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TIRZA BETTY ROSENBERG FREEMAN
BIRTHDATE: NOVEMBER 2, 1927
INTERVIEW DATE: AUGUST 5, 1997
AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 69
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INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.
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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE
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GERMANY, 1939
AGE: 11

SHIP: QUEEN MARY
PORT:
RESIDENCES:

SIGRIST: Good morning. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Tuesday, August 5th, 1997. I'm in Millburn, New Jersey with Mrs. Tirza Freeman. Mrs. Freeman came from Germany in 1939. She was 11 years old at that time and she was held at Ellis Island for almost six months in 1939 when they arrived in the United States. Anyway, Mrs. Freeman, thank you very much. I should say for the sake of the tape that I met you last fall at Ellis Island and—and you gave me your name and your address and phone umber, which I promptly lost. And it has taken me all this time to recover [laughs] it and call you. But anyway, can we begin by you giving me your birth date, please?

FREEMAN: I was born on November 2nd, 1927.

SIGRIST: November 2nd, 1927. And what was your name when you were born?

FREEMAN: My name was Tirza Betty Rosenberg.

SIGRIST: Rosenberg was your maiden name?

FREEMAN: Correct.

SIGRIST: Betty or Elizabeth?

FREEMAN: Betty—B-E-T-T-Y.

SIGRIST: Okay. Were you named after anyone in—

FREEMAN: Yes, I was named after my grandmother, whose name was Babette Rosenberg.

SIGRIST: Can you spell Babette.

FREEMAN: Babette—B-A-B-E-T-T-E.

SIGRIST: That's your father's mother

FREEMAN: That's my father's mother.

SIGRIST: Do you know anything about the day you were born? Were you ever told a story about the day that you were born and the circumstances that surrounded that?

FREEMAN: No, I was not. I know that I was a—a very welcomed child but I have no idea about anything. We certainly didn't have the ""New York Times"" so that we could find out what happened on the day we were born.

SIGRIST: Oh, I—I don't mean—I don't mean in the world. I mean within your family. Did your mother ever tell you about when she went into labor with you or anything like that?

FREEMAN: No, I only know that I was born in the house with the assistance of a—a Dr. Huschenbett, which is difficult to spell. But in any case, it was very uneventful. I was my parents' fourth child, of whom only three survived, because my first sister—or the fir—my parents' first child died of diphtheria, which has relevance, because subsequently, it was diphtheria that brought me to Ellis Island. So my parents knew that diphtheria could kill.

SIGRIST: Can you name the names of your siblings?

FREEMAN: Yes, my oldest sister, who was born in 1918, her name was Hannah Rosenberg. My next brother was Ernest Nathan Rosenberg. My next

sister was Leah Hildegardt [PH] Rosenberg. And I was number four, Tirza Betty Rosenberg. And after I was born, my parents had one more child by the name of Josef Rosenberg.

SIGRIST: Can you spell Josef, please?

FREEMAN: J-O-S-E-F, at that time. In the meantime, he spells it differently and he has become a very distinguished financial assistant to Mr. Lawrence Tisch [PH], who is the president of the Lowe's Corporation and at one time was the president of CBS.

SIGRIST: Which child died of diphtheria?

FREEMAN: The first child, Hannah Rosenberg, died of diphtheria.

SIGRIST: How old was she?

FREEMAN: She was three years old and she is buried in the cemetery in Eschwege in the town where I was born.

SIGRIST: Can you spell the name of the town where you were born?

FREEMAN: The name of the town is spelled E-S-C-H-W-E-G-E. It's also—

SIGRIST: And—

FREEMAN: —referred to Eschwege an der Werra. Werra is W-E-R-R-A and it is a river and it is called Eschwege an der Werra.

SIGRIST: This is in Germany?

FREEMAN: And it is in Germany in the province of Hessen—H-E-S-S-E-N.

SIGRIST: Thank you. Where—where is the province of Hessen in terms of the country?

FREEMAN: I'm very poor in geography but I know that the next larger town would be Castle [PH]. Hessen is distinguished for Americans because in the Revolutionary War it was the Hessian soldiers who helped George Washington to—no, I take that back. It was the Hessian soldiers who were on the other side, who helped the British in trying to subdue the revolutionaries, who we today refer to as Americans.

SIGRIST: Did you grow up in this town?

FREEMAN: No, I did not. I grew up in New York City.

SIGRIST: Well, I mean—

FREEMAN: Well, I grew up first in Eschwege and, subsequently, my parents moved to Washington Heights in New York City, which at that time was the center for German Jews. And as they couldn't make a living there, they then moved to the Bronx, to the worst part of the Bronx, and that is where I grew up in public schools in the Bronx, P.S. 58—

SIGRIST: But your time in Germany was all spent in this one town.

FREEMAN: That is so.

SIGRIST: You didn't move around to other towns.

FREEMAN: We were in another town only subsequent to an event called Kristallnacht, which happened in November, 1938. And at that time, my family flee—no, flew—I—I forget what—

SIGRIST: Fled?

FREEMAN: Fled. I'm sorry. Fled from Eschwege to Cologne. And that is what saved our lives.

SIGRIST: Well, we'll get to that as we move into—

FREEMAN: Right.

SIGRIST: Tell me what some of your earliest memories are. When—when your memory kicks in as a child, what—or little glimpses of memory, what are the things that you remember?

FREEMAN: I'm sorry to tell you that I have very few memories, that most of my memories seem to be of terror. Now, I'm sure there was no terror before 1933 but most—that would make me six years old. Most people don't remember their early childhood. I remember having some nice—it was called Ausfluge [PH], which would be, like, picnics. Other than that, I—I remember very little, other than taking care of my younger brother, Josef, because he was more or less my responsibility, since my mother was involved in business. And so my younger brother, Josef, was kind of my charge. But I—I only remember when—after I was six years old, being in constant terror because whatever transpired in Germany in—which was bad under the Nazi terror, it seemed to be intensified in Eschwege because it was a small town. We were well known in the town and so we could about constantly harassed. There was no doubt that we were Jews and that

meant that we were always under fear. And my parents, after 1933, worked almost fulltime trying to get us out of Eschwege.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the house that you lived in, or the apartment?

FREEMAN: I remember that the house belonged to my father. It was a house of five stories in which the—in the street level was our business, which was a very old business called J. Pappenheim—P-A-P-P-E-N-H-E-I-M. My father was the son-in-law and was running this business because the only son of the Pappenheims, who was my Uncle Ludwig Pappenheim—he was not interested in the business. He was an editor. And I have to tell you that Ludwig Pappenheim was one of the first victims of the Nazi terror. And it was particularly impressed upon me was the first and only time I ever saw my mother in tears was the day we had the phone call, which told us that Ludwig Pappenheim had been shot. This was lo—a long time before it was generally known that there was terror in Germany, because it occurred in 1934 when people weren't normally being killed by the Nazis. But Ludwig Pappenheim was because he was an editor of a liberal newspaper and was violently opposed to the Nazis and exposed their activities.

SIGRIST: What kind of a business was this?

FREEMAN: This was a wholesale grocery business, in German called Kolonjavan [PH]. My father also did roasting of coffee. The coffee was bought green and it was roasted in—in a large machine. And it is one of the most delightful odors you ever want to have. You can experience it today in certain areas in downtown New York. My father also had six branches in various small towns in the Hessen area around Eschwege. And so it—it was a very well run business and a very well funded business. It wa—was not your small corner grocery. At any rate, we lived on the first floor of this building. We also had other tenants. And the most distinguishing part of our apartment was what we called the Musiczimmer [PH], which is music room, which contained a large grand piano, because my mother was a very capable and talented pianist. And that I do remember, that we would have chamber music in this music room. And it is beautiful. And to this day, there are pieces that I hear on the New York music station, WQXR, which can bring tears to my eyes because I remember my mother playing these music pieces. Pi—

SIGRIST: Can you tell me which ones they are?

FREEMAN: I know they—the composers but I cannot tell you the numbers. The composers would be Beethoven and Schumann and Schubert and

Heiden, the kind of things that you hear played at Lincoln Center, particularly during the summer.

SIGRIST: How many rooms did you have in—in your flat in this building?

FREEMAN: In—in that—the rooms that we occupied probably were perhaps eight rooms, perhaps a little—it was the entire floor. My parents were not impoverished and, of course, we had help in the house.

SIGRIST: Live-in help?

FREEMAN: We had live-in help, yes.

SIGRIST: Do you have a story about something you remember about one of the—the domestics who lived in the house?

FREEMAN: The only thing I remember about the domestics is that they were very good and, of course, that they disappeared once the Nazi period arrived be—not because they wanted to leave but because they would be threatened that, if they continued to work for this Jewish family, they would have major problems. And the only other thing I remember that one of the domestics once pulled rather hard on my brother, Josef's arm, and apparently pulled it out of the shoulder. And—but that was not done intentionally. It was done because Josef was not always a very obedient child and I guess he didn't follow up the stairs. We lived one—one staircase up from the business, which was on the ground floor. And—but it—it w—I do remember my mother in the dining room pulling a button when the next course was to be served, because the maid, of course, would not be there during the dinner but would only come to bring in the next course.

SIGRIST: You mentioned the grand piano. Any other pieces of furniture that stick out in your mind in that apartment for some reason?

FREEMAN: Just that the furniture was very elegant and very massive and very heavy. Some of that furniture we subsequently brought to this country and we sold very quickly, because New York apartments do not lend themselves to such heavy furniture. And even the mattresses which we brought, we had to discard because in New York they quickly became infested with bedbugs. And it was impossible to keep. These things were meant for elegant living quarters in Germany, not for New York City with roaches and other vermin that got into it.

SIGRIST: Any details about the room that you slept in as a child that stick out in your mind?

