

EI-966

FANNY [PH] REISMAN

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RUSSIA

AGE:

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RESIDENCES:

REISMAN: He's got a good memory. [chuckles]

HERZ: Good afternoon.

REISMAN: Good afternoon.

HERZ: This is Roger Herz—

REISMAN: Yeah.

HERZ: —for the National Park Service. Today is October 7th—

REISMAN: Uh-huh.

HERZ: —1997 and I'm in the Catari [PH] Residence with Fanny Reisman—

REISMAN: That's right.

HERZ: —who came from Odessa.

REISMAN: Right.

HERZ: And Miss Reisman—

REISMAN: What?

HERZ: And in the room—excuse me—is also Paul Sigrist from the National Park Service and the director of the Ellis Island Oral History Project, and Jody Parsowith [PH]—

PARSOWITH: Very good. [chuckles]

HERZ: —who is a staff member here at the Catari Residence.

REISMAN: Joseph what?

HERZ: Jody Parsowith. Jody is someone you know who works here.

REISMAN: Oh, yeah.

HERZ: She's just sitting right over there.

REISMAN: I see. I wouldn't know him. I have to see him.

HERZ: Miss Reisman?

REISMAN: Yes.

HERZ: Can you tell me where you were born?

REISMAN: Jesus Christ. I don't remember whether it's Odessa or some other—I'll have to—I'll have to ask my mother or my father.

HERZ: Okay. And do you remember your birth date?

REISMAN: I know it's October something. I'll have to ask my parents. They would know.

HERZ: Okay. And the year?

REISMAN: I don't remember either.

HERZ: Okay. We ha—

REISMAN: I don't know. I'll have to ask my father or my mother.

HERZ: We have the record of your birthday as being October 31st, 1898.

REISMAN: That must be right.

HERZ: Is that—

REISMAN: I imagine it's [unclear].

HERZ: —the way—can you tell us a little bit about your mother and your father?

REISMAN: Oh. My father is—was a very fine musician. He played in—trombone. And he was very, very devoted to music. His whole life was all music and my mother was a housewife. That's all. We lived in Odessa and we lived in—in rap—I forget what other city. I don't re—I was just a child when I came here.

HERZ: C—can you tell us a little bit about Odessa when you were a child? Do you have any memories?

REISMAN: Yes, some nice memories. Big—nice, big city.

HERZ: Uh-huh.

REISMAN: And my father was a musician, a very fine musician. He played the trombone.

HERZ: What was his name?

REISMAN: My father's name was Israel.

HERZ: And your—and your mother's name?

REISMAN: Anna.

HERZ: And what was the last name?

REISMAN: Weltman—W-E-L-T-M-A-N. Weltman.

HERZ: And when you say Odessa was a very big town—

REISMAN: Yes, big, big city.

HERZ: —can you tell us a little bit? Take us around the town a little bit.

REISMAN: Big city, big city.

HERZ: Big city.

REISMAN: Yeah.

HERZ: Walk us around a little bit, if you would. Just tell us a—

REISMAN: Well, well, I was just a child. I don't remember too much.

HERZ: How old were you?

REISMAN: I don't remember but I was very young. And all I know is that we lived in a big city and my father was a musician. He played the trombo—he played the trombone.

HERZ: Did he play in an orchestra?

REISMAN: Yeah. Yeah, he was a very fine musician.

HERZ: Did you go to school in Odessa?

REISMAN: Yeah, I went to some—yeah, the [unclear] school. Yeah. We spoke Russian. That's all, and a little Jewish but mostly Russian.

HERZ: Do you remember anything about the school?

REISMAN: No, very little. Very, very little.

HERZ: Do you remember—

REISMAN: Came here—I was very young when we came here, you know.

HERZ: Uh-hmm.

REISMAN: I was very young when we came here.

HERZ: Do you remember the synagogue?

REISMAN: Not very much.

HERZ: And brothers and sisters?

REISMAN: I had—I had a sister, no brothers. We didn't have any boys. I had a sister and me. I think there were two sisters and me; I don't

remember. Yeah, but I know we—I had a sister but no brothers, no brothers. No brothers.

HERZ: You remember your sister's name?

REISMAN: No. She was very, very young when she died and I was very young. So I don't remember. Yeah.

HERZ: And—and what about the house that you grew up in in Odessa? Do you—any memories of that?

