

LEVINE: Was it made out of wood? Was it made out of stone, or..?

ZELEI: Around, well I don't know...

BETTY: It's more like a Stucco.

ZELEI: Stucco, I think it was. But it had beautiful wood work inside. Oh, yeah, it was nice. And she furnished it really nice.

LEVINE: And it was just the two of you?

ZELEI: Yeah, eh-hm, just the two of us.

LEVINE: Ah-huh.

BETTY: And then the aunt who came later.

ZELEI: Well, later after her husband went to war. Then she moved in with us.

LEVINE: Oh, ah-huh.

ZELEI: And then she, until, and then we left the house to her, and then after she passed away then they, we sold the house to the, we

EI-921/ZELEI

gave it away to her brother. She had a half brother, two of them. That's all. And then she willed it over to them.

LEVINE: Eh-hm, Ah-hah. Now do you recall anything that your mother brought with her to this country or anything you brought either..?

ZELEI: Just a few, cause see we were told we couldn't bring too much, so just little trinkets she brought and she brought a pillow, all feather pillow. And, what else did she bring? And a little dish I know she brought, we still have it. But not too much because we couldn't bring too much, you know.

LEVINE: Now, you came three years after World War One, was, was that the earliest time..?

ZELEI: Yeah, cause we couldn't come. My mother had to go to Budapest, I don't know, about a hundred times before we, we got our passport. You know, you, we couldn't come, you know, like we do today, you had to wait for your turn.

LEVINE: Well, the [not understood]...

ZELEI: Eh-hm.

LEVINE: ...is what started...

ZELEI: Yeah, Eh-hm.

LEVINE: ...in 1920. Okay, so do you remember the departure? Do you remember leaving? Do you remember...

ZELEI: Yes.

EI-921/ZELEI

LEVINE: ... saying goodbye to your...

ZELEI: to Grandpa...

LEVINE: ...Grandpa?

ZELEI: ...and my aunt that lived with us. And then she had another sister, and they all cried, they didn't want us to come. And...

LEVINE: How did you feel?

ZELEI: Oh, I felt terrible too. I hated to leave.

LEVINE: You did?

ZELEI: Ah-huh. So, not knowing what were we coming to, and I just didn't know.

LEVINE: Ah.

ZELEI: Plus I was anxious to meet my dad, cause I was two years old when I left. So I didn't remember him.

LEVINE: Ah-hah. Did you have any ideas as an eleven year old about what America was..?

ZELEI: No, I didn't. I had no idea what it was going to be like.

LEVINE: And how about your mother, how, did she express..?

EI-921/ZELEI

ZELEI: She felt the same way. When she said we are leaving our nice home. She had everything, but she, she made up her mind that she's going to be able to coax dad to go back. In two years, we're gonna go back. We're not gonna stay here. But he said, "No." He wouldn't go. So then she gave up and we started here. And then she realized it after that.

LEVINE: After a while.

ZELEI: Eh-hm.

LEVINE: And, do you remember traveling to the port that you left from?

ZELEI: Yeah, [not understood] We went on a train to...

BETTY: Paris.

ZELEI: ...Paris. And we, we stayed there about a week.

LEVINE: Do you remember...

ZELEI: Before we...

LEVINE: ...anything about that?

ZELEI: Yeah, I remember, and it was real nice. And I remember going down town. And we went to a, a beautiful store. My mother bought me a real pretty hanky. And we went to church on Sunday, it was beautiful. Beautiful, people had beautiful hats on. [Laugh] So nice.

LEVINE: Any other impressions of Paris? For, with...

EI-921/ZELEI

ZELEI: No, that's about all I can remember.

LEVINE: Eh-hm.

ZELEI: But I remember it was hard to find a hotel. It was, they took us to different hotels and they were so dirty. And mother wouldn't stay. So finally, I think the fifth one was halfway decent. And I do happen to remember that. [Laughs]

LEVINE: Ah-huh. And then you two, where was the port that you left from?