FREEMAN: Only that I shared this room with my sister, Leah, and my brother, Josef, and that we had another room that had all our toys, which were in terrible disarray because my mother was much more involved in, A, writing letters to get us out of Germany and, B, playing music than checking whether her kids did or did not put their toys back in any orderly fashion. And it may be as a revolt of that, that today I am maybe even chronically neat because I dislike this terrible disarray with a passion.

SIGRIST: Is there a toy—is there a toy that was your favorite as a child, or toy that sticks out—

FREEMAN: There was a toy that I liked very much, which was made by our family doctor, a Dr. Huschenbett—H-U-S-C-H-E-N-B-E-T-T.

SIGRIST: Thank you.

FREEMAN: Dr. Huschenbett thought I was an adorable child and so he made me something called a puppenwagen [PH], which is a doll carriage. And I was very fond of it and I mention it particularly because that same Dr. Huschenbett, when I subsequently needed him when I had a life-threatening disease, was so frightened of coming into the apartment that he didn't. And later on, you'll see. That's what led to my confinement at Ellis Island because I had a—a disease which was not attended at all. And those of you are familiar with the vows that doctors take know that the doctors violated that vow, because a doctor is committed to treating his patients and they did not.

SIGRIST: Well, we'll get to that part as we go on in the story, I think.

FREEMAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Well, let—let's talk about your parents. What was your father's name?

FREEMAN: My father's now was Bernhard Rosenberg. Bernhard is B-E-R-N-H-A-R-D.

SIGRIST: And what do you know about his upbringing and his family background?

FREEMAN: My father was born in the town of Neudenau—N-E-U-D-E-N-A-U—which is a small town in Baden Werdenberg [PH], very small. And before he married, he was a traveling salesman and working for a firm in—

SIGRIST: You want pause for a—[tape off/on] resuming the tape.

FREEMAN: He—he worked for a firm in Hiblun [PH], which is a larger town in Baden Werdenberg. And it was because of his work as a salesman that he eventually ended up in Eschwege, because in order to live there he had to meet my mother.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things was he selling? What sorts of—

FREEMAN: I—I don't remember what he was selling but he did well.

SIGRIST: So he met your mother when?

FREEMAN: I believe that he—but he didn't just meet my mother because that's not the way—people didn't date in that society the way they do today. He was introduced, I believe, through an uncle of my mother's because, otherwise, there would be no way for him to meet a young Jewish lady in Eschwege. You didn't just meet in the street. You were introduced rather formally. You have to remember that these were very formal, elegant people that didn't just float around the street.

SIGRIST: Do you know anything about his childhood and his upbringing?

FREEMAN: No, I only know that my father was born to people of rather meager means, that my grandfather (that is, my father's father) sold cattle. And that's what brought him in to Neudenau, this very small town. They were very observant Jews. That meant that they followed all the Jewish laws. But other than that, I never met my grandparents because they had died before I was born. I only know that I had two aunts. They were—never married, two maiden aunts, whom I visited at various times, very sweet ladies and ladies who subsequently helped us in our efforts to get out of Germany. And unfortunately, they, themselves, did not get out but we did. And to this day, I have the idea that the people who got out of Germany were the ones, both who had the foresight to make all the efforts and, also, who had a lot of cash. And to this day, I have very strange notions of what money can or cannot buy because I have to tell you, in my instance, it bought us our freedom.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me the names of the two maiden aunts?

FREEMAN: Yes. The—one was Ca—Caroli—Carolina [PH] in German, Caroline in English, Rosenberg. And the other one was Sophie Rosenberg. And most of the time they lived in a very small town called Berlinchingen [PH] in Baden Wertenberg. It's a town that is very close to Neudenau. Berlinchingen is spelled B-E-R-L-I-N-C-H-I-N-G-E-N.

SIGRIST: Thank you. Tell me a little bit about your father's personality.

FREEMAN: My father was a—a businessman who was quite ambitious in Germany, perhaps even just as ambitious here but certainly not as successful here. How you can tell that he was ambitious is that he wanted to broaden this business of which I spoke, E. Pappenheim, and therefore, had at that time begun these different branches. He was very kind to me, although my brothers would disagree. And it is a total mystery to me, because my brothers do not have as high an opinion of my father as I do.

SIGRIST: What are some memories you have of your father when you were a little girl? What were some of the things you liked to do with your dad?

FREEMAN: I—what I liked to do with my father is simply walk in the street and hold his hand. And we did that quite often. Since—we had a—a truck, which was part of the business, but we did not have a personal car. So—and of course, in Eschwege you could walk wherever you wanted to walk. And I also remember working for the business because, after 1933, we had fewer and fewer employees. And so one of the things that I did was to go around to the various customers and sell them fish. And I was so young that I couldn't write yet. And so I had a book in my hand and these people would give me orders. And they loved giving me orders because, from what I've heard subsequently, I was a cute little girl. And so I sold a lot of fish and I got five pfennig [PH] for every pound of fish that I sold. I wanted to use some of the proceeds of these sales to buy Oster eier, which I called Easter eggs. They—they're very sweet confections. And my mother wouldn't sell it to me because she was a great believer in healthy food. And so what I did is I took my money and I bought these Easter eggs from my parents' competitors, who, of course, didn't hesitate to sell me. And I'm still very—I—I still have a very sweet tooth.

SIGRIST: Can you spell the Easter egg in German?

FREEMAN: Oster eier? O-S-T-E-R E-I-E-R.

SIGRIST: Getting back to your father, tell me what were some of the things that your father liked to do for his own enjoyment, for his own pleasure.

FREEMAN: I don't think my father had a lot of things to do for his own pleasure, other than to attend my mother's concerts with her friends and to attend to his business. I don't believe my father ever learned how to purely enjoy oneself, simply because he had a rather rigid childhood. So other than to go for walks or to go what we called banden [PH], which is to go in the surroundings, I don't think he did much than—

other than to pursue the business. Again, I told you that I don't have much memory before 1933. And after 1933, the times were one of terror, more or less, at all times. There were no fun times after April 10th, 1933.

SIGRIST: You mentioned your father's rigid childhood. Do you know any details about that?

FREEMAN: No, I do not. No.

SIGRIST: Well, what was your mother's name?

FREEMAN: My mother's name was Meta—M-E-T-A—Pappenheim. I—do you want me to spell that again?

SIGRIST: Yeah, spell Pappenheim again.

FREEMAN: Oh, P-A-P-P-E-N-H-E-I-M.

SIGRIST: And—and let me ask you—

FREEMAN: And she was born in Eschwege. She was born to a distinguished family in Eschwege who—whose great grandparent, I believe, founded this firm called E. Pappenheim and Company.

SIGRIST: What do you know about her childhood?

FREEMAN: I know that her childhood was quite different from my father's in that it was very privileged. My mother was 23 years old when she married, and she had never been gainfully employed because she didn't have to. What she did after she graduated from what was called Letzeom [PH], which is a higher school for girls, she continued to study the piano. And she did that on a full-time basis. And she would travel to Kastl [PH] because her teachers had to be more well trained than whatever you could find in Eschwege. In other words, she was no longer a student on a child basis but rather on a professional basis. And I believe that, if the events that transpired hadn't, that she would have become a distinguished concert pianist.

SIGRIST: And what were some of the aspects of her personality? You've talked a little bit about this already.

FREEMAN: My mother was very spiritual, that she did a lot of studying of religion and, I believe at one time, even played with the idea of becoming a Christian Scientist. She was very much into natural foods, into healthy foods, into exercise. She was definitely a very strong personality. And

maybe the reason I can't tell you more about my father is because my mother dominated the house with such force. She also was fluent in English and French. She had attended a private girl's school. And for her, the trauma was much worse because she thought, as an old Eschweger, that she had all these wonderful friends, because they were wonderful friends until the terror started. And after that, she didn't have any friends, other than Jewish friends. She had one friend by the name of Mata [PH] Pappenheim, who was and remained her friend all her life. And the family, Mata Plaut [PH], or subsequently, Goldschmidt [PH], played a very important role in our lives all our life.

SIGRIST: Do you want to begin telling me now about how your life changed after 1933 and what was going on in—in the town at that time?

FREEMAN: My brother, Josef, was born on April 10th, 1933. And it was with a great deal of shock that I found out when I went to the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC that that was precisely the day when there was the first real action. And there were several hundred Nazi SA, which stands for—I forget now what it is. But anyway, these were what we call today Brown Shirts. They stood around my father's store and told people not to buy there and put up signs saying that it was a Jewish store, which wasn't necessary. Everyone knew it was. And it must have been horrendous for my mother to be in labor expecting her fifth child while this terrible commotion was going on no more than 10 feet below her window. And after 1933, I do remember continuing to go to school. The school, of course, was a Jewish school, since we were no longer welcomed in the regular public schools. And we spent more time trying to learn English than attending to our regular classes. It was not what you would call a normal school system. There were eight classes in one room. And when I think about it today, how they ever kept order is a mystery to me. But I think we were all so terrified that we behaved, because I also try to re—think, 'What did I do for these six years, being more or less shut up in an apartment?' And again, I believe we were good because we were so terrified and didn't act the way normal, rambunctious children do. I do remember that my sister came home one time from the school and her hands were swollen, because she had gone with a bicycle, and some Nazi thugs had used a broom handle to hit her hands so hard that she would fall off the bicycle. And of course, the hands swelled up.

SIGRIST: You mentioned a little bit earlier about your grandfather. This is your mother's father.

FREEMAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about them, what you remember about your mother's parents and—

FREEMAN: Okay. My grandfather, Julius Pappenheim, who was the owner of this firm that my fa—

SIGRIST: Julius, being Julius—

FREEMAN: Julius Pappenheim died before I was born in 1925 so I can't tell you anything about him. However, I vividly remember my grandmother, Emma Pappenheim, who lived in the same building where this firm was founded, which is not the building where the business was after my father took over, because my father moved the business to this house, which actually is two houses. It was a very large establishment. There were two houses tied together. And in the middle of these—between the two houses there was a large garage, which is where our truck stood. This truck was used to deliver groceries to various smaller groceries in the vicinity because, in addition to the branches that my father had founded, he also supplied various groceries, particularly the coffee which he roasted, but also other edibles, to various smaller groceries all over the vicinity. As a result, so my grandmother lived in the house where this firm was originally founded, which was on the Marktplaz—M-A-R-K-T-P-L-A-Z. Marktplatz, which is a—kind of a large plaza across the street from a schloss [PH] or a castle in Eschwege. And she lived there with my aunt, who was my mother's sister, whose name was Louisa Pappenheim Kahn [PH]. And so my grandmother lived with this family until they left Germany, which was sometime later. And they eventually moved to Brazil and she died in Brazil. So my grandparents are not buried together. My grandfather, Julius Pappenheim, is buried in Eschwege. My grandmother, Emma Pappenheim, is buried in Rio de Janeiro in Brazil.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

SIGRIST: —memories of your own interaction with your grandmother do you have? What—what did you do with her?

FREEMAN: It was my custom after synagogue on Saturday morning to visit with my grandmother. And she always had very nice cookies for me which, of course, were forbidden in my household, since my mother was so very health oriented, so that we was—if I would ask my mother for a snack, I either had a carrot or an orange, both of which were much more expensive than candy. But my mother somehow thought that

candy would be ruination of children. And so we always had healthy foods. But my grandmother would stuff me full of cookies because she knew that I loved them. And she was very sweet to me. I do remember thinking of her as a very old lady, which she wasn't, because she lived into her 80s. So at the time when I thought that she was old, she was probably either in her late 50s or early 60s. But she was a lot of fun to be with and she was just very, very nice to me and I enjoyed visiting with her.

SIGRIST: Was she musical like your mother?

FREEMAN: No, she was not. My mother was the only one—while everybody, I guess, liked music—remember that we didn't have as many entertainments, like movies or television or even radio. They existed but, again, because we lived this rather straight-laced life, we didn't have distractions, like radio. My cousins, Kahn, with whom my grandmother lived, they had a radio but we did not. We did have a telephone, however.

SIGRIST: Is that K-A-H-N?

FREEMAN: K-A-H-N.

SIGRIST: Okay.

FREEMAN: Kahn, yes.

SIGRIST: You did have a telephone. You smiled when you say that. Is there some association with the telephone or—

FREEMAN: When I tell this to people here, they kind of have the idea that I'm at least 3,000 years old. The reason we didn't have some of these things was neither because we were poor or because they didn't exist but, rather, because my parents felt that people should study. We had a very extensive library with the classics, the same thing with music. Music was classical music. It was not what you would today call pop. My mother—and both my parents were very intelligent [chuckles] and they had they idea of raising children in a healthy, intelligent way, which meant that you had good food and not too many distractions other than classics.

SIGRIST: We started talking about the Nazis coming into town.

FREEMAN: Ex—excuse me. The Nazis didn't come into town. The Nazis were in the town. And the N—the members of the Nazi party weren't brought in from some extraneous place. They were people of the town who

accepted the ideology. They were not imported from anywhere. But Eschwege is the kind of a town that is rather closed in on itself. And when a theory takes hold, it stays. The reason I say that, I've visited Eschwege since then and I'm amazed how little people have changed, except today it goes the other way. Today, they tell me how much they love me and how much they miss the fact that we left and the fact that we are no longer—and when I say "we," I mean the entire Jewish community of Eschwege—how much they regret this input, as much as at that time they were ferocious in beating up on us. And it invaded every part of our life. And that's why my mother, who was certainly part of the community, had grown up with these people, experienced the—the terrible trauma of having people crossing the street in order not to confront her.

SIGRIST: Am I to believe that, prior to this period then, the gentile and the Jewish population actually got on very well?

FREEMAN: Remember, I was a child. But to my childish perception, they got on very well.

SIGRIST: Talk about some of the other differences too that happened after 1933 in town, how your life changed.

FREEMAN: Well, the life changed in that we no longer had help in the house, that my father's business shrank terribly, that my father was threatened by some of his former employees, and threatened in the sense that, to my knowledge, my father ran an honest business, but that they would create stories in order to frighten him into giving up the business. And indeed, they succeeded in rather short order.

SIGRIST: How gradual was this process?

FREEMAN: It wasn't gradual at all. It—it—when I think about it today, I—I don't understand how my parents survived this, because the fright was almost unceasing and th—they devoted most of their lives into trying to either sell the business or, when they found that they couldn't sell it because the—the name, which was its most valuable asset, since it was so very old and very distinguished, no one would dare to run a business with the name of Pappenheim. It was well known and it would signify that it was a Jewish business. So they—what they tried to do is to sell as much of the goods as possible. My father sold the house or, rather, the two houses, as I mentioned, which were connected and also, to spend their time trying to find a country that would accept a family with four children. My father traveled to what was then called Palestine and bought land there in the hopes that we could start a new life there. We found that we couldn't go to Palestine

because the permission, which was called the certificate, was not given to us because the British had only a limited number of certificates. And it was one certificate to a family. So they preferred to give these certificates either to one or two people, rather than to a family of six. And so even though we owned the property in—in Palestine or, today, Israel, for many years, we never were permitted to emigrate there. Other than that, my parents also spent their time trying to get to Chili, to Cuba, to Shanghai in China, to Argentina. Sometimes when I think about it today, I—I don't think there was a country to which my parents didn't write. But because my family was so very German, they didn't have relatives in these places. And it was fairly impossible to get permission to emigrate unless you had someone to sponsor you. When we eventually ended up in the United States, it was because my parents owned a family tree, which—and in which they found some obscure relatives. When I say obscure, they were probably 10th cousins. But they wrote to these people. And eventually, that is how we received affidavits, which en—enabled us to come to this country.

SIGRIST: Do you remember as—as a girl in this town growing up, what your consciousness was of what was going on around you? Not only—not only the prejudice being shown the Jewish population, but also your parents trying—make attempts to get you out of there. How did you think about all this?

FREEMAN: Simply with fear. I do know that it—when I mentioned that I visited my grandmother, across the street from this Marktplaz there was a glass case. And in this glass case they would exhibit copies of a newspaper called "Stürmer." S-T-Ü-R-M-E-R. And this was the most violent newspaper that you ever wanted to see. It was—consisted mostly of terrible diatribes against Jews with pictures, which were not photos but, rather, drawings of people that never existed, Jewish or otherwise, but in order to tell people how awful Jews were. And that is one of my memories. The other one was going to school with my friend, Gerhardt Rothschild and going by circuitous route through a—a park that we both knew, because we wanted to be sure that we weren't hit or assaulted on the way to school.

SIGRIST: Can you spelled Gerhardt's last name?

FREEMAN: Rothschild today.

SIGRIST: Oh.

FREEMAN: R-O-T-H-S-C-H-I-L-D. And he lives in Philadelphia today. I can also tell you that I had another friend, Gretel Katzenstein. Gretel is G-R-E-

T-E-L. Katzenstein is K-A-T-Z-E-N-S-T-E-I-N. She's a girl of the same age as I am, and I'm happy to tell you that we were friends then and we are friends to this day. She lives in Floral Park in New York City.

SIGRIST: Was there a story about her that you were beginning to tell me or—

FREEMAN: Just that both Gerhardt Rothschild and Gretel Katzenstein and my cousin, Werner Kahn, and another friend that I had were all only children. And I think there—or I have made myself think that there's a relationship. And that is that there was always so much tumult in our house, too much commotion with the toys and all the kids, that I rather enjoyed being in a household that only had one child, where there were toys that belonged to that one child and didn't have to be shared with three other children. But I have warm memories of all these kids. And of course, we were all classmates because we were all in this one room. Remember that, in my particular class, there were only six children. That was the entire class. And that is one of the reasons why you could have eight classes in one large room, because there weren't that many children in each of the classes. The population of—that is, the Jewish population of Eschwege was probably less than a—a hundred people.

SIGRIST: And the school that you were put into was—these were all Jewish children?

FREEMAN: These were only Jewish children and only Jewish teachers. And the school was in back of the only synagogue in Eschwege.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how you felt about having to go from the school that you were accustomed to going to to this place?

FREEMAN: N—no. I wasn't accustomed to going to any other school because, remember that I only became six years old in 1933. So therefore, I never attended public school. My older brother, Ernest, attended what is called a gymnasium [PH], which would be equivalent to a high school here and, perhaps, the first year of college because you went there until you were 19 rather than 18 here. But he attended a public school. I did not.

SIGRIST: I see.

FREEMAN: But I do remember that he was beaten up mercilessly and, particularly, it was bad in gym because, in gym, the boys would find that he was—being a Jewish boy, that he was circumcised and that was torture. It was not customary for non-Jews to be circumcised in Eschwege or, perhaps, in Germany. And of course my brother was and he would be

taunted something awful about that. Teenagers are notorious for being mean to their fellow students but this was beyond teenage exuberance.

SIGRIST: Are there any other occasions that come to mind about your family being threatened in some way prior to you leaving this town?

FREEMAN: Well, certainly, the most memorable of that would be what is called Kristallnacht, which was on November 10th everywhere else in Germany, but in Eschwege was November 9th. It was subsequently identified as a spontaneous attack on the Jews. There was nothing spontaneous about it because it came to Eschwege one day earlier, because I assume people had been told that this action was to take place. What happened there was that my brother returned from early morning services at the synagogue and told my parents that they were throwing the books and burning Torah scrolls in the street. With that, my parents packed up a few valuables and us, and we proceeded to the railroad station in Eschwege and bought tickets for Cologne, called Köln—K-Ö-L-N. And we went there because my mother had this uncle, Tony, and—it'll come to me after a while.