REISMAN: Well, a few nice memories. Yeah, very nice. My father—my father was a very fine musician and my—we went to school there. We spoke only Russian home.

HERZ: At home.

REISMAN: Yeah. All along then. We didn't talk Jewish in the house even.

HERZ: Did you speak Jewish in school?

REISMAN: No, no. Just Russian.

HERZ: Did your father play music around the house or only professionally?

REISMAN: Well, he played professionally and around the house, of course, he practiced home.

HERZ: Uh-hmm.

REISMAN: But he was a very fine musician, very fine, very outstanding.

HERZ: Were your grandparents still alive when you lived in Odessa?

REISMAN: No, no.

HERZ: No.

REISMAN: No, I didn't know my grandparents.

HERZ: And do you have any remembrances of when you started hearing about America? Even as a child?

REISMAN: Well, we had some relatives here in America.

HERZ: You did?

REISMAN: Yeah. So my mother—on my mother's side. So they used to write letters to my mother in Russian. And my mother used to read 'em to us. So we were always very anxious to come to America. I came here. I was a little girl when I came here. I had a sister, no brothers. I just had a sister, that's all, and me.

HERZ: Well, do you remember what it was like getting a letter from America?

REISMAN: Well, my mother used to read Russian, see, and she used to read all the mail, mostly Russian. And my—my father read Russian. My mother read Russian, Jewish and a little bit of Engl—Eng—America—English.

HERZ: Was—she was an educated woman?

REISMAN: Yeah, she went to school in Eur—Russia. In Russia, she went to school.

HERZ: And which of her relatives were here?

REISMAN: I don't know. Very few. Very few.

HERZ: So when the letter came from America and your mother read it to you, even though you were a little girl, what were your thoughts about America, if you can remember them?

REISMAN: Well, we always wanted to come to America, always wanted to come here. And we used to get nice letters from our relatives so we were always anxious to come to America.

HERZ: What did they say about America in the letters?

REISMAN: I don't remember but they always spoke very highly of America.

HERZ: What were they doing here? Do you remember?

REISMAN: Yeah, they—they had a business. I—I think that—like that, yeah. What kind of [unclear]. I forget what kind of business you call it. They spoke Russian and Jewish and English.

HERZ: And do you—do you happen to know when they came to the United States?

REISMAN: I was a little girl. I don't remember.

HERZ: Before you were born, maybe?

REISMAN: No, no. I had a brother, may he rest in peace, and he was very bright, very beautiful. He studied law and he died very young, very young. He was a handsome young man. He died very young so I came with my parents to America and that's all.

HERZ: So all three of you—or was your sister still alive?

REISMAN: No sisters.

HERZ: No sisters.

REISMAN: No, just a brother I had—I had.

HERZ: When you came to America, you came with your parents.

REISMAN: Yes, of course.

HERZ: Do you remember an—have any memories about the trip, how you left Odessa?

REISMAN: Well, I don't think we left Odessa. Another city—I forgot the name. Well, we had relatives in America and that's—was easy for us. We just stayed with them a little while. Then we got an apartment or something.

HERZ: Were they in New York? Do you remember?

REISMAN: Wait a minute. I'll tell you right away. I think—I don't remember.

HERZ: You don't remember where they were.

REISMAN: No.

HERZ: But when you left Odessa, did you remember taking anything with you, a toy or something? Or did your parents take anything with them?

REISMAN: No, I don't remember. My father was a very fine musician and he played the trombone.

HERZ: Can you—can you remember anything about the boat ride, the ship coming over?

REISMAN: No, I was very young, remember very little. Remember very little and it—it was a nice trip.

HERZ: What do you—what was nice about it?

REISMAN: Well, it was—it was interesting, I think. I was just a little girl.

HERZ: Uh-hmm.

REISMAN: So I know we were glad to come to America. And my father and mother just spoke Russian. They spoke very little Jewish at home, mostly Russian.

HERZ: Did you—did you speak any English?

REISMAN: Not when we came here.

HERZ: Not when you came.

REISMAN: I learned here. Yeah.

HERZ: Can you—can you—after the boat ride, the ship ride was over, the trip, do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

REISMAN: Yeah, sure.

HERZ: What was that like?

REISMAN: Well, we were very amazed. I was just a little—very little child but it was interesting to see it.

HERZ: Were you playing with other children?

REISMAN: Yeah, we used to play but not too many. We lived in our own house.

HERZ: Do you know if you went to Ellis Island—you and your family went to Ellis Island first?

