

EI-952
PETER HOM
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INTERVIEWER: MINDY HAPEMAN
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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: MINDY HAPEMAN, 10/1997
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ELLIS ISLAND ORAL HISTORY PROJECT VOLUNTEER AND EMPLOYEE:
1990-1997

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: As Peter explains in this interview, he originally came to us as a high school student intern in November of 1990. On June 25, 1991 he received a certificate of recognition from the mayor of New York City at that time, David N. Dinkins, "for his tireless efforts in assisting the Oral Historian at the Ellis Island Museum to record memories of the past." Peter, his mother and I attended a formal ceremony at Manhattan City Hall where these certificates were given to the various high school age recipients who had been volunteers throughout the city. Peter's extensive experience working with the Oral History Project (first as a student intern, then a volunteer, and in 1994 an official paid staff member) makes him an integral component of the Ellis Island Oral History Project in the 1990's. I have added all information in brackets for clarification. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of Oral History, 1/29/1998.

HAPEMAN: Good afternoon. This is Mindy Hapeman for the National Park Service. I am an intern with the Oral History Project from Skidmore College. I am here in the Ellis Island Recording Studio with Peter Hom who began his career here as a high school intern with the Oral History Project in 1990. From there, he became a regular volunteer until he was finally hired by the National Park Service in 1994. Tomorrow, September 26, 1997 is Peter's last day at Ellis Island. Peter has asked that I conduct the interview and I am very grateful for this opportunity to learn more about this project that I am just now becoming involved in. I am also thankful for the interview experience as this is only my

second interview. We are going to talk about Peter's time here and the various impressions and memories he has of his experiences. Let's begin by having you state your name and your birth date.

HOM: Okay. My name is Peter Hom, H-O-M. I was born June 27th, 1973.

HAPEMAN: Where were you born?

HOM: Queens, New York.

HAPEMAN: Tell me about your family background.

HOM: My father immigrated through Canada to, to the United States in the '50s, 1950s or so. My grand-, my grandmother on my mother's side immigrated to New York City via the West Coast and my mother was born in the Bronx. And my, uh, aunts and uncles after that were also born in New York City.

HAPEMAN: And where did your father emigrate from?

HOM: China.

HAPEMAN: And your grandmother?

HOM: China.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Um. How did you first become involved with the Oral History Project?

HOM: I was in an alternative high school program called "City as School. This, I started there in the winter of 1990. Ellis Island had become a resource of ours later on that year, around the, around the fall, late fall early winter. And the museum had just opened at that time so I heard about it in

the news and was kind of interested. And there were, uh, I believe President Reagan [sic., Vice President Dan Quayle] came out here for the opening and it was, it was quite a big news story. I overheard a teacher of mine, called a resource coordinator, talk about it, and I asked him about it. His name is John Jacques, um, J-A-C-Q-U-E-S, and I still keep in touch with him. He still knows I'm here. Anyway, I asked him about it, what it was about, and expressed interest and he gave me Paul Sigrist as a contact person. This was roughly late November of 1990 or so. I came out here, met with Paul, got a tour of the museum and the rest of the island and started working in 1990, November of 1990.

HAPEMAN: Okay. What did you know about oral history prior to becoming involved?

HOM: Nothing. (they laugh) I knew nothing of oral history. I knew very little, if anything, of Ellis Island because my family, as I said, came through the West Coast. My father lived in Bu-, in uh, Canada for a while before coming through, I believe, Buffalo. So I knew nothing of oral history. I knew nothing of the history of the island itself. And so everything I picked up I just kind of picked up on through years and years of toil around here. (they laugh)

HAPEMAN: Okay. Did you have any other internships through your school?

HOM: Yeah, I had quite a few. Previously to Ellis Island I had done student teaching at elementary, private elementary schools. I worked in theater. I worked in radio. I had worked at a musical archive. So there was quite a bit of background that I came into Ellis Island with.

HAPEMAN: Okay. What do you remember about your first day at Ellis

Island?

HOM: I remember waking up that morning and asking my sister if I looked good. (they laugh) I had, my, my teacher John had recommended that I dress up somewhat so I wore a shirt and tie. I asked my sister that morning how I looked and she said it was fine. I came here, took the boat out. It, it was quite warm even though it was late November, it was still quite warm. I was wearing a very light jacket. Took the boat out here. Met Paul on the dock. He showed me the museum real quickly. He showed me through Islands Two and Three, which are the abandoned parts of the islands. As we walked through the hallways to Island Two, we passed Brian Feeney [Audio Visual Division of the museum and site photographer], who was my predecessor here and now works at Gateway [Gateway National Recreation Area]. And, that was the first time I had met Brian and Paul introduced us and I expressed interest in the audio part of the interviews and Brian, at the time, was doing that and, and, and, he told Brian that I was interested in, in learning it and Brian gave me a funny look. (they laugh) Not a, not in a mean kind of way but Brian was one who was very protective of the equipment and was very careful about who came in here [referring to the recording studio in the museum]. And, but Brian did teach me quite a bit of stuff about the audio equipment and park operations in general.