ZELEI: Cherbourg.

LEVINE: Cherbourg.

ZELEI: Cherbourg.

LEVINE: And, when you got there were you examined at all before you boarded the Aquitania?

ZELEI: No, we just, we just boarded and we got in, it was beautiful. It was real nice and we loved it. And there was another lady coming with us from our town. And she got real sick on the plane, my mouth it goes so dry. And she never went out of the cabin. She never ate, she was so sick. My mother and I never got sick. And we were so anxious to go to the dining room, it was so beautiful. They had white table clothes, fresh flowers on the table, and the food was real good. Ever-, I was just telling Betty today, the peas were so good, I don't know how they fixed it but it was so good. [Laughs] And, we never got sick, we looked forward to the meals. It was so nice. And we were lucky that we enjoyed it.

EI-921/ZELEI

LEVINE: Well now you must have been traveling first or second class, I would think.

ZELEI: First.

LEVINE: First class.

ZELEI: It was good. It was nice, ah-huh.

LEVINE: Yeah. Did you, were you aware of, like people in steerage or third class on the same ship as you were on?

ZELEI: Yeah, we were. But we never went off of our, our, you know, it was just like stories high, you know. And they had elevators for you.

BETTY: Should I bring you some to?

LEVINE: No, thank you. So...

ZELEI: And they had, all these stores on the ship, that's where mother bought me that silk hanky, on the ship.

LEVINE: With the...?

ZELEI: And they had the florist, eh-hm. And, and it was really, we enjoyed it. Mother and I just loved it.

LEVINE: Ah-hah.

ZELEI: But a lot of people did get sick because it was a fast ship.

LEVINE: Ah-hah.

EI-921/ZELEI

ZELEI: And we were supposed to make it in four days. And it took us five because one night it got real foggy, and there was three other ships around us. And they couldn't see, so they had to drop the anchor. It made the biggest noise, we got so scared. We didn't know what was going on, until they told us. So they waited out till morning, until the fog left. And they were all blowing their whistles in there, cause they were so near, yet they couldn't see them. So they all dropped their anchor. And it took us five days that way.

LEVINE: Well that must have been exciting...

ZELEI: Oh, that was exciting.

LEVINE: ...for an eleven year old.

ZELEI: [Laughs] I remember that we were all so, cause we thought something is happening, you know, it made the biggest noise, and it was terrible.

LEVINE: Ah-huh.

ZELEI: But then they told us what it was. And then everybody quieted down. [Laughs]

LEVINE: Do you remember when the Aquitania came into the New York Harbor?

ZELEI: Yes, I think I do. Yeah, I remember. Ah-huh, they told us that that was the ship we're gonna board on.

BETTY: Oh, she means, stop it.

EI-921/ZELEI

LEVINE: In the New York Harbor?

ZELEI: Eh-hm.

LEVINE: When the, did you see the Statue of Liberty?

ZELEI: Oh, yes, ah-huh. Yeah, we saw it.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ZELEI: Eh-hm, yeah.

LEVINE: We're resuming here, about when you came into the New York Harbor, what happened?

ZELEI: That-that's where we boarded the, the...

BETTY: Little ship, little boat.

ZELEI: ...a little boat. And took us to the Aquitania.

LEVINE: Took you to?

BETTY: No, from the Aquitania.

LEVINE: You, in other words, you got off the Aquitania and then you took the smaller boat to Ellis Island?

ZELEI: To Ellis Island.

LEVINE: And then what happened there?

EI-921/ZELEI

ZELEI: Well, that's where, they took us into a room and they examined people. But we showed our passport and they told us that we could go out. And then we went to the little boat that took us to the island.

BETTY: [Not understood]

ZELEI: Back to New York. Eh-hm. And then that's when we boarded the train, to come to Barberton.

LEVINE: And did that take a long time? The train ride.

