

**EI-970**

**MARGARET (MARGIT) FRIEDMENN HIRSCH WEISS**

**BIRTHDATE: OCTOBER 25, 1908**

**INTERVIEW DATE: NOVEMBER 18, 1997**

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**INTERVIEWER: MINDY HAPEMAN**

**RECORDING ENGINEER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.**

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**RESIDENCES:**

HAPEMAN: Good afternoon. This is Mindy Hapeman for the National Park Service. I'm a student intern for the oral history project from Skidmore College. Today is November the 14<sup>th</sup>, 1997 and I'm here in Brooklyn with Margaret Weiss, who came from Hungary in 1925 when she was 17 years old.

WEISS: Yeah.

HAPEMAN: Paul Sigrist is also present today and there may be an occasion where he stops the tape at—at different points throughout the interview. I should say for the sake of the tape that we are in a residential area and there may be some neighborhood or traffic noises heard on the tape. Okay, Mrs. Weiss, why don't you begin by giving me your full name?

WEISS: My name is Margaret—actually, it was given to me in this country but in Hungarian was Margit.

HAPEMAN: Oh.

WEISS: Margit Friedmenn. That was my childhood name. Then I married first to the father of the children, who was—whose name was Julius Hirsch. Now, he and I—he was 26 and I was 19 when we married. And that was in—I—1927, huh? And Eleanor was born in 1928. See? So, actually, I married late in life when I lost Julius. I was 56.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: And he was 61. And then I met my number two husband. I was 58 or 59—four years later after Julius died. And we had only eight years together, a lovely Russian gentleman. And we had a lovely adult romance. [chuckles]

HAPEMAN: Could you spell your—your Hungarian name?

WEISS: Yes, Friedmenn. F-R-I-E-D-M-E-N-N.

HAPEMAN: Two Ns.

WEISS: Friedmenn.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: Yeah.

HAPEMAN: And what is your date of birth, please?

WEISS: October the 25<sup>th</sup>, 1908.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Now, where were you born?

WEISS: I was born in Hungarian, which today is Romania. After the First World War, we were the loser so Hungary was partitioned off. Many countries got parts of Hungary. And where we lived is now Transylvania. It's part of Romania, even today. And I will show you pictures later of the—of the surrounding country and the time I lived there. It was a small town but quite advanced. There was a beautiful art col—colony in there and, therefore, we had a lot of contacts with people from all over the world.

HAPEMAN: What was the exact name of the town?

WEISS: In Hungarian, was—

HAPEMAN: Yes.

WEISS: —Nagy Banya.

HAPEMAN: Could you spell that?

WEISS: I—

SIGRIST: [unclear]

WEISS: —I will write it.

SIGRIST: Here, I have a pencil.

WEISS: It's [unclear]—

HAPEMAN: Mrs. Weiss is now spelling out the name of her town.

WEISS: Now, Nagy is with a double wor—we have different letters r—for a different sound.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: Nagy is two letters, G-H—I—I think I remember, yeah. Nagy, yeah. Then I forget. I think it—Nagy—N-A-G-H. That means big mine so it's a mining town.

HAPEMAN: Big mine.

WEISS: Big mine. Nagy Banya. It's two word—B-A-N-Y-A.

HAPEMAN: Nagy.

WEISS: Yeah, like, Banya. And when it's said R, you put a little—

HAPEMAN: Accent?

WEISS: —line, yeah.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: See, this is the way it's written. Now, in Romania now is Baia Mare, which it is—this is in my t—time.

HAPEMAN: Yes.

WEISS: After this—after the First World War, I think in 1919 that they partitioned Hungary. That then became the Romanian name. It's the same thing, Baia Mare. Baia—it's—it means the big mine.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: Baia—I used to speak Romania. I forgot. I speak Hungarian still fluently. German, I spoke very well but you don't g—if you don't use it you lose it.

HAPEMAN: Right.

WEISS: Here. Now, this is Romanian and this is Hungarian.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: Okay, dear?

SIGRIST: Great.

WEISS: Oh.

SIGRIST: Mindy, why don't you read aloud, spell each name?

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: Okay.

SIGRIST: Starting with the Hungarian and then—

HAPEMAN: The—the Hungarian version of what Mrs. Weiss has spelled, the name of her town—

WEISS: Nagy—

HAPEMAN: Nagy.

WEISS: Nagy. J—j—

HAPEMAN: Nagy. [chuckles]

WEISS: Nagy. Nagy.

HAPEMAN: Nagy.

WEISS: Just say Nagy.

HAPEMAN: Nagy.

WEISS: Nagy, because the double letter.

HAPEMAN: Right.

WEISS: And it's—you sound it as J—not n—[unclear].

HAPEMAN: J—

WEISS: J—j—

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: [unclear], Nagy. Nagy Banya. It's also a double letter here.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Great.

WEISS: See, it's hard for you.

HAPEMAN: Yes, it is. [laughter] I'm going to spell out what you've written.

WEISS: Right.

HAPEMAN: First in—in Hungarian.

WEISS: Yeah.

HAPEMAN: N-A-G-H—

WEISS: Right.

HAPEMAN: And then a second word, B-A-N-Y-A.

WEISS: Paul, do me a favor. There is an album under the coat, a yellow album. I want to see if I—if I spelled that right.

SIGRIST: Okay. And keep it going.

HAPEMAN: Yes. And the Hungarian version is B-A-I-A—another word—M-A-R-E. And Mrs. Weiss right now is looking through her photo album to see if she has correctly—

WEISS: Spelled.

HAPEMAN: —spelled.

WEISS: I forgot already. My goodness. Such a long time.

SIGRIST: The—the Banya reminds me, in Yugoslavia, of course, there's Banya Loca [PH].

WEISS: Sure.

SIGRIST: I wonder—

WEISS: All these—what did you call these countries around that area? Austria Hungary. All right? Czechoslovakia. What is—what we have trouble now with? These Balkan countries.

HAPEMAN: Yes.

WEISS: But they all—no, I don't think this is—these photographs. This—

SIGRIST: Well, maybe while you're talking I could look through it and maybe I could find it for you.

HAPEMAN: Is that—

WEISS: [unclear].

SIGRIST: All right.

WEISS: I know where to look. Some of them, I couldn't—I didn't have enough films. So—oh, here.

SIGRIST: Maybe what I'll do is I'll pause the tape—

WEISS: Yes.

SIGRIST: —for a minute.

WEISS: For a minute.

SIGRIST: And when we find it we'll turn it back on.

WEISS: Because—

SIGRIST: Okay. We're going to pause [unclear].

WEISS: Because these are different cities I visited. [tape off/on]

SIGRIST: We're back on tape.

WEISS: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: So, Mindy—

WEISS: Okay.

SIGRIST: Could you spell then, perhaps the—the [unclear] spelling?

WEISS: Now, corrected, darling—

HAPEMAN: Yes—

SIGRIST: The corrected spelling.

WEISS: Because I felt that I—I was wrong. That's why I had to make sure.

SIGRIST: Right, that's—

HAPEMAN: Now, we know. It's N-A-G-Y B-A-N-Y-A.

WEISS: Right.

HAPEMAN: And that's the Hungarian spelling.

WEISS: Right. Correct.

HAPEMAN: And the—

WEISS: And the other one is correct.

HAPEMAN: That one was correct from before.

WEISS: So that's all.

SIGRIST: Great.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Well, continue. Let's talk about your town that you grew up in. How big was it? What size was it?

WEISS: Oh, really. You see, today, like, it's double. We can't go—when I was there, I think that maybe 8,000 people, a small but a very sophisticated little city.

HAPEMAN: And why was it sophisticated?

WEISS: Well, because as I said before, we had a very famous art colony there, a famous pai—painting school. And people came from all over the world to learn painting. All right? And to that, I guess everybody had to be—the—only thing I remember, we didn't have electricity when I was born. And later on, it was such a big deal that electricity came in. But we didn't have electricity concealed. All the wire, it went on the outside. You know? I remember that.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: And it was such a big deal when we—we had electricity. We had no inside plumbing. We had an outhouse. [laughter] Strange as it may seem to you children, I'm going to tell you, it is very interesting even for me to think back of those days. [laughter] Wintertime, especially.

HAPEMAN: I'm sure. [chuckles] We'll—we'll talk about your house in just a minute. But first, I want to talk a little bit more about the town. You said that the—the main industry was mining?

WEISS: Yes.

HAPEMAN: It was a mining town.

WEISS: Gold, sulfur, because I was down there—gold, sulfur. N—not—I think gold is—mostly gold and sulfur, maybe something else. I don't remember.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: But this is—I distinctly remember because I was—you know, [chuckles] when I was brought up I had a governess, a German governess. And she was a very interesting young lady, about 22, and she wanted us to learn by seeing thing, so sh—we—I mean, just anybody couldn't go down in the mines. So she got special permission and she took us down in the m—that they get the ore out of the walls, then also how they separate the gold from the—you have to—I have [unclear]—separate the ore from the gold and how they melted all the [unclear]. And the sulfur mine was—I—I don't recall that. Only thing I remember. [chuckles] Terribly strong odor. But it was such experience. And all our town was surrounded by mountains. It was a part of the Carpathian Mountains, a chain of the Carpathi—it's—I show you. And we were, like, in a valley. You know? And it was a beautiful place, beautiful place. I remember how we went on the top of the mountains to see the sun come out. She took us. I—I can thank that

girl a lot because she really got us aware of those things, you know. We were four children, three sisters and a brother, you know.

HAPEMAN: Okay. What—what did the center of the town look like?

WEISS: Well, you want to see it?

HAPEMAN: Well, see, I'll look at it later but for—can you—

WEISS: Well, let—

HAPEMAN: —describe it more?

WEISS: Yes. It was—first of all, the buildings were not higher than one story, none of the buildings. All right? The—the center of the town was a circle and where all these buildings around the circle were one story high. And underneath was all the shops, everything. You'll see it. All the shops built under. And the owners used to live on the first floor and be—you know. And in that to—in the middle of that circle was, like, a gazebo where every Saturday and Sunday we had music. Then what else? The only hotel in—was on that circle. So everything—now, that circle, like picture, their streets came—

HAPEMAN: Okay—

WEISS: —out of it.