HAPEMAN: Okay. What are your impressions of your first few months, after you had time to settle a little bit?

HOM: I picked up little by little, I guess, the little things that go on here. Paul had given me some books to read. I believe at that time they had done, that the EI set [Ellis Island Interview

Series] since 1990 had, had perhaps five interviews so I had read through those transcripts and became familiar with the contents of the interviews. I think the big part of my first few months here was learning about the history of Ellis Island itself. And, as I said, Paul did give me some books and I had read up on those and I picked up just in passing quite a few things. Besides that I remember doing quite a few interviews, being involved with interviews through December and into January.

HAPEMAN: What was your first nursing home experience?

HOM: The first nursing home was to King's Park or King's Point [St. Johnland Nursing Home, King's Park, New York]. I, I get those two mixed up. But it was to a nursing home on Long Island which is where Joe Allatin [Interview EI-6] lived at the time. We did four interviews with residents out there. Brian Feeney and I and Paul Sigrist met at Penn Station that morning. Bought our railroad tickets. Got out to the, to the stop on the Long Island Railroad and we were stranded. (they laugh) And Paul or Brian called the nursing home and eventually someone came to pick us up. The DAT machine [referring to the Sony digital recording machine], which is what we use for off-site interviews, was a brand new machine at the time and Brian was learning how to use it and little by little teaching me how to use it. Um, I remember Mrs. Marchione [sic., Yolán Batta, Interview EI-13] talking about making the strudel. I believe it was Mrs. Marchione [sic., Yolán batta, Interview EI-13]. And the lunch experience...

HAPEMAN: Which was?

HOM: Which had, which had, the four people we interviewed, and Mr.

Allatin and the, I guess, the home administrator, perhaps caretaker, sat around a large table, perhaps five or six of us or so, and had pork. (they laugh) Had pork, and we have photos from that time period

and, and I believe they are somewhere around the building here.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Did you ever conduct any interviews?

HOM: Yeah, as part of my, my school program, for part of my report, I did an interview with Mr. Ohrn, Axel Ohrn, [Interview EI-27] who is in the 20s somewhere [referring to the EI series numbering system]. We drove up to Darien, Connecticut, did the interview. I recall being very nervous because it was my first interview. I had read over the form [referring to the Oral History Form, EI-54] he had sent in, I had spoken to him. What I do remember about Mr. Ohrn is that I had trouble contacting him. There were quite a few phone calls in which I got busy signals and, we figured, it was around Christmas holiday, so we figured he was away and he just took his phone off the hook. Eventually, I got in touch with him. We arranged to do the interview. We all hopped in a government car and drove up there and did the interview, which was quite good. Got over the nervousness fairly quickly. (he pause) I remember on, on Mr, Ohrn's end table there was a, a ashtray I believe that had, that had a variation of "Sigrist" on it. It was S-E-G as opposed to S-I-G and I asked Paul if it looked familiar and he didn't know. I don't remember a response exactly but I remember seeing it and Mr. Ohrn explained to us what it was and the background to it.

HAPEMAN: Great. Is that the only interview you conducted?

HOM: I conducted a second interview, and my last interview in, later on that year with John Peter [Interview EI-42], who came from Germany. He lived on Long Island and what struck me about wanting to interview him is the form [Oral History Form EI-107] he sent in was very detailed. It was very small handwriting. It filled up all the spaces, I believe, there was an extra page that he sent in with it. So, there was a lot of detail that he sent in. I got in touch with him and formulated questions in my head of what the interview would be like and what I wanted to find out. And again, we all hopped into a car and went out there and um, he went on quite a bit about his World War Two experience. We had coffee and cake afterwards. (they laugh) Entenmann's Coffee Cake (Ms. Hapeman laughs), and

tea, and sat around his table for about another hour or so just chatting before we took the car to Ellis.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Are there any early off-site trips or interviewees that come to mind, not necessarily one that you've interviewed but...

