

EI-948

PHOEBE (FANAY) AKIVIS SHULMAN

BIRTHDATE: JUNE 24, 1910

INTERVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 23, 1997

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 87

RUNNING TIME: 48:53

INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

RECORDING ENGINEER: PETER HOM

INTERVIEW LOCATION: BROOKLYN, NEW YORK

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:

UKRAINE VIA ROMANIA, 1922

AGE: 12

SHIP:

PORT:

RESIDENCES:

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Tuesday, September 23rd, 1997. I'm in the Sheepshead Bay section of Brooklyn and I'm here with Mrs. Phoebe Shulman. Mrs. Shulman came from the Ukraine in 1922. She spent a chunk of time in Romania prior to leaving for the United States. She was 12 years old at that time. Present also in the room are Mindy Hapeman and Peter Hom, who's running the recording equipment. I should also say that we're a neighborhood near a—a major street so we may hear some street traffic on the recording. Mrs. Shulman, thank you very much for letting us traipse into your house and take over. Can we begin by you giving me your birth date?

SHULMAN: June 24th, 1922.

SIGRIST: Your birth date.

SHULMAN: My birth date?

SIGRIST: The day you were born? What was the date of your birth?

SHULMAN: Like a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday?

SIGRIST: No, no—

SHULMAN: Well, I said June 24th.

SIGRIST: Yes, and what year?

SHULMAN: 19—1910.

SIGRIST: 1910, right. You said 1922.

SHULMAN: See, I li—I [unclear] so long already that I'm—I'm mys—I can't believe it. Yeah. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: [laughs]

SHULMAN: Oh, boy.

SIGRIST: June 24th, 1910.

SHULMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the town where you were born?

SHULMAN: I was born in—let me see. Where was I born? Well, Sovr [PH]. It was a small n—put down [unclear] with [unclear], which was a big city.

SIGRIST: Would you know how to spell Sovr?

SHULMAN: Sovr?

SIGRIST: Yes.

SHULMAN: Give me a pencil. I'll write it down.

SIGRIST: Here's a pen. Mrs. Shulman's just going to spell out Sovr for us. You can use any—

SHULMAN: Where?

SIGRIST: —blank spot. Anywhere. It doesn't matter.

SHULMAN: Did she—she didn't put it down here?

SIGRIST: No. Just—just spell it out.

SHULMAN: Mmm. Do you think I remember? Sovr.

SIGRIST: Okay. So you think that's spelled S—

SHULMAN: I—I don't know. S-O-V-R.

SIGRIST: Okay.

SHULMAN: As the—the valley of the owl.

SIGRIST: Okay.

SHULMAN: If you want to translate it.

SIGRIST: What—do you know what part of the country that's in? Where in the Ukraine is that?

SHULMAN: Well, it's near communist—it's—what part of the country? You mean a—as far as big city?

SIGRIST: The north or that south or the east or the west. You know?

SHULMAN: I don't really know.

SIGRIST: Okay. What—what sticks out in your mind about the town? What do you remember about the town itself?

SHULMAN: Uh-huh, the town itself. I know that my father had a paper factory where we were. And I remember playing with a little girl and that's about it. We had a very big home. We had a maid—

SIGRIST: Could you describe the home for me, specifically? What did it look like?

SHULMAN: Well, it was a one-family house, I remember, big house. And it had a—it had a big living room. And I remember that living room because my brother, who was older than I was, came back from high school or college—gymnasia [PH], that time, it was called. We had a private teacher; we were younger. And when he came home, he told my mother that he's a vegetarian. The reason I remember that living room was that my mother opened this beautiful big door, and there was a living room. This was like a kitchen or something. I don't remember that. And she cooked chicken for him. I remember the plate that—

over plate that she put the chicken on and something else. And she locked him in that room. The next morning, he was no longer a vegetarian. He finished the chicken and that was finished. That's the only thing I remember [chuckles] about that—that home. Yeah.

SIGRIST: You mentioned that your father had a paper factory.

SHULMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

SHULMAN: Well, you can call him Michael, was I chael—I-C-H-A-E-L.

SIGRIST: And what do you know about your father's family background?

SHULMAN: What—

SIGRIST: Like his childhood and growing up?

SHULMAN: Well, I know one thing, that he was one son. He had about 10 sisters. He was the only child, the only boy.

SIGRIST: The only boy. Did he ever tell a story about what that was like to grow up in a house with his sisters?

SHULMAN: No, no. I know one thing. He did say that they had—my grandmother had a goat and they used to milk that goat. And all this—11 children had enough milk from that poor little goat. That was always on my mind. That poor little goat. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about your father's paper factory and how he got involved in that business.

SHULMAN: Well, how he got involved—I don't know how he got involved but he was there. I can't tell you too much about the factory. I remember big trucks of old papers, magazines and everything used to come in from a different city or somewheres. And that was the—the bulk that they used to make paper, the brown paper bags. That was what he did. That was his. That's all I can remember.

SIGRIST: Did you, as a child, ever visit the factory?

SHULMAN: Yes, we—

SIGRIST: Do you remember a—a specific occasion where you went over to the factory?

SHULMAN: Well, the factory was on the same—say, on the same lot or block that we lived on. To go into the factory, I don't remember that. I remember the big trucks of old papers that used to be brought in, and that was turned into a recycling business.

SIGRIST: What did your father—what was his specific job there? Did he own it or—

SHULMAN: He owned it.

SIGRIST: He owned the—

SHULMAN: Yeah. Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: —paper factory.

SHULMAN: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: And was this a family business of some sort?

SHULMAN: Well, there was no family. He owned it. As far as a family, you mean brother, sisters of his?

SIGRIST: Yes, were there other people involved in that?

SHULMAN: No, no, no. He had help.

SIGRIST: What was your father's personality like?