ZELEI: It had, it took all, yes, it took us, well it was, I don't know what it was. It was day time I remember, we boarded a train, and we got into Barberton and it was like midnight, it was dark. And then all these people, our aunt and our uncle, and his family and some of the neighbors, that were from our town in Hungary, they all met us at the station. When we got off the train, they were glad to see us.

LEVINE: And how did you feel seeing your father?

ZELEI: Well, and then dad had problems with the car, he didn't make it to the station. And then when he got to our uncle's place it was late. It was like, oh, 2:00, 3:00 in the morning. And I was sleeping. I was in bed and he came upstairs and he woke me up. And then he told me he was my father. And I was glad to see him, Ah-huh. And he was real glad to meet me too.

LEVINE: Yea.

EI-921/ZELEI

ZELEI: That was kind of touchy, eh-hm.

LEVINE: And, what, can you think of any impressions during that, those first days and weeks in the country, maybe things that you never had seen before, or things that struck you as new and different?

ZELEI: Well there was a few, one thing struck me loud, is colored people, black people. I never saw one before. [Laugh] And, that kind of was different. But, there wasn't too much difference in what we had back in Europe, you know.

LEVINE: And were you living with someone, or how, how, where did you..?

ZELEI: No, my dad had, he bought a house before we came on, on Pigeon Run.

LEVINE: This is Pigeon Run?

ZELEI: Pigeon Run?

LEVINE: This is part of Massalon?

ZELEI: Eh-hm. Yes, it's still nice. And the neighbors were real nice, but it was kind of hard because we couldn't speak to them. You know, American, but it didn't take long. We learned and, and they were real nice to us. And they taught us lots of things. And we got along real good. So then after a while we liked it real well. After we got the house fixed up the way mother wanted it and everything. Then she was pleased. Then she made up her mind, she didn't want to go back. So dad was pleased about that.

LEVINE: What was it like for you, going into school?

ZELEI: Well, that was hard, cause I, all the kids were real nice to me. And they never made, I thought they'd make fun of me, that I can't talk to them, but they didn't. And I had the nicest teacher. She was so nice. And she helped me a lot. And I learned real quick, and then she put me in the second grade right away, the same year. And then when I got in the second grade, I did real good, then the following year I started in the second, and they, I stayed in the second grade about two months and they put me in the third grade. I kept going and I caught up to the other kids then. So, and I learned and they all liked me. And we got along, I got along real good. And then our neighbor next door to us, they had a girl the same age as I was. And we went together all the time, I was with her. She was real helpful. And I liked her and she liked me. And, and she always wanted me to go and sleep with her, even at night, just like sisters. We just got along real good. And I liked it real well.

END OF SIDE A  
BEGINNING PF SIDE B

LEVINE: Were there many other children who had come from Europe, in the school, or in your..?

ZELEI: No there were-, I was the only one. That was just a small little village in Pigeon Run, you know, small school house. There was four grades in, there, there was two, two school houses. One had four grades in it, and the other one had the other four years, up to the eighth grade. So, there wasn't too many kids. So that's why I think the teacher had a lot of time to spend with me too, you know.

EI-921/ZELEI

Cause she didn't have too many. And she was real nice. Her name was Ms. Phipps. I can still remember. [Laughs]

LEVINE: Ms. Phipps?

ZELEI: Ms. Phipps. And she was real pretty.

LEVINE: Ah-hah. Did you feel like an outsider?

ZELEI: No, I thought I would, but I didn't

LEVINE: You just never did? Ah-hah, ah-hah.

ZELEI: No, I didn't really.

LEVINE: And, then, how about religion, here in this country. Were you able to..?

ZELEI: Well, that was, that was our biggest problem. See, out there, they didn't have a Catholic church. We only lived their five years then, in Pigeon Run. Cause it was too far away to go to church. And dad used to work on Sundays, and we couldn't go to church, you know. And it was kind of hard, so then we decided that we'll move into town. Dad sold the place and we built a new house in town.

LEVINE: Was that part of the reason?

ZELEI: Yeah...