HOM: Um, Lucy Nigro [Interview EI-22], who we interviewed in, Bensonhurst, I believe, in lower Brooklyn. The, at the time, we were doing, we were going to Brooklyn quite often. We were going there, we probably went there about three or four times within a month and, and we had just found this treasure trove of immigrants in that area. Rose Levine [Interview EI-65], we interviewed who was on the same floor, as another person we interviewed. So that was quite convenient. [The other person we interviewed who lived on Mrs. Levine's floor was Martha Gardner, Interview EI-59, although they were interviewed nearly one month apart in 1991: Mrs. Gardner on July 30th and Mrs. Levine on the 20th of August. The trips to Nathan's [referring to Nathan's Hot Dogs in Brooklyn, one of Brian Feeney's favorite places] are the, are the things that stand out...

HAPEMAN: Explain those.

HOM: We would go to Nathan's to get hot dogs, and sodas, and french fries and that would be lunch. And there was a Carvel's [Carvel's Ice Cream] a block or two away where we would get dessert (they laugh). So that was a tradition. We did go to Nathan's probably about two or three times in the trips we made down there.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Let me ask you about a particular date; Thursday, September 26, 1991. Does that stick out for any reason? I can give you a clue if it doesn't.

HOM: No.

HAPEMAN: Oral History lore tells me that, that day was nicknamed "Black Thursday."

HOM: (he laughs) Which is tomorrow!

HAPEMAN: Exactly! (they laugh) Happy Anniversary.

HOM: Yeah. Thank you. Black Thursday is when we did four interviews in one day. Two interviews were scheduled. There was one person [Helen Rosenthal, Interview EI-100] who, there was some sort of mix up, that she thought she was scheduled, and perhaps she was, but Paul didn't write it down, or there was some mix up so that was the third one. And then Mr. Pastika [Interview EI-99] who lived in Washington State was, met an interpreter [Interpretation Division of the museum; this does not refer to language skills but to the staff members who assist the visitors inside the museum as well as conduct tours and function as crowd control], George Tonkin, who I will be working with at TRB's [Theodore Roosevelt Birthplace National Historic Site]. He brought him up and we interviewed him. He had, I believe, a World War Two story. So Black Thursday, I recall during one, the first interview we did, I believe, left her umbrella here [referring to the wife of David Saltman, Interview EI-97] so the superintendent, Ann Belkov, came in here during the second interview [Anthony Meritai, Interview EI-98]. I mean we were in mid-interview and she walked through the door and we stopped everything and gave her the umbrella back and Ann was, was embarrassed I think, you know, because she did walk in when she wasn't supposed to. So, I believe that was the second interview we did that day and two more after that [George Pastika, Interview EI-99 and Helen Rosenthal, Interview EI-100] . And that consisted of Black Thursday. (he laughs)

HAPEMAN: Okay. What were your impressions of the new museum at Ellis Island?

HOM: (he pauses) As I said, I had heard about it in the news. I didn't know much about it beyond that. There were, I remember, some

problems that had happened concerning some of the exhibits.

HAPEMAN: Do you remember what those problems were?

HOM: On the second floor, there are foreign coins on exhibit and they are in plexi-panels [referring to panels made of plexi-glass] and one thing, I don't know if this was an oversight or if they just didn't think of it, but they expanded and contracted depending on what the temperature was. So, if they contracted, they would, they were smaller than the space they were designed for and they would slip. If they expanded because of heat, they would bre-, break the plexi and I remember that was a concern for the museum staff. I was quite awed by the museum. It took a lot to go through. I remember seeing the movie for the first time. Um, I sat in the back row. The ranger was Marty O'Toole [Interpretation Division of the museum], who I've kept in touch with. I remember asking him what he's probably been asked a million times of, "How long is the movie?" And so, I met Marty. I met the other museum people. Um, Marcy Davidson [Curator of Exhibits], Frank DePalo [Exhibits staff] and Sydney [Sydney Onikul, Collections Division staff]. Sydney was one of the first I met out here. Um, Brian, as I said, earlier. George Gordon [Audio Visual Division], who used to be the projectionist out here. He very quickly showed me how the projection room works and how the film works. And, and Marty O'Toole and a handful of other people probably in passing.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Now, you mentioned earlier that it was Brian Feeney who taught you how to run the recording equipment. When, when did you take over, essentially, as the recording engineer?

HOM: I guess I unofficially took over in my volunteer days. I think Brian

left in '91, in the fall of '91. So, at that time, I had learned enough of the studio to feel comfortable with doing every day to day activities in the studio. A handful of volunteers came on, including Kevin Daley who is employed by the park. He came on as, as an AV tech and took, and, and took, and had oral history as one of his responsibilities. And, of course, when I was hired in '93, July, no, excuse me, '94, July of '94, that was one of the duties and I just dove right into.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Was this a willing thing?