SHULMAN: Very good, very gentle, very loving. Take me. I—I—I'm like my father. [laughs]

SIGRIST: Wh—as a child, were there certain things that you enjoyed doing with your father or places that you enjoyed going with your father?

SHULMAN: Well, there were—no, I don't remember anything like that. No, no. [sniffs] He was busy and we had friends. I—I really don't recall anything with my father.

SIGRIST: What did your father do for his own pleasure when he wasn't working? How did—how did he enjoy himself when he wasn't working?

SHULMAN: I don't—I don't remem—I—I remember him only in the office working. He had—what do you call that—a calculator? Where you push the—back and forth.

SIGRIST: Oh, you're—you're gesturing, like a abacus of some sort.

SHULMAN: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. That was his—that's the way he was keep—kept his records or something. But I don't remember what it—what he was doing. I think he fished. We had a lake nearby. I think he li—he liked to fish.

SIGRIST: I—I meant to ask you this before. What was your name when you were born?

SHULMAN: Born Fanay, a Russian name.

SIGRIST: That would be your first name.

SHULMAN: Yeah, my first name.

SIGRIST: Fanay. Can you spell that?

SHULMAN: And—F-A-N-A-Y. Fanay, and Akivis. A-K-I-V-I-S.

SIGRIST: Which would be your maiden name.

SHULMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes, which is written down here.

SHULMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And did you have a middle name at all?

SHULMAN: No, I don't think I had a middle name.

SIGRIST: Were you named after someone?

SHULMAN: Well, that doesn't mean I have to have a middle name.

SIGRIST: No, but I'm wondering if—if you—

SHULMAN: Oh, I—I must have been named after a relative. I don't know.

SIGRIST: But not to your knowledge.

SHULMAN: No.

- SIGRIST: No. And do you know anything—did anyone ever tell you a story about the day you were born?
- SHULMAN: Yes. The day I was born, I was born—now, you have it here, June what—June 24th?
- SIGRIST: June 24th, 1910.
- SHULMAN: Oh, in June 8th, my mother said there was such a terrible snowstorm—June 8th. I remember that. So that was—brought me in, that storm.
- SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?
- SHULMAN: My mother's name, Sonya.
- SIGRIST: Sonya. And what was her maiden name?
- SHULMAN: Hochberg.
- SIGRIST: Can you spell that?
- SHULMAN: Yes. [chuckles]
- SIGRIST: Grab the pen. [chuckles] Just anywhere. You can write on the side of the—Mrs. Shulman is now writing out her mother's maiden name. And then—and then spell it out for me after you've written it.
- SHULMAN: Berg—H-O-C-H-B-E-R-G.
- SIGRIST: Thank you. What do you know about your mother's background, her growing up?
- SHULMAN: My mother was a very beautiful woman, very independent and very smart. That's about all I know about her. [chuckles]
- SIGRIST: Do you know what her educational background was? You say she was very smart.
- SHULMAN: She was smart. She was smart. You know, there could be a—I had a brother-in-law, Dante, had eight degrees but he was such an idiot that, you know, he was stupid. [chuckles] My mother never went to college but she was a smart woman. What her education was? Well, in Europe, as a rule, they—young children never went off to a high school. They had private teachers. So what she had, I don't really know. I know we had a private teacher.

SIGRIST: Could she read and write?

SHULMAN: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: And in what language?

SHULMAN: English, Russian, Jewish.

SIGRIST: Did she speak English in Europe or—

SHULMAN: No.

SIGRIST: —was that after she got here?

SHULMAN: No, no. We—none of us spoke English in Europe.

SIGRIST: So—so in—in Europe, you spoke Russian—

SHULMAN: Russian. Russian, mostly Russian, yes. But she, with my father, my grandparents, I imagine, spoke Jewish. They didn't want us to understand.

SIGRIST: And that's the same thing as Yiddish?

SHULMAN: Yeah, Yiddish.

SIGRIST: I see.

SHULMAN: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me—you started talking about your mother's personality a little bit—what sorts of things stick out in your mind about your childhood and your mother? The things she did around the house or with you?

SHULMAN: My mother was very, very smart and I remember one thing she used to say, "If a mother was really smart, she'd never have children." Isn't that a go"—[laughs] That's so—huh?

SIGRIST: Nice to tell your children—

SHULMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —that. [laughs]

SHULMAN: Well, my—one thing about my mother and father, when we came here they went to night school immediately. And my mother can write and read, and my father too.

SIGRIST: Did your mother have a job outside of the home—

SHULMAN: No.

SIGRIST: —in the Ukraine?

SHULMAN: No. No, in Europe, you don't have a—no, the women don't work.

SIGRIST: You mentioned, I believe, at the beginning of the interview that you had a maid in the house or there was—

SHULMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —some domestic help. Right?

SHULMAN: Yes, yeah.

SIGRIST: What sticks out in your mind about the domestics in—in the house?

SHULMAN: Nothing I reco—I really can tell you, that—nothing. She was just—she was just there. She—she did the cooking—[unclear] the cooking. She did the cleaning. She took care of us. M—

SIGRIST: And your mother didn't do that [unclear]?

SHULMAN: My mother—no, my mother was—in Europe, when you have help, you are the lady. The help is there. You don't do anything.

SIGRIST: What were some of the things that interested your mother in life? Some of the things that she was very passionate about, interests that she had?

SHULMAN: Just to come to A—to come to America and give her children a good education.

SIGRIST: But—but I mean more, sort of, did she have a hobby or a talent of some sort? Did she—

SHULMAN: Oh, she used to s—

SIGRIST: —embroider or, you know, something?

SHULMAN: She used to sew. She used to—she used to sew. She made all our clothing.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me in words what your mother looked like?

SHULMAN: My mother was a very beautiful girl—woman with—she looked better at 99 when she died than I look now. She didn't have a wrinkle—she had wrinkles, you know, age wrinkles, but blue eyes, very, very beautiful woman.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about your life as a child in this—in this house. What were some of the things that you enjoyed doing as a little girl?