HAPEMAN: —and you're—you're gesturing like there's a circle with—like a star or sort of—

WEISS: All the streets—

HAPEMAN: —like spokes.

WEISS: All the streets—so, yeah. Now, I—my street was a s—small street, not too—not too—not too—well, maybe, I—I can't s—tell you how many feet or—wasn't a mile. [chuckles] A short street. There was the high school for the boys. Girls and boys didn't go together. There was—there was [unclear] church. There was—I've got to show you. I can't explain it to you otherwise.

HAPEMAN: Mrs. Weiss is flipping through her—her photo album.

WEISS: Album. That reminds me of the stamp. You know, 70 years is a lot of years.

HAPEMAN: Yes.

WEISS: And you don't remember every—this is the old [unclear] which h— which was considered the—well, here is the hotel. [clears throat] On the street I lived there was the courthouse. There was the house for the nuns and the priests. There was a very famous, very—printed newspaper.

HAPEMAN: Newspaper.

WEISS: And also, in the—where the town—see, this is the town. See? It's a thousand years old, part of a—what is that called? A—

SIGRIST: Castle?

WEISS: Ca—yeah. That's all remained. As a matter of fact, I have painting from the school. I'll show you it later. Now—

SIGRIST: Keep in mind, Mrs. Weiss—

WEISS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —that this is just an audio recording. So whatever you're looking at, it's important to describe it in words.

WEISS: Well, I am talking to you.

SIGRIST: Yes, right.

WEISS: This is the hotel. This is the—this is the part of that—the square. Where is the square? I have a positive place [unclear] where it shows you. See, picture this. This is a—around. And all the streets—now, my street came from here. Now, the courthouse was there. The high school for the boys were there, the—the nuns' residence, the priests' residence, the church. Because this was also—around this was a playground for children.

HAPEMAN: Playground.

WEISS: And the church. The Catholic Church was there and all the people who w—worked for the church. I went to a Catholic school, although I'm Jewish.

HAPEMAN: Oh.

WEISS: Yeah, because we had no—as—as Jewish children, we were not allowed, have education.

HAPEMAN: Hmm.

WEISS: And the nuns and the priests accepted the Jewish children and they taught us, but we never got credit for it. It wasn't acknowledged, okay.

HAPEMAN: You didn't get credit for the schooling you got—

WEISS: No.

HAPEMAN: —because you were Jewish.

WEISS: Right.

HAPEMAN: Right.

WEISS: That's why we're here.

HAPEMAN: Okay. We—okay. What—we'll get to that.

WEISS: Okay? Okay. Okay. Now, I just wanted to show you part of it. I thought I have—but this was another little square, a—a circle, which—the reformers—

HAPEMAN: Uh-hmm.

WEISS: —had a church there.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: See, it was—

HAPEMAN: Yes.

WEISS: Ev—we have many, many reformers. Hmm. Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic. [unclear]. The people who believe in the Saturday Sabbath but they're Christians.

HAPEMAN: Uh-hmm.

WEISS: What do you call them?

HAPEMAN: Ah—

WEISS: Ah—

SIGRIST: I don't know.

HAPEMAN: [unclear] [clears throat]—

WEISS: You know, all the different—

HAPEMAN: Yes.

WEISS: —religions. And through that, every part of the city had different, you know—

HAPEMAN: Churches and—

WEISS: Yes. And the people lived around the church—

HAPEMAN: Yes.

WEISS: —who belonged to that church.

HAPEMAN: Who belonged to the church.

WEISS: Now, this is the street I lived on here.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: A narrow street.

HAPEMAN: Yes.

WEISS: You know?

HAPEMAN: Yes.

WEISS: And I wanted to show you the—the im—

HAPEMAN: Oh. Is that your—is—

WEISS: I [unclear]—I lived there a little bit [unclear]. [chuckles] A little bit—a house like this, I think. I don't remember which one it was.

HAPEMAN: Let—let's talk about your house.

WEISS: Well, the house was very pretty.

HAPEMAN: We—describe it.

WEISS: But very, very—as I said before, very primitive.

HAPEMAN: Very primitive.

WEISS: No—no modern—this is the street. No—no modern con—  
conveniences. [unclear]—

HAPEMAN: How many rooms did it have?

WEISS: How many rooms? Well, everything opened up. Everything was in a  
row and everything opened up upon into the yard.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: It was like a long corridor and e—every room. Now, the front room  
was the so-called parlor. My father and mother were—my father was  
a tailor and my mother was a dressmaker. But my father learned his  
trade in the royal house in Germany. When he was 17, he was  
working in—what was it—his name? The—the—the—before the  
Revolution, the—

SIGRIST: Franz Joseph?

WEISS: Franz Joseph. Franz Joseph's court. He was 17 years old. He was in  
Vienna that time, my father, and also in Berlin and he learned his trade  
over there. And he got a [chuckles] diploma. And mother, when he  
died, [chuckles] she cleaned out his papers and threw out that  
diploma. I thought I'll die when I heard that. But, you know, she  
wasn't aware of how important that was. Anyways, but when he came  
back to Hungary he met my mother and they got married. She was 21  
and my father was 29. And he took her back to Berlin. She didn't like  
to live there so they came back to Hungary and sh—they got stuck  
there. And all her life, she wanted to get away from that—that place.  
But we children were very happy there. We did not have the feeling of  
being discriminated against at all. Not at all, being that also, that I  
went to that Catholic school, you know. I didn't have the feeling of  
being separated or—or—or made uncomfortable.

HAPEMAN: Uh-hmm.

WEISS: But my father had different ideas, evidently. Five children were born to  
my mother and I was the number three.

HAPEMAN: Number three.

WEISS: They had two boys and I was—and three girls came after that. And, well, I w—my brother was 19. I was seven—no, my brother was 21. My—I was 17 and then a younger sister, 15, and my youngest, 11, we—when we came over.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Before we get to—to when you came—

WEISS: Now, about the city.

HAPEMAN: Yes, about—

WEISS: Okay.

HAPEMAN: About your—about your house—

WEISS: My house was—let me see—in the front room, you went in. The—my mother had—that was a room where she took care of the customers who came to order clothing.

HAPEMAN: So the business—

WEISS: So—

HAPEMAN: —was happening in the house.

WEISS: In the house. Yeah. Then we had another room next to that room. Everything in—in a row. That was the waiting room but—with tables and a—a round table with the c—the fashion books. And people sat around and they selected their clothing. Then, the next was the worker's room where the—we—my father had eight girls and two men working there, which was in the—[chuckles] in the [unclear] became our bedroom, children, because you know, the table what my worked on, the top came off. And that was the bed for the three girls. [chuckles] We slept in one bed. And my brother had different arrangement. Then the kitchen and a—a small little room, which was used as a bathroom. No, bathroom. How should I say? Where we took baths. As I said before, we didn't have convenience. So how we did it, we had to carry buckets of water, warm it up and pour it into a wooden b—a wooden—

HAPEMAN: Tub?

WEISS: —tub and that's—that's the whole thing.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: Then we had a—outside in the yard, a, like a lean-to for the wood because we had to buy wood ahead of time. We—every room had wooden—wood-burning stoves.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: And of course, it was very difficult to get wood so we didn't heat all the rooms, only the room where the workers were.

HAPEMAN: Did you keep any animals of any kind in—

WEISS: Cats.

HAPEMAN: Pets?

WEISS: Cats.

HAPEMAN: Oh, c—okay.

WEISS: And my mother had a—in the back, also, chickens and geese and the—what do you call that here when you have your own chicken coops?

SIGRIST: Coop? Chicken coop?

WEISS: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Chicken coop.

WEISS: She had chicken coops and—and that's—

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: —the—all—we—I mean, my mother grew her own chickens.  
[chuckles] And we had—we ate that.

HAPEMAN: [chuckles] And you ate—and you made that. Right?

WEISS: [chuckles]

HAPEMAN: Okay. Tell me—you—you were talking before about your parents.

WEISS: Yes, dear.

HAPEMAN: Tell me about your father.

WEISS: My father was a lovely man.

HAPEMAN: What did he look like?

WEISS: I can't tell you. I think I have pictures of him. [chuckles] I think. I don't remember. Anyways, he was a sophisticated man because he didn't stay in just—in the little village. He traveled all over because he grew up in Vienna and—and Berlin was a sophisticated city. And as a matter of fact, when end of the World War, all the royalty came here. My father was the one who took care of them, from Russia, from Hungary, from Germany, got them jobs and took care of them. So you know, it wasn't a very dull life.

HAPEMAN: Hmm.

WEISS: I knew them all. You remember—maybe you—not in your life and not in your life but I remember when Barbara Hutton marry—married Princess Opilinski [PH]—Prince Opilinski. I knew them. I met him. I met her and my father made all her trousseau.

HAPEMAN: So you were introduced to all kinds of—

WEISS: Royalty.

HAPEMAN: —famous people—

WEISS: Oh, yes. Yes.

HAPEMAN: —because of your father—

WEISS: Yes, yes. Yeah.

HAPEMAN: —and his connections as [unclear].

WEISS: Well, you know, maybe I'm disappointing you because I haven't got—my background is not what's probably accepted from the usual émigrés because I had a very different life.

HAPEMAN: When you—when you remember your father, when you think of him, what childhood remem—memory do you have of him?

WEISS: Well, first of all, he—he w—he served in the Hungarian Army so he wasn't home much. And I have pictures of him as a soldier but, you know, my house is in—in a complete mess. And forgive me, I have pains. I—I can hardly talk but I'll get over it. It's not—it's—

HAPEMAN: Should we pause for a moment?

SIGRIST: Do you want to stop for a second?

WEISS: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Get a glass of water?

WEISS: No, no. No water. [tape off/on]

SIGRIST: We're now resuming.

WEISS: Ask me the question.

HAPEMAN: What—what else do you remember about your father as a child? And—and actually, before you even say that, one thing that we need to get clear is your father's name. I never asked you what your father's name is.

WEISS: All right. Samuel Marcus Friedmenn.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: Can you spell that?

HAPEMAN: Yes.

WEISS: Now, he—he was in sort of a h—middle side. We were all short people. Only my mother was—my mother was gorgeous, tall. Go next to my bed.