HOM: Yeah...

HAPEMAN: Were you interested in it?

HOM: I, I, I had found audio recording an interest of mine. As I said, I worked in a radio station before so I had some familiarity with recording studio equipment and tapes and terms and thing of that sort and that was something I wanted to expand on.

HAPEMAN: What was it about your experiences at Ellis Island that made you want to stay when you've had all these other internship opportunities and you've seen so many different places?

HOM: I guess the first thing was, it was the most fulfilling. The other places I worked at were businesses and, and they weren't always as on top of these things as, not that this place was necessarily always on top of things, but in relative terms it was. I just found it different. I thought that for the summers I worked out here it was a better place to work than McDonald's, basically. It was, there was some prestige to it. You know, "Yes, I work at Ellis Island." (he laughs) So, I think there was some prestige to it.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Are there any other things that stick out of your mind, stick out in your mind about your earlier days with the project?

HOM: Being very quiet, minding my own business, coming in, I, I would often take the 12:45 boat [referring to the staff boat] in and just work half a day. And, and just coming here about one o'clock and doing four hours worth of work and going home at five. Minding my own business, staying pretty much on the third floor the entire time. I, I think something that Ellis, working at Ellis did which carried over into my personal life is that it allowed me to open up in the way of relationships and friendships and that was something that, that this experience allowed me to do both, both with the interviewees and with the other staff members here. And, and I've been told quite a few times actually that I'm much different now than I was five, six, seven years ago.

HAPEMAN: Okay. I know that you went away to college at some point. Tell me about that.

HOM: I went to Antioch College in the fall of '92. I was here the day before I left. I left September 5th. No, I left September 4th. My first full day at school was September 5th. I was here the day before. I kept bragging to people that at this time tomorrow I'd be waiting at, I'd be on line at JFK Airport, waiting to get on the plane. Um...

HAPEMAN: Where is Antioch College?

HOM: Antioch College is in a town called Yellow Springs, Ohio.

Its population is four thousand. Two thousand during the summer. It's about twenty miles from Dayton. About an hour and a half from Cincinnati. About an hour from Indianapolis, from, rather from the Indiana border-, border. I flew out there. I remember the US Tennis Open was going on that week and we sat on the tarmac for about four hours at JFK Airport. Eventually we got to the Dayton Airport in, in, in Ohio and was met by Danny Hardman, who now lives in Germany with his wife. And, got to campus that, late that evening, probably around eleven o'clock or so. And the next day we, I had signed up to go on a canoe trip to Canada with other incoming first-year students and transfer students and the next day was a get-to-know session where I met my fellow campers and, you know, got acquainted with the other people in my group I'd be spending the next week and a half with. And, uh, the next day after that we all hopped in a bus and two college vans and drove to Canada for a day, driving about a day and a half and went canoeing. (he laughs)

HAPEMAN: Great.

HOM: And that was a very nice trip and made some friendships that, unfortunately, I've lost touch with but most of whom I still remember.

HAPEMAN: Okay. What sort of relationships did you maintain with the people in the Oral History Project while you were away?

HOM: Letters and an occasional phone call, postcard every now and then. I remember, I remember in early December, I got a letter from Paul saying that Marcy [Marcy Cohen Davidson] was pregnant and she had been married a few years at the time. And I told a friend of mine in

college that my friend Marcy was pregnant and his reaction, his first reaction was "I didn't do it." (they laugh). And he was, he was my neighbor three doors down and he was from the Bronx, he was from New York City and I had, I didn't know him until we met at Antioch but I recall that clearly as being a reaction from a friend of mine from school concerning Marcy's pregnancy. So...

HAPEMAN: Okay. How often did you come back to visit?

HOM: On occasion, I stopped by once or twice over the winter holidays. When I returned to school that '93, that winter semester, that term of '93 we still kept in touch and, and there was on-going contact back and forth between, between myself and the island and Paul and Janet [Janet Levine, Ph.D., Oral History Project staff member beginning as a volunteer in January 1991 and officially hired in July of that year]. And I, I did a little bit of work, actually I probably did a lot of work in '93 while I was still in New York before returning in winter of '94.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Did anything you learned with the Oral History Project influence your college studies?

HOM: No. (he laughs)

HAPEMAN: That's easy. (she laughs)

HOM: No.

HAPEMAN: Why did you leave college?

HOM: I had. I had some family related issues going on in New York.