SHULMAN: As a little girl? I really don't remember anything that I enjo—I—I enjoyed everything.

SIGRIST: You mentioned that you had a—you had a private instructor in the house.

SHULMAN: Oh, yes. We had a teacher.

SIGRIST: What—what do you remember about that?

SHULMAN: I remember that he took us—he used to take us out in—at night and teach us all about the stars and the moon. I don't remember anything else. And he showed us how to eat oysters. That's about it. I don't—I can't remember anything. I can't stand here. You're sitting at my dining room table. Can I make you some tea? [laughter]

SIGRIST: That's very gracious of you. We're okay.

SHULMAN: Oh, I have ice cream. Oh, have I got ice cream.

SIGRIST: Well, maybe—maybe after we're done we can do that.

SHULMAN: How much longer you have to talk to me? [laughs]

SIGRIST: We just started. [laughter]

SHULMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: I hope it isn't torture for you. [laughs]

SHULMAN: Yeah. No, no, no. I—I just said it. No.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about your family's religious life. What religion were you?

SHULMAN: Well, as far as reli—we're Jewish.

SIGRIST: Jewish, obviously. Right.

SHULMAN: We're Jewish. But as far as—we didn't have a—a—like a real orthodox Jewish home. I remember my father used to smoke. My—grandmother came—well, before my grandmother came, my mother used to make sure that there's nothing—that she shouldn't see that my father smoked. That was his parents. Actually, no, n—not religious. Not orthodox.

SIGRIST: Did you keep kosher i—in terms of food at that time?

SHULMAN: Not really, no. No.

SIGRIST: Was there a synagogue in that neighborhood somewhere that your family attended?

SHULMAN: Where we were, no. I don't think there was a synagogue. I don't remember one. No.

SIGRIST: What about religious holidays? How would you celebrate—

SHULMAN: Holidays. We had—

SIGRIST: —Passover at that time?

SHULMAN: Yeah, holidays were holidays. We had the food that came for holidays. And holidays were like food. This was the holiday.

SIGRIST: What are some of the foods from that time period that stick out in your mind about—

SHULMAN: Holiday?

SIGRIST: Yeah. The—the kinds of things you would eat on a holiday in 1920.

SHULMAN: I don't remember. No. Everything that we ate [chuckles], nothing im—nothing that I can just put my finger on that that was what we ate.

SIGRIST: Do you remember a food in general, like—like what you would eat on a daily basis? Did you eat a lot of something?

SHULMAN: At my mother's home?

SIGRIST: Yeah, when you were growing up.

SHULMAN: We had—you know what buckwheat is?

SIGRIST: Yes.

SHULMAN: Oh, we had buckwheat in soup. We had pot roast. I don't know what—Jewish meals. N—nothing—

SIGRIST: What was your favorite place as a little girl to go in this town?

SHULMAN: We didn't have anything like that in that town. We used to go swimming to the lake. That's about it. I don't remember.

SIGRIST: How did you get to the lake?

SHULMAN: Walking.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

SHULMAN: Yeah, short distance.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Does anything stick out in your mind specifically about going to go swimming and [unclear]?

SHULMAN: Not going to go swimming. I remember there was a ledge, like before the lake, and we used to sit on that ledge and play in the lake. That's about it.

SIGRIST: Is there toy that you remember having as a child?

SHULMAN: Yes. My father went to—I think to France or someplace on a business trip. And he brought me the most beautiful doll. And I took the doll into my room and, before the day was over, I took her eyes out. I undressed her. I made nothing of that doll. Now, is that torturing a doll? [chuckles] I have so much ice cream. Let me give you the ice—sit in—no, what—what are these stupid questions? [laughter]

SIGRIST: Well, it's important. It's important—

SHULMAN: Why?

SIGRIST: It's important for somebody in the future, who—who doesn't necessarily have an understanding of this experience that you do.

SHULMAN: My daughter—I'll kill my daughter. [laughter]

SIGRIST: Well, I mean, we don't have to do the interview if you don't want to do it.

SHULMAN: No, no, no, no. I'm kidding.

SIGRIST: Okay. All right. Did you have any relatives in America at that time?

SHULMAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Prior—prior to your coming.

SHULMAN: Yes. My father's sister was here with children, and that's how we came to America. They sent us the visa.

SIGRIST: Where did she live?

SHULMAN: My father—South Ninth Street in Brooklyn.

SIGRIST: She was living in Brooklyn.

SHULMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And what was she doing in America?

SHULMAN: She was raising a family. They had four children. They had a—two chil—all four of them went to college. I remember my cousin. She was about 19; she was still going to school.

SIGRIST: Did you have other family members who lived—

SHULMAN: Nearby?

SIGRIST: Yeah, in your town—

SHULMAN: In Europe?

SIGRIST: In Europe, yeah.

SHULMAN: No, I don't remember anybody there. No.

SIGRIST: You did mention a grandmother earlier.

SHULMAN: My m—but they didn't live in our town. They lived near—nearby.

SIGRIST: How often did you see them?

SHULMAN: I didn't—I don't remember. Not too often.

SIGRIST: Not too much. No.

SHULMAN: No.

SIGRIST: Can you talk about the relationship in this town between the Jewish population and the non-Jewish population?

SHULMAN: No, that I didn't know. We didn't have anything like that. We just had—there were people but I didn't know whether they were Jewish or non-Jewish or—

SIGRIST: I see.

SHULMAN: Nothing like that.

SIGRIST: So you don't know specifically if—

SHULMAN: No.

SIGRIST: —your parents, for instance, had gentile friends or—

SHULMAN: Oh, they had gentile friends. They did. My teacher was a gentile. He came from a big city. And he stayed with us. That's about it.

SIGRIST: Was that the teacher that taught you how to eat the oysters?

SHULMAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

SHULMAN: Yeah. I told you, he was sent a—

SIGRIST: That's right. [laughter]

SHULMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, as a—as a child, how did you think about America when you were growing up? What kind of ideas did you have about America?

SHULMAN: I never thought of America. I never—and I really never did. But my mother thought of that very much. She only wanted us in America so

we can get a good ed—education. And—but I never did; I was too young.

SIGRIST: You—you mentioned you had an older brother.

SHULMAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: And were there any other children?

SHULMAN: Yes, my sister.

SIGRIST: And what was her name?

SHULMAN: Rita.

SIGRIST: Rita. What was your brother's name, the older one?

SHULMAN: Stanley.

SIGRIST: Stanley. And he—you said he was a lot older than you.

SHULMAN: Yeah, there was about five years—five—five years difference between the three of us.

SIGRIST: So your sister's about five years younger.

SHULMAN: Younger, yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Well, so it was your mother who really wanted to come to America?

SHULMAN: Oh, yes. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about how—how it all came to be? How—how was it that it was decided that the whole family would go to America?

SHULMAN: Well, we went to—of course, they used to correspond with my fam—with my father's family here in America. And we—my father sold out everything and we went to Romania, which was just a short—a short distance away from us. And we stayed there for two years until we got our visa, and that's how we came to America.

SIGRIST: How did your father feel about coming to America?

SHULMAN: I never knew. I know my mother wanted to come. My father was good. My mother wanted to come; we came.

SIGRIST: You say that you sold everything. Does anything stick out in your mind about that experience of having to sell possessions?

SHULMAN: No, I—I didn't—it didn't mean anything to me.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how you felt about having to leave your home?

SHULMAN: No, no.

SIGRIST: Or friends?

SHULMAN: I remember that we were—we had to sneak across the—the river, N—Neper [PH], I think it was, between Romania and Russia. And it was—the ice was just melting and I remember they put—what do you call—the felt shoes on my—on my shoes, felt to keep me warm. And those things got wet and by the time we went through, we were jumping from one ice—what do you call it? The ice was broken up already. And they took us across. And my shoes were—my felt shoes to keep me warm got wet and they froze. And they had to actually pull me up the hill in Romania, because I couldn't walk. They were so heavy with—with ice. That's the only thing I remember. [sniffs]

SIGRIST: You—you mentioned that you snuck across the border.

SHULMAN: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: What—

SHULMAN: We—we weren't allowed to leave.

SIGRIST: Why was that?

SHULMAN: I guess you had to have a passport or something. I don't remember. But I know we were—we got to Romania and we stayed—they arranged for us to take—at that time, they had no telephones there and they had a town crier. In the morning, he would walk the streets and tell the news. I don't know how he got the news. And we stayed with him so nobody would find us there. He was supposed to be a very loyal citizen.

SIGRIST: Was he a gentile? Jewish man? Do you remember that?

SHULMAN: I don't know what he was.

SIGRIST: Oh.

SHULMAN: No.

SIGRIST: I—I'm wondering if you have any memories about leaving your town in the Ukraine and getting to the river. Anything about—

SHULMAN: That—

SIGRIST: —that part of the journey.

SHULMAN: No, that I don't remember. Now, probably was a wagon and horse. I don't know.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what your family took with them for—you said you sold off a lot of your stuff. But—

SHULMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —what did you actually take with you?

SHULMAN: I think my mother t—took quilts—pillows, bedding, like. Well, I really don't remember too much about that.

SIGRIST: Do you remember taking something that was yours?

SHULMAN: No.

SIGRIST: Nothing. So let's see. If you are—you're—you must be, what, about 10 years old when you're getting to Romania?

SHULMAN: I—I was younger than that. I was about eight, maybe.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. And so your—your sister is even younger than that.

SHULMAN: Younger, yes. My sister was younger.

SIGRIST: Does anything stick out in your mind about making this part of the journey with a small child?

SHULMAN: No, I wasn't aware that she was a small child. I really—at that time, I didn't think of her as a child or anything. She was just there. N—nothing that I can tell you.

SIGRIST: You mentioned that you stayed with the—the town crier—

SHULMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —once you got to Romania.

SHULMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: How long did you stay with him?

SHULMAN: We stayed with him about—I think about two months and then they made room for us in the temple, and we stayed in the temple.

SIGRIST: Can—does anything specific come to mind when you—when you think about living with the town crier for two months?

SHULMAN: No, nothing at all. I know we had a couple of children there. I—I remember that part. It's a long time ago.

SIGRIST: Yes, it was.

SHULMAN: I haven't thought of that.

SIGRIST: They—they made room for you in the temple. Were you the only ones coming or were there other people were [unclear]?

SHULMAN: There was another family. Yeah, I remember there was another family, friends of my father's and mother's. They too had children. They had two boys, I think. Yeah.

SIGRIST: And what did eat along the way?

SHULMAN: Eat?

SIGRIST: Yeah, how did you eat and what did you eat?

SHULMAN: That I don't remember.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what people wore back then, what kind of clothing they wore at that time?

SHULMAN: Like any other place, coats, jackets. I don't remember [unclear]—

SIGRIST: Okay. [laughter]

SHULMAN: What questions [unclear]. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: How lo—how long did you stay in the temple?

SHULMAN: We stayed in the temple—I know we stayed in Romania for two years. Now, how long we stayed in the temple, maybe six months or maybe longer.

SIGRIST: Two—I mean, that's a good chunk of time.

SHULMAN: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: What is your family using for money if they need money a—at this time?

SHULMAN: We were very comfortable in Russia. I never thought of money because my—they probably had—

SIGRIST: Do you know, and you may not know the answer to this, but do you know if they took money with them on the journey?

SHULMAN: Well, they didn't leave the money there.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how they carried the money?

SHULMAN: No.