REISMAN: I think so. Yes, I think so.

HERZ: Did they ever tell you anything about that?

REISMAN: Very little. No. They were glad to get away.

HERZ: From—

REISMAN: From Russia. My father was a very fine musician. He played the trom—played the—the trombone.

HERZ: And w—do you know why they left?

REISMAN: Well, my father was a very fine musician and they made it very tough for the Jew. And my father played—that was his profession, music. Music was his profession and he played on—on the trombone. And it was very bad for the Jews in Russia. So we came. We had some relatives. My mother had relatives here. So they treat—they sent a shift card for us. That's how we came here.

HERZ: They sent—could you say that again? What did they send for you?

REISMAN: A shift car—a shift card.

HERZ: Like a ticket.

REISMAN: A ticket, yes. And we were glad to come to America. We had cousins here, relatives. And then my father was a very fine musician.

HERZ: Where were your cousins in the United States? What city?

REISMAN: Mostly New York.

HERZ: Mostly in New York.

REISMAN: Yeah.

HERZ: In New York City?

REISMAN: Yeah.

HERZ: Were they also musicians?

REISMAN: No. I don't know what they did. They—they were not musicians. My husband—my father was a very fine musician, very educated in—in—in music.

HERZ: Where—where was he educated?

REISMAN: In Russia.

HERZ: Do you remember the university or—

REISMAN: I don't know. I don't remember.

HERZ: When you—when they came to the United States—when you came to the United States—

REISMAN: Yeah.

HERZ: —what was it like learning a new language, dealing with people who spoke a different language?

REISMAN: Well, we liked to hear it and we enjoyed it—learning it, really enjoyed it. It was good education. And we spoke Russian mostly at home too.

HERZ: Even here after you moved here?

REISMAN: Yeah, yeah. Then we started to learn English. And my mother and father both learned English quickly. And then they opened up a little grocery store. My father was a very fine musician. He played the trombone.

HERZ: But after they came here, your father didn't play music? Or he—

REISMAN: Yeah. Yeah, he belonged to a union here.

HERZ: Uh-hmm.

REISMAN: Yeah. And he played with all the different orchestras and they played mostly in concerts. He was a very fine musician, my father.

HERZ: And they had a grocery store at the same time, you said?

REISMAN: Well, they had—when they came to America, it was hard to get a job as a musician. So my mother looked some friends—and she had friends. They had a grocery store so they advised us—my parents to get a grocery store. And that's how we made a living. We had a grocery store in the front and rooms in the back. That's how we went to school here.

HERZ: Do—do you remember where that was?

REISMAN: No.

HERZ: But did—and you went to—started going to school?

REISMAN: What, darling?

HERZ: You started [chuckles] going to school right away?

REISMAN: Yeah.

HERZ: What grade were you in?

REISMAN: I don't remember but I was a little girl. I remember how old I was—very young.

HERZ: But—and didn't know much English?

REISMAN: Nothing at all. And I had a brother, may he rest in peace. He studied law; he died very young. He was very bright, very brilliant as a musician and as a—as a speaker. Yeah, he died very young, unfortunately.

HERZ: When you were still a child and living with your parents, can you remember some traditions that they used to keep in the home?

REISMAN: My father used to teach in the home?

HERZ: No. Do you remember some traditions, Russian traditions that they still practiced in the home, even though they were in America?

REISMAN: No.

HERZ: No?

REISMAN: No.

HERZ: Everything was new?

REISMAN: That's right. They didn't take anything from Russia that they wanted to remember. That's all I remember. Because we had a hard time. See, my father was a very fine musician and he couldn't get a job because he was Jewish. So that's why it was so sad. But when we came here, my father came first and then he sent for my mother and me. And I had a brother, may he rest in peace. He studied law; he was brilliant, handsome and brilliant. He died very young.

HERZ: Who were some of the musicians or orchestras your father played for here in the United States?

REISMAN: I don't remember. But he played with big orchestras, was a very fine musician. He loved music.

HERZ: And you love music.

REISMAN: Oh, yeah. We all do.

HERZ: Did you play any—any instrument?

REISMAN: Yeah, piano.

HERZ: Professionally?

REISMAN: [unclear]. Not professionally, no. And—

HERZ: Is there anyone from your family who became professional musicians?

REISMAN: Well, I had a br—a brother. He was very brilliant and handsome and he studied law. When he—when he was very young, we came here. Studied law but he didn't live very long. He died very young. He was handsome, very handsome.