My mom had died that summer, the summer of '93. I really lost

interest in school. I felt that I needed to be in New York for a while. Paul had written me that winter, it was pretty much within a week or so when I decided to leave to leave school, writing me that they were developing positions here and that, if I, asked if I was interested and I wrote back saying yes, I was interested and so that was something. I recall, also, I was thinking about cooking school also, which is still an interest of mine. I recall friends of mine, after I had told friends at school that I was leaving, what I would be doing, and my response was "Well, either I'm going to be a cook or a park ranger." (they laugh) And I ended up being the latter, kind of. I, I got back to New York. I, I had driven from Ohio to San Francisco at the end of that term. Kind of my first time to San Francisco. I had wanted to see it and I had the opportunity and I had the time and I had the money to do it. So, we drive cross country. Flew back to New York. This was mid-April or so. Went through the process of applying for the job and everything and then, when the time, I believe the announcement came out in May of '94 and I put in for it and, and, and started working in July of '94. I think between the time I officially found out I was working here and when I actually started was about a month or so.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

HOM: I believe I found out before my birthday so it was before, sometime in June, and July is when I started.

HAPEMAN: Okay. I guess that you've already answered why you wanted to come back. The opportunity was there and...

HOM: Yeah, New York. To be in New York, to be with my family, where I felt

I needed to be. Um, to kind of re-group to, uh, to find myself, and, and that's on-going, that's an on-going process.

HAPEMAN: Describe the process of being hired, as far as, did you have an interview?

HOM: Um, no. Like all Park Service and probably government jobs, most of them, an announcement came out saying this position would be opening up, these are the opening/closing dates, you know, this is the title of the position, these are the duties, and I put in for it and did the application, sent it in. And that was pretty much it, you know. Probably about a month later, which was mid to late June, is when Diana [Diana Pardue Crane, Chief of Museum Services], I was here. I remember I was here volunteering that particular day and I walked out of the listening room, which was then our office space. I walked out, Diana was walking by. She asked if Paul was around. I said, "Yeah, he's right in the, he's right at his desk." I went to the copy machine, did what I was doing and then came back about five, ten minutes later and I guess in that time Diana had told Paul that this was all through the system and that I was hired, And, and Paul, I remember Paul had to formally ask if I wanted the position. He had to formally offer me the position.

HAPEMAN: How'd that go?

HOM: He went, he said, "I have yo formally ask you. Do you want to work here?" I said, "Yes." And that was that and then later on that day we went to, we took the boat back. And Diana Pardue and I chatted for a little bit and, you know, congratulated me and, and, and that was probably three to four weeks before I started work.

HAPEMAN: Okay. What were your exact duties when you were hired?

HOM: Oooh! (they laugh) Um, I guess my primary duty was the, was the audio aspect of the project. Taking care of the, the back-log of recording, recording tapes, and ordering supplies, and storing them and labeling them and so on and so forth. And, and that took up most of my time, I guess. I guess there were smaller duties or lesser duties like correspondences and the occasional tour, VIP tour, updating the catalogues and the lists of forms we get in. I, I think those were my primary responsibilities when I first started. Just shuttling back and forth between the studio and the office.

HAPEMAN: Okay. What was your title?

HOM: The, The policy has, well, at the time I came on there was no policy for the Museum Division. I chose to wear a uniform and that was my choice. My feeling was it saved my own clothes. Paul said I looked relatively good in it which, you know, is his opinion. (they laugh) The policy has changed at various times to where memos would come out saying that all employees beginning this date must be in full uniform. I believe a compromise at some point was reached where you had to be in uniform three days a week. And then, at other times, the previous memos just kind of faded away and they were forgotten and we went back to business as usual.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

HOM: But that's always been a kind of ongoing issue with the Division.

HAPEMAN: Have the uniforms physically remained pretty much the same?

HOM: Yeah. Yeah. Yea. A few new items here and there. But I mean the basic items are the same.

HAPEMAN: Okay. After you were hired, were you sent on any extended off-site trips?

HOM: Yes. When I was hired, I was hired with a person named Elysa Matsen, who had also volunteered periodically through several years. We were sent to California in September of '93 [sic. 1994], right, right after we had been hired, and the reason we were sent there was because a contract interviewer named Kate Moore was hired to do a number of interviews [referring to the KM Interview Series], I believe seventy or so interviews in the Mid-West and the West coast. And she was in California when the Northridge earthquake hit.

HAPEMAN: Oh!