SIGRIST: Okay. Well, what happened next? You were in—you were in—

SHULMAN: Romania.

SIGRIST: —Romania for a couple of years.

SHULMAN: Two years.

SIGRIST: Did your father have a job at that time?

SHULMAN: In Romania, no. No.

SIGRIST: No. Did you get any schooling during that time?

SHULMAN: Yeah, we went to Roman—we went to school in Romania.

SIGRIST: And does anything stick out in your mind about that, going to school?

SHULMAN: Well, I remember [chuckles]—I remember one thing. We went shopping with my mother. Now, we went to school. And I remember she was buying me a very beautiful hat and scarf. And the

storekeeper said to her, "Shasta," which was six. My mother said—and my mother was told that in Romania you have to bargain with them. My mother kept saying Shapta, seven. And I kept saying, "Mama, Mama. That's [unclear]." [laughs] She finally realized what she was saying. She thought she was speaking Romanian and she bargained them down. [chuckles] Yeah. [laughter] So that's the only thing I can remember.

SIGRIST: What happened next? What was the next part of your journey? You were in Romania for two years and then what happened?

SHULMAN: Then we had—we had—my relatives here sent us the visas. I guess they had to. And we went to—from Romania, we went to Constantinople—Turkey, right? And we were there for a short time and we were on the freighter, not a luxury liner but a freighter. And that's how we came home.

SIGRIST: Do you remember anything about going from Romania to Constantinople? Anything about that trip?

SHULMAN: I don't even remember how we got there. No.

SIGRIST: Did you have to be photographed for a passport?

SHULMAN: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Was—do you remember wh—where that happened and what part of the trip that happened?

SHULMAN: I think that was in R—Romania, I imagine. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Does anything stick out in your mind about being photographed for—for the passport?

SHULMAN: No.

SIGRIST: Okay. So you went to Constantinople. You traveled with another family. They're also going too?

SHULMAN: Yes. Yeah. No, I—I don't remember what happened to them in Romania. We were there with them. But what happened to them later, I don't know. But I know they came to America.

SIGRIST: I see.

SHULMAN: When or how, I don't know.

SIGRIST: When you got to Constantinople—you said you were there a short time—do you remember the name of the ship that you got on?

SHULMAN: I think it was Constanza [PH]. I'm—I'm not sure. It had something, Con—Constanza.

SIGRIST: Constanza—

SHULMAN: Is—is it there?

SIGRIST: Well, your daughter put that the ship was the Constantinople.

SHULMAN: No, the—

SIGRIST: And it says that the—that the—

SHULMAN: No, Constantinople was the des—

SIGRIST: That you left from Constanza. That's what your daughter—

SHULMAN: Oh, may—

SIGRIST: —says on here.

SHULMAN: Maybe just the opposite. What differ—does it make a difference?

SIGRIST: [chuckles] Well, Constanza is a—is a port town.

SHULMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: But so is Constantinople.

SHULMAN: Oh.

SIGRIST: So—

SHULMAN: [chuckles]

SIGRIST: But you think—you think you went to Constantinople, to the city—

SHULMAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: —and—and left from there.

SHULMAN: Yes, I think so.

SIGRIST: Okay. Had you ever been on a ship before?

SHULMAN: On the ship before?

SIGRIST: Had you ever been on a—on a—on a boat before you got on the freighter—

SHULMAN: On the big one—

SIGRIST: —to come to America? Yeah.

SHULMAN: —to come to America? No, not in Europe.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what your impression was of having to get on the ship?

SHULMAN: No. I remember the food that they had there. No, I don't remember.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me what you do remember about being on the ship. What kinds of things stick out in your mind about being on this ship?

SHULMAN: That m—the—the what do you call them? Who's the one that—that runs the ship? The captain—

SIGRIST: Captain?

SHULMAN: —took a liking to me. I was a very nice little girl, homely, probably, but very good. And he used to give me tomatoes all the time. Oh, my pussycat. That's—that's my companion—

SIGRIST: Your—your kitty is looking through the window. Oh, wait, wait, wait. You're wired up here.

SHULMAN: What?

SIGRIST: Do you want to go let her in?

SHULMAN: Do me a favor? Open the door and get to a side. She may not like you so [chuckles]—

SIGRIST: Mindy is going to let the cat in the house.

SHULMAN: Yeah. Pussycat. Mama Cat. Come on in. Come on. Yeah, okay. What?

SIGRIST: Did you—did you break?

SHULMAN: What?

SIGRIST: Do you want to break? Keep going. You started telling me about the captain, the captain of the ship.

SHULMAN: That he took a like to me and I remember he kept giving me tomatoes—I love tomatoes—on the ship, because they had—it was a freighter and they used—they brought raisins in to America from wherever they were, Portugal or something. [cat meows] Wait. You'll see. She'll come on the table.

SIGRIST: [chuckles] We've been joined—what is the name—what is the name of the cat?

SHULMAN: Mama Cat. She has no name.

SIGRIST: Mama Cat. We've been joined by Mama Cat—

SHULMAN: Oh, there she is.

SIGRIST: —who's gray and white and—

SHULMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —jumped up on the windowsill behind Mindy now.

SHULMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: [laughs]

SHULMAN: Yeah, she's a very good cat.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

SIGRIST: What other things do you remember about being on the ship? Do you remember where you slept on the ship?

SHULMAN: On the ship, we were third class. We slept bel—we—[chuckles] we slept—we slept below. And—and not—nothing too much.

SIGRIST: Do you remember where you slept, if it was—

SHULMAN: Pussycat! We have company. Get her off the table.

SIGRIST: This is like the third cat this week we [unclear]. [laughs]

SHULMAN: What? No, she's a very good cat. What?

SIGRIST: Where you slept on the ship. You say you were down below. Were you in a big room with lots of people or in just a cabin with just your family?

SHULMAN: No, no, no, no. Just—just our cabin or so. I have to give her—am I [unclear]?

