EI-929
ERIKA KLOPFER STONE
BIRTHDATE: JUNE 29, 1924
INTERVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 3, 1997
AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 73
RUNNING TIME: 1:02:40
INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.
RECORDING ENGINEER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.
INTERVIEW LOCATION: NEW YORK CITY
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:

AGE:

SHIP:
PORT:
RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: Today is September 3rd, 1997 and I am here on the Upper East Side of New York City with Erika Stone, who was given the assignment by the European Picture Service in 1951 to go to Ellis Island to photograph a woman who had been detained there for two years. We're going to try to find out that woman's name and then we can—we can attach that. But Erika Stone is a very well known photographer, who has had numerous shows and—and has been written up in books. She, herself, immigrated from Germany, although not through Ellis Island, although her father, who came before her mother and herself—

STONE: He came temporarily.

LEVINE: Came temporarily.

STONE: He went—came back for us.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. He came—he went a—ahead and then returned for his family. He was detained at Ellis Island. So maybe we can just start. If you would say your birth date and where you were born.

STONE: Okay. I was born in Frankfurt, Germany on June 29th, 1924. Eek! [laughter]

LEVINE: Okay. And how long did you stay—were you in Frankfurt up until the time you left?

STONE: No, after about a year, my father's job changed. And first, we moved to a town called Saubrechen [PH], where we lived a year, and then to Munich where he became a lawyer for the BMW Company. And he was there with them until we left Germany in 1937, December, '37, I believe.

LEVINE: And [clears throat] do you have memories of—of life in Munich?

STONE: Oh, yes, I do. I mean, not my baby years but certainly my—because I was 12 when I left. So I have many memories. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Were you—maybe just—just to contrast what it was like for you in Germany and then when you came to this country, where did you settle when—when the family came here?

STONE: Well, first, we lived downtown. My uncle put us first up in a hotel on Madison Avenue and 77th Street, and that was a very fancy life. And then my parents looked for an apartment and we moved to Riverdale, and I lived there until I got married.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And wh—when you think of the early years in Germany, what are the kinds of things that you recall?

STONE: Well, I was never terribly, terribly happy in Germany. I'm really glad I was transplanted to the United States, especially to New York, which I love. I was always depressed a little bit in Germany. Everything was gray. The buildings were gray looking. And there weren't many lights, as there are in New York. And the atmosphere was just sort of always somewhat drab, although we had wonderful times too, and my parents took us to the Alps and—on—for vacations, and we had wonderful trips. But basically, I was always a little bit depressed there. And then, of course, when Hitler came along, there was—my parents became very secretive. They told us nothing because there was a tremendous fear that your maid might report you if you say anything against the government. And actually, about a year before we c—left Germany, my parents sent us away to what's called a kinderheim [PH], a children's home, where we were so they could dissolve the—the home and take care of all the things that had to be done

without the disturbance of children. And—but even before that, we never listened to the radio. The radio always had earphones and my parents were only allowed to listen to them. So once in a while, I think they had the earphones off, when I heard Hitler screaming [chuckles] the way he screamed when he talked. And I thought, 'Who is this insane man?' But basically, we knew very little. We were—we had to change schools. We were not allowed to stay in the public school we were in, and we had to go to a special private school, which it's the opposite from the way it is here. The private schools were not as good as the public schools in Germany. And I do remember that our teachers praised Hitler and told us what a wonderful man he was and the wonderful things he was doing for Germany and how he stood up to the Allies after the Treaty of Versailles and how he, you know, got jobs for people and got the Volkswagen rolling, and what a marvelous man he was. And there was anti-Semitism. We certainly felt it. And I have to say that my sisters' and myself's idea of Jews were colored by this anti-Semitism, that I too thought a Jew was kind of an awful person with horns coming out of the head. [chuckles] [coughs] And I remember once at school there was a—a Jewish girl in our class and everybody said, "She's a Jew. She's a Jew." And after school, we all threw stones after her. And I've never forgotten, and especially after I came to the United States and my parents told us why we had to leave, because we were Jewish background, I had—I had terrible guilt feelings about that.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: That's something that's stayed with me always.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. As a—as a little girl, did—did you—did you sort of realize what was going on? Did you [unclear]—

STONE: Not at all. We—we just thought it was marvelous and wonderful for the country. My parents said nothing to us. They were very careful because everyone lived in fear. Hitler really brainwashed the people and, as I said, he especially brainwashed the young people, because young people love militarism and uniforms and beautiful music. And Hitler had some very beautiful songs, the "Horst Wessel Lied." [PH] I don't know if you know it. [singing in German]. It was a very beautiful song and we heard that all the time. We sang it. And there were performances and then Hitler came to town and we had to stand there and go, "Heil Hitler." And it was all very exciting. Young people just loved that. And they were totally drawn into that, totally brainwashed. And everyone thought Hitler was the greatest thing that happened to Germany, and especially the young people. Now, my parents knew differently because they knew the history. They knew his anti-Semitism. But they didn't say anything to us bec—out of fear. So

we really did not really learn anything about our background till we arrived in the United States. And that was a big shock.

LEVINE: But of course, your—your parents were planning to leave because—

STONE: Yes.