SIGRIST: Okay.

WEISS: Over—over that where my filing cabinet. Her pictures—I want you to bring it.

SIGRIST: I'll bring it out. Okay. You keep talking about your father—

WEISS: I have to—

SIGRIST: —while I'm doing it.

WEISS: My father was, according to the times, a sophisticated man. As I told you, he was always with royalty and—and to that, he became not an

educated man, but life educated. Very nice manners, jolly, always smiling, always happy. Did you find it?

SIGRIST: Yes, I have.

WEISS: Isn't she something?

SIGRIST: Yes. Keep talking about your father and then we'll talk about your mother.

WEISS: [laughs] And how should I say? He was—he was an easygoing—very easygoing, full of fun. You know? And my mother was just the opposite, a very serious and, therefore, there was—

HAPEMAN: Wh—what do you mean?

WEISS: [chuckles]

HAPEMAN: What [laughs]—

WEISS: I don't want to say it. You know what I mean [unclear].

SIGRIST: Well, you're gesturing with your hands back and forth.

WEISS: That they had—

SIGRIST: Does that mean tension?

HAPEMAN: Tension, okay.

SIGRIST: [laughs] Okay.

WEISS: Ladies.

HAPEMAN: [laughs]

WEISS: Anyways—

HAPEMAN: Your—your father ran quite a business—

WEISS: Oh, yeah.

HAPEMAN: —out of your house.

WEISS: Oh, yes. Oh, yeah.

HAPEMAN: What kind of relationship did he have with—with the people that worked for him?

WEISS: Everybody loved him. Everybody loved him. The whole town loved him. And my brother was the same, very nice people. So anyways, to get back to my father, then he joined the army. And being that he had four children—one died. One of the children died. They—and he had an enlarged heart. But that was no excuse those days. So they took him in the army, kept him behind the lines, doing nothing else but sewing for the army. They used his talent to be useful repairing, making uniforms. So—but he was like a—how—how would you describe a man like that? Kept the boys a—alive, you know, because he was older—40, 42, maybe. So whatever it was, he was—he was to me—I—I adore him. Yeah. Then, naturally, when he went in the army, Hungary went bankrupt, completely bankrupt. Whatever little money they had, they lost everything, my mother and father. And my mother was the earner of the family. She was—she took over the running of the business. And she made enough but not—we didn't—she didn't get money for her work. Bartering. If you were a shoemaker, you made shoes for the children. If you had a store who had flour, the woman gave me—gave my mother flour so she can make bread for us. We never went hungry. If—for the—for the peasants, we didn't have Hungarian peasant, only Romanian and gypsies—tilled the w—the—the land. Now, if you had a farm and you had dairy farm, the milk and the dairy went to the soldiers. So in order for her to feed the four children—so she says, "I'll make you dresses. You give me"—at night, they used to come to my house. I remember it like I—I see them right in front—front of me. They came, no matter what weather w—they used to carry those woven baskets on—with leather straps and put butter, cheese, whatever they produced so they could get something, because the soldiers took it away. They didn't get any compensation from the soldiers. They gave soldiers too. They had to, you know. But they made sure that Mrs. Friedmenn had enough for her four children.

HAPEMAN: And what w—what was your mother's name?

WEISS: Hilda, Hilda. Hilda. Her—her maiden name was Hilda Karpelesz. That's a little hard to—

HAPEMAN: Can you spell that or do you—

WEISS: I got to write it down.

SIGRIST: Here's a piece of paper.

WEISS: That's [unclear].

SIGRIST: Yes. We're going to bring Hilda out right now onto the table.

WEISS: Isn't she—

HAPEMAN: She's a beautiful woman.

WEISS: She was 42 then. H—

HAPEMAN: Paul—Paul has gotten a picture of Mrs. Weiss' mother and we are now looking at it.

WEISS: Here [unclear].

SIGRIST: Feel free to describe it, actually, [unclear].

HAPEMAN: Mrs. Weiss' mother looks like she was a very elegant woman, given this picture.

WEISS: She was.

HAPEMAN: She has very fair skin and very dark hair as a very [unclear]—

WEISS: No, she had red hair.

HAPEMAN: Wh—is it light? Is it—

WEISS: Red hair.

HAPEMAN: Red. Oh, red. Yes.

WEISS: So did I when I was little.

HAPEMAN: Yes?

WEISS: Red.

HAPEMAN: So she has red hair.

WEISS: Yeah.

HAPEMAN: Ve—very beautiful woman.

WEISS: Yeah, she was 42 there.

HAPEMAN: Forty-two in this picture.

WEISS: Yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: What year was that taken? '20s?

WEISS: Well, let me tell you. She was 21 when she married my father. She probably—21. [chuckles] Well, she was born before the century. Yeah. Have no idea.

SIGRIST: I see.

HAPEMAN: Wow. She looks—

WEISS: She w—let's see now. I'm just trying to figure out, 21. Well, she was married at the First World War already. Did you turn it off? She was—and I was born in 1908. So all right. And I was born. She was—we'll figure out. She was—I was the third child and every two years she had a child. So '14—1914, the First World War broke out. I was six exactly. I [unclear]. So you figure I was—if I was six—she was 21. I haven't got the head for that—

HAPEMAN: Well, how old—

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

SIGRIST: How old was she when you came to America?

WEISS: Maybe 50.

SIGRIST: Maybe 50.

WEISS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So it's 1925 when you come to America.

WEISS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So she was probably born sometime around 1875? That sound right?

WEISS: Maybe later.

SIGRIST: Maybe later? 1880s?

WEISS: Something.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Okay.

SIGRIST: And you were going to spell her name.

WEISS: Oh, yeah.

HAPEMAN: Yes.

WEISS: You—you look out for this?

SIGRIST: Shall I go hang her back on—

HAPEMAN: Yes.

SIGRIST: —the wall here?

HAPEMAN: Please do.

SIGRIST: Great.

HAPEMAN: Paul's going to go return the picture.

WEISS: Thank you, darling.

SIGRIST: You're welcome.

HAPEMAN: She has a very demure look on her face [unclear].

WEISS: [whispers] She was beautiful.

HAPEMAN: Very pretty.

WEISS: She was a [chuckles] celebrated beauty.

HAPEMAN: Yes.

WEISS: Now, here is another double letter.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: S—Karpelesz. Sss—Sss.

HAPEMAN: Karpelesz.

WEISS: Sss, sss, sss. S, we say sh—one letter. When it's a Z next to it, it's sss.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: It's like a sss.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: [unclear].

HAPEMAN: Mrs. Weiss has spelled out her mother's maiden name and it is spelled K-A-R-P-E-L-E-S-Z.

WEISS: Karpelesz. There.

HAPEMAN: You—you talked a little bit about your mother's personality, especially in relationship to your father. Is there anything else you'd like to say about her personality?

WEISS: Well, she loved beauty, paintings. She was very, very advanced to the—the way sh—she was born into a very f—a very strange family, very poor. Very poor. But her mother was a business lady, meaning she baked ginger cookies. She married—[chuckles] she married a young boy. Her parents were wealthy. And the young boy was the only Jewish boy in the neighborhood so they bought him. He was 19 and she was 26. She was an old maid already. He was busy making children, [laughs] for she had eight children. She had to support the eight children and her husband did nothing else but go to temple and studied the Torah. All right? So she threw him out. She got a divorce but not a l—legal divorce. She wouldn't give him—only a Jewish religious divorce, which is called a get [PH]. In other words, according to the Jewish religion, you are divorced. You can marry. But according to this legal, Hungarian, you can never marry because if you marry you have children out of wedlock. All right. So they—my grandmother divorced him and he waited a few years and he got married again. He was 29 by that time. And he married a 16-year-old girl, beautiful girl. Eleven children. One was nicer than the other. You never saw a family like—my grandmother [chuckles] was so much in love with her husband. She earned money. She built him a house and she supported him with the children and the wife. All right? Is that interesting enough for you? [laughter] It isn't an—an everyday life.

HAPEMAN: Could—could both of your parents read or write?

WEISS: Oh, yes. My mother wrote beautiful German. But not my grandparents. Yes, they did. My grandfather was working for a count, a Hungarian count. He was a beer—he made beer. Okay? My father's father. He was a brewer and he had a secret formula he will never give away. And he w—he became—he took care of the estate for this count. What do you call those people who take—

SIGRIST: Caretaker?

WEISS: Caretakers. [sniffs] My grandmother was the n—nanny for the count's children. So the count built them a little bit of a house at the end of his estate. I was there. And that's where my grandmother and grandfather lived for the rest of their life because the children went all over the world. They had eight, nine children. I don't remember. And one went to Budapest. One went to Vienna, like my father. And they dispersed all over. They never came back. They were all killed. Hitler. Everybody. So it was a sad story.

HAPEMAN: Hmm.

WEISS: You know.

HAPEMAN: Hmm.

WEISS: Some of them, they brought over after the—after Hitler. I mean, after the American Army liberated them in the camps. So my h—husbands—Julius and I, we brought over my grandfather's children. The one [unclear]. Two the—how many [unclear]? Two girls and three boys. That's all remain from 11 children. The rest of them—so that's the story of my life, sort of. [laughs] I could tell you stories for—from morning till night. [laughs] Actually, it's really interesting. That's [unclear]. "Mother, please write a book." I says, "No. That's not interesting. You know, just for me."

HAPEMAN: Could you—we've talked about your—your brothers and sisters. Could you name them?

WEISS: Yes.

HAPEMAN: Their names, please?

WEISS: My brother, Jack, American. He was—his name was Isadore [PH] Friedmenn. Isadore Friedmenn, but he didn't like that name so he changed it to Jack when we came to America, just like they changed my name into Margaret from Margit, because they said, "Nobody will be able to pronounce it." And incidentally, my number two husband

was not Weiss. His name was Vashevnikov [PH], Russian name. And they—when he came to Ellis Island one of the gentlemen there says, “You can’t go to America with that name.” [laughs] “So what should I call myself?” So he—he says, “All right, Weiss.” So actually, that’s his name, Weiss. Vashevnikov is his legal name. He came here; he was 19.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: Yeah.

HAPEMAN: So—so you have one brother, Jack—

WEISS: Oh—

HAPEMAN: —or Isadore.