SIGRIST: Oh, yes.

SHULMAN: [unclear]

SIGRIST: We can—we can pause for a second—

SHULMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —if you want to—

SHULMAN: All right.

SIGRIST: [unclear].

SHULMAN: J—just put that tray down on—

SIGRIST: Put that down? Okay.

SHULMAN: —on the floor for me.

SIGRIST: I'll [unclear].

SHULMAN: Just as it goes. Thank you.

SIGRIST: With—with the—

SHULMAN: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Come here.

SHULMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: There you go.

SHULMAN: [chuckles] Thank you.

SIGRIST: You're welcome. Do you remember being up on deck of the ship?

SHULMAN: Yes, we—

SIGRIST: What could you see when you were up on deck?

SHULMAN: I saw people throwing up, hanging over the rail. I saw—oh, what do you call it—oh, those big—not fish, mammals.

SIGRIST: Whales?

SHULMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Or dolphins.

SHULMAN: Dolphins that would—they would swim, like, on the side of the ship. I imagine they would throw down leftover food for them or something. I don't know. But I remember that.

SIGRIST: Did you see anything on the ship that you had never seen before that was new to you?

SHULMAN: On the ship? No. Just the railing that people used to hang over the railing and throw up.

SIGRIST: Did you get sick?

SHULMAN: No.

SIGRIST: What about someone in your family?

SHULMAN: I think my father was sick.

SIGRIST: Did your—you—your little sister, do you have any memories—

SHULMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —of her on the ship and what she was doing?

SHULMAN: No, I don't even remember that she was there but she was there.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

SHULMAN: I don't remember.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

SHULMAN: I was busy with my own business. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: [chuckles] Does anything else stick out in your mind about being on the ship?

SHULMAN: No.

SIGRIST: Other than what you've said.

SHULMAN: Just that that captain took a liking to me and I had fresh tomatoes all the time. I love tomatoes, at that time.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how long the ship took to get to New York?

SHULMAN: Thirty-one days.

SIGRIST: Thirty-one days. Long time.

SHULMAN: Uh-hmm, yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

SHULMAN: Because it was a freighter. It wasn't a—a luxury ship.

SIGRIST: Do you remember there being a storm at sea during that time?

SHULMAN: I don't remember a storm, probably was asleep. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the ship coming into New York City?

SHULMAN: We came in—what's the matter, Pussycat?

SIGRIST: [unclear]

SHULMAN: No, no. She's—she'll calm down. She'll lay down here.

SIGRIST: She just wants to see what all the excitement—

SHULMAN: Do you mind? Do you mind if she lays down?

HAPEMAN: No, I don't mind.

SHULMAN: All right. My companion. And what I remember about the ship?

SIGRIST: When the ship came into New York City, what do you remember?

SHULMAN: It was—yes, it was about three o'clock at night and I remember the lights were on. New York was very bright. [sniffs] And they sent—somebody gave us bananas. I don't know, my relatives, what, and that's the first time I saw a banana. I thought was soap. My mother used to have fancy soaps. I thought it was soap. Pussycat, we have company. Is that right? It's not nice. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when the ship came in?

SHULMAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Yes.

SHULMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you know what that was?

SHULMAN: Well, they told us that's the Statue of Liberty. It was given to us by France. Who gave it to us? France? Yeah. [sniffs]

SIGRIST: Did you have to go to Ellis Island [unclear]?

SHULMAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about getting to Ellis Island?

SHULMAN: Well, I don't know. I think—how did we get—I think the ship was close to Ellis Island, because I remember there was a long walk. And then they examined us at Ellis Island and we were supposed to drink some, I think, cod liver oil or something. And I remember telling to the nurse or the doctor or whoever was examining us, I said, "I don't care if—you can send me back, I'm not drinking and I will not drink it." And I came in without drinking.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how long you stayed at Ellis Island?

SHULMAN: I think it was just like we came in at three o'clock, and in the morning my cousins came and we went home with them.

SIGRIST: Do you remember anything else that you saw at Ellis Island?

SHULMAN: No. I remember that my mother came. We had suitcases, of course, and my mother brought a teapot. In Europe, you travel with a teapot. And wherever—every station that you stop—you're looking at my teapots. [chuckles] That's—that's a leftover from that, I think.

HAPEMAN: Oh. [chuckles]

SHULMAN: No, I'm not kidding. I like teapots. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: We should say for the sake of the tape, since it's just an audiotape—they can't see that—Mrs. Shulman has a very lovely collection of teapots.

SHULMAN: [chuckles] That's not all. I have more in the living room. My granddaughter took already about a dozen. Yeah, I like teapots. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Well, what—what—you started telling us about your mother's teapot. What—what sticks out in your mind?

SHULMAN: Oh, yeah. My mother came in with this basket, a straw basket, I remember, and a teapot was tied up to it. And my cousin, who was a very big businessman here—he was in the ribbon business. Shore. His name was Shore, Herbert Shore, and he says to her, "Tan—Tante," [PH] or Aunt or whatever he called her, "Don't—do you mind if I take the teapot off?" He was ashamed that we should travel with a teapot. [chuckles] I don't know where my mother left the teapot. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Do you remember—you said you were examined at Ellis Island. Do you remember what kind of an examination it was?

SHULMAN: For—my h—your hair had to be examined. You shouldn't bring in any lice. No, we were clean.

SIGRIST: How—how did you have your hair back then when you were a little 12-year-old girl?

SHULMAN: Mm, mm, mm.

SIGRIST: You're gesturing to—

SHULMAN: [chuckles] Like this, like this.