LEVINE: —of their—

STONE: Oh, definitely, yes. And my mother's brother, who was a wonderful man—he was a lawyer also and he always felt his duty was to stay in Germany. He was a war hero. He had fought in World War I, lost his eye, had gotten the Medal of Honor. He had married a Catholic woman, had two daughters. And they're my cousins; they're still in Munich today. And he felt it was his duty to help—help Jews get out of the country and he devoted himself to that. And my father always wrote him, "Hans, you must get out. You must get out." And he said, "No, nothing's going to happen to me. They're not going to touch me. I'm a German hero." And sure enough, he was carted off to Mauthausen and never came back. And he was such a wonderful man. So—

LEVINE: Hmm. Well—

STONE: But his daughters, because they were brought up Catholic, remained in Germany. They're still there. And my mother's sister also married a Christian man and she—he was with the industry on the Rhine. And he was asked to leave her and divorce her and he wouldn't do it. They were separated. They could not live together during Hitler's time. But he wouldn't divorce so he was demoted. And they got through the war okay too. They also had two daughters. My one cousin died of cancer but the other one is still living in Freibruk [PH]. So I still have three cousins in Germany and I do go back periodically.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So in other words, if—if you—if you had Jewish blood on—on one side, you—you were not necessarily carted off to a camp? Is that—

STONE: Well—

LEVINE: Is that the way it was?

STONE: They—I mean, Hitler did try to, you know, do things to almost everybody who had any kind of Jewish—what he considered Jewish blood. But I think some people were able to escape it, like my uncle, the people that lived in Freibruk, since he was an—an industrialist and had a lot of influence, I suppose. He was able to escape and keep his family safe. But my other uncle, who had married, you know, a—a Christian woman,

he was carted off to Mauthausen. Now, my parents were J—were Jewish on both sides but just not interested in the Jewish religion. They considered themselves Germans. They were not interested in religion at all. And they did baptize us and send us to Lutheran church because they wanted us to know about, you know, the Bible so we could make our own choice later on.

LEVINE: What was your father's name?

STONE: Fritz. Fritz M. Klopfer—K-L-O-P-F-E-R.

LEVINE: And—and so Hans was Klopfer too? [unclear]—

STONE: No, he was Bloch—B-L-O-C-H—because he was my mother's brother. And her family name was Bloch. B-L-O-C-H.

LEVINE: And your mother's first name?

STONE: Elizabeth.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And you say you had sisters.

STONE: I have one sister.

LEVINE: Sister. And her name?

STONE: Karen.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And how old was she when she—when you—

STONE: She was a year and a half younger than I. So she was 10 and a half. I was 12.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And maybe you could talk about when your father—anything, you know, surrounding why he left when he did and what happened when he—

STONE: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: —when he [unclear].

STONE: Well, unfortunately, I wish I knew more and I wish I could ask him. But I do know that we had—and my father had a cousin in the United States who was a well-known heart specialist. He was very distinguished, even in Germany, because he and his family had opened a big spa for heart patients called Badenauheim [PH]. N-A-U-H-E-I-M. And then, because

he was Jewish, he had to leave and he came to the United States but he became a very distinguished heart specialist here in the United States. And he corresponded with my father by coming—leaving Germany and coming to the United States. And he invited him over here about a year before we all immigrated to discuss, you know, how he could make a living here. And so my father left just for a visit over here to—to see his cousin. And he had some sort of a medical problem. It was nothing major. I—I think it was a hernia, something like that. But they wouldn't let him into the United States because of that. And he was brought to Ellis Island. I don't know how long he—he was there but probably just a day. His cousins got him out very quickly. But I remember his telling us about it when he came back, that he was on Ellis Island. And that sort of created an interest in Ellis Island for me.

LEVINE: So your—your father's cousin probably came to this country, '33 or '34—

STONE: Yeah.

LEVINE: —or somewhere around in there?

STONE: He did. I don't know exactly, but certainly a few years before us.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And your father, was he traveling first or second class, do you know, on the ship?

STONE: I have no idea. I really couldn't tell you.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

STONE: I imagine probably in a perfectly good class, not steerage or anything [chuckles] like that.

LEVINE: Right, so it would have been that—that somehow, usually the examinations were cursory on ship for the persons who [unclear].

STONE: Oh, I see.

LEVINE: But they must have picked up this tradition [unclear] —

STONE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

LEVINE: —and [unclear].

STONE: I wish I knew more about it. I know when he came back he had to have this operation. It was a minor operation.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: But he took care of it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And so your father came and—and stayed here a—after his cousin had him released from Ellis Island?

STONE: Yes, a brief time. And again, I don't know how long but maybe one or two weeks, and discussed his future with his cousin, who helped us a great deal financially. Now, my father could not practice law here because the law is very different in the United States from Germany. In Germany, you're guilty until proven innocent, and here you're innocent until proven guilty. So he would have had to go all through law school again and he was too old for that. So he had a problem making a livin—living and he decided to become an insurance broker. But he was not really the type, you know, the golf-playing, back-slack—slapping salesman. He was not—he was a very intellectual, educated, introverted man. And so he never made it. I mean, all relatives and friends and other immigrants gave him their business. But it wasn't enough for us to live on and when we finally came here we had a very, very difficult time. It's one reason I couldn't go to college. I had to work. I worked already from the age of 12 on, first babysitting, then working in the five and ten after school and every summer. And I had to help my parents financially. And right after high school, I had to work and help them financially. My mother started crocheting blouses and all kinds of things and tried to make a little money with that. But things were very tough for us.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: I remember she took us down to Orbach [PH] and bought us $1 dresses. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

STONE: So—

LEVINE: Was your father able to practice law before he left in Germany [unclear]—

STONE: Until he was fired by BMW, yes. He worked for BMW. He was a lawyer for them. The called it Sündikus—S-Ü-N-D-I-K-U-S, which is a—a term for the kind of lawyer he was. I pr—I guess he probably handled all kinds of suits against the company. And he was with them for many, many years. But then I think probably the Nazis put pressure on him to fire him and he was fired. And—

LEVINE: And that's right before he—

STONE: —that's when he decided—yes, he decided the time had come to leave.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So—so when you first got here, you were—you said in the [telephone rings]—

STONE: Oh, excuse—yeah. [tape off/on] Okay.