HERZ: What did he die of?

REISMAN: I don't know. He died in Russia and then we came here and we liked America. Then my mother [unclear]—see, my father was a very fine musician. And he—he couldn't play everywhere. They didn't let Jews in in some places. So he—we went to open up a grocery store.

HERZ: What—

REISMAN: And my mother ran the grocery store and my father played music outside.

HERZ: Were they very religious, your parents?

REISMAN: Yeah. They kept up to—to all the forms, you know, Jewish r—religion, but not very, very religious. They were very nice. They observed all the Jewish holidays.

HERZ: Did you get married eventually?

REISMAN: Here, [unclear] get married. I was very young when I—we came here.

HERZ: [unclear].

REISMAN: So I got married here.

HERZ: And you had children?

REISMAN: Yeah, thank God. Had three daughters. Three daughters, God bless 'em.

HERZ: Did they do any music?

REISMAN: Yes, they all played music.

HERZ: Professionally?

REISMAN: No, not professionally but they played very well because there was always music in our house.

HERZ: It sounds like a very happy household when you came here.

REISMAN: Thank God, it was, yeah. And my mother—[unclear] my father was a very fine musician. But you had to belong to a union. You had to be American citizen. So my father couldn't become a citizen right away so he—he played the—the trombone. And then that's how he made a living.

HERZ: Do you remember anything about your father joining a union or talking about the union at home?

REISMAN: Yeah. He was a—a very happy union man. He loved his music and he liked playing all over, was a fine musician. Everybody wanted him in their orchestra. They all wanted him, very int—interesting person. He was very intelligent.

HERZ: Well, you seem like a very interesting person yourself.

REISMAN: Thank you.

HERZ: Can you tell us a little bit about your life growing up in New York City?

REISMAN: Here in the city?

HERZ: Yeah.

REISMAN: Oh, we came here. I was about—I was very young, very, very young. And my mother had to open up a grocery store to make a living because my father was a very fine musician.

HERZ: But do you remember anything of what you did?

REISMAN: What I did here? Well, I went to school right away and I studied music and there was music in our house all the time. My father played the tr—the trombone and he played—that—that's what he played, the trombone. [sneezes] Excuse me.

HERZ: Bless you.

REISMAN: Thank you.

HERZ: Are there any other things about your life in America that you'd like to tell us?

REISMAN: In America, well, we came to America. Here, we couldn't—didn't speak English at all but we spoke Russian and Jewish. And then my father learned Russian and my mother—and my mother opened a little grocery store in the neighborhood, you know. And she learned how to—how to talk Russian.

HERZ: English.

REISMAN: And they began—popular that way and they made a nice living that way for the children. That's about all I remember.

HERZ: Did you eventu—did your mother work?

REISMAN: No, she never worked.

HERZ: And did you—

REISMAN: Had a grocery store.

HERZ: Did you eventually work?

REISMAN: What, darling?

HERZ: Did you eventually work?

REISMAN: Me?

HERZ: Yeah.

REISMAN: No, no.

HERZ: Never.

REISMAN: No.

HERZ: Well, looking back on it, can you just tell us a little bit? Was it worth it coming to America, do you feel?

REISMAN: Oh, yeah. Very much, because the Jews had it very bad in Russia. And if you were Jewish you couldn't get a job. You couldn't do this; you couldn't do that. And my father was a very educated man and he spoke Russian beautifully, and he was a very handsome man too. So my father had some brothers here. So they brought us out here and we liked America but my mother couldn't do anything. She opened up a little grocery store and my father went to work as a musician. Well, whether they were playing weddings or whatever music there was, they used to call on him, a very fine musician.

HERZ: Well, I think that's a very nice note to end on. So we'd like to thank you—

REISMAN: Thank you.

HERZ: —for—for speaking with us.

REISMAN: I enjoyed telling about it.

HERZ: And your birthday is in three weeks and we'd like to wish you a happy birthday.

REISMAN: Thank you very much.

HERZ: [chuckles] This is Roger Herz with Fanny Reisman—

REISMAN: Yeah.

HERZ: —and for the National Park Service and the Ellis Island—

REISMAN: Okay.

HERZ: —History Project.

REISMAN: God bless you.

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HERZ: It's October 7th—

REISMAN: God bless you.

HERZ: —1997. Thank you.

REISMAN: Thank you, thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]