HOM: And my understanding was she was in the shower when it hit (he laughs) and after it happened she refused to go back. She, she, she did, she did some make-up interviews in Las Vegas, in Nevada, and I believe Arizona. But there were a, a good number of people in California, Los Angeles area, that she contacted who were left hanging. And they wrote back and called us saying, "What's going on here." So, when Elysa and I were hired, we were sent out to California for about a week and a half. We took A Continental Airlines flight from Newark Airport and, and at the time I had just moved also from where I was living in Queens to a place in Manhattan. It was after Labor Day so it

was early to mid-September or so. Went to California, and Elysa and I worked together doing the arrangements, doing the rental cars and hotels and arranging the interviews and doing the scheduling. We did ten, maybe twelve interviews in California, all of which were interesting, some of which were more informative than others. But it was a, a, a very good trip and I'm glad I did it. Early on in the trip, the DAT machine we had failed and, um, when it failed we, I was setting up to interview Liba Feuerstein [Interview EI-551] who was from the Isle of Rhodes, who was not an Ellis Island immigrant, but because she came from Rhodes, the Isle of Rhodes, we felt that it was an interesting, would have been an interesting interview. We went to a place called Adray's [ph], in, which was, at the time was a chain in Los Angeles, and bought some equipment and I was fiddling with the equipment that evening and it started working again. And, I curse at it and I promptly erased the tape I cursed on and everything was okay after that. (they laugh) We had, we had the DAT equipment from the park and we had backup equipment which lasted us and, and on the last day we returned, the last interview we did, we went back to Liba Feuerstein's [Interview EI-551] home, and after the interview we returned the equipment so there was no financial loss on any of our parts, and went back to the hotel, which was quite a drive. I believe, the hotel that we stayed at was right by the airport and so we checked in very late and left very early for an early morning flight out of Los Angeles back to Newark.

HAPEMAN: Okay. What has made the biggest impression on you in these last three years?

HOM: I guess the contact with people, both employees and visitors and interviewees. The variety of personalities I've encountered.

Some good, some bad, some indifferent. (he laughs) And just learning about interaction and Park Service policies and about how the world works in some ways and how it doesn't work in some ways, and just overall, overall opening myself to different experiences and different kinds of people and different personalities and you know, just things that could happen in the future, that may happen in the future.

HAPEMAN: Okay. What were the positive aspects of working as a paid employee of the Oral History...

HOM: A paycheck every two weeks!

HAPEMAN: Yeah! (they laugh)

HOM: Which allowed me to move, to live on my own. I was living with my sister at that time and I felt I just needed to expand my wings a little bit and, you know, be on my own, be a little more independent. So paycheck certainly. Opening up opportunities elsewhere, both Park Service and non-Park Service opportunities. As I said, meeting different people and, and going to different places and seeing different things. Kind of got my foot in the door for a possible life-long career, so that's, those are all positives that came out of it.

HAPEMAN: Okay. How about negative aspects?

HOM: Bureaucracy! Layers of management, which is, which is the case throughout the Park Service in general, so, it's not just here, My impression is that that's the case elsewhere. Certain staff members who, who, would do a lot of things for themselves. Certain

people who just kind of took care of themselves and that was it. You know, personality conflicts.

HAPEMAN: Um-huh. Okay. How do you view your role in the personality structure of the Oral History staff?

HOM: Well, I, I remember a few years ago I was unofficially given the title of Morale Officer in the park... (they laugh)

HAPEMAN: In the, the whole park?

HOM: For the entire park, yeah.

HAPEMAN: Wow!

HOM: Um, I, in some ways fulfilled it. I think at the time, Pam Battaglia [Protection Division of the museum], who has been a good friend of mine, she and I would arrange outings. You know, bowling and, you know, an outing on a Saturday night or a ball game or something like that and that, that was kind of the morale aspect of, of the park and I, I did it not so much for myself, well, I did do it for myself, but I. I did enjoy interaction outside of the workplace with some people here and that was something that I, I think allowed me to more easily meet people. That there was something to break the ice with. Um, I think, I hope I kind of fulfilled that, that title, and even up to now, you know, that is something that Pam and I still work on and will probably still continue to work on is doing these outings, and whether it be bowling or a ball game or just dinner somewhere or, you know, or some going away party or something of that sort.

HAPEMAN: Okay. How do you view your importance to the Ellis Island Oral History Project?

HOM: I remember when I left in the fall of '92, and I, I told this to Paul later on, that I had a dream that after I left the entire the entire Project fell apart. (they laugh) I had a dream that both Paul and Janet had, actually, I think that was one dream. Another dream I had was that Paul and Janet found jobs elsewhere and that left me in charge. (he laughs) So, I think I've always tried, not only in the Project, but throughout the entire park to work well with other people and to be as flexible as possible and be as helpful as possible and that, you know, if things happen that needed to be taken care of, and I, I was able, willing and/or able to take care of them I would do my best to do that. And, as I said, I think that applies for not only Oral History related issues but park issues also. So, I like to think I was kind of the, the jack-of-all-trades that kind of, you know, got into a little bit of this and a little bit of that and sometimes that got me into trouble but I think, you know, ninety-nine percent of the time it, it, it, I came out for the better and the park came out for the better and other parties involved came out for the better.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Then I guess you answered also your importance to the whole museum.