LEVINE: Okay, we're resuming here and, [clears throat] after a phone call, which brought up the name of—

STONE: Leo Veck [PH] Institute.

LEVINE: —Leo Veck Institute, [clears throat] which is a—a contact and it's a German Jewish group in New York City here. And also, there's a story in Albert Lichtblau [PH]—

STONE: Right.

LEVINE: —who has been interviewing Austrians who have come to the United States.

STONE: Right.

LEVINE: Okay. [coughs] Maybe you could talk a little bit about [clears throat] when you first got here, what your initial impressions were of this country, as compared with what you were coming from.

STONE: Okay. All right. I was ex—extremely impressed with New York immediately. I—I just fell in love with it right away and we were sent to school very quickly, even though we didn't speak English. And the children were so nice to us in school. And all I ever said is, "I do not speak English." And we were put back a year and we just sort of sat in class and couldn't do anything, which was kind of frustrated. But everybody was so nice to us, in contrast to what—the way we treated foreign or Jewish kids in school in Germany. I realized that contrast. We were so nasty and unpleasant and here in America everybody was so warm and friendly. And I especially loved black people right away. I've always had a very strong feeling about them. And so I felt really quite at home. And then as the—the English language sort of came through osmosis, of course, I felt more and more at home. And I must say, when we first came, we—my sister and I were brats. [laughs] Because my father's cousin wanted to show us New York, and he took us all over. He took us to Radio City Music Hall. But we were just used to movies without a stage show and we said, "What is this? A stage show with the movies." And he took us to beautiful restaurants and we didn't like the food.

[laughs] It wasn't like our German food. And I wish—I wish I could re—you know, undo all this and do it now where I'm more sensible. And I would so appreciate some of these beautiful meals he took us to. He took us all over to show us New York. And as I said, we were bratty kids. "We want to go home." We said to my parents, "You have robbed us of our homeland," which must have been very hard for my parents to take. And we just wanted our friends and wanted to go back home. So we were very bratty in the beginning, but then after a year or two, certainly things changed and we made friends here. And we—we were very happy here except for the—we had great financial problems, my family. And, you know, I had to work and help. And my mother had mental depressions. She was crippled from early age when—in fact, it happened when I was born. She got rheumatoid arthritis and she became crippled in her hips. And then when my sister was born it got worse. So the only way she could walk was by throwing her body left and right all the time. And she couldn't bend and my father had to help her dress. So—and that in—I think caused some of the depression she had. And my father also was not a happy man anymore because he couldn't make a decent living. His career was ruined. He was kind of a broken man. And so that had a damper on us children. And when my mother had these mental depressions, all we did—we were teenagers. All we wanted to do was escape and run away because she was so indecisive. She couldn't make up her mind what to wear, what to cook or what to do. And we always had to help a great deal. And so we escaped a great deal and ran off with our friends. So those were not—and they weren't easy times at all.

LEVINE: [clears throat] So you—you were starting to work even when you were in school. After school [unclear]—

STONE: Yes, yes. First, I just did with babysitting right away at the age of 12, 12 and a half. There was a neighborhood family and I babysat for them all the time. And then I started working in the five and ten after school and in the summers. And then I started photography quite young. My father gave me his old Reutlander [PH]. And I started photographing neighborhood kids and then sold the pictures to their parents. And then the following years the parents would call me and say, "Would you photograph our children again?" So even then, I started a little photo business. And then after awhile, I got in with the local paper, the "Riverdale Press" and they gave me assignments. And so I started very young with photographing.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: In my teen years.

LEVINE: You—you said that you—you liked black people right away. Had you ever seen black people before you came?

STONE: Only once in Munich. You know, in Munich we had the Oktoberfest, the October festival. And there was a black man and my sister was a little, little girl, maybe four or five years old. And he liked her. She was very cute. And he picked her up and, you know, held her up high. And she started screaming holy murder. She had never seen a black person before. And that made a big impression on me and the—the only black man I ever saw until I came to the United States. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And then did you have contact here? I mean, much contact? Were you—

STONE: Not right away, no. But, you know, whenever, for instance, I had to—in the early years, I had some health problems. I had to have my—what do you call it?

LEVINE: Tonsils?

STONE: Tonsils taken out. And then later on, I had an operation. I had chronic appendicitis and they took a cyst out. And there were always black nurses and I always felt they were the warmest and the nicest. And I—I just liked black people a lot. I was always drawn to them.

LEVINE: So [clears throat] you—did you start—when you started working with—with photographs, were you actually doing darkroom work? Or when did that—

STONE: Well, as I told you, when I was 17, roughly, I—and I was photographing these neighborhood childrens—children, I needed a darkroom. And I was looking around and someone said, “Why don’t you go to the New York Photo League? They have a big plant down on 23rd Street and they have lots of darkrooms. And most of the men are away in the war and I bet you could use their darkrooms.” So I went down and, sure enough, I had I could. I think I had to join the Photo League, which was a minor fee. And I used to go down in the afternoons and—and work in the darkrooms down there. And then I got involved with some of their meetings and then, later, lots of the men came back from the war and among them were very famous photographers. Weegee was one of them. I got to know him. I don’t know if you know the name. His real name was Arthur Fellig and he went under the name of Weegee. And he’s very famous now. He died since but his pictures are very valuable now. And Walter Rosenblum [PH], who became the head of the Photography Department at Brooklyn College. There were many distinguished photographers in the group. Paul Strand, who became a well known photographer and moviemaker.