SIGRIST: That's okay.

FREEMAN: But anyway, their name—their last name was Pappenheim and they had a large apartment. And I don't know if my parents called them or whether we just simply proceeded there, because we knew that if we stayed in Eschwege something awful would happen. We didn't know how awful. We found that out later. But we left. Our apartment was not attacked because my father had previously sold the entire building. And the man who had bought it said, "Don't touch that apartment because the house belongs to me." But many other Jewish homes were totally demolished. We spent over six weeks in Köln. And during that time, my parents sent out cables to the various distant relatives that I had mentioned previously with the simple word, "Help us." These—the same people had previously refused to give us an affidavit because, after all, we were very distant relatives. And in those days, if you gave someone an affidavit, you obligated yourself to support these people in case they became wards of the state or in case they couldn't work. And it didn't—the state was not obligated to give you money. S—the people who gave the affidavits were. And they were petrified that we—we would make claim on them. In fact, one of the people who subsequently gave us the affidavit was a man in Chicago who provided it—the affidavit only with the understanding that we would never set foot in Chicago. It was my pleasure many years later to call him at a time when I lived in Michigan and say to him, "May I now visit you? Because I have done well, I promise you I will—I only want to

thank you for saving our lives." And he was absolutely delighted to receive us. He was very well to do but told us that he had given affidavits to 32 people. And he had nightmares thinking, what would he do if all those 32 people would land on his doorstep and ask him for sustenance?

SIGRIST: That's a great story, actually. Tell me about the six weeks in Cologne and what you remember about it.

FREEMAN: Again, when I think about it, I cannot imagine how six of us could be in this one apartment, especially seeing how my American children and how so many American children require so much care. But I think the terror just made us into very good children, that we would never ask our parents for anything because we knew they were only trying to save all of us. I do remember going to various churches in Cologne. One of the—more distinguished one is called Dom—D-O-M—and listening to music. I must have walked the street by the hour. But remember that in Cologne I could do that because no one knew I was Jewish. I don't look whatever is called today "look Jewish." My name was Rosenberg, which in Germany was the name of one of the top Nazis. So that wouldn't be any difficulty. In those days, we were not required to wear yellow stars. So there was no way for anyone to know who was or wasn't Jewish. And so I assumed that what we must have done is done a lot of walking, and I guess we ate whatever we could. In fact, going back to Eschwege, I can tell you that we didn't eat very much, other than potatoes than carrots because that's what we could get. We had ceased eating meat because we were kosher and we—and the—it was no longer permitted to supply kosher meat. And so we simply stopped eating kosher meat. My father did have quite a bit of butter because butter had be—become rationed. And since my father continued to retain the ration that was allotted to the business, he continued to have a lot of butter and could even give it to other Jewish families and, also, bread, which was very gray and rough because, remember that Germany no longer imported goods. That was one of the Nazi ideologies, was to keep as much of foreign exchange, called divisen [PH], because Germany wanted to become totally self-sufficient. And even in those years, the economy of Germany was pitched towards defense, not towards providing people with good imported food. And—so that in—I assume that in Cologne we also lived mostly on potatoes and bread and carrots.

SIGRIST: Is this your uncle's apartment that you're staying in?

FREEMAN: Yes, his name was Leopold Pappenheim. It was my uncle's apartment. And when I think about it today, we must have slept sideways on these beds because this uncle had only one child. And

he couldn't have had enough beds for six people. I—one thing I do remember that, occasionally, my father and my oldest brother, Ernest, would have to go into the back area, because there would be—the bell in the front would ring. And on occasion, there were Nazi officers looking for any Jewish males, because during this time subsequent to Kristallnacht, all Jewish men were interned in a concentration camp called Buchenwald. I believe you know how to spell that. My father and my brother, Ernest, were spared that by being in this apartment. And since my uncle also was fairly affluent, he had an apartment which had a servant's entrance or for deliveries of groceries. And that's where my father and my brother would stay until the danger would pass. And so they were never—they were never interned. After about three or four weeks, my mother called the people who had bought our house and asked them whether we could return from—she used the euphemism "our vacation." And the people answered, "Well, why don't you—if you're enjoying your vacation, why don't you stay a while longer?" And that led to our staying in Cologne for six weeks. After the six weeks, these people by the name of Jost—J-O-S-T—said that we must have had enough vacation. And at that point, we did return to Eschwege.

SIGRIST: While you were in Cologne, did you [clears throat] get news of what had happened during Kristallnacht down there or—or how other family members, like your grandmother, had been affected by this?

FREEMAN: Yes, we did. And we heard that every Jewish male in Eschwege had been rounded up, that they had to sweep the streets with brooms and then were sent to Buchenwald. Of these people, six of them returned dead to Eschwege. I saw that site. That was sometime after we returned, after the six weeks. And it has stayed in my memory all my life, these boxes with the—the bodies being drawn through Eschwege on hand carts. You can—and to know that it isn't just a figment of my memory, these people are still—well, obviously, still—but they were buried in the Jewish cemetery in Eschwege. And by the dates, you can see that they all died more or less at the same time. You have to remember that November is a cold time in Germany. And there was no heat in concentration camps and these people literally froze to death. I also remember that my teacher, Herr Neumann, also was interned. I, subsequently, met him here in New York City and he could never uncurl his hands again. I take it that while he was interned that his fingers froze in a certain rigid position and that remained his lot in life for the rest of his life.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how you felt when you returned to your original apartment?

FREEMAN: I was even more frightened than I was before and you couldn't get—when—I have to tell you, when I think about Eschwege today, most of the time I think of it as being in constant terror. In fact, one of my biggest surprises was when, at a much, much later time, because in the early years here in the United States I couldn't even dream of returning because I was so terrorized. But when, as a mature adult, I returned to Germany the first time, and, perversely, it was because my brother, Josef, with whom I've remained very close, he was an American soldier and said, "Wouldn't it be nice if you came to visit me?" And he was in—in a American military installation in Badkreuznach [PH]. And he said, "Wouldn't it be fun to come and visit me and see what Germany's like today?" At that time, I did return. I paid a visit to Eschwege and I was absolutely amazed how perfectly beautiful the place was, because that isn't what I remembered. And I know my parents had told me over and over again when I questioned them, because I did question them, "Why did you ever stay in such a dreadful, dreadful place?" And they kept in—assuring me that it wasn't dreadful, that it was a beautiful place. And as a mature adult, I found that they were right. It is and was a beautiful place. But to my childish memory, it was so filled with terror that I never saw the beauty. And so when you ask me, "How was it after Kristallnacht?" it was probably even more frightening than before, although I don't know what the limits of fright are, because they—they had been reached a long time before.

SIGRIST: How long were you there prior to leaving for the United States?

FREEMAN: We were in Eschwege for about another four months, from November of—well, we returned, actually, in December. And we left for the United States in—at the end of March.

SIGRIST: That's December of '38.

FREEMAN: December of '38 until March of '39.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about—

FREEMAN: Now, during the—I—either in Köln or perhaps when we went to the American Consulate in Stuttgart, which is where you got the permission to come to the United States, which is called the visa, which is the—the golden card for entering this country. Sometime during that time, I contracted diphtheria and then spent that time, and I don't remember exactly on what day. I do remember that the night before, I was lying on the couch not feeling very well and that my brother, Josef, was lying on the couch with me trying to comfort me. Why he never caught the disease, I don't know, but I bless the fact that

he did not. After that time, I spent most of the time in bed. And I do remember that my mother made a fire in—in this bed. I—indeed, this bed was actually their bedroom because that bedroom had a—a—an oven, which was made out of ceramic tiles. And it wasn't customary normally to make fire there, because we were brought up in this rather healthy atmosphere where you had to learn to do without such comforts as fire. But in any rate, she realized that I had to have some fire so I could get warm because I was so very ill. I can also tell you that this Dr. Huschenbett, who had made the baby or doll carriage for me, came one time very late at night to swab my throat and then confirmed to my mother that what I had was diphtheria but that he couldn't come anymore. There was no treatment for me, that the only thing they could do was hope to get out of there. My mother called every other gentile doctor in Eschwege. I still know the names. And they all said they could not come, that it was too dangerous, that they were not permitted to treat a Jewish child. So I had no medical attention whatsoever during that time. And my parents then arranged for our furniture to be packed up, and we left in—on March of 1939. My mother said, "Wouldn't it be dangerous to take a child in that condition?" And they said, "It's more dangerous to stay here." And so we left. I was carried from Eschwege by my brother, Ernest, who was at that time already 17—18 years old. If he hadn't carried me, I wouldn't have been able to leave.

SIGRIST: Were there no Jewish doctors?

FREEMAN: The Jewish doctors had left. There were three Jewish doctors in Eschwege but they had left prior to 1938. It was easier for Jewish doctors to leave Eschwege and, indeed, all of Germany because a doctor didn't have to wrap up a business. People asked, well, why didn't my father leave in 1933? And the answer was because, while he had a very good remunerative business, the business as such didn't produce cash. Only merchandise produced cash. You couldn't sell the good name because no one wanted to buy it. And so, indeed, that is the only way that we had any money was by selling the individual merchandise that is the—the foodstuff and the truck and whatever else was in the business. And indeed, the reason we were able to go to Cologne in such a rush was because my parents had enough cash to pay for such a thing. And again, that's why I stress, I still have this rather perverse attitude towards money, because I know that money played a big role in facilitating our exodus. Without—the people who didn't have money in Eschwege—and people always think that all the Jews had money; that's not true. The ones who didn't have money perished.