WEISS: Jack. Yeah. Now, he also—in Europe, usually the children follow the father’s trade so he became a—a tailor. And he worked for Warner Brothers Studio.

HAPEMAN: Warner Brothers Studio?

WEISS: Yeah.

HAPEMAN: Uh-hmm.

WEISS: All the famous actresses. He made the suits for them.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: And he had—he died in an automobile accident at the age of 49. He was—think of—what’s his name? Paul Newman. That’s—he look—he looked just like Paul Newman. I—I have a box full of photographs here but it’s too much work.

HAPEMAN: Mmm.

WEISS: He was a handsome man and his wife is an actress who was acting in Budapest in the theater. And here in America—she’s a character actress—she’s older than I am and she’s still acting for character. You know, he—I must tell you this because you’ll get a kind of out of this. You know when—what is his name? Oh. That Italian actor who just had a baby. What is his name, Paul? Very famous. Little guy.

HAPEMAN: Anthony Quinn—

SIGRIST: Anthony Quinn is—

WEISS: No, no, no.

SIGRIST: Just had a baby.

WEISS: But he's Greek.

SIGRIST: But he's not Italian. He's Greek.

WEISS: He's Greek. He's Italian. What is his name? He just divorce and had a new baby and [unclear] the baby? Just now.

SIGRIST: Oh, Sylvester Stallone.

WEISS: Stallone. Stallone.

HAPEMAN: Oh, yes. That's [chuckles]—

WEISS: He had the first picture. What was the name of the—his first picture? He played—

HAPEMAN: "Rocky."

WEISS: "Rocky."

HAPEMAN: "Rocky"?

WEISS: "Rocky." "Rocky" [unclear]

HAPEMAN: Yes. [chuckles]

WEISS: She played his mother.

HAPEMAN: Oh, she did?

WEISS: Yeah. [chuckles]

HAPEMAN: So your brother's wife played Rocky's mother in—

WEISS: Mother, yeah.

HAPEMAN: —"Rocky."

WEISS: Yeah.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: She was a Hungarian [chuckles] peasant woman.

HAPEMAN: [laughs]

WEISS: And Rocky was his—her son. And they was—always be sit around the dining room table. That's—that's the European style. [clears throat] And they—they had a big argument and she was talking Hungarian. [laughs]

HAPEMAN: Oh.

WEISS: But he adored her, Stallone.

HAPEMAN: I know you had three—or two sisters. Right? What were their names?

WEISS: Lily and Clary [PH].

HAPEMAN: Lily.

WEISS: Lillian.

HAPEMAN: Lillian.

WEISS: Lillian and Clare.

HAPEMAN: Clare.

WEISS: Yeah.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: Yeah.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: It's on the television, the three sisters. [laughs]

SIGRIST: Oh, yes. I can see it [unclear]. [laughter]

WEISS: Well [chuckles]—

HAPEMAN: Okay. Who did the cooking in your family?

SIGRIST: Wait. Just—was—didn't you have two brothers?

WEISS: One.

SIGRIST: Just one. Just Jack.

WEISS: Oh, one of them died in infancy.

SIGRIST: You said there were five kids.

WEISS: Yeah. Yeah. The—the—the baby was only three months old, b—a crib death. You know, the—they call in America, crib death.

HAPEMAN: Yes—

SIGRIST: Crib death.

HAPEMAN: Crib death.

WEISS: Three months old and my—my mother was sick a year after that. Hmm, life. So what else would you like to ask, young lady?

HAPEMAN: Who did the cooking in your family?

WEISS: Mostly my mother.

HAPEMAN: Did you help out? Were—were the children help—expected to help?

WEISS: Nothing.

HAPEMAN: No?

WEISS: [laughs]

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: My mother says, "I cooked enough in my life. I sewed enough. I don't—I don't need to teach you."

HAPEMAN: [laughs]

WEISS: I says, "Mother." I says, "People pay you to teach their children." I says, "Teach me how to sew." "Not you." She was working for a living at 12. So she didn't want us to have a hard life. And she tried everything. Yeah.

HAPEMAN: What can you tell me—we—we talked a little bit about your being Jewish and—

WEISS: Yeah.

HAPEMAN: —going to a Catholic school.

WEISS: Right.

HAPEMAN: Talk—talk to me about religious life in your town.

WEISS: Well, my father and mother were what you call a modern Jew. In Hungarian, they called n—[unclear]. I don't know what that meant. The word for a—a modern Jew was called—meaning—like over here, in Brooklyn, we have the Hassidim [PH], which is the early—very—

SIGRIST: Let me just fix—get your microphone—

WEISS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —there. Keep—keep going.

WEISS: They're very religious Jews, who are following the ancient—

HAPEMAN: Uh-hmm.

WEISS: —Torah and ancient beliefs and—help me. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Just the orthodox—

WEISS: Yeah, yeah. They're very orthodox, ultra, ultra orthodox. My family—my f—mother's family is right here in—they don't want to talk to me. I'm not Jewish, according to them, because I don't—I don't follow their sect. And now what—what I'm trying to say, there was also in my time two sects, the very religious, and we were the modern Jews. Okay. That's all.

HAPEMAN: What—there were two synagogues? Or were more than—

WEISS: One synagogue. They called them—we all went over there.

HAPEMAN: You all went—both the—the orthodox Jews and the modern Jews went to the same synagogue.

WEISS: Yeah. Honey, I'm going to tell you something. I am the product of a very modern world. I don't go back to the Russian Jewish life because

those are the ones who are really the most interesting background, as far as religious, you know. In other words, we were not properly Jewish. [chuckles] Unfortunately, I—I regret that because I think everybody should have a real faith, you know. And I didn't teach my children either. My children married Chinese. I have Chinese grandchildren and great grandchildren. I have Catholics. I have every—I have [chuckles] Israel. My step grandson mar—is a rabbi in Israel. And he just sent a picture with the girls on the desk. [chuckles] They're the cutest little guys but they are brought up as a very ultra—

HAPEMAN: Orthodox.

WEISS: —orthodox.

HAPEMAN: Uh-hmm.

WEISS: He's American and he went there to take a course. And he fell in love with the way of life. The parents are like I am, modern Jews. And he fell in love with the—I'm trying to find the word—the—oh, when they—I—I don't know. I don't know the American word for it. Anyways, he studied. He went to a school—a rabbinical school and he met American Jewish girl there and they got married. And they remained in Israel and has three children in five years already. They don't—they don't believe in—you know. It's against their religion and they're going to have 11 children, [chuckles] like my grandfather. He had 19 children. But they were beautiful children and very valuable people, you know. But this is—this is a different world, honey. You know.

HAPEMAN: What do you remember about in—you went to the Catholic school.

WEISS: Yes.

HAPEMAN: So that you weren't aware of being made to feel uncomfortable.

WEISS: Oh, no. You know how nice they were—I meant to tell you that every Friday they invited a rabbi. We had maybe 11 Jewish children in my class and that—and we were excused, you know, to play in the morning to just bent—just like here, you know. They had fights over that. But we just gave the respect to the—when the Catholic children prayed we just bent our head. All right? And then we didn't say our prayers. But every Friday afternoon a rabbi came in and gave us our religious training for two hours or three hours.

HAPEMAN: So the Catholic school made arrangements for a rabbi to come in—

WEISS: Right, right.

HAPEMAN: —so that your religion—

WEISS: Yeah.

HAPEMAN: —was—

WEISS: Absolutely. They were very nice. Very nice. We had a very wonderful relationship with the Catholic community. My mother was very nice to them. They used to write me letters when I came to America.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Tell me about school life in Hungary. What—what was the school like?

WEISS: Beautiful, beautiful. And—

HAPEMAN: Besides—besides the—the [unclear]—

WEISS: The discrimination wasn't obvious, only among children. You know?

HAPEMAN: Only among—

WEISS: Among little children.

HAPEMAN: So discrimination was obvious to the adults but not to the children?

WEISS: No, just opposite.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: The parents were more understanding and we had a good relationship. But the children—I don't know where they picked it up but we were always—you know. I don't want to say it but my best girlfriend was a Catholic girl and she—she—whenever she got angry at me she called me a dirty Jew. So I says, "Listen. I'm going to tell you something. You know who Jesus was? Was a Jew." I thought she'll kill me. [laughter] I thought she's going to kill me. She went to the priest and, "You know what Mar—Margaret said?" And this—he says, "He—she was right." "That's not true. You lying. You like the Jews." Says, "No, that's the truth." I'll never forget that. He says, "That's the truth." I says, "I wish you'd teach your children." And she went back to her mother and actually, her mother said it's true. And then she came back. She—you know, never was friend again. Never. So that's what—and my father—we used to go home and talked about these things. He says, "It's time to go to." Jewish children were not allowed to go to higher education. I got four years of elementary

school. Further down, my father wasn't rich enough to pay. High school, college was out. They had what you call numerous [PH] [unclear]. Now, in other words, you c—from every race, you could only two or three, or 10 percent. I—I think that's Latin, numerous [unclear]. In other word, it was a—like a controlled—so that was one thing. Then what else did they—that was already the beginning of the end, beginning of Hitler. So this is the story, darling.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: [unclear]?

SIGRIST: Oh, we're doing fine. We've got—we've got 10 minutes.

HAPEMAN: Sev—several—

WEISS: What else? What else did I say—talk too much?

SIGRIST: You're doing a wonderful job, Mrs. Weiss.

WEISS: You know, I get emotional. I really do. I do. I—I—between you and me, I dreaded this because I know that I'm going to talk to you about things I shouldn't talk, discrimination and all that. After all, it's—it's not right but I can't help it.

SIGRIST: But it's important. That kind of relationship.

WEISS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Especially—especially when we interview people—

WEISS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Especially Jewish people—

WEISS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —who've had experiences, good or bad—

WEISS: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: —with the gentile population—

WEISS: I've never had—

SIGRIST: It's important to get this on tape. One thing I might ask—need to ask you—you—we were talking earlier before we did the interview about the differences between the uneducated peasants—

WEISS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —who were mostly gentile.

WEISS: They were not the prejudiced.