They were all in—in—at the Photo League. And I was very young and very naïve and knew very little about politics. But I knew that—you know, I knew I was a liberal. I knew I—I was a person who loved photographing the people in the street and so on. And I wanted to use my medium as a means to improve the world and make the world a better place. And that was always in me. And so I felt I fitted right in. And then later on, there were petitions we were supposed to sign. I didn't even know what I was signing but apparently there were some communist members among us. And e—eventually, when McCarthyism started, we were put on the—on the list, whatever—McCarthy list and we had to be disbanded. And a number of people's lives were made quite difficult because of that. One of them, who was a friend of mine—his name is Clem Kailer [PH]. He's now living up in the Berkshires in Stockbridge. But at that time, he was about to become an American citizen and they wouldn't let him become a citizen because he had been a member of the Photo League.

LEVINE: So the Photo League was disbanded as a result?

STONE: Was disbanded, yes. But it's now back in the limelight. And in fact, there was supposed to be a show being put together about the women of the Photo League by a woman called Lily Bensner [PH], who was, I think, with the University of North Carolina. And she was in touch with me last year and came to see me. And she called me maybe in April or—March or April and said, "I've got the funding and I'll be in touch with you this summer. I'll be in New York." But I haven't heard from her so I don't know what's happened.

LEVINE: Hmm.

STONE: But there—there will be shows about the Photo League and there will be—it will be in the news again.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: Because a lot of good photographers came out of that organization.

LEVINE: Now, you mentioned earlier before we were taping that—that you had been taught by Bernie Savit [PH]. Would you talk about that?

STONE: Okay. When I started seriously going into photography, I decided I needed to take some courses. And so I took a course with Bernie Savit at the new school. And I know she was a great photographer and a wonderful person but I must say, she was a bit of a dull teacher, very monotone, very monotone. And I was very young, 17, and I was kind of bored in the class. [chuckles] And I didn't listen as carefully as I should—should have. And she had one young man who was kind of her teacher's

pet. And he was always up there helping her. And so, unfortunately, I don't think I got as much out of her course as I should have and would have if I'd been a little more mature.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

STONE: I was always flirting with some guys [laughter] instead a listening and—

LEVINE: But do you think she influenced your own work in—in some ways?

STONE: Well, I think the whole—the Photo League influenced my work more than Bernie Savit. But certainly, my love for New York came from her work. And I—I think she influenced me somewhat.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: Definitely.

LEVINE: And the Photo League, do you think that influence was—was the kind of Democratic, liberal influence. Was that [unclear]—

STONE: Yeah, because they were all idealists who wanted to use photography to make the world a better place, to teach people, you know, things and not to just commercialize with it. And I think that street photography type thing, going up to Harlem, going down to the Lower East Side, I think that was instilled in me through the—through my membership in the Photo League because they all were doing that sort of work. And I started loving it.

LEVINE: And these were a—a lot of the—of the men had come from the war? That had come back from [unclear]?

STONE: Many of them were in the war and came back—and came back to the Photo League. There were some there all along. But others came back, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And d—was there some influence that they brought as a result of having been in World War II?

STONE: I really can't say because I—I didn't talk to many of them that had been in the war so I don't know, really.

LEVINE: Hmm. So—

STONE: But we—I think we had, at that time, the Louis Heim [PH] Collection. The Photo League owned the Lois Heim Collection or it was given to them to take care of it. I don't know where it is now, maybe with you people.

LEVINE: Hmm.

STONE: With Ellis Island. I don't know. But, you know, those were the early immigrant pictures that were so famous. And they were with the Photo League at that time. Yeah, you should look into that.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, okay. And so when the League was disbanded, wh—what did you do? What filled in that—that hole [unclear]?

STONE: Well, you know, I was quite sad about it but by that time I was, you know, much further along. And I guess—let's see, I was working for different photographic places. One of my first jobs with—with a big photo lab called Pavell [PH]—this was still during the war and we were, I think, involved in war pictures, sorting them and printing them and getting them to different wartime organizations. And I was just, you know, somebody who organized the—the pictures and sorted them and matched them with the negatives and so on. It was a boring job but it was a job. And then for—I left that and I started working for a photographer, also of German immigrant, by the name of Gary Wagner. And he had a big photo lab and also a studio where he made copy—transfer copy negatives of pictures for people. And he rented out the studio to photographers. So there was a lot of activity that and it was interesting for me and I always learned a lot. And I started photographing myself and walking around the city and photographing. And I remember the day—well, first of all, I remember VE Day because I had—I was—I—still working for Gary Wager and I had gotten—my father had given me his h—his Voitlander [PH] Superb, which was a very good 2 ¼—2 ¼ camera. And I had just come home from work when the news flashed that it was VE Day. And I went up—I lived in Riverdale. I went up on the parkway and hitchhiked back down and went to Times Square and got up on the fire engines and sat there with all the other photographers taking pictures and walked around Times Square a little bit and ended up with another photographer going out for drinks. [laughs] I had a good time. And then when Roosevelt died, I remember that. I was all around town taking pictures of people sitting and reading the paper and crying, and the atmosphere. So I—you know, I started—

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

LEVINE: —work. You were getting into the photography world and—

STONE: Right.

LEVINE: And is there—did life—

STONE: What—

LEVINE: —for them change at all?

STONE: No, not much. I think that, you know, they—I mean, my mother—but they were struggling and my mother was managing. But she was in and out of depression so it was very hard for my father. And he was struggling to make a living. Then the cousin of his died and my father became the executor of his will. And I think he had a salary from that so that helped a little bit, and I think that it alleviated the problem a little bit. I remember my mother saying, "Things are a little better for us now." And then I was bringing in money too. So I guess things were a little better. But I think my father died a broken man.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. And so when you—you were working for Wagner—

STONE: Gary Wagner, yeah.

LEVINE: Gary Wagner. And then where did you go—what—where did you work between working for Gary Wagner and working for the European Picture Service?