SIGRIST: We're going to pause for a second. I'm going to put in a second tape. We're going to get you to America soon. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with tape one with Tirza Freeman.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B]

[BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A]

SIGRIST: Okay. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. We're beginning tape two with Tirza Freeman, who came from Germany in 1939 when she was 11 and ended up detained at Ellis Island. Today is August 5th, 1997. It is a Tuesday morning and you may hear a dar—barking dog in the background. Mrs. Freeman, we ended tape one with you telling me about you having diphtheria [clears throat] and your family kind of getting ready to leave. May I ask you what you remember about the diphtheria, specifically? What—do you remember how you felt or—or what the symptoms were? What—what do you remember about the—the experience of having the diphtheria?

FREEMAN: Actually, very little. Just being terribly ill, having a horrendously sore throat, being almost unable to eat. I do remember my mother bending over me and I asked her, "Mama, why is your hair so gray?" And she said, "Just from worries." Other than that, I remember very little because—because I was so ill, I couldn't take any part in the preparations for leaving.

SIGRIST: You mentioned earlier that your—your father had been in contact with his distant relatives in the United States. And that allowed you to get a visa to—to get out of Germany. Do you have any recollection of what your parents actually did to get the visa? Where did they have to go and what did they have to do to get it?

FREEMAN: You had to go to Stuttgart—S-T-U-T-T-G-A-R-T, which is where the American Consulate was. And we then would pre—we presented ourselves and we were fortunate that we had a low number. There were thousands of applicants to leave Germany and to come to the United States. And I failed to tell you that before. My mother did have one aunt, or perhaps it was an aunt in the second degree, who lived in El Paso, Texas. And her name was Helene Aronstein [PH]. She was a sister of my grandmother.

SIGRIST: Can you spell Aronstein?

FREEMAN: Aronstein is A-R-O-N-S-T-E-I-N.

SIGRIST: Thank you.

FREEMAN: And she lived in El Paso, Texas. And apparently, she had a very small house where—and I remember that now that it was all of $8,000. That was not enough to be a bond for a family of six. However, my parents submitted this affidavit and that enabled us to get the low number, 8,000. And therefore, when we received the additional affidavits from these far wealthier members, who only gave it to us after Kristallnacht, because apparently that was publicized in the United States, and they got the cable from my parents just saying, “Help us.” They then submitted it and, with that in hand, we went to the consulate in Stuttgart and were given—after we were examined by a doctor—and remember, this was before I had the diphtheria. And so we were given the bill of health and this wonderful paper that said that we could leave, and so that when we returned to Eschwege, we immediately began the proceedings to pack up the furniture. At that time, you were still allowed to take goods with you. You were not allowed to take money. The money was limited to six Marks, which at that time was four dollars a person. So in other words, our official assets were $24. Unofficially, my father had kind of saved—hoarded, if you will, dollars for years before from the grocery store. We had some things that hadn’t sold. And among these were loose pudding mix. This was in a black box. And my father stuck all these dollars in this pudding mix and then put a string around it. I didn’t see it but it was told to me that when they packed up the lift, that was one of the things that fell out and my father was in—in agony that it would open. It didn’t. Anyway, it was shoved back in there and it was that money that paid for us after we came here, because you remember that we had told these people we would never hit them for any kind of money. We—both because we were much too proud and, also, because we thought it was so wonderful for them to save our lives by providing the affidavit, so we would never ask them for money. But obviously, six people, even modestly, need some money to function in this country. And that’s the money that provided for our first few weeks in the country.

SIGRIST: During the process of—of going to the consulate, going to the doctor, all of that, was there a Nazi presence at that time during this whole process?

FREEMAN: Not—

SIGRIST: —that you remember?

FREEMAN: Wait, first, I—the Nazi presence was with you all the time. There were constant parades. Since we lived in a kind of central part of the town, which was originally called Bahnhof Strasse [PH], and subsequently was changed to Hermann Goering Strasse [PH] because all these

streets, the central streets were all renamed for officials, high officials in the Nazi party. So they would constantly have marches with music, very dramatic music. I'm sorry to tell you that I remember the words of these Nazi songs, while I do not remember German children's songs, because these songs would be repeated over and over and over again. And I—

SIGRIST: Would you like to say what the words are?

FREEMAN: "[speaking in German]." "When Jewish blood sprays from the knife, things go much better." That's a horror. There was also a song called "[speaking in German]." That—when you asked why was I terrorized? It was because they had these frequent marches where they would have tortures. They were called faculn [PH]. They were live fire and they would hold them and—and hundreds of flags. Indeed, my parents had to buy a flag with a swastika on it, because if you didn't fly the flag then you were in big trouble. And that would flow—would be flown off our balcony. We did have a balcony in front of our apartment. But as far as—wherever you went, there were these men with brown shirts and the—and swastika bands around their arms. It—it wasn't more than 10 minutes on the street that you were unaware of the Nazi presence. It was everywhere, whether it was in the newspapers that were in these glass boxes or whether it was of the people. What little walking we did in the street, we were always threatened and particularly because there was no doubt who we were. Everyone in Eschwege knew our family because we had been there for so many hundreds of years. That is my mother's family, not my father's.

SIGRIST: You mentioned your father putting the money in the pudding mix. What other specific details do you remember about packing up, about ac—actually packing what you were going to take?

FREEMAN: You were allowed to pack all the goods that you can. And so my parents, to the degree that they could, bought things, which they hoped that they could sell in this country. So we had I don't know how many umbrellas. At that time, there was a—a folding umbrella, which was kind of a—a symbol of Germany called Knirps. It's still sold in this country. K-N-I-R-P-S. And [unclear] tell you, I wouldn't be caught dead carrying a Knirps umbrella, even though I know today it's not the same family—the same organization. But they—they tried to convert whatever they could into merchandise in the hope that we could sell it here, because we knew that we would have very limited means. So this lift was rather filled with all kinds of things, not silver. The silverware, and that was also very traumatic—whatever—my mother had already early on begun to collect silver for my sister, Leah, and myself. And there was a Nazi edict, which said that whatever you

owned of silver you had to bring it to some central place. I wasn't there but I remember my father saying that when he brought this big bag with silver that the guy just simply took it and threw it on the pile and—and there went my sister and my dowry. And it was many years later that I had the pleasure of buying another silver candlestick for my mother, which looked more or less as I remembered the original one did, and to tell her, "Well, here is the replacement. Now, I have the money and I'm happy to be able to provide it for you."

SIGRIST: Do you remember something that was your own that you took with you?

FREEMAN: No, I do not remember a single thing because I—I was much too terrified to ask for anything. I—I knew that my parents had more than they could handle, just getting us out of there. There wasn't anything that I took.

SIGRIST: You—you've mentioned a couple of times the lift, things falling out of the lift. What do you mean by the lift?

FREEMAN: Oh, the lift is what you could t—today would call a container. When you go to the Newark—port of Newark, you'll see these large, square containers. All our goods were in containers. You didn't use a—was—excuse me. In this one container. It was a large, rectangular box. And you would be amazed, if you know how to do it, how much stuff you could put in such a container, because, remember, this container had to go on a ship. And many containers would fit together. But those containers still exist today and you can see them in the harbor of Newark. The New—New York harbor seems to be inactive right now.

SIGRIST: I see. Yes, I know exactly what you mean. I just never heard it referred to as a lift. What do you remember about leaving the apartment and going to the port where you would get the ship?

FREEMAN: I left the apartment in the arms of my brother, Ernest. Since I had become paralyzed, my legs weren't functioning. And so he took me to the train.

SIGRIST: How long had you had the diphtheria prior to leaving the apartment?

FREEMAN: I don't know precisely, but it was probably something like four weeks, give or take a few days. It could have been five weeks. I don't know. But I know that I was on the train and, on the train, we—in the compartment there were two men in brown shirts, which meant that they were members of the Nazi parties. And they asked me my name and I told them Rosenberg and they had rather high regard for me,

because one of the chief members of the upper echelon was Alfred Rosenberg, so that was okay. They, of course, did not see my passport because they didn't ask for it, because the passports at that time were all easily identifiable. And I have it to this day and—

SIGRIST: We'll look it when we're done.

FREEMAN: Oh, okay, because—okay. They're identifiable because they have a large "J' for Juda [PH], or Jew in English. But they didn't ask and they were very kind and, needless to say, I didn't tell them who I was. But it was in a private compartment. This railroad took us to Holland because, in Holland, in Amsterdam, my mother had a lifelong friend—his last—by the name of Max Wolf. And he took us into his apartment. And for the first time that I could remember, I had really wonderful rolls. It has stayed to me to this day. I can still taste these marvelous rolls because, after eating this horrible gray bread and nothing but potatoes and carrots for six years, I really enjoyed them, even though I was ill. And from there, we went to Hoek [PH] van Holland, which is the place where you take a boat to England, which took us to Harwich. And from Harwich, we boarded the boat called the Queen Mary, which was one of the stars of the Cunard Line. Again, because my father had sufficient fund, he could buy us tickets on one of the better boats of the British Navy.

SIGRIST: How long were you in Holland before you actually got on the ship to get to England?

FREEMAN: Probably no more than one or two days.

SIGRIST: Does anything stick out in your mind about the whole process of getting to England? Something that happened along the—

FREEMAN: No, because you have to remember, I was ill the whole time. I was not able to walk or do anything.

SIGRIST: Was there some treatment that your mother was offering you that you can recall?

FREEMAN: No, there was no treatment, other than she gave me some kind of a pill called ponflavine [PH], which I guess soothed my throat, but it's a little bit like giving somebody a—a—a cough drop. Because, remember, I had no medication. Since I wasn't seen by any doctor and I certainly didn't have anti-toxin, which was available, I had no treatment. The treatment of my diphtheria was simply blankets and these—some kind of drops to—to sooth my throat. But it—it was—and, of course, I had no company either because after the—the determination was that I had

diphtheria, no one could get into my room because my mother, of course, was petrified that the others would catch it. It's a highly contagious disease. But they—no one ever caught the disease.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about being on the Queen Mary?