LEVINE: To go to church?

ZELEI: ...that was the main reason.

LEVINE: The main reason.

ZELEI: Eh-hm, that was the main reason.

LEVINE: Now, what was your father doing in this country?

ZELEI: He worked at Republic Steel, a steel worker, eh-hm.

LEVINE: And that's, is that here?

ZELEI: Eh-hm, that's here in Massalon.

BETTY: He worked in the mill.

ZELEI: Eh-hm.

BETTY: Steel mill.

ZELEI: Eh-hm.

LEVINE: And, lets see, when you look back on that time now, was there, well, did your, did your i-ideas change about, did you have ideas about what you wanted to do, or..?

ZELEI: Well.

LEVINE: As far as school, or after you finish school?

ZELEI: Well, I, after I-I got out of school I went to work at Sears Roebuck and worked for them for thirty years.

LEVINE: Oh.

ZELEI: And after that I re-, quit and Betty and I bought a hat shop. I always wanted a dress shop, but at the time we bought a hat shop. So, we stayed in it about five years. And then hats went out so we put in dresses. And we did real well. We had it for thirty-four years. And we retired in '92.

BETTY: '93.

ZELEI: '93. '93 retired.

LEVINE: Oh. Now...

ZELEI: And we love it. [Laughs] Ah-huh, and we loved our job.

LEVINE: Eh-huh.

ZELEI: I also loved my job at Sears too. I had a good job.

LEVINE: What was that like? The Sears job.

ZELEI: It was real nice. I worked in every department in the store. You know, during the depression, there's only eight of us, and there was three floors in the store. And there was only eight of us in the whole store. And, we worked hard. We worked day and night practically. You know to keep up the store. And our manager said, "Well, if you don't want work on Sundays too, there's a lot of other people on the street that will take your job." So we had to work if we wanted to keep our job. But I, we liked it. We didn't complain. We just, we knew we had to do it and we did it. And they were all

EI-921/ZELEI

nice people. We were just like a big family. We all worked together. And I loved it, I really did.

LEVINE: So this wasn't like a mail order part of Sears it was a regular store?

ZELEI: Regular store, we also had a mail order department. In fact I had, I had charge of every department practically, during the time I worked there.

LEVINE: But that was a big part of it.

ZELEI: Yeah.

LEVINE: Sears did it fulltime, wasn't it?

ZELEI: Oh, yeah. A nice big part. Yes, it was. We had a lot of mail orders, but it was a retail store.

LEVINE: Ah-huh.

ZELEI: You know, we had everything. So...

LEVINE: So then, you said you stayed there for how long?

ZELEI: Thirty years.

LEVINE: At Sears?

ZELEI: At Sears.

LEVINE: Ah-hah.

ZELEI: Eh-hm.

LEVINE: And then what was the impetus behind starting the hat store when you did?

ZELEI: Oh, I always wanted, I always said to Betty, "If I can work for Sears I can work for ourselves too. We should buy a store." And there was none available for a long time. I always wanted a little store. I didn't want a big one. And finally, this woman that had the hat shop, she broke her leg, her arm, and she gave up the shop. So she, Betty always wanted a hat shop. And one time she said to Betty, "Betty, you gotta have this shop. You like hats like I do." And she said, "Well Versa, sell it to me." She said, "Okay. You know sometimes I might" So when she broke her arm she gave up the shop. And then, somebody told Betty. She went up to get a hat. She ordered a hat from her. And she was to go up to get it. And here when she went in, Versa wasn't there. This woman said that Versa broke her arm. And she said, "I'm not gonna work for her anymore." And she said, "She wants to give up the shop. And there's another woman who wants the shop too" And she said, "Who is it?" And she said, "She doesn't even know her name, all she knows is Betty." And Betty says, "That's me." She says, "Well you better call her right away cause that other woman wants the shop too." So then Betty called me at Sears and she said, "Guess what, Versa's giving up the shop." And she said, "what should we do?" I said, "Well take her up on it, call her and we'll go and see her." So, after work we went over and bought it from her. We gave it right that night. [Laughs] Without even telling Mother and Dad. And when we ran home, we told them that we bought a hat shop. They couldn't get over it. [Laughs]

EI-921/ZELEI

LEVINE: Were they happy?