SIGRIST: —to bangs over your forehead and—

- SHULMAN: Yeah, but—but I don't think—n—nothing here. I just had bangs straight, black Indian col—black hair, straight.
- SIGRIST: Kind of shoulder-length, you're pointing to?
- SHULMAN: Ah, yes.
- SIGRIST: Yeah. And does anything stick out in your mind about Ellis Island? About your time that you spent there?
- SHULMAN: No, that just my cousin came and we went home with him.
- SIGRIST: Now, this is a cousin—
- SHULMAN: My mother's—how is he my cousin? He was my father's nephew.
- SIGRIST: Father's nephew. And where did he take you when you left—
- SHULMAN: South Ninth Street in Brooklyn.
- SIGRIST: South Ninth Street—
- SHULMAN: Yeah.
- SIGRIST: —in Brooklyn. Do you remember how you spent your first night in America, what you did?
- SHULMAN: No, I remember one thing, that I wanted—they served us—my—when we came to my aunt's house and I think they were giving us tea, or I don't remember what. But I wanted sugar. And of course, I spoke Russian. I didn't speak English. And my cousin, who was 19 years old (she was a college girl) and—and she said, "No more. This is sugar." And I can drop dead. She won't give it to me until I said sugar. That was it.
- SIGRIST: Did they have—where did you sleep that night in the—in the apartment?
- SHULMAN: Well, they had—they had room for us. They had a big apartment, a big house.
- SIGRIST: And how long did you stay there?
- SHULMAN: Ah, we stayed there about two months or so and then there was a family; they were going back to Poland. And they had their apartment for—it—it was very hard to get apartments at that time. I mean, I don't

know but that's what they told me. And they—they were leaving for Poland and they were selling their—everything that they had there, including the apartment. You can—and my—I remember my father and mother went down there and they bought the apartment. The—they got—they rented the apartment but they bought everything that was in there.

SIGRIST: Like that furniture and stuff?

SHULMAN: Yeah, I remember we had a piano and a lot of pictures that would—I—I don't know. Whatever.

SIGRIST: Did the apartment have electricity?

SHULMAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Did—and it had running water?

SHULMAN: Running water, yes. Yeah, it had everything.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

SHULMAN: It had a meter in the hall, like. I remember my mother had to put a quarter in. I don't know whether the meter was for gas or for water or for whatever—whatever it was.

SIGRIST: And tell me about your father getting work in America.

SHULMAN: Yes. My father got work. It was a little bit degrading to him but he got work. He worked in the—in the factory where they made the legs for furniture.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how he went about getting that job?

SHULMAN: I really don't know how he got it but he got—but he got a job immediately.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how he felt about having to get that job?

SHULMAN: No. No, I was too young. Those things didn't mean anything to me at that time. I don't know. Nothing.

SIGRIST: Did your mother get a job?

SHULMAN: No, my mother never worked. No.

SIGRIST: Tell me about being put into school. Were you put into school?

SHULMAN: Yeah, my—my niece took us to school immediately. And I remember I went—there was a school, P.S. 37 where they took foreign children first. And I was there about a month and then they put me into public school.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about that one month, being with the other foreign children, how you felt about it?

SHULMAN: I wasn't aware that there were foreign children. I was only—I re—I don't remember. I remember that she was trying to teach us and she'd pick my hair up, and I had to get up. Down, and she'd press me down. [laughs] That's all I remember from that school. I didn't stay there long. That was my clock.

SIGRIST: Then tell me about when they put you in the public school, how that was different.

SHULMAN: Well, I was with children and—

SIGRIST: What grade did they put you into?

SHULMAN: I think they put me in the fourth grade. But I kept—they kept skipping me as soon as I knew the language a little better. I was a little better, yeah. [sniffs]

SIGRIST: Can you tell me little bit—actually, you have told me a little bit about how you were taught English. Does anything else stick out in your mind about the process of learning English and who helped you do that?

SHULMAN: N—no. The—the reason that we learned so quick, and we did, was because we stayed with my aunt, and my cousin made sure that if I wanted this, I can stand on my head, unless I said, "Matches, please," and that's how she was teaching us.

SIGRIST: Do you ever remember attempting to—to speak English, say something in English and making a mistake?

SHULMAN: No, I don't think I ever made a mistake and if I made a mistake, I didn't know it. [chuckles] And nobody correc—

SIGRIST: [laughs]

SHULMAN: And nobody corrected me.

SIGRIST: Did your parents attempt to learn English?

SHULMAN: Oh, yes. They went to—

SIGRIST: You said they went to night school.

SHULMAN: Immediately.

SIGRIST: C—

SHULMAN: My mother and father.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit what you may know of their experience going to night school? Who ran the night school, first of all? Do you know?

SHULMAN: I think it was the public schools, city schools. But they went to school immediately.

SIGRIST: And do you know what age group these classes were for?

SHULMAN: You mean for the—for the seniors?

SIGRIST: Well, for—for your mother and father. Were they all adults that went—

SHULMAN: Oh, they were all adults. There weren't in with children, no, because they went to night school, anyways.

SIGRIST: And did your parents attempt to speak English in the house?

SHULMAN: No, no. They spo—we spoke Ru—Russian only.

SIGRIST: Did your father become a citizen?

SHULMAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: How long had you been here before he did that?

SHULMAN: I think he became a citizen—I remember—1929? No, no. I don't—really don't remember. But he became a citizen. As soon as he was able to, he became a citizen.

SIGRIST: Does anything stick out in your mind about his—his—the process that he went through to become a citizen? What did he have to do?

SHULMAN: Well, he went to school. And then they'd get them in the big—a big auditorium. They swear him in and he's a citizen.

SIGRIST: Did you help him with his studies at all?

SHULMAN: I? No.

SIGRIST: Yes.

SHULMAN: No. I was younger. No. I wasn't even interested in—stop it.

SIGRIST: How about you? How—how did you become a citizen?

SHULMAN: I became a citizen through my father because we were still underage.

SIGRIST: So when he became—

SHULMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —a citizen you became—

SHULMAN: We all became citizens.

SIGRIST: What about your mother? The same?