FREEMAN: That I remember very vividly because, as soon as the boat began to go into motion, I became seasick and I tried to throw up and I couldn't because my throat was constricted. The Queen Mary was a very large boat so it had its in-house physician. He came to our cabin and immediately ordered that I go into the hospital of—the Queen Mary had its own hospital, which probably had only two or three beds. And I spent the entire time of the crossing in the hospital of the Queen Mary, just trying to catch my breath because I was trying to throw up and I couldn't. And there was very little that they could do for me. But I became more and more ill. And of course, at that point, there was no question of my getting out of bed. In fact—and I should tell you, because I consider one of the miracle of my lives, because before you boarded the Queen Mary, you had to go past a doctor who would stand on a kind of a bridge. And my mother told me, "You must walk past the doctor or none of us will come out." Now, my brother had carried from Eschwege to the train, from the train into our friend's apartment. I had been carried the whole time. And I cannot tell you how I managed it but I know that I walked past this doctor because, otherwise, he would never had permitted me to board that ship, because I can tell you subsequently, that the mother company of the Queen Mary, which is the Cunard White Star Line, had to pay for my entire hospitalization at Ellis Island. And I imagine even in the terms of money of those days, that it must have been more than what we paid for the six tickets to get on the Queen Mary.

SIGRIST: Do you know what—where your parents slept on the ship, what their accommodations were like at all? Did your mother—

FREEMAN: Oh, yes. Yes. No, they—they were very elegant accommodations and they probably had more space after I was moved to the hospital. I believe we occupied several cabins. But other than that, I can't tell you anything about the crossing because I spent the entire crossing in the—in the hospital.

SIGRIST: Are there any details about the hospital itself that stick out in your mind? Things that you saw [unclear]?

FREEMAN: No, just it was—no. It was just a simple bed and people would come and—and try to make me comfortable. But I couldn't be made comfortable because, obviously, this hospital wasn't geared for people

who were paralyzed. And the longer I stayed there, the more paralyzed I became. And how I can tell you is that when—before we landed, you know that they give you a—a card, which you have to sign. And my mother gave me that card and I said, "I'm sorry. I can't see the line." And so she just held my hand while I signed my name. And I was amazed later on to see how badly I signed it. And of course, I signed it cockeyed because I couldn't see the line where the signature went. In other words, m—my—the roof of my mouth and my eyes and my arms and every part of me, apparently, other than my heart and lungs, were not functioning by the time I got to the port of New York.

SIGRIST: Do you know how long the ship took to get across the Atlantic?

FREEMAN: Yes, I do. It took six days.

SIGRIST: And—

FREEMAN: Which was—by the way, was very fast at that time. The—the Queen Mary was one of the premiere ships. It was really—the Queen Mary and the Queen Elizabeth were the premiere ships of the English fleet.

SIGRIST: So you arrived in New York in April of '39.

FREEMAN: That is correct. But wait. I didn't arrive in New York City. Someone from the ship must have telegraphed to New York because the ship stopped in—before it was tied up, and they lifted me in a stretcher over the side of the ship to a barge and took me over to Ellis Island. They did not want me to land in that because they didn't know how ill I was. They did not want me to land in the harbor of New York and maybe infect the whole city. You—at that time, people were still petrified of diphtheria. Diphtheria and scarlet fever, people would attach a note to your door so that no—say, if you were in an apartment in New York, because they didn't want you to come in, for your sake, not the sake of the people inside, so that you wouldn't be infected by these people.

SIGRIST: D—do you have any recollection of how you felt when you were being lowered down? I mean, did you understand what was going on?

FREEMAN: I didn't understand what I was—going on. But needless to say, I was very frightened because I couldn't speak to these people. You hear me today in my almost accent-free English. At that time, I only knew the little English that I had learned in the school in Eschwege. And it was very little, indeed. Probably consisted of no more than a hundred words.

SIGRIST: Tell me what happened after you were lowered into the bar—barge. Then what happened?

FREEMAN: Then I was brought over to a place, which today I know is Ellis Island and put into the hospital in Ellis Island. And for the first time, I was surrounded by medical personnel. Now, needless to say, I didn't know who was doctor and who was nurse. But I know that the first thing they did was to try to, I believe it's called siphon. They—they put something down my throat and I fought tooth and nail because it's a terrible feeling and I thought they were choking me. But what they were trying to do was to remove some phlegm so that I could catch my breath. So after they put this instrument down my throat I felt better. In—while they were doing it, I—I was in agony.

SIGRIST: Was there someone there who could speak German that was explaining anything to you?

FREEMAN: There was no one there who spoke German. However, there was a Dr. Julius Ginsberg [PH], and I'll never forget him because he spoke Yiddish. And so he addressed me in Yiddish and I could more or less communicate with him. And he took tremendous care of me. And to this day, I say that my life really began in 1939 in Ellis Island—

SIGRIST: Where—where did your family go during all of this?

FREEMAN: My family also was taken, either in the same barge or on another barge. I don't—that, I don't know. But they—they were also brought to Ellis Island but not to the hospital but into the Great Hall, because they didn't know what to do. But they knew that they couldn't be admitted to New York. And then after that, the Queen Mary proceeded and docked and the rest of the people were off-loaded in New York. My parents were in—in the Great Hall in Ellis Island but only for a day or two. When they determined that they were all healthy and they were then admitted to New York City. And I continued to remain in Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: So no family members stayed at Ellis Island with you?

FREEMAN: No family members stayed at Ellis Island with me. So here I was, only speaking German. And I remembered that it was Passover and that you shouldn't be eating bread. It wasn't a problem because I couldn't eat anyway. But I do remember saying that I really shouldn't be eating anything. And my mother had arranged with a—a—a rabbi who was—well, today, you would call him a chaplain, who came and said, "You know, you—this is a life and death situation. Whatever you can possibly eat, eat it. It is to save a life." And I then did, even though it

was Passover. And so to this day, when people tell me, “Well, the reason I’m kosher is because I don’t know how good bacon or ham tastes,” I tell them, “I do know,” because later on, not at—in the early time, but later on, I ate anything that was put in front of me, including bacon, ham, sausage, because I was in constant hunger, because once my body started to heal, I guess being a child, I could eat quantities of food that, today, I look at in complete amazement, because apparently it was trying to work itself into such a state so that I would look like an 11-year-old child and not like a 60 pound skeleton.

SIGRIST: During—you were there for over five months. What are the strongest impressions of that time?

FREEMAN: I wasn’t in Ellis Island the entire five months. After about six days in Ellis Island, they realized that they couldn’t cure me. And so they received permission to admit me to a hospital for contagious diseases. It’s called the Willard Parker Hospital. It no longer exists but I have found out just these week from an older physician that he remembered the Willard Parker Hospital very well, because in those days that was the place that you went to if you had scarlet fever, diphtheria, polio. Polio was a terrible scourge at that time. And they knew how to treat people who had these diseases. The—whoever it was in Ellis Island received permission to transfer me to the Willard Parker Hospital. And that I remember vividly was the entrance into New York, because it was in an ambulance with sirens screeching. I think that’s pretty dramatic.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what the location was of the hospital?

FREEMAN: East 15th Street at the bottom of the street. In other words, facing the East River. And—

SIGRIST: So you were at Ellis Island six days.

FREEMAN: Correct.

SIGRIST: Six days. And then you—

FREEMAN: Constantly being si—what—I believe it’s called siphoned out because the—the phlegm was just rising and just gasping for breath.

SIGRIST: Well, before we get you to the hospital, is there anything else about Ellis Island that sticks out in your mind? Details about the room you were in or—you mentioned—

FREEMAN: Are you asking me for the six days or the—or the five months afterwards?

SIGRIST: Well, we're going—going to do the five months.

FREEMAN: Well, during the six days I are nothing except constantly being siphoned out and—and a constant commotion around my bed, because I guess they realized that I was in a—a—a life and death situation. I was constantly being attended to. They tried to do whatever they could. And I guess they must have told me, "Stop fighting so hard when this—this machine is put down your throat," because it may very well be that I didn't fight that hard, because I remember it as being hard. But remember, I had no strength. So it was probably the tap of a little baby. But I didn't like this—this machine being put down my throat because I thought they were choking me. Other than that, I remember nothing because I—I was just—well, I guess I was as close to—to death as you can be and still remain alive.

SIGRIST: Now, tell me what you remember when they brought you to the—to the contagious disease hospital and—

FREEMAN: Oh, that I remember because—well, the first thing they did was that they put a lot of bricks under the end of the bed in order to elevate my legs and to have my head lower than my legs. I—I don't know what the medical reason is. I assume it has something to do with circulation. And then they brought in better breathing apparatus and I remember at one point there was a lady walking around trying to manipulate my arms and my legs. And subsequently, I saw a picture of someone called Sister Kenny. I cannot swear to you that this was Sister Kenny. But I assume it was because I think they were trying to determine even whether I had polio or whether I had diphtheria, because they really didn't know what my medical history was because I didn't have any, since I wasn't seen by any doctor. My mother must have told them that she thought that I had diphtheria. And when I think about it today, what my mother's state must have been, having lost one child to diphtheria—that is, her first child—and then my getting it. And I do remember my father saying to me, "I want you to fight, fight, fight because I didn't bring you to this blessed country in order to die in—in the first month of being in the United States." And I did fight very hard. I also remember that I spent a great deal of time singing every Hebrew prayer that I ever remembered because, again, remember. I couldn't read. I couldn't do anything. And so I was singing and praying to be saved because, not only my father was anxious for me to live, I was also anxious. Remember, I was 11 years old and I thought there must be more to life than either being in terror or being beaten up. And I wanted to live. And to this day, I have a strong affinity to

Hebrew music. I have memorized a great deal of Hebrew music and, also, continue to sing in the choir at our synagogue. And I—I believe it has something to do with my early childhood.

SIGRIST: So your parents were—were able to visit you then while you were in this hospital in New York?