HOM: Uh-Huh. Okay.

HAPEMAN: Unless you have anything else you'd like to add...

HOM: No, I, I think that, um, at least with that issue is pretty much it. You know, just, just kind of remaining flexible and doing

different things here and there and not, not keeping focused on only doing oral histories.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Talk about your relationships with employees in different Divisions of the museum or in the Oral History Division.

HOM: Well, well I guess with the Museum Division first of all, you know, Paul and Janet and I have always maintained a very good, extremely good professional and personal relationship. Kevin also has, has more recently gone away from Oral History but yet still, you know, keeps contact with it and, and remains up-to-date on what's, what's going on. So, I guess those within the Museum Division are currently are, you know, the strongest relationships. And then there's Eric Byron who works in Exhibits, who have, we have not, of a working relationship day-to-day but we kind, you know, of kid around during the day and stuff like that. Lucy Cerezo, who was our Museum [Division] secretary until about a year ago, she and I developed into a very strong relationship outside of the park. And, she moved to California about a year ago and, we, we, um, developed, I think we developed a very close friendship in that time that, that she was in, that I knew her in New York and then while she was in the park and seeing her everyday here and, and outside of here.

HAPEMAN: Okay. What do you think is the significance of the Ellis Island Oral History Project?

HOM: I always was under the impression that the reason we did this, and I still believe it, is that when we're all dead and the immigrants are all dead and, you know, a hundred, two hundred years from now, that the experience of immigration, at roughly the turn of the century to the mid-1920s will, will live on. That people will know first hand

what the experience was like. I like to think maybe a hundred years from now, people will say, "I'm glad these people did what they did," and will perhaps mention me by name, perhaps not, but that, that is a legacy that I hope will live on. That, that they're just going to stand up and say, "Hey, what these people did was good and because of what they did we have knowledge now that we probably wouldn't have otherwise."

HAPEMAN: Okay. What opinions do you have about how the Project should be improved?

HOM: I think learning different aspects of the Project a bit more than has gone on, you know, certain people have certain things they are comfortable, not comfortable with and that's fine. But I, I think that, that there's, there should be more of an attempt to kind of learn different things about it, Learn different things about how the Project operates. And, how just to go day-by-day, you know, what to do day-by-day.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Talk about the computer installation in the Oral History Library.

HOM: Um, Jay Schneider was the contractor for that, the contract was put out probably about three years ago. When I first started, and when Elysa first started, we were working on that. That was one of the projects that was on-going at the time. About a year and half ago was when they actually started physically putting in the computers and the, the work stations and so on. The computer system probably could have been done better. As it is now, it's okay. I mean, there are some features to it that I know Paul is unhappy with, that I'm unhappy with that probably could have been taken into consideration at the, in the planning stages. It's an okay system. I mean, for its purposes

and what it's designed for, I think it, it works pretty well, not perfectly, but pretty well. The Schneider's lived in New City, New York so I remember going back and forth at least twice to drop-off and, and pick up tapes. Um, Michael Guthrie was one of the subcontractors who has been in touch with us regularly in the last year or so. The system probably doesn't get as much use by visitors as, as you know, it should. I do know the staff has discovered it in the last six months or so. I, I do see more staff up there than I did earlier. But, it is something that I, I, I think could probably be a more useful resource, a more used resource by the visitors to the museum than it probably is right now.

HAPEMAN: Okay. What were your responsibilities once the system was up and running?

HOM: Regular maintenance, which included updating and correcting information that was in there, putting in new information as we did interviews, putting in new audio, which only a handful of new audio has been put in but a few and learning how that all was done and learning troubleshooting, you know, when you get error messages on the screen, what to do. And that's pretty much been it. Being, being the contact between the park and the contractors so, you know, if a problem develops we can say, "Hey, this is going on. What should we do?" And, and just learning little by little how it works and how to treat it and how, how, uh, how to correct some mistakes and, and learning just day-to-day, I guess, functions of it. And, and, of course, helping visitors use the system, helping staff use the system and just making sure it keeps running.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Why don't you tell me about the Ellis Island softball

team and your participation.