STONE: Oh, yes. Well, in between that—let me see. I quit Gary Wagner because he was making passes at me [laughs] and I didn't like it. And I worked in a photographic studio for a very short time, probably a week, because I wanted to be an assistant photographer and I wanted to learn how that worked. And in was in ad—he did advertising photography. And I knew how to load big 4 by 5—what do you call them? You loaded the films into them and then they were put into a big camera. And he gave me a box of film and told me to go in the darkroom and load them, which I did, load the film. And then the client came and we did this advertising job. And he was very tense, very tense man. And he said, "Push that light closer! Do this!" You know, he was yelling at me all the time. And then when he developed the film, it turned out he had given me the wrong box of film. He had given me copy film. So the pictures didn't turn out. And he blamed me for it. And he said, "If you'd known more, you would have known I'd given you the wrong box of film." [chuckles] Which I doubt that I would have. You know, I wouldn't have looked at it. He gave it to me. Anyhow, he fired me. It's the only time I was ever fired. [chuckles] And so then I was kind of fed—fed up with the whole thing. And at that time, I had a man friend, a boyfriend, who was a musician, a violist. And he was going up to Tanglewood, the music festival, for two months of studying at

Tanglewood. And I was between jobs and I had nothing to do. And he said, "Why don't you come up there? You can photograph musicians at Tanglewood." Tanglewood's a very famous place. I have never heard about it. And I said, "Oh, I'd love to do that but, you know, I have to make a living. I can't just go up and not do anything all summer." He said, "Well, go up and get yourself a waitress job." So I—before the Fourth of July, I went up by myself on the train. I'd never been there, hitchhiked into town. I got myself a room and I asked the woman whether she knew of any waitress jobs. And she said, "Well, it's a little late. Most people have their—have their staff already. But you might try Howard Johnson's in Pittsfield." So I hitchhiked to Howard Johnson's in Pittsfield and I got myself and my girlfriend, who had said, "I'll come with you," a job. And we both became waitresses from four until midnight, worked at Howard Johnson's. And in the meantime, I got myself a letter from a picture agency in New York that I was a photographer, and that they had asked me to photograph musicians at Tanglewood. So the—I had a press card and they gave me rein to sit in on all the rehearsals. And this was in 1947 and Tanglewood was still fairly small, and not like now when—now, when you want to photograph a musician, you have to get permission and the—the arrangements have to be made. It's awful. But in those days, you could just go in, sit in on rehearsal. So there was Lenny Bernstein. There was Kosivitsky [PH]. There was Copeland [PH], Herniger [PH]. And I got to know them all. And Lucas Fores [PH]. And I sat in on rehearsals and I photographed. And I had a ball. And then at around three o'clock we would—hitchhiked to Howard Johnson's and [chuckles] become waitresses. And I al—was always worried that the musicians would walk in one night after a concert. And sure enough, one night, Lenny Bernstein, Copeland and a few others sat down at my table. And in the kitchen, I said to my friend, "I can't go out there. They think I'm this famous photographer from New York and here I am"—and—but I had to or I would have lost my job. So I went out there and Lenny was—always very nice. He said, "Oh, what are you doing here?" And I said, "Well, I have to eat. I can't just photograph." So he said, "Oh, what's good on the menu?" So I told him and sure enough, he ordered that. And then, just before he left, he said to me, "Listen, on Sunday we're having a party at this castle in Great [unclear] and it'll give you another chance to photograph me. Why don't you come upon my invitation?" So I told my boss I had to take off and I went. [chuckles] So he was a neat guy. He was very nice. And I photographed him, you know, for a number of years. But then in later years, I—it was too difficult to photograph the musicians. But I did see him the year he died and he looked horrible. I sat in a rehearsal and he looked so awful. We all knew he was going to die soon.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: So that was my experience getting into the music field. And then, toward the end of that period, I got a call from my mother saying that a man—a—a—"a Mr. Haas called from the European Picture Service and they have a job for you. So come on back." So we quit the job as waitresses and we went back and I got the job at the European Picture Service, where I was for six years.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

STONE: And I worked, as I told you, as—doing captions, writing and translating captions, selling pictures, working on the files. And he let me photograph for him and he sent me out on a lot of different assignments. So that gave me a—a very good opportunity to photograph a lot of well known people. He knew a lot of opera people so I was able to photograph well-known opera people, and different events and the tennis matches. He was a tennis photographer. He took me out there. I have a—a funny anecdote [chuckles] of my experience as a tennis photographer. Well, the first time he took me out there I was, you know very young. And I had a very low cut lin—pink linen dress on with a little jacket over it and high, high heels. And we were sitting up in the press b—box. It was in August. And he said to me, "Look, these guys are warming up. Go out there and take some pictures." So I had to take my little jacket off because it was very hot and I just went out there with my high heels on. And somebody coming running over to me and said, "You can't go out there in these high heels. You're going to ruin the field." So I just kicked them off and I went out and I started with my Rolleiflex, kneeling down, photographing these Australian guys warming up. And suddenly, the whole stadium applauded and I thought they were applauding for these guys. The guys stopped playing and they said—they looked at me and they said, "Hey, don't you know they're applauding for you?" [chuckles] I was so embarrassed because of my low-cut dress and being barefoot. So I got off the field as quickly as I could. But for weeks after that, I would meet people and they said, "Oh! You're the girl who made such a scene at Forest Hills." [laughter]

LEVINE: Now, this is a Mr. Haas. H-A-A-S?

STONE: Yeah, Max Haas was his name.

LEVINE: Max. And h—now, what prompted the call to your mother asking that you come back? [unclear]—

STONE: Well, I had applied to various jobs and this was advertised, I think, in the "Times" before I left for the Berkshires. And I had answered that and I gu—I guess he contacted her.