SIGRIST: Well, wh—I—if you could talk a little—

WEISS: They were not prejudiced—

SIGRIST: —bit about the relationship—

WEISS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —between the peasantry and the people who [unclear]—

WEISS: At least my personal remembrance, you know. Now, I'll tell you something, during the—during Easter holidays, the Jewish people are not allowed to eat from the same dishes or—in other words, we have to change our dishes during—during Easter. I don't know. I—I don't even know. I should know. We have to change everything. In other words, no breads. You're not supposed to eat bread. And you're not supposed to use any of your dishes that you used w—we had a whole different—cooking, everything, like always, in the closet. So during the holidays, you not supposed to have milk unless you take your own dishes to the cow and put the milk right from the cow into your own dish. So this farmer woman, who used to come to my mother says, "Look, Mrs. Friedmenn. It's no problem but I can't go to your house. You send your children or whoever you want to send along. And I'll milk the cow right into your dish." Don't you think we went there every other day? It was like eight kilometer away. All right. And we had a—a—a young Romanian girl, which my mother brought up. She was a—a—an orphan. And her sister-in-law did—did—miners and they were very poor and says, "Mrs. Friedmenn, she would be good for a play—play—you know, play with your children. Just feed her." So my mother took that little girl into her home. She was with us until my mother married her off, you know.

HAPEMAN: So she lived in the home with you—

WEISS: Yes.

HAPEMAN: —in Europe?

WEISS: Now, that little girl came with us to the p—peasant woman. We shouldn't walk alone for eight miles. My brother, my two sisters and this little girl—that's what I'm trying to bring up, that she was older than we were. So she was about 12, 13. And she was coming and she sew and she carried because we didn't have proper—you know, the—the milk—pitcher was made out of clay. So if you drop it, there's no milk. [laughs] So we had to be very careful. I'll never forget that. It was very—it was interesting. Yeah.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: [sighs] I hope I didn't bore you. [chuckles]

HAPEMAN: As a young woman in Hungary, what did you imagine America to be like?

WEISS: I can't—like a never, never land.

HAPEMAN: What do you mean by that?

WEISS: I'll never forget it. Well, you know, you—you don't hear too much. I never heard English spoken or I never saw an American. I never heard anything about American. But my father used to say that freedom—okay? Freedom. And everybody has the same chance. He was a—a dreamer and, according to whatever I heard, I imagined America to be land of plenty, of course. I didn't—I knew that you can't f—pick up dollars from the floor; you got to earn it. But the—they called the big sk—skyscrapers and when we arrived to Ellis Island we saw the skyline of New York. And we came in, like, at night. I cannot s—describe you the thrill of it. Even now, I go—when I go into New York, and I traveled for 20 years. I was in my business; every day, I went in. I couldn't get over that. And it is just like you see it in a picture postcard. And of course, lot of interesting—I loved to go alone to downtown New York by the [unclear]. You—you didn't see that but you heard of it. It was so—I loved that. To me, first, I didn't speak their language, mostly Russian Jews and Polish Jews. And I just loved to be with—to watch them. It was so fascinating to me. And alone, I used to go downtown to New York, 17 already, look for work. And my mother didn't have money to give me for carfare so she gave me 25 cents each day to buy a sandwich and have 10 cents, five cents for the subway coin. So—so when I couldn't find a job, I went downtown and just walked and walked and walked and observe everything. So when I got married to Julius, we went to Delancey

Street to one of these places to buy my trousseau. [chuckles] It was just fa—fascinating.

HAPEMAN: We're going to talk quite a lot about your life in America once we—we get through your trip over to America—

WEISS: Yeah.

HAPEMAN: —on the ship and then through Ellis Island. We will come back to that. But before we get to that, I want to—I want to talk to you about, first of all, was there somebody in America already? Some—some [unclear]—

WEISS: Oh, yeah. My father was here.

HAPEMAN: [unclear] you—

WEISS: Five years before we came, he came.

HAPEMAN: Oh.

WEISS: And he established himself. He had a tailor—you know these brownstone houses—

HAPEMAN: Yes.

WEISS: —on—on the 50s, so he took the second floor and took the—he made a shop. And—and, you know, he worked for the millionaires.

HAPEMAN: And where was his job?

WEISS: Madison Avenue and 50—somewhere, 50—56—I don't remember exactly. I—you wouldn't believe it but I still have his stationery. I'm a—I'm a—you know what you call a—a person who saves everything? That's me. That's why—everything.

HAPEMAN: Yes, packrat. [chuckles]

WEISS: That's the word I was looking for.

HAPEMAN: [laughs]

WEISS: And it is. I saved my father's business papers and I have it but I don't want to waste your time to look for things. But—

HAPEMAN: How—how did you finance the journey? Did your father send money home to your mother and your—

WEISS: [unclear], this is very interesting. He had a partner, who wasn't a good tailor. But to my father, he was able—also all get out his family, Mr. Wendel [PH]. And they worked together in that shop and he went home to his—to get his wife and only child. And he has some money saved up. So my father told him, "Look, when you come back, you come back to me. You'll have a business." In other words, "I won't discontinue the partnership when you come ho—back. You have a business. You walk into a business. You help and I pay you back the money." It cost my father—I—\$3,500 to bring his family. That was a terrible—big money, those—all right? And we paid it for years. [chuckles] Yeah, all of us children worked and—

HAPEMAN: What did you pack to come to America?

WEISS: I pack—my mother packed everything. [chuckles] Now, this is very interesting. I'll tell you why because, you know, we didn't have regular luggage. We had these woven baskets as big as half of this. So when we got to Paris everybody laughed at us because who travels with baskets? So, bedding. She brought bedding, pillows. I still have pillows from her. [chuckles] Bedding, quilts, whatever. You know, they didn't have quilts in Europe, down quilts. You know, like now. She brought as many as we needed with four children, and pillows and—and linen and pots and pans. Very little, not too much, because I remember going to the five and ten and buying pots and pans. [chuckles] Yeah, yeah. It was fun. I didn't even ever saw a stove with gas in it. So one of our Hungarian neighbor, she came in to teach us because we could have blow us up. [laughs]

HAPEMAN: A Hungarian neighbor taught you how to run a gas stove—

WEISS: N—yeah, yeah.

HAPEMAN: —in anticipation of what you were going to find here?

WEISS: Right, right. Right, right. That's exactly what happened.

HAPEMAN: Okay. How—did you take something with you that was very personal—

WEISS: No.

HAPEMAN: —to—

WEISS: Oh, the only thing I took, the boys, I used to keep company with their pictures. [chuckles] And then when I—engaged to J—Julius—says, Well, if you love me you tear up the pictures.” And like a damn fool, I did. I never forgive myself. I should have never done that. All the boys I went out with. All those lovely boys. [chuckles]

HAPEMAN: How did you feel about leaving these boys and everything [unclear]?

WEISS: I felt very sad. I—because, you see, by nature I’m a loner. I never made too many friends. Never. I’m not—I don’t like people, a lot of people and my mother never allowed us to have friends because, “You have two sisters. That’s friends. You don’t have friends.” She was afraid we’d get into bad company. So we were always—I was always lonely for friends. Naturally, when I came to this country I was very lonely.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Where did you—where—where did you leave from? Which port did you leave from?

WEISS: Cherbourg. French.

HAPEMAN: In—in France.

WEISS: Yeah.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: We—we came—I remember the name of the ship, the Majestic. And I—I don’t know whether it was a White Star Line or the Cunard Line but you can look that up. We stayed in Cherbourg. The—the company, who we came through, paid for our hotel accommodation.

HAPEMAN: The—

WEISS: They had a—a house where there was a great big room for men and a great big room for women. It was like a—you know, [unclear] soldiers. But when they notice my mother with four children, so they gave us a private room. The boy, my son—my son—my brother had to go in the m—oh, how—how is that room called where all—

SIGRIST: The men’s area?

WEISS: Yeah.

HAPEMAN: Dorm—

WEISS: Dorm.

HAPEMAN: Dormitory?

WEISS: Dormitory. My brother had to go away. He was already 19, I think. He couldn't be with—in the same room with us. So my mother and the three of us, you know, among [unclear]—

HAPEMAN: You were separated.

WEISS: Yeah.

HAPEMAN: Yes.

WEISS: We had a private room and a purser. They treated us royally, really.

HAPEMAN: I have to interrupt you for a second. We're going to stop the tape, flip it over and then continue, and I'd like to hear more about your time before you left from France, but we're going to do that in just a moment.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B]

[BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A]

HAPEMAN: This is Mindy Hapeman. We're beginning tape two with Margaret Weiss, who came from Hungary in 1925 at the age of 17. We're going to pick up where we let off. Wait. I want to talk about leaving Hungary and how you got from where you were to Cherbourg, right, which is where you left.

WEISS: From Nagy Banya to Cherbourg.

HAPEMAN: Uh-hmm.

WEISS: Can I speak now?

HAPEMAN: Yes, please do.

WEISS: All right. Well, you know, this—about three months, the preparation for the trips until my mother was able to get rid of her furniture, all right, then legal things.

HAPEMAN: Did she sell it? Did—

WEISS: She gave it away. Nothing sold. Who had money? [chuckles] She gave away through a—girls who worked for her and to the men who worked for her. Sort of left them presents, whatever it was. And then we just got—even our clothing. She only—we only brought along that what we needed, let's say, two, three days of [unclear]. And not—not too much. Mostly, she paid attention to her sleeping equipment so she should be able to put us back—

HAPEMAN: Uh-hmm.