FREEMAN: My parents were not able to visit me because they were only trying to establish themselves. Remember, they came to New York. They didn't have an apartment.

SIGRIST: But you just said that your father was telling you to "Live, live, live."

FREEMAN: Only while I—I guess that in the two days between them landing in—in—in the Great Hall at Ellis Island and—and their being admitted to New York—during those two days, my parents visited me. And it was during that time that my father said, "Live, live, live," or, "Fight." Actually, what he said was, "Fight. I want you to live." After that, remember that they didn't have the money to take subways and what—and a boat. Remember that you had to take a subway and a boat to visit anyone in Ellis Island. And they were trying to become established. So I don't think that my parents during those five months visited me more than—less times than you can count on the fingers of a hand.

[END OF TAPE 2, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE B]

SIGRIST: This hospital that you were then taken—you were at Ellis Island for six days.

FREEMAN: Right.

SIGRIST: Then they brought you to this contagious disease hospital—

FREEMAN: Right.

SIGRIST: —which, I believe, was in Manhattan so—

FREEMAN: That's correct.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

FREEMAN: Willard Parker Hospital in Manhattan.

SIGRIST: That's right. And that's really where you spent the—the five months. Correct? You weren't going back and forth to Ellis Island?

FREEMAN: No, I only spent four weeks at Willard Parker Hospital. After the four weeks and while I was in—in Willard Parker Hospital I was treated aggressively. And I began to turn around. It—to begin with, they fed me through a tube in my nose. Since I couldn't swallow, it was a tube. And they would push, literally, gallons of some kind of liquid. I assume it was some kind of a—a liquid with lots of calories and protein. And they asked me and I—I—I guess somehow I must have told them—well, chocolata [PH] is a German word and chocolate is close enough in English, because they must have asked me what I liked. And not that I could taste it, but they pushed this food into my stomach. And apparently, that began to turn me around. At the same time, they also started to do very gentle exercises with my extremities. So I was in Willard Parker Hospital about four weeks. And after that four weeks I was returned to Ellis Island. In other words, I was in Ellis Island altogether the six days before, four weeks in Willard Parker Hospital and then another four to five months in Ellis Island after I returned. Remember, when I returned from Willard Parker Hospital, I still wasn't walking. But at least I could function, so that when I returned to Ellis Island they continued the various therapies to limber up my various extremities. But at least now I could breathe. In other words, what they did in Willard Parker Hospital was to stabilize me. But they didn't keep me there because I still did not have permission to enter the United States, because the proviso was that I could only enter the United States if I was recovered. I have subsequently heard that the process was that HIAS, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, put up a bond for me, saying that they would guarantee that I would recover, or they would see to it that I would be returned to Germany. You're asking who visited me at Willard Parker Hospital, and that is a story in itself. I had mentioned to you that my mother had this wonderful friend called Mata Goldschmidt or—whose maiden name was Plaut. This lady had a brother who lived in New York. His name was Walter Plaut. My mother got in touch with Walter Plaut. He had already become established. And Walter Plaut, whose name I will bless forever and ever, visited me every single day while I was at Willard Parker Hospital. And he translated to them. In fact, thinking back, maybe that's how they found out that I liked chocolate. And he would visit me and try to be my contact between the medical establishment and myself, because he spoke fluent English and fluent German. And since I was a young child, I did start to pick up words very, very quickly. Certainly, by the time I left Ellis Island in those five months, I speak more or less the same as I do today, no accent, or very little, and also had learned to read English, because the staff there kind of adopted me. Normally, the people who were in the Marine Hospital at

Ellis Island were sailors. They weren't accustomed to children altogether. There were no other children there. There were some babies that were born while I was there, because that, again, seems to be a re—or was a reason to detain people. They didn't want people having their children first day in New York. So there were a couple of babies that were born there. But the staff at Ellis Island was simply magnificent, not only that they treated me but also, they would bring me the "New York Times," a little stiff reading for an 11-year-old. But they also started to bring me children's books and would point out things. And that's how I learned to read English so that, by the time I actually landed in New York, I spoke English and I also knew how to read English.

SIGRIST: Well, so when you were brought back out to Ellis Island it seems like you had a—a stronger consciousness of what was going on—

FREEMAN: Absolutely.

SIGRIST: Good. Can you talk about that remaining time at Ellis Island, the things that you remember most vividly about that?

FREEMAN: Well, I can remember learning how to walk again at Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me how they taught you how to do that?

FREEMAN: Yes, they—there would be one nurse on either side of me and telling me, you know, "Now, you put one foot in front of the other foot." And, again, I cannot stress how kind everybody was. Here I was, an immigrant kid from Germany, abused almost to death there. And then I come here and these are people that don't know me, have no contact with me, and treated me with such love and such kindness, including teaching me how to walk, teaching me how to feed myself again. It was v—this—all of this didn't happen in one day. The reason I stayed there as long as I did is because all these faculties returned to me slowly. As I said, to begin with, I couldn't eat either. I was—only received liquid via the tube. Eventually, the tube was removed and then I lived on only liquid but taken by mouth. And I could put away eight glasses of this heavy duty, high caloric drink because I—I seemed to be starved all the time. And whatever was put in front of me, I ate every single bit of it. And slowly, I began to put on weight and I began to look like a little child and returned to good health. I do remember Walter Plaut telling me not to let myself drop into a chair like a lump of lead. And I had to tell him that the reason I fell so heavily is because I had no control, that I didn't know how to go from a bed into a chair without dropping into it. Again, in time, I developed the faculty of lowering my body properly. But all—even how to write again, how to

hold a pen. All of these things I had to relearn. But I did relearn them. And so, eventually, I was permitted to leave Ellis Island. I also have to tell you that I wore clothes that were entirely too big for me, because the only clothes they had in their stock was shorts that would fit the smallest sailor. And I presume some of these must have been Orientals, because they were, for a man's size, very small, and for me they were, of course, much too big. But that's what I wore because, remember, I had brought no clothes. I came there in the hospital gown that I had been given on the Queen Mary. I had—my clothes were in New York with my parents.

SIGRIST: You mentioned the sailors a couple of times. Do any of the sailors stick out in your mind as—as characters that you've—

FREEMAN: Well, I just remember being very envious of them because these sailors would go to the edge of the island and would dive into the water. And I was dying to go swimming with them. And of course, I didn't because I knew that I—I couldn't do it because, physically, I wasn't capable and—but besides that, I mean, I wasn't—I—I wasn't detained in the sense of being in jail. But I was told pretty much, "You better stay on the floor." That is, once I started to be able to walk, I pretty much had the run of the place. Everybody was very nice to me because I was sort of the pet, because I was the only child there and I gather I was appealing and—and they liked me. And everybody was very nice but they did tell me, "Look, don't go to the water because you can drown." And having managed to live, I wasn't about—but—about to drown myself in New York harbor. But remember, at that time, New York harbor was, I assume, much cleaner because I know that the sailors had a lot of fun swimming in the waters around Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: You mentioned one doctor, Dr. Ginsberg, I believe.

FREEMAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Does anything else stick out in your mind about him or his staff?

FREEMAN: Well, just that he wore a uniform because he was not a—he was an employee of the Navy, because it was the Navy that ran this. At that time, Ellis Island wasn't a national—what do you call that? You are an employee of the National Park Service. Ellis Island wasn't part of the National Park Service. It—that's why it was called the Marine Hospital, not Marines like in the Marine being a separate part of the Navy, but marine like in—in having to do with ships and water, and so that any sailor who became ill landed there. And so this doctor wore a uniform. I can tell you that I retained my friendship with Dr. Ginsberg and, subsequently, visited him at his house, a very attractive house in

Brooklyn, to thank him for the big part he took in saving my life. Incidentally, that visit was in company with Walter Plaut because I remained friends with him, because these were all people that I knew had done so much to save my life. And I have always been very conscious of people who help. And I would like to think I've incorporated into my own life and I continue to be involved in voluntary activities. And today, I'm involved with patterning a little boy who is neurologically impaired, because I feel that I owe the world and society a lot for letting me have these years, because without all the care of all these people, I wouldn't have had these extra 50-some odd years. And they've been very good years.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you remember about being released from Ellis Island.

FREEMAN: Well, I just remembered being very grateful to be released. Walter Plaut came there to pick me up because I had no idea of what you do after you get off Ellis Island. I was very anxious to return to my family, since I hadn't seen them for so many months. I had seen my father and mother some time. I never saw my two brothers or my sister, because my older brother had already begun to work, because it was very important that somebody in the family earn some money. And so my older brother was working. And my younger brother was still a child. He was at that time six years old. My sister was 13. At any rate, I hadn't seen them. But I just remembered going off and being taken, first thing, to the office of Walter Plaut. He was a travel agent and he had an office on 28th Street in New York on Fifth Avenue. And he took me there and people were absolutely floored how this new immigrant to New York came there speaking perfect English. But again, it was because these people had spoken to me in English all that time and I had no other opportunity—as you know, children learn whatever language they are exposed to. And that was the only language that I heard was English.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what impressed you about New York the most at that age?

FREEMAN: Yes, the size of New York, the—the noise, the life, the—the amount of traffic. I was totally overwhelmed by just the size, the modernity of New York, the many buses and trucks and cars and the subway and just the hustle and bustle of the city that never sleeps.

SIGRIST: Tell me about being reunited with your mother and father and family.