LEVINE: Okay. And so it was through this European Picture Service that—it was Mr. Hass who sent you to Ellis Island?

STONE: Right.

LEVINE: Okay, why don't you—

STONE: In 1951. I remained with the European Picture Service for six years till 1953. That—M—this is another interesting story. Mr. Haas didn't have much business in the summer and I always wanted to take the summer off to photograph. And he didn't mind at all. He didn't have to pay me. So one summer, I went out to the University of Wisconsin and took a photography and a—a journalism course, a picture-editing course out there, spent the summer in a summer session out there. I wanted that experience to be an out of town—and I established a contact with the Borden Company. And while I was out there, they—they let me photograph a number of their plants. And then even when I came back they gave me assignments here in the east photographing farms and plants. And then another year I decided I wanted to go to Europe. And I had never—I had not been back to Europe since 1937 when I immigrated. And this was 1952 and I wanted to see where I came from and I wanted to go back. So at that time I was a member of the Riverdale Count—the Riverdale Count—no, the Riverdale Camera Club. And I met a friend of mine, Anita Bea [PH], an Austrian woman. We're still friends. She's a bit older than I, but at that time she was in her early 30s and I was in my mid-20s. And we decided that we were going to go to Europe together. And we both loved music so we decided we were going to go to Casal's [PH] Music Festival in the South of France in—in a town called Praud [PH]. And they had an office here in New York and I contacted them and they made all the press arrangements for us. And then I got myself a semi-assignment from a magazine, who were interested in our doing a photographic story of—of the Ca—Casals Music Festivals. But they said, "If you can possibly get one of the musicians to write the text, we would like that very much." So when we got there we let the word get around that we were looking for some musicians to write the text to the story we were doing. And both Isaac Stern and Joseph Seghetti [PH], famous photographers, wanted to do it. So they both catered to us very much. And that's how I became very good friends with Isaac Stern and his then new wife, Vera. And they ushered me into Casals and it—it was—it was a—the highlight of my life, that experience. It was a beautiful experience and I got wonderful pictures of Casals. And then later on, I photographed him again up in Vermont and I got a record jacket for Columbia Records. And so this is how I got involved in the music photography [chuckles]—of music. And so Mr. Haas was always very happy when I went away in the summer, took pictures, which he then could sell and get his 50 percent on. And he didn't have to pay me during that time so it all worked out very

well. And that's how I managed every summer to—to go on photographic trips.

LEVINE: Hmm. And you said you were—you were also—because you speak German, you were also, what? Being able to write captions in—in both languages?

STONE: Yes, he had—he distributed his pictures to German picture agencies, to British ones, to French ones. And when we got pictures in, the captions had to be translated so we could send them overseas. So I did that.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And were you—are you able to speak French as well?

STONE: I did. You know, I don't speak it so well anymore but I—I managed. And whatever I couldn't, you know, I looked up in the dictionary. But I—I got along. In fact, at the Casals Festival I became friends with a French recording engineer and I met him again in Paris. And he didn't know a word of English. But somehow, we got along with my little French. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: But what led me to—actually, to tell you about these trips, when I came back from this last trip in 1952, Anita and I had taken many pictures. We did all kinds of picture stories. For instance, we were introduced to a man who made pictures out of wool. This was done in the Pyrenees. He took, like, pieces of wool and put them together on a flat cardboard and made portraits, portrait of Queen Elizabeth, portrait of Casals and all of them. They really looked like these people, all done with wool. So we did a picture story on that and when we came back, we were able to sell that a couple of times. And of course, the Casals Festival pictures, I sold. And, oh, we did another story. There was a museum in Switzerland, Muse Rede [PH], and the man was a Russian who had taken a lot of i—icons out of Russia and started a museum in Switzerland. We did a story on that. We did all these picture stories and we were able to sell them all, and also, individual pictures. So we felt that we could maybe start a picture agency and be on our own. We had this good beginning. We'd made all these contacts, sold all these pictures. So I quit my job with Max Peter Haas, who was a very strange man anyway. He was paranoid. He was a very paranoid person and he ended up in a mental institution. I mean, once, while I was working for him, he had this rickety typewriter table. And I got u—up very quickly and the table fell over and the typewriter broke. And he didn't talk to me for weeks. And I said, "Mr. Haas, I'll pay for the—for the repair." No, just wouldn't talk to me, thought I did it purposely. That's how he was. He was really mental.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: So it was time for me to leave. So I quit and Anita and I decided to start a picture agency. And we were called Photo Representatives. And we had a little office on 42nd Street and we sold pictures. And I still worked for "Time" magazine. I had assignments for "Time" magazine. [coughs] And we managed to get a lot of well-known, good photographers, including Weegee, who was very well known. We represented him. And it became a very good little income for me for six years. We had the picture agency. In the meantime, during that time I got married and had my first child. And it got more and more difficult for me, because sometimes the babysitter stood me up and I had to take my baby along to the office. And so after six years of running this picture agency and my having become a mother, and the economy was, at that time, in a recession and the business wasn't go—going that well. We decided we would give up the business. And we made arrangements with two other picture agencies to take over [unclear]. We wrote to all the photographers and—and asked them if they would be willing to go to another picture agency. So for two more years we still got an income out of it. We had made arrangements. And so that was the story of my own picture [chuckles] agency. And then I stayed home and started photographing my children and their friends. And that's how I became a photographer of children. [laughs] And then I got known with—as that and I built up a big picture file, which I have upstairs. I can show you.

LEVINE: Just a—what was Anita's last name?

STONE: Anita Beer, like the drink, beer. B-E-E-R. And we're still very good friends.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: She is 81—83 years old now. And she's very active, plays tennis and swims and we're very good friends.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So, now, was she working with the—with the European Picture Service?