SHULMAN: My mother became a citizen on her own.

SIGRIST: Yes?

SHULMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do—do you remember something specific about that?

SHULMAN: No, no. No, I know she went to school.

SIGRIST: What do you think the hardest thing was for your parents to get adjusted to in the United States?

SHULMAN: Oh, it wasn't easy. [sniffs] Well, first of all, to make a living for the family, where we were very comfortable in Europe. I mean, I didn't know that I was comfortable, that this was our life. And that's about it. They had friends. My mother always entertained and it was a good life.

SIGRIST: When you got a little older, did you get a job?

SHULMAN: I didn't get a job until I was in high school.

SIGRIST: And what was the first job that you got that you were paid for?

SHULMAN: Not—not a job. I was learning to be a milliner. My cousin—one of the cousins that brought us to America—was keeping company with a young lady and she had a millinery store. I remember the—I remember the location, the Hotel Ansonia [PH] on 72nd Street. Still there?

SIGRIST: Yeah, the—the Ansonia is still there.

SHULMAN: Yeah. [chuckles] And she had a millinery store where she would make a hat for Lillian Gish. I don't remember who else. Eddie Cantor's wife. The hat was, like, 35, 40 dollars and that was a fortune at that time. And she was teaching me how to be a milliner. After school, I'd go up there.

SIGRIST: Do you remember some of the things that she taught you how to do?

SHULMAN: Yeah, how to put a lining in. You have to put—take four pins, pin it in. That's about it. She used to take me out to lunch to the Tiptop. I remember a Tiptop Restaurant on 72nd Street, around the corner.

SIGRIST: And did you—did she pay you for—for learning how to do this?

SHULMAN: No.

SIGRIST: No.

SHULMAN: No, there was no—no, I had no pay. No.

SIGRIST: Did your—did your parents ever want to go back to Europe for any reason?

SHULMAN: I don't think they wanted to go back. No, there was no reason for them wanting to go back.

SIGRIST: Even to visit?

SHULMAN: Huh?

SIGRIST: Even to visit? R—I—I don't mean—

SHULMAN: To—no, I don't think so. No. They didn't leave anybody there that they would want to go. I know they wanted to go to Israel but not to Europe.

SIGRIST: To relocate to Israel? To actually—

SHULMAN: No, no, no.

SIGRIST: To just visit.

SHULMAN: For a visit.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

SHULMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you ever go back—

SHULMAN: No.

SIGRIST: —to Europe to see—

SHULMAN: No.

SIGRIST: No. Did you ever want to?

SHULMAN: I'd like to go back someday. But I don't know. Nah.

SIGRIST: Well, I just have a couple more questions and then—and then—

SHULMAN: I'll give you some ice cream.

SIGRIST: [chuckles] We'll let you off the hook. What year did you get married?

SHULMAN: What?

SIGRIST: What year did you get married?

SHULMAN: When did I get married? 1929.

SIGRIST: And what was the name of the gentleman that you married?

SHULMAN: Bernard Shulman.

SIGRIST: And what was his background? Was he born in America or Europe?

SHULMAN: He was born here. His parents came from Poland, I think. He was born here.

SIGRIST: How did you meet Mr. Shulman?

SHULMAN: As I said, I was learning to be a milliner and he had a little factory on Bonn [PH] Street, 22 Bonn Street. I'll never forget. And I thought if I—as long as I knew how to put a lining in, I'm a milliner. And I was walking there with a friend of mine and says, "Milliner wanted." So I went up. He had about three people working for him. He had just started. He was 24 years old. And I said, "I'd like—get the job as a milliner." He said, "Okay." He said—he took one look at me and he said, "That's"—he told one of the fellows that did the blocking of the felts—he said, "That's the girl I'm going to marry." [chuckles] I didn't know that. I would have run away but I didn't know. [laughter] No, I had a good life with him. He was a wonderful husband. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: And did you have children?

SHULMAN: Yeah, I have two children.

SIGRIST: And their names?

SHULMAN: Adrienne Adrian.

SIGRIST: Adrienne, who filled out the form for you.

SHULMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

SHULMAN: And Bob Shulman. Bob is in Florida.

SIGRIST: Adrienne is older?

SHULMAN: Younger.

SIGRIST: And since there are lot—lots of different spellings of Adrienne, how do you spell it?

SHULMAN: A-D-R-I-E-N-N-E, her first name, but she's married to an Adrian—A-D-R-I-A-N.

SIGRIST: Really? [chuckles]

SHULMAN: Yeah. Adrienne Adrian. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Do—did your children ever take any interest in your family background and their European roots?

SHULMAN: Not really, no. Ooh! I'm—I'm allergic, not to my cat. I don't know; my eyes are tearing.

SIGRIST: Hmm. What did you do in your life that you're the most proud of?

SHULMAN: I have two wonderful children. I married the right guy. What else?

SIGRIST: And when you think of yourself in terms of nationality, how do you think of yourself? Do you think of yourself as—as American, as Ukrainian—

SHULMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: As Jewish?

SHULMAN: No.

SIGRIST: I mean, a combination of these things?

SHULMAN: American—American Jew.

SIGRIST: What are your feelings about the United States?

SHULMAN: I think it's a wonderful country. Anybody that has anything to say about it, go home. [chuckles] Go where you came from.

SIGRIST: [chuckles] Well, good. Well, Mrs. Shuman—

SHULMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —Shulman—excuse me—thank you very much.

SHULMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: I appreciate—

SHULMAN: Could I give you some ice cream?

SIGRIST: All right. Well, let me just sign off and then we can—

SHULMAN: All right.

EI-948/SHULMAN

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Phoebe Shulman on—today is Tuesday, September 23rd, 1997 with Peter Hom, Mindy Hapeman and Ma—Mama Cat—

SHULMAN: Mama Cat.

SIGRIST: —Mama Cat in attendance. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]