HOM: Well, we're "O" for the decade, first of all. (they laugh)

This was, you know, an activity that Pam and I were involved in. I probably, I got involved in it probably in '95 or so. I mean on a, on a regular basis. We came out to have fun, to have a few beers, occasionally to grill, you know, bring your own burgers or hot-dogs or whatever. We played, we've played Manhattan Sites [National Park Service] this past summer and we've always lost to Manhattan Sites. We played Circle Line [Circle Line ferries] periodically. Always lost to Circle Line. Last year we were able to get a field on Governor's Island and we played Circle Line on Governor's Island. That was a unique experience. We were, they had lights so we were able to play after dark. Um...

HAPEMAN: And by "Manhattan Sites," you mean the National Park Service.

HOM: Yeah, the National Park Service Manhattan Sites.

HAPEMAN: And the Circle Line is the ferry company...

HOM: Circle Line is the ferry. They were always bigger than we were. We discovered that the more they drink, the better they play. (they laugh) So, so, I mean, Pam's intention and, and my intention was just to have fun. There was very little, if any, real competition going on. Of course, you wanted to win but the main thing was to have fun. We practiced probably about once or twice a week on Ellis after work.

HAPEMAN: Where would you practice?

HOM: Island Two and Three. There's a what's called a "festival lawn" right between the buildings out there. And, actually one of the interviews, or one of the oral history forms we received was someone who played softball out there back in the '40s against the Coast Guard. So they played softball then and we play softball now.

HAPEMAN: Great. What do you think has been your greatest contribution to the Oral History Project?

HOM: (he pauses) Taking care of things that probably wouldn't be taken care of otherwise. Kind of, you know, from small, mundane things like making arrangements for Post Four and MIO for guests [referring to securing permission for visitors coming from New Jersey over the bridge guarded by staff posted at Post Four or on the staff boat which leaves Battery Park in lower Manhattan from MIO] to, you know, being actively involved with the computer system, you know, getting that up and running and functioning day-to-day. And, of course, doing audio and, and buying tapes and, you know, updating the equipment and keeping it in working order, and, and, you know, just little things that, little background things that, you know, little, little things that if, one or two weren't done, wouldn't be a big deal but collectively, you know, it makes a strong impact.

HAPEMAN: Okay. What impact has the Oral History Project had on your current life?

HOM: (he pauses) I think its expanded my horizons. I think that I'm more aware of who I am and, and the world, you know, outside of the Park Service and outside of New York City. And, and given me a

chance, which hopefully will prove fruitful, but a chance to, you know, do things I really want to do.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Has your own ethnic background shaped the way that you've worked with the Oral History Project at all?

HOM: I don't think so. No. I, I, I think more of an influence on the way I worked is the fact that I went to Catholic school. (he laughs) And I still remember Sister Mary Theresa and that there were, I guess, certain work ethics that I think I've developed that were taught to me in Catholic school and, and just by my family in general. I, I guess that, you know, coming in here and being able to, to, do, you know, a days works and, and not have someone look over my shoulder and, and have a fair amount of independence in, in, in work, day-to-day work around here.

HAPEMAN: Okay. What's next for you?

HOM: Manhattan Sites [National Park Service]. I will be working at Theodore Roosevelt's Birthplace starting Sunday. I probably will rotate through the sites for the first week but after that I'll be at "TRB's". I've returned to school so, uh, that's occupying a lot of my time right now, so that's the immediate future. What happens at Manhattan Sites, I don't know. I'd like to see how things work out, you know, I'd like to perhaps stay there long-term, perhaps use it as a stepping stone to move elsewhere. But, for the immediate future, meaning next year or so, I think I'll be in New York and be working at Manhattan Sites and learning and growing and making contacts and hopefully the goal, my personal goal, is to end up in San Francisco but, and, and that's a step perhaps to doing that, to reaching that.

HAPEMAN: Okay. I think your whole interview has sort of had this thread in it, but what impact do you think the Oral History Project will have on your future?

HOM: It's something that, that is a unique position. It is something very few, very few people in the Park Service have, have, have had experience with and the general population also. It, it's a good amount, I think there's a fair amount of knowledge I'm taking with me that can be applied elsewhere, so that certainly will, will, will build up my credibility, (he pauses) and I guess just, just leaving it knowing that I've made some kind of positive impact on it.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Well, if you don't have anything else you'd like to add...

HOM: No, I think that pretty much covers everything.

HAPEMAN: Okay. That seems like a good place to end the interview. I want to thank you very much for talking with me about your years here at Ellis Island and with the Oral History Project. This is Mindy Hapeman signing off with Peter Hom on September 25th, 1997 for the Ellis Island Oral History Project.