STONE: No.

LEVINE: That was the [unclear]—

STONE: No. I met her—I met her in the camera club and she was not working. She had one daughter, whom she'd put into a sort of a summer school in Switzerland while she and I traveled together. And at the end of her trip she met her husband and picked up her daughter and they traveled

together. And I met my aunt from Germany and traveled with her a little longer. But we had this very productive trip where we took a lot of pictures. And then after we gave up our picture agency, which we had for six years, she became—and this is interesting because she was always—she always said she wanted nothing to do with Germans and Germany, because of Hitler and the Nazis. She wouldn't go to a German restaurant. She didn't read any German books. But somehow, the opportunity came for her to become the representative—what do you call that—New York representative for the German magazine "Der Spiegel." And she was sent over to Germany to meet them. And she liked the people. They were all a new generation, young people and not, you know, anti-Semitic. And she became very good friends with many of them. So she became their New York representative. And ev—every morning they called from Germany and gave a—a request to get certain pictures to call this picture agency or call "Time" magazine, get that pictures—and then she got these pictures on the plane to Germany so they'd be there in the next day for the "Spiegel," which was a weekly magazine like "Time."

LEVINE: Was she—

STONE: And when she went away—away on vacation I took over that work. So I was for a while a representative. And then that's—through her, I got a lot of photo assignments for "Der Spiegel" too.

LEVINE: Now, was she, herself, German Jewish?

STONE: Austrian. She's from Vienna. Austrian Jewish, yeah.

LEVINE: Okay, so getting back to the European Picture Service and the—and the—the assignment to go to Ellis Island, will you talk about that?

STONE: Well, one day, Mr. Haas said to me that there was a woman on Ellis Island. And unfortunately, I don't know her—remember her name, who had been there for two years, and it's been in the newspaper. And she won't go back to Vienna and they won't let her into the United States. And he thought it'd be interesting to go to and see her and photograph her. So he sent me to Ellis Island. And when I got there, the head of Ellis Island took me to her and I photographed her. And Mr. Haas already knew all the information about her from the paper so I didn't interview her or anything. I just photographed her. And then I just decided that I wanted to photograph the rest of Ellis Island. And I asked the man who was the head whether that would be okay, and he said sure.

LEVINE: [sentence unclear].

STONE: And I think he gave me somebody to walk around with me.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: And the way I photographed in those days, I used the Rolleiflex, the 2 ¼, 2 ¼ camera, which I have since given up and I now shoot 35-millimeter where you can change lenses. You never could with the Rolleiflex. But it was fine; I got very good negatives. And I used one flash on the camera and then a second flash. And I usually asked somebody to hold the second flash so that I'd get more interesting lighting. So this person who went around with me was sort of like my assistant. He always held the second flash. And in those days, we had flashbulbs, which you then had to take out and burn your fingers with [chuckles] and—and get rid of, and I usually left them lying all over the place. And I had a bag over my shoulder with the flashbulbs in it. Now, it's much more—much easier with the electronic flash. And so I just went around from place to place and this person showed me all the interesting places and I just took my pictures.

LEVINE: Maybe you could just mention some of the—some of the—the shots that you have in your collection, which is probably, what, about 50 or so?

STONE: Fifty-one. Oh, how many pictures?

LEVINE: Pictures.

STONE: I—I imagine maybe 40 or so.

LEVINE: Something like that, lovely pictures.

STONE: Well, you know, I showed the big room. They call it, what?

LEVINE: Great Hall.

STONE: The big—Great Hall. And there was a woman giving a man a haircut there while I was there and I photographed that. And I happened to get daylight coming in through those big windows—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: —which I think I combined with flash, and so that it was a little more interesting lighting. And then everywhere, there were people sitting. If—if you can get me [chuckles]—

LEVINE: [unclear]

STONE: I can't walk over there because I don't want to—the folder. Everywhere, there were people sitting. Some of them were sleeping. Others were playing cards. Some people were reading. There was a library, I believe, with books and people were sitting, reading. There were quite a few children. [telephone rings] Oh—[tape off/on]

LEVINE: Okay, we're continuing here. Erika Stone is going through her photographs of—actually, took at Ellis Island in 1951 and commenting on that.

STONE: Well, as I was saying, there were people of all kinds of nationalities, Oriental, non-Oriental, all different nationalities everywhere, reading newspapers. There was a group of Chinese boys that were reading Chinese newspapers. There were others sleeping. There were children playing around. I was taken to the cafeteria where people were eating. I was taken to private rooms, which, I guess, were for whole families. And I photographed a family sitting at their table, the father and son sitting at the table reading and the mother sitting in the background knitting. And this gives a view of what the rooms were like. I came across a corner where they had a billiard table and men were playing billiards. I saw the dormitories where the people were sleeping with lots of beds in a row. There was a library where people were taking out books and reading. There was a medical office where people got shots or were taken care of when they were ill. There was a school, which I also saw. And I had one picture where a little immigrant-looking child was pledging allegiance to the flag of the United States, but the—the—I had taken it with another camera, a 35-millimeter camera, a Leica that I had at the time. And Mr. Haas at European Picture Service retained those 35-millimeter pictures. And later on, his—all his whole file was sold to an outfit called Freelance Photographer's Guild, FPG, and for years and years, I tried to get these pictures from them and the negatives. And they always said they can't find them. So I lost those negatives. And I'm very sad about that. Let's see. The cafeteria, people getting food. Oh, I think I told you, there was a haircut—somebody was getting the haircut. There was a room where all their luggage was on shelves. I photographed that. And I photographed individual people and I photographed the head of Ellis Island at the time, Mr. Phillip Forman [PH].