FREEMAN: Well, my parents in the meantime had gotten an apartment in Washington Heights on 181st Street and St. Nicolas Avenue. It was a—quite a large apartment, which they already had rented parts of the

apartment because they—even though it was, in today's terms, very cheap—it was an elevator house. But they had to rent parts of the apartment to single people so that they could have some income, because my father had not found work. My father, at that time, was over 50 years old. And you know that it's very difficult to find employment, in addition to which, since my parents were observant Jews, they wouldn't—my father would not work on the Sabbath. And at that time, it was very customary for people to work six days a week. So my father hadn't gotten employment. The only income was my brother's work as an upholsterer with Levidis [PH] and Company. And people say, "Why upholsterer?" He had no interest in upholstery. It was the first and only job that was offered to him and he didn't question. And indeed, it has also led to his entire life career, because he became an interior decorator, only because what he worked with first was furniture and he has stayed in that business. But we didn't stay in—in the apartment in Washington Heights very long because it was too expensive. And my parents then bought a rooming house business in the Bronx. And so we—I don't believe that we were even one year in Washington Heights when we moved to the Bronx.

SIGRIST: Were you put into school?

FREEMAN: Yes, I—in fact, come to think of it, we must have moved very s—soon thereafter, because my first—no, I'm sorry. Take that back. Scratch that—that previous thing. Yes, I remember going to school for a short time in Washington Heights. And where I was put was in third grade. I was at that point almost 12 years old and I was just mortified to be in third grade. But they did not have English as a Second Language. And so they thought, well, where I belonged was in third grade. And that's where I was until we moved to the Bronx, where I was put in fifth grade, which was still below my capacity but at least it wasn't as humiliating as being in the third grade.

SIGRIST: When you were first put into the third grade—of course, you were speaking English to some degree by then—

FREEMAN: Right.

SIGRIST: —certainly.

FREEMAN: Well, excuse me. One thing I should tell you, though. I had only gone to the fourth grade in Eschwege. And the reason was because th—after they smashed our school, there was no school in Eschwege. So remember that I had on—it is possible that they asked me, "Well, where"—what was my last grade? And I told them the honest truth, which was fourth grade. There again, when you asked me before,

what did we do, I can't tell you because the fact is we did not even go to school. So we were in the house from morning to night. And yet, I don't remember our parents yelling at us in the way that I know kids get yelled at now when they're home for two days because it's a snow day. We must have been very, very good because we were so frightened.

SIGRIST: Did you experience any kind of prejudice when you first went to school in the United States because you had been foreign born?

FREEMAN: Not at all, no. Just the—many of the kids in the third grade who were my fellow students also were kids from Germany. At that time, there—many German Jews had settled in Washington Heights, which is probably the reason that we settled there too, because you heard that some of your fellow immigrants were also living in Washington Heights. I can tell you that there—at that time, on a corner of Broadway, which was only two blocks from the place that we were, they would sell a newspaper published by a Father Cocklin [PH], called "Social Justice," which was a highly anti-Semitic newspaper. And that I did find pretty terrible, having come from Germany, that such things existed in New York City as well. It was called "Social Justice." I'm not sure how that name was derived because it was neither social nor just. But it was a highly anti-Semitic paper and it was sold no more than two blocks from my house. But you may remember that in 1939 the United States also had offshoots of the Nazi party called the Bund—B-U-N-D. And it existed here in New Jersey and in Union, which is the next town to here and, apparently, in other parts. And of course, we still suffer with such things in places like Idaho and Washington State even today, although they're not—today, I believe they are not pitched solely against Jews. I think today many of these Arian organizations just hate the government in general.

SIGRIST: Tell me about your parents' adaptation to being in New York and perhaps their attempts at learning English.

FREEMAN: My parents tried in the worst way to improve their English. Remember, my mother knew English. It was accented English but nevertheless, it was English. I would say that my parents, in effect, never truly recovered. And it's not amazing. My father was over 50. He did eventually establish a small grocery here. But you cannot say that he ever became fully integrated into this country. He did learn English and he did run a business and he was self supporting. He certainly never took any money from anyone and was able to provide my sister and me with modest but lovely weddings. And he was grateful that he was permitted to live here. But if you mean, did he ever achieve the prominence that he had in Germany, the answer is no.

SIGRIST: What do you think—

FREEMAN: And also, my mother was never able to pursue her career in music. Indeed, one of the first things that my parents sold, and when I think about it today, I—it could just move me to tears—the first thing my mother sold was this beautiful, beautiful grand piano. And it was sold for $110, which was a fortune at that time. And that's the reason it was sold, because they simply needed money to live on, because even with the money in the—that my father had stashed away in the pudding box, which by the way was, of course, completely illegal under German law and has also colored my thinking about the laws that governments issue. I'm a—a law-abiding American citizen. But sometimes when I hear about certain laws that are issued by other governments, which people violate, I can understand why they do it, because when your life is in danger and the laws are purely vindictive and only apply to certain people—when those laws are violated, I can understand that. So I have great sympathy for the democracy movement in China or things that people did under communist dom—domination because these were—these were not laws of men. These are just laws of opportunity.

SIGRIST: When they sold the piano in New York, did they sell anything else?

FREEMAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: What else—

FREEMAN: They sold these—these umbrellas that they had brought. They sold furniture. They sold anything that anyone was willing to give them money for, because in addition to the fact that they needed money, they also needed space. And of course, the living accommodations that we had in New York were probably half the size of what we had in Germany. So both in order to raise cash and also to give us some breathing space, we sold whatever we could.

SIGRIST: What do you think the hardest things—what were the hardest things for them to get accustomed to in the United States?

FREEMAN: I think the vermin. Apparently, New York City, bedbugs and cockroaches seem to be endemic because I've heard since then that even people in—in the most elegant apartments on—in Fifth Avenue or Park Avenue in New York City have to cope with them. My parents were unable to cope with them because they'd never experienced bugs or—or ve—any other vermin, whether it was mice or whatever it was, we didn't have that in Germany. And I can remember going through some of our springs. They're not box springs like here. These

springs were—did not have fabric coverings. And I would go with my mother with a candle and try to burn these bedbugs out of our furniture, because we couldn't sleep because we were being eaten up alive by—by just hundreds or perhaps—I don't know, maybe it was thousands of these bugs. And we tried to—we didn't know any other way to do it and so we used candles to try to burn them out.

SIGRIST: We have just a couple minutes left. I do want to ask you about becoming a citizen. Did your parents become citizens?

FREEMAN: My parents became a citizen on the very first day that it was possible to be a citizen. When I hear about people being in the United States for 50 years and not becoming citizens, I don't understand that. They immediately began, upon landing, attended classes at high school to learn English. And they studied and on the very first day, five years and one day after we landed here, my parents became citizens. And the reason I know that is because I became a citizen on their papers because I was not yet 18. Because they wouldn't allow more than five years to go by.

SIGRIST: And what do you remember about the process that they went through to become a citizen? And did you participate in that process at all?

FREEMAN: No, I did not participate. I only know that they studied English very hard. They studied the books that we learned about the Constitution and—and the laws of the United States. And they—they were very anxious to become citizens. At that time, we were—before we became citizens, we were enemy aliens in this country because you remember that in—Germany invaded Poland in 1939. After that, we became enemy aliens. And to this day, I have the card, so that we were Germans to the United States—that means enemy aliens—and Jews in Germany. And of course, we were no longer permitted to be German citizens. And so we wanted to be American citizens and—

SIGRIST: Did your parents ever have any intention of going back to Germany, even to visit?

FREEMAN: No. My parents would, not under any circumstance, even enter the soil of Germany. Their—their children have but my parents wanted nothing further to do. Subsequently, my father did become—compensation from Germany and it made his later years a lot easier because he—you asked me whether he ever established himself here and the answer is no. But he was able to live much better because he then received some compensation for his business. It's called Wieder Gutmajong [PH]. I don't think it—it means making good again. And

then enabled him to enjoy a relatively pleasant old age, rather than living in this abject poverty.

SIGRIST: My final question for you is, how do you think of yourself in terms of nationality?

FREEMAN: I—

SIGRIST: Or ethnicity, for that matter?

FREEMAN: Oh, absolutely as—as an American Jew. And I have great love for the land of Israel but I'm not a—a citizen there, although I wouldn't hesitate to be one. But definitely, I'm enormously proud of being a Jew, of the things that we have accomplished. But I definitely think of myself as an American. When I returned to Germany, we—the people who lived in Eschwege were invited back. And I joined this group. Incidentally, not everybody joined. My brothers didn't want to go back, and didn't. I came back and I was asked, "Would you consider living in Eschwege?" And I said—and not only I did, but all the people who came back said, "Never." I am entitled to be buried in the very beautiful cemetery in Eschwege and I would curse anyone who did this to my body. No way. So do I—I think of myself as an American. And I'm very proud. I have been very happy here. I'd like to think I've been reasonably successful and I—I am delighted that I was able to have two children. When my children were born, I said a prayer of thanksgivings together with my husband. A lot of people here, they just have children. I said a prayer to thank God for permitting me to live to this day because it wasn't at all sure.

SIGRIST: Your last three minutes. What's the name of your husband?

FREEMAN: My husband's name is Henry Freeman. He was also born in Germany in Frankfurt. And he has entirely different memories because he left earlier and he wasn't beaten up and—and—and he was able to succeed much more. I should also tell you that, subsequently, I attended James Monroe High School and City College in New York. And I graduated from Rutgers University at the age of 50 and became an accountant. And the reason it took that long is because I sustained my husband while he was studying.

SIGRIST: And name your children for me on tape.

FREEMAN: My older daughter's name is Eva Freeman and she's married but she continues to carry the name Eva. And she has also become very successful. She is a Ph.D. from Harvard, as is her husband. My younger daughter's name is Naomi Freeman. She's also married to

Morris Klein [PH]. But she retains the name Freeman. And she is with the Commerce Department in Washington, DC, no more than two blocks from the White House. And as you can see, we're all terribly proud to be Americans.

SIGRIST: Great. Mrs. Freeman, thank you very much.

FREEMAN: You're very welcome.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Tirza Freeman on Tuesday, August 5th, 1997 in Millburn, New Jersey. Thanks.

FREEMAN: Yeah.

[END OF INTERVIEW]