ZELEI: Yeah, they were.

LEVINE: Or were they surprised?

ZELEI: Oh, Yeah, ah-huh, they were surprised.

BETTY: Oh, they were happy.

LEVINE: It's wonderful. And now, would, would, it was just the two of you?

ZELEI: Just the two of us, eh-hm, yeah. And...

BETTY: We enjoyed.

ZELEI: We enjoyed it.

BETTY: It was wonderful, really wonderful.

ZELEI: We had a lot of fun with it

BETTY: Oh, we had so much fun.

ZELEI: Oh.

BETTY: So much fun.

LEVINE: And what, what was it like compared with Sears for you?

ZELEI: Well, it was a lot different. You know, it was a different feeling. Cause I was working for myself, you know. And we were doing

well. And, but like I say, I liked Sears too. I like my job there. But this was a better paying job. [Laughs] So, we liked it.

BETTY: And we had no experience, never prepared for it.

ZELEI: Yeah.

BETTY: Nothing at all. We didn't prepare at all.

ZELEI: No.

BETTY: We had no idea when we went up to New York. Versa didn't give us any idea. You wanna turn it off?

LEVINE: I think that, let me just ask you a few final questions then. When you, when you look back on having come here, as an eleven year old, do you think that experience of picking up and starting over in a new place, and new, do you think that made a difference in the kind of person, or your personality in some way, that kind of experience, do you think it left a mark on you in some way?

ZELEI: I don't think it has. I don't, it didn't make that much difference, you know. I thought it would, but it didn't, really.

LEVINE: Eh-hm. And how do you feel, like about yourself now, as far as the Hungarian side and the American side? Do you, do you, do you reconcile them in some way, or how do you think about the two?

ZELEI: Well, well I-I still, you know that was my country. I still feel good about it. And we have relatives there. I still keep in touch with

EI-921/ZELEI

them. But I like it here. I'd rather be here than there. But I still have a feeling for my country, you know.

LEVINE: Eh-hm. And how about the most satisfying things that you've done in your life. What would you say would be the most satisfying?

ZELEI: The most satisfying is that we bought that shop. We had [laughs], we had a lot of fun. And we made a nice living out of it. And we enjoyed it. So that, that's, that, that's about the biggest thing in my life.

LEVINE: Ah-huh. And how about your trip back to see Ellis Island? And...

ZELEI: Oh, we loved it. It was different, it's beautiful. It's fixed up so nice. We really enjoyed it. I'm so glad we got the chance to go and see it. But it was really, it stays with me, you know, that it's, it's so different than the way I remembered it.

LEVINE: Oh.

ZELEI: And I really loved it.

LEVINE: Oh, good.

ZELEI: Eh-hm.

LEVINE: Okay, well is there anything else that you would like to say?

ZELEI: No, I think that's about, covers it.

LEVINE: Okay, well I-I, Betty had been talking...

EI-921/ZELEI

ZELEI: Eh-hm.

LEVINE: ...she was off about the, about the, I guess you were pioneers...

ZELEI: Oh.

LEVINE: ...with your hats.

ZELEI: Yes, we were.

LEVINE: And accessories. And...

ZELEI: And dress shop.

LEVINE: Ah-huh.

ZELEI: And we loved it too.

LEVINE: Okay, well I think we'll close here then.

ZELEI: Okay.

LEVINE: I want to thank you so much.

ZELEI: Thank you. I enjoyed it, it was nice talking to you.

LEVINE: Thanks. Okay, this is Janet Levine, I've been speaking with Margaret Zelei, and it's August 2<sup>nd</sup>, 1997. And we're signing off.

END OF INTERVIEW