LEVINE: He was the one who gave you permission to—

STONE: Permission, yes.

LEVINE: —[unclear].

STONE: Yes. And a Chinese mother with her playing with her baby. And I photographed the signs in different languages, for instance, to the dining

room, some schweizesal [PH]. [speaking in foreign languages]. All in—in five different languages. And I photographed kids playing chess together. There was a lot of boredom there, not—not enough to do. There was no TV. And I photographed people coming off the ferry to go to Ellis Island and groups of children just looking bored, very much looking like immigrants. And I think that's about it. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Okay. Well, we have about—a few minutes left on the tape. Maybe you could say what you did after the—after [clears throat] your—you had your own agency. And you started and you had—well, why don't you say who you married and how you met your husband.

STONE: [chuckles] Okay. Well, I met my husband up in the—in the Berkshires in Lenox, Massachusetts, which I fell in love with where the—where the Tanglewood Music Festival was and where I always wanted to have a place. [chuckles] And he was working in the camera shop up there. And one of my friends had met them—met him and she said, "Hey, there's a cute fellow working in the camera shop. Let's go in and have our film developed." So we did. And we—he and I started talking and he was very interested in photography. And so we became friends and he took me to Tanglewood that night and out to dinner or something. And then I went back—when I went back to New York, he was still working up there and we corresponded. In fact, one day he sent me a postcard and it was a big—what do you call it—a paper—what do you call that, going—coming across the street?

LEVINE: Like a banner?

STONE: Yeah, a banner.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

STONE: A big banner and it said, "Welcome back, Erika." And he said on the postcard, "You see the Chamber of Commerce had gone to all this trouble to make a banner, 'Welcome back, Erika,' so you must come up and visit me." [chuckles] And I was so impressed with that and I thought he had gone to all that trouble to do that. Well, later, he told me he was photographing in a camp and there was a counselor by the name of Erika who had been sick and in the hospital and the kids made that banner. And he photographed and made a postcard out of it. [chuckles] So this is how our friendship started. And then his boss had a studio here in New York too. He—in fact, he was a photographer for Carnegie Hall. So Bill, my husband, came back and assisted him here in New York and we started seeing each other. And—

LEVINE: And his name is Bill Stone?

STONE: Bill Stone, yeah. And after a while, we, you know, realized we liked each other a lot. And then my father died very suddenly, which—between Christmas and New Year's also. He died of a heart attack while being in a movie house. And we were called by the police in the evening. I think my mother and he had had a misunderstanding about his smoking. And he walked out and he went to the movies and died there, which was not good. And so I called Bill and I said, "We have to go over to the hospital to identify his body. I can't do it." And so he came and he did it for me and, you know, that made us even closer. And then we decided to get married. [chuckles]

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B]

[BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A]

STONE: [chuckles] And we—

LEVINE: And your children's names?

STONE: I have a son, Michael, and a son, David. And they're very old now. Michael, I think, is 38 and David is 36. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Now, we just have about a minute. If you could just say a thumbnail sketch about your—your work photographing children.

STONE: And then when my children were born, I didn't want to be always on call by "Time" magazine or "Der Spiegel," having to travel or go off. I couldn't just, you know, on the spur of the moment leave my children to do these spot news assignments. So I decided—I had to do some photography. It was a very strong desire in me. So I started photographing my children and their relationship with their father. And I always had my camera ready. And whatever took place between Phil and the kids, I phot—photographed. Well, first, Michael and then later with David too. And so I got quite a collection of pictures of father and child. And I started going to the baby magazines and showing them and they started using them. And then they gave me other assignments and they asked me for ideas, like baby bath, do baby bath. And then I had one idea when my second son was born. I had the idea of getting a big doll that was almost the size of a baby and a little tub and a little bottle so that he could do all the same things that I did with a real baby and it would keep him from being jealous and interfering and having sibling rivalry. And it worked beautifully. So I did a picture story on that, my husband bathing the baby and he took some pictures of me feeding my child. And Michael was always there with his little tub bathing his doll and then feeding his doll. And then when the baby was old enough to be handled by him, he got tired of the doll and

pulled out the arms and everything. [chuckles] And then he was able to really handle the real baby. And that story, I did three times with other families. And it always sold because, psychologically, it was very helpful to parents to do that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

STONE: And so some of the baby magazines used that. Anyhow, I took more and more pictures of families and babies and friends and interaction with my children and other children. And all the baby magazines started using my pictures. And then I got into "Parents" magazine and I became known as fairly well known baby photographer. And that stayed with me for a long time. And I have a tremendous file of about 50,000 color transparencies and maybe 60,000 black and white pictures of family and children and school situations and pediatrics and everything to do with family and children.

LEVINE: Huh.

STONE: But now, as I mentioned to you, the—the—I had a very good business for a long time. But it's changed totally now because there are a lot of free pictures out there, clip art. A lot of companies have made clip disks. And the publications have also fallen on hard times and have merged. The—all the publishers have merged with each other. There are fewer publishers and they're using a lot of free pictures now. So my business has really shrunk. I still have a little bit but it's gone down 80 percent. I maybe have 20 percent of the business left.

LEVINE: Okay. Just before the tape expires, let me just say that the City Museum of New York has a number of your pictures.

STONE: Right.

LEVINE: And we'll have, perhaps, some—

STONE: In their—in their permanent collection.

LEVINE: In their permanent collection. And we'll perhaps have some—a folder with some of the write-ups on your work at Ellis Island as well.

STONE: Could be.

LEVINE: Okay. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I've been speaking with Erika Stone. And it's September 3rd, 1997. We're here in New York City and I want to thank you for a most interesting interview.

STONE: You're welcome. [laughs] I enjoyed it.

LEVINE: Good.

[END OF INTERVIEW]