WEISS: —and the table to set up. So anyways, we went first. We took the train to Austria at night so we didn't see much of Austria. But we had trouble, food. She didn't bring anything along and we h—wherever we stopped, we tried to ask for food. And luckily, we spoke German so I was able—because Austria. Some people came with scrambled eggs, glass of milk. You pay for that. But that's all we had and I got terribly sick because they—somebody brought something. It was spoiled and I got—I almost died on the way. But anyways, besides that, the train ride was comfortable, very cold, because we came in December. Very cold. Nobody had a blanket. I was frozen and no heat. So for—I think we traveled, like, three days and two nights from—from our part of Romania to Cherbourg. That's quite a long train ride. When—first, we stopped in Paris. The hotel was very primitive. You never saw anything like it because there was no toilet. There was a hole in the floor and you had to squat. Can you imagine that in Paris? You think Paris is a—a—a beautiful city. But you know who pays for it? The company who brings you over. So we had a very unhappy three days there. I don't remember where we—we ate, even, or where we slept. It was some—in that lousy hotel, probably. [chuckles] Excuse me for saying that word. But we had a very unhappy—but Cherbourg was nice. Even though the company had these so-called hotels, but was comfortable, clean. Food was freshly prepared. But naturally, we weren't used to it. Coffee was terrible. [chuckles] We didn't like anything but we were hungry so we ate. And they were nice, really nice, caring, because everybody was sick. And we had a private room, which was very crum—so we stayed there about almost a week. So we took little side trips back to Paris. And the first time in my life, I saw a department store in Paris, which was, coming from a small little city, was phenomenal. Now—which we did a little shopping. And [chuckles] I bought—they took us to a—a little private factory they made. We never saw a jersey; you know, a silk jersey.

HAPEMAN: Uh-hmm.

WEISS: So over there, they had—they made jersey blouses, printed silk jersey blouses. So we [unclear] in a sweater. I never saw a sweater.

[chuckles] All these things were g—new to me. So my mother treated us to a sweater and a blouse in Paris. [sniffs] And then in Cherbourg, we used to go a lot with the fellows. You know, a lot of young men come from all over the country there, college kids. So we—they took u—they took us for little trips to see the city. And Cherbourg is a very interesting city, all those citadels, you know, and how—because that is a city that sort of was like a place where they went—how should I say? Citadel is the word? In German.

SIGRIST: Citadel? A fort—

WEISS: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Or some sort of—

WEISS: No, no. In Germany, they have a lot of these ancient—not castles but—

SIGRIST: Fortresses.

WEISS: —fortresses. Now, this was a fortress city because it sort of protected friends from the enemy. So they had these fortresses and we took w—walks around the—it's very interes—that's—that's what I remember, and the fun we had with the boys. [laughs] That's all. And then—then the ship—oh, wait a minute. We had to wait for the ship because the ships were still—the troop ships, they didn't have luxury ships. One of the troop ships, this was made over already from the troops to take private people. So we had a first class. We had a second class. And we, naturally, being what we were, poor, we traveled on the third class. And you would never believe it, how classy that was. Every table had a waiter with a uniform, white gloves, two or three waiters. But everybody was [chuckles] so sick—children. That—we were always on the deck day and night because that's all [unclear] over the rail. My poor mother was in her bunk and nobody to help her off the bed. So the purser, [clears throat] he came in and gave her orange juice and—and brush—you know, I was a selfish girl. I was up [chuckles] with my brother. I didn't realize how sick she was. And we j—we didn't even go down to sleep. We—we slept in the—on the—out not fresh air. It was so bad. In—we arrived here November—December the 21<sup>st</sup>.

HAPEMAN: Do you know what day you left, the—the date that you left?

WEISS: Well, I don't remember. I never made a note of it. A—I am sorry. But let me—

HAPEMAN: That's o—that's okay.

WEISS: Let me see now. Well, if we arrived here and, let's say, three days for train and week from—for waiting for the ship to come ba—they—that's what I was trying to tell you. The ship had to go to America with one load of people, come back to America. And you had to wait that—the ship just left. The passenger ship just left to America. So we had to wait until that ships unloads and—and loads with the necessity, come backs for the next transport. And you—you never saw anything like it, honey. The way people rushed for that ship, the people almost got killed. They were—they were like animals. They were pushing and—

HAPEMAN: Trampling.

WEISS: Ah! It was terrible. But we got on the ship and we had a terrible trip over because, even though with all the care and all the good food, nobody could eat. That's all—I had one meal and [chuckles] after that, I don't remember anything. The only thing is that we arrived safely and when we got to New York my father waited for us with the cousins. And the first time I—I saw a little car, because those days they didn't give car—didn't have cars.

HAPEMAN: Okay. One more question about the boat. Were there activities on the boat?

WEISS: Oh, yes.

HAPEMAN: What kind of things did you do to pass the time?

WEISS: Be—singing, dancing, music. You know, there was a lot of gaiety, a lot of fun. And the second class, they had beautiful balls and the—and the first class was just like you see now. The—the old pictures, you know, and you could see moving pictures. Yeah. But you don't mingle, not third class.

HAPEMAN: There wasn't mingling between the classes?

WEISS: No, no mingling and no—no fraternity—fraternizing.

HAPEMAN: Uh-huh.

WEISS: And definitely, class distinction. Money. Money, money. So it didn't bother us.

HAPEMAN: Were there other people on the ship from Hungary, from—

WEISS: No, no, strangely. A lot of Russian. A lot of Russian. And I don't remember. All kinds, even from Israel. That time was Palestine.

HAPEMAN: What was that like to be on the ship with so many different cultures? You said that they were singing and dancing. It must have been a very [unclear]—

WEISS: You don't pay attention. You pay attention to the rhythm and the music, you know.

HAPEMAN: Yeah, right.

WEISS: Who cares about the language? You go to the opera. You understand everything? [chuckles] Right?

HAPEMAN: Earlier what you were talking, you told me about seeing the Manhattan skyline for the first time.

WEISS: That was breathtaking. I cannot tell you. Even—I told you, even now, when I go to New York [chuckles]—[telephone ringing] telephone.

SIGRIST: Oh, we're going to pause just for a m—now resuming.

WEISS: Okay.

SIGRIST: Go ahead, Mindy.

HAPEMAN: So tell me about seeing the Statue of Liberty for the first time.

WEISS: Well, the Statue of Liberty was very emotional, to tell you the truth, because under—under ship, I think he heard that the—they gave a speech, what we—we should expect. And—and [unclear]—

HAPEMAN: Who gave the speech? Somebody—

WEISS: Somebody—one of the—

HAPEMAN: One of the ship's personnel.

WEISS: Personnel, yeah.

HAPEMAN: Uh-huh.

WEISS: Young lady, I'm going to tell you something. After 70 years, it's very hard to remember. It's deep memories because I do remember a lot of things. But mostly, a young girl, you know, I wasn't interested.

HAPEMAN: But you do remember seeing the statue?

WEISS: Oh, sure. Oh, sure. [chuckles] Lit up and everything. And I went there with all my grandchildren. Every time they come here, I take them there, even now. [unclear]. Now, I expect this [unclear] was— whenever a—a grandchild became 13, you know, I gave them a summer here. They came to visit me here. And then when I had a big house, I had four bedrooms—so even in this [unclear], all these boxes are merchandise for the store. I was the buyer for my antique shop.

SIGRIST: We should say for the sake of the tape that we are surrounded by antiques [unclear]—

WEISS: Oh, yeah.

HAPEMAN: Yes, we are.

SIGRIST: —as we're sitting here.

HAPEMAN: We are.

WEISS: You see these? This is all New York.

SIGRIST: Yes, [several words unclear].

WEISS: All original, yeah. All originals. Brook—I started with Brooklyn Bridge. I took it in the Star Store and I couldn't sell it. And I said to Eleanor, "Eleanor, I can't believe that people don't want to buy that." So she says, "Oh, Mother. New York is not interested." I said, "But I am. I'm taking it home." So that started me. I have the Third Avenue EI where I used to go to work from the Bronx, Third Avenue EI, to New York. I—

SIGRIST: Well, let's get you into New York [chuckles] so we—

HAPEMAN: Yes, okay.

SIGRIST: —can hear about it.

WEISS: All right.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: Tell me when you [unclear].

HAPEMAN: Tell me what you remember about Ellis Island.

WEISS: Well, the building, you know, we arrived at night so it wasn't impressive yet until next day. You know, I don't even know if we—I think we even left that evening. Yeah, we did leave that evening because we didn't stay too long in Ellis Island. The only thing, they all took us in in a tremendous large room, benches. You know, like a—a sports arena and people were, of course, from every—not only one shipload, probably another shipload of people. And like you said, everybody spoke a different language. [chuckles] So I had enough of my own, my mother and four of us, you know, and a couple of guys from Hungary. So we had enough of our own. We didn't talk too much. And they tell—told us in German—German is a universal language. Ger—that—being that nob—not many people speak Hungarian, would be my [unclear] was in German. “No,” I says. “We understand.” And we did and they—of course, they had the documents. They [unclear] the documents and the doctor wanted to see us. But when we went into the office to see the doctor, he took—

HAPEMAN: He—y—he just looked—

WEISS: Just looked into our—

HAPEMAN: —into your blouse.

WEISS: —into our blouse to see what kind of underwear we wear.

HAPEMAN: Oh!

WEISS: You know?

HAPEMAN: That's—the only medical exam you had was the—well, I—

WEISS: No, no.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: On Ellis Island. [unclear] I had a feeling that the document said something about our being clean and properly dressed, so forth and so on. And that's why he didn't want to waste his time with us. That's our feeling. And my—oh, I wanted to tell you this. My mother, when they examined her at the consulate, they noticed that she has a—on her bellybutton, what is it? Protruding [unclear]—

SIGRIST: Protruding bellybutton?

WEISS: Yeah. Well, you know that she had a—what do you call that when men has it too?

SIGRIST: The—the—the—the navel itself or something in the—

WEISS: Yeah—no. She—just the navel, popped out like.

SIGRIST: Yes—

WEISS: That she needed—that's dangerous because it's—you know, it could—strangulated hernia, something like that. You know? So they wanted her—she can't come to America until that will be not operated on. So we had to go to a big city where there was a hospital. In our town, there was a—not enough of a—so we h—from the consulate, we went to that city. And my mother had that operation. And we had to leave three or four days after that, s—they release her from the operation. We went back and packed up and got on the train. And on the train, someb—some doctor was coming, was notified to change the bandage on her. So when we arrived in Cherbourg the same thing happened. She had to go to a doctor. So naturally, they knew more about us than we thought. Do you understand? So, because everywhere we went, my mother had that very good follow up. So therefore, it wasn't that uneventful trip for us [chuckles], to say the least. But my poor mother was sick and she was a—still a young woman. So—

HAPEMAN: What—what did you see at Ellis Island that you had never seen before? Anything that stuck—sticks out in your mind?

WEISS: Not really, because it wasn't—it was just a public place. Nothing—today is a museum, as I understand. I—I like to go back now and dif—the only thing, I have a problem walking. I would have to hire a—a—

SIGRIST: Try not to play with the picture, Mrs. Weiss. It'll pick up on the tape recorder.

WEISS: Thank you. [coughs] I'm a mess.

SIGRIST: Oh, no. [chuckles]

HAPEMAN: [chuckles] That's not true.

WEISS: It is, honey. It—

SIGRIST: We all have good days and bad days. [chuckles]

WEISS: No, no. I never have good days. [chuckles] I—I live with a lot of pain, a lot of pain. And even though I put up a good front, I am sick. I don't want to give in. I don't. Even when this girl comes to me and she wants to help me dress or bathe, I says, "No, I do it." I do it.

HAPEMAN: Tell me about your father being at Ellis Island. Was he there waiting for you in your—

WEISS: He was waiting for us in New York.

HAPEMAN: Oh.

WEISS: You don't—you can't go to Ellis Island to wait. It wasn't allowed. I don't know what is today. Oh, people don't come to Ellis Island. Anyways, I know that whoever waited for us waited at the pier. All right? And, oh, I was so thrilled. My—my s—father's sister had a little house in Richmond Hill, Long Island. And we were taken there and—until my father found an apartment for us and settled. And he—

HAPEMAN: What—what was it like to see your father again after all those years?

WEISS: Happy.

HAPEMAN: Yeah.

WEISS: We were happy. [chuckles] I was so crazy about him. Really. I really felt very happy to see my father. And my mother, [unclear]. [chuckles]

HAPEMAN: And wh—where did your father find the—the apartment after he left Richmond Hill?

WEISS: Ninety-seventh Street between—right off Park Avenue.

HAPEMAN: And wh—

WEISS: Is even now a beautiful house.

HAPEMAN: What did it look like?

WEISS: An apartment house. I never saw an apartment—five-story walkup. But we had a apartment on the first floor. I think they took a two-bedroom apartment and we had a dining room. Those days, they didn't have living rooms. But it was like a r—railroad apartment, everything, you know. And the bathroom, oh God! Having a bathroom, that was the biggest thrill. A bathroom and a kitchen, and then we didn't know how to cook, you know, all—so, luckily, my mother

had a friend who lived in that vicinity. And we lived there only a year. And my mother wasn't well so the doctor says, "You got to have elevated air." So they advised us to move to the Bronx. So that's the—the time we moved to the Bronx. And the East Bronx, that was still very nice. Very nice. As a matter of fact—where did we live then? Let me see now. What was my first apartment? Oh, yeah. I remember now. It was an eight-room railroad apartment, just like over here. You have every room [chuckles] from that corridor opening. Eight rooms. That's where I got married, from that apartment. [chuckles] I didn't even know that you're supposed to go and hire a car and my husband, that time, although he was here six years before us and he didn't know. So I get dressed in my bridal gown and walked on street [chuckles] to go to the—to the place where the—what do you call that? Where the ceremony had to be. You know, we marry under a canopy and the rabbi and the attendants to hold up that canopy religiously, was like across the street from where I lived in a hall, in a hallway. Prospect Hall, I remember that. We were on Prospect then. And I walk with a coat over [chuckles] my bridal g—"Look at that bride! Look at that bri"—I was so ashamed. [chuckles]

HAPEMAN: [chuckles] So the house that you moved to in the East Bronx is the same—you lived in that house for a long time until you were married—

WEISS: No.

HAPEMAN: No.

WEISS: I was here only two years when I got—

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: —married. [laughs]

HAPEMAN: Okay. Relatively, in terms of how long you were here.

WEISS: A year and a half, I lived there.

HAPEMAN: What was the neighborhood like?

WEISS: Middle class Jews.

HAPEMAN: Uh-hmm.

WEISS: Mostly, Jews and Italians.

HAPEMAN: What kind of religious life did you have once you got to America?

WEISS: None.

HAPEMAN: Did you go to a synagogue?

WEISS: No. I start to go to synagogue where—after I got married because I insisted when the children are—I said to my husband, “Look, this is no life to bring t—to the children.” So I insisted we go to a synagogue, belong to a synagogue. But you know, those—you know, the—to belong to a synagogue is money. And my husband earned a big \$38 a week. And he worked at nights by a tailor ironing. And I worked—I worked in New York, [unclear] here to New York. And I was pregnant right away so every time I—I had to go out and give my breakfast back. [chuckles] What a life. What a life.

HAPEMAN: Did you go to school at all in America?

WEISS: I learned from sc—going to the movies. [chuckles]

HAPEMAN: Is that where—

WEISS: [clears throat]

HAPEMAN: —partly how you learned English?

WEISS: Yes.

HAPEMAN: How else did you learn English?

WEISS: Reading. I read a lot. I—as you see, I have seven bookcases. [chuckles]

HAPEMAN: Uh-hmm.

WEISS: I read a lot. That’s my only—well, being that I can’t go out alone—ah, well, even as a child, I was an avid reader.

HAPEMAN: What year were you married for the first time?

WEISS: 1927.

HAPEMAN: 1927, okay.

WEISS: And Eleanor was born in 1928.

HAPEMAN: Okay, okay.

- WEISS: She's a lovely lady.
- SIGRIST: Can we just—can we just pause for a second? [tape off/on]
- HAPEMAN: Before we—we continue, I—I want to sort of backtrack a little bit and talk about how—the process of learning English from going to the movies. Talk—tell me about that. What did you learn? What was that like?
- WEISS: Pronunciation.
- HAPEMAN: What kind of things were you learning to pronounce from the—from the—
- WEISS: Words.
- HAPEMAN: —movies?
- WEISS: Words. You have no idea, even now. I take words apart if I don't understand, if I don't know how to pr—pronounce it, because as you notice, I lose words even now. I take my—
- HAPEMAN: Dictionary?
- WEISS: —dictionary and study it even now, take the words apart and—and that's how I learned then. I took—I see the words. I'm—I couldn't even—even the dictionary doesn't give you the sound. So if you go to a movie and the mov—mov—the talking picture—
- HAPEMAN: [unclear] here.
- WEISS: Sure.
- SIGRIST: Was there anything else that you were learning from watching American movies? Sorry. I had to ask that. [chuckles] I had to ask.
- WEISS: Listen, I came over here in America. I was brought up in very strict household as far as a young girl. I wasn't allowed to even hold a boy's hand. I was 17; I was never kissed, okay. Really. And very—my mother was just so—if not, [chuckles] we got it. [laughs] She ruled us with her hand. Well, anyways, what I'm going to bring you out, when—what did you ask me?
- SIGRIST: I asked, was there anything else that you were learning about America by watching the movies, other than the language?

WEISS: Oh, yeah. Dancing. The—what was the—shimmy? What was it? [unclear], you know. Shimmy, I think with that—that was [unclear]. We were not brought up to let our bodies go, you know, and I came here. What was—jitterbug. Jitterbug. And I see these girl, ooh, whoo! I said, “Oh, my God! Shame on you.” [laughter] You know, so free. And now, I envy them. I could never let go. I was so curtailed, so s—so the freedom of the American youth impressed me very much. Very much. And the freedom how you could talk. You—you—you—you didn’t have to hide anything. We—we were always, like, under a curtain. [laughs] I never—you can’t compare that, that feeling of restriction, continuous restriction. You can’t—I couldn’t talk the way I wanted to. I couldn’t bring—I couldn’t talk to my mother. I couldn’t talk to my father what a young girl would—should know, you know. I found it out from books or sch—school, the children, or the governess I had, [unclear]. She was only 22. She was a teacher and Germany went into bankruptcy that time. And they went out their country to—teacher, regular teachers to become governesses for food and to get \$2 a month in American money. My mother used to send us \$25 a month and my mother felt like a millionaire. Our Romanian dollar was courlei [PH], [unclear]. That was our dollar. But you had to pay 200 leis [PH] to buy one dollar. That was the exchange rate, was—so you can imagine, \$25 was a lot of money. And that’s why sh—she paid the governess and we had a private German teacher. I spoke perfect German, hoch [unclear], the high—higher level. But I’m here 70 years.

SIGRIST: Thanks for letting me interrupt you.

HAPEMAN: Certainly.

SIGRIST: Go ahead.

HAPEMAN: On—once you were in America, do you remember feeling any kind of bigotry or persecution—

WEISS: Never.

HAPEMAN: —because you were an immigrant?

WEISS: Never, never. I felt free and it was a wonderful feeling. I loved America.

[END OF TAPE 2, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE B]

HAPEMAN: You got married in 1927 to Julius.

WEISS: Yeah, to Julius. I was 19. I was 19 in October—October 25<sup>th</sup>; we got married October the 31<sup>st</sup>.

HAPEMAN: And y—the two of you had three children.

WEISS: Right.

HAPEMAN: Could you say their names?

WEISS: Bob—Eleanor was the firstborn; Barbara and Ronald. Now, Eleanor is 68. Barbara is 62 and Ronald is 60.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: My babies.

HAPEMAN: [chuckles]

WEISS: You know, I always think of them as babies. It's amazing. Yeah.

HAPEMAN: What kind of relationship did you maintain with family members back in Hungary once you were in America?

WEISS: Very good. During the bad years after Hitler, very few were left and it was very bad. So I sent them packages. I sent them money. Some—

HAPEMAN: What kind of things would you send them?

WEISS: Food.

HAPEMAN: Food.

WEISS: A dry b—barley, rice, coffee, green coffee, saccharine—for a little package of saccharine, I kept them alive, two or three family. No, not a package—or I mean, all the—I figured out, in 10 years time, I spent—I sent 500 packages. And every package was itemized and entered in a book. I just threw it out.

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: Five—you know what I did? Packing and, you know, you couldn't just send a package because they stole it from her. So I used to take old clothing, old—used clothing from my mo—mother or my father, who—and sewed the grocery into the sleeve. All right? And in the pockets

underneath the lining. I did that, you know, 500 packages. And I schlepped it through snow and rain and no matter what weather of walking to the post office with a carriage, baby carriage. [chuckles] I saved their lives after. Yeah. And you know how my cousin escaped? This is Paul. They had two little children. And who saved them? Catholic nuns.

HAPEMAN: Hmm.

WEISS: They hid the children in the cellar and when the—the mother and father was killed, going, marching from Budapest to Bergen-Belsen they—boom, because they couldn't walk. They had no transport trains left so they made the people walk. So they sat down a few minutes on the side, they shoot the parent. When I found out, they didn't know my name. They only know that my husband's name was Julius Hirsch. And the Red Cross wrote to me here in America because the nuns already had to give up the children, because it was after already liberation. So they said, "Well, if you can remember, your cousin will get a"—so when I got that letter from the Red Cross I got in touch with them and I—I—and then I found out another cousin in a small town escaped with her whole family. And I wrote to her. I says, "Listen. Our cousin"—I didn't know the mother and father. I just knew that they were cousins, my father's sister's children. I says, "There is two little children. They're still in the cloister. Would you mind taking over? I'll send you \$25 every month and packages, food packages, clothing every week, every week." You know, they live here in—in Connecticut and [chuckles] stories. She—my cousin, this cousin was in the model camp Steria—Steria—Theresienstadt.

SIGRIST: That was the camp that they—

WEISS: Right.

SIGRIST: —made movies of [unclear].

WEISS: Right. She was there and she was a young woman. And her mother and father, two of her children and her were there. Her husband was taken for labor I—labor in Russia. Okay? And when she married, this girl, she didn't know that her husband had a child out of wedlock by a Christian girl. And the mother died in—influenza. And the boy was about six years old and somebody got—I think a police got in touch with the father. And he was just married to my cousin. So he says, "Well, what am I going to do?" So she said, "Bring that child here and I'll bring him up." She adopted that boy but she never made him change the religion. The father was taking them. He was brought up as a Catholic and then she had two children by him, a boy and a girl.

Now, listen to this. 1956 was the revolution in Hungary. All right? These boys were already teenagers. One was Catholic. One was Jewish. All right? The father came home from the labor camp and I helped, \$25 a month, to bring—to have food. What happens is when the revolution, these kids were already shooting around. The older was 19 and the little one was s—s—11 or 12. They had to run away from the Russians. They would have killed them. I was in Budapest. I saw what they did to the t—the city. So they wrote to a—here in— where are they? They live here in Connecticut somewheres. I don't—I don't remember the name. A Christian—they found out that the boy is Christian so they brought over the two brothers. The older boy was a tinsmith, okay. And he came to America. He discovered something very, very important for the government and they put him—or, oh, yeah. This is what I'm going to say. The Christian boy was put into a congregation, Christian congregation and the Jewish boy was given over to a Jewish family. All right? The older boy became a very wealthy man. Today, he's a multimillionaire. Okay. Bridgeport, they live. They—the two brothers are very close. All right? The—the Christian boy married a Christian girl and the Jewish one [chuckles] married a Jewish [unclear]. And I was in touch with them. I'm still in—in touch with them. Later on, they bring out the mother and the father. Okay? And they buy them a house. They're—they're very wealthy people. When I'm telling you they're million—he's got three factories, one in Florida. He—he employs hundreds of people. Right? That shows you. All right? Well, [laughter] isn't that amazing?

SIGRIST: Thank you. That's a wonderful story.

WEISS: Isn't it?

SIGRIST: Yes.

WEISS: I could keep you here until tomorrow morning. You better make up your mind. [laughs]

SIGRIST: Well, I think Mindy has some more questions for you.

WEISS: Yeah.

HAPEMAN: I do.

WEISS: Oh, I hope you had that off.

SIGRIST: Oh, no. That was all recorded.

WEISS: Oh, God, no.

SIGRIST: [chuckles] It's—look, it's an important story, actually. [unclear]—

WEISS: Well, this was so interesting.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

WEISS: But you know, I lived all through this, Paul. I wish—whenever we get together in our family, “Oh, M”—they call—my pet name is Mancì—M-A-N-C-I. M-A-N-C-I. Mancì's like Margi, you know, for Margaret because Margaret—Margit is my name.

HAPEMAN: Yeah.

WEISS: So Margit is—Mancì is the pet name. Okay? So in the family I'm called Mancì, Aunt Mancì, Cousin Mancì. So [chuckles] I still feel like a little girl. Ninety years next—years—next—next year, I'm over 90.

SIGRIST: So, Mindy, what's your next question?

HAPEMAN: Okay.

WEISS: Children, I'm so sorry. [laughter] I talk too much.

SIGRIST: No, you're doing fine.

HAPEMAN: I have some—a few questions about—some concluding questions, actually. I want you to tell me how you think coming to America influenced the rest of your life.

WEISS: Very much so.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Weiss, you're blocking the microphone.

WEISS: Oh, I'm sorry.

SIGRIST: That's all right. That's all right.

WEISS: I have pains so I'm trying to—

SIGRIST: Well, you know what you can do is you can—is that all right—

WEISS: No, it's okay.

SIGRIST: —if you put your weight on the—

WEISS: No, it's all right. It is the excitement and the [unclear] is no good. Anyways, you talk.

HAPEMAN: Okay. [chuckles] How—how has America, your coming to America influenced the rest of your life?

WEISS: Well, the psychology of American—what is that called? The—the paper—what—

SIGRIST: Becoming a citizen?

WEISS: Oh, I became a citizen, naturally. But, no. What the—the—our forefathers wrote.

HAPEMAN: The Constitution?

WEISS: Constitution. I—I like that.

HAPEMAN: Yeah?

WEISS: Yeah, I like—I read that very often and—and I says, “This is a wonderful way,” you know. So these are the things. You can't put it into words. It's the experiences that—the life itself, you know. Hmm. I always felt free; not lately. I don't feel free anymore here, what's going on now.

HAPEMAN: Well, why did you feel fear in the first place?

WEISS: When I felt free, because it was a different world, darling. I wasn't afraid to go downtown at mi—at midnight alone on the subways. Nobody accosted me. I took Eleanor. We went to the ap—opera [chuckles] every Monday night. All right. And I came home to the Bronx on 61<sup>st</sup>. You know where the—the—what is it? Baseball—

HAPEMAN: Uh-hmm.

WEISS: That's why my son is such a baseball field. From our—[chuckles] our roof, they could see all the—play games there.

HAPEMAN: Oh, they could watch the Yankees—

WEISS: Sure.

HAPEMAN: —playing baseball—

WEISS: Everything. Sure.

HAPEMAN: —from—from the roof.

WEISS: He was hardly six years old and he knew everything about the baseball.

HAPEMAN: Hmm. No wonder he liked baseball.

WEISS: Yeah. Well, not only that, he's—he was always a—a sport—

HAPEMAN: An athletic person?

WEISS: Athlet—

HAPEMAN: Uh-hmm.

WEISS: Athletic.

HAPEMAN: What have you done in your life that you're most proud—

WEISS: Be a mother. [laughs]

HAPEMAN: Hmm.

WEISS: That's all I wanted, really. I just wanted to be a mother. [sniffs] My—my—Barbara always tells me—she has three sons (that's one of them)—she says to me, "Mother, I always wanted to be like you." I says, "Why?" "Because you were such a perfect mother." I thought I'm terrible. [chuckles] No, I—whatever I didn't approve of my mother, I—I corrected by my own behavior. Hmm. I instilled them a lot of things, what I am now. You know?

HAPEMAN: Did you make an effort to teach your children about their heritage, where—

WEISS: Oh, yeah.

HAPEMAN: —they came from?

WEISS: Oh, yeah. Stories that I tell you. But, you know, it's not living it. They don't live that. I lived it. They didn't. Living that and going through all of the experience, let me tell you something else. When it was—when the First World War broke out and we had a lot of problems with the Russian, was the—Russia was our enemy. So all of a sudden, we hear—I must have been maybe eight years old. The Big Berthas, you know—heard about them?

SIGRIST: Big Berthas, the tanks.

WEISS: Yeah, tanks with the—

SIGRIST: Big guns.

WEISS: Guns. We could hear it in our town all—we had no communication. We had a drum. They came to the sh—the—the—

HAPEMAN: Center of the town that we talked about earlier?

WEISS: Yeah. And middle of the night, they—everybody woke up.

HAPEMAN: You're gesturing like they pounded on the drum?

WEISS: Yeah, on the drum.

HAPEMAN: To tell you that they're—

WEISS: And they—"Extra, extra. Hear all about it." My—I—I woke up first. I said, "Mother, do you hear that?" She says, "Oh, you're dreaming." I says, "Listen," because we were, like, a block away, you know. And all—sure. We got dressed and we go there. The br—that the war broke out. And a couple of—about a year later, the Russian troops came so near to our town that we were afraid, women, children. They going to be raped, you know. Everybody, the priest and the rabbi, "We got to run." So my mother goes [chuckles] and hires the farmer with an oxen cart. [laughs] I'll never forget that. It is—I says, "Where are we going to run with an oxen cart?" [laughs] That was so funny.

HAPEMAN: She brought the oxen cart to put the—your family in. Your father was—

WEISS: In the army.

HAPEMAN: Yeah, in the army.

WEISS: No, he was in the army.

HAPEMAN: Right? So she was taking—

WEISS: What the hell did he know?

HAPEMAN: Right. [laughter] She was taking care of her family.

WEISS: But I've—never forget that feeling, when I saw that man pull over with the oxen cart and put a—and putting all the children on the bedding and the big boxes of whatever she could gather. And all of a sudden, again, we hear the drums. They pushed back the Russians and we're not in danger anymore. So we unpacked [chuckles] and we lived on. Yeah.

HAPEMAN: That's something I should have asked you a long time ago in this interview was how the First World War affected—

WEISS: Affected us?

HAPEMAN: —affected you.

WEISS: Well, as a children, no, because they—my mother was a fighter. And as I said before, she was lucky that she was a dressmaker so she could barter. She even got furniture.

HAPEMAN: Right, and you told us about that before.

WEISS: Yeah, everything. Everything. We—actually, there was one period where we couldn't get food or, especially wheat to make bread. So you know, the kind of wheat, it was on something like that, that when you made bread it didn't stay together. It was like gum. So she baked the—in a baking sheet, the bread. So we open it up, it was like—what do you call that, what you—you use to—you want to stick together two things?

HAPEMAN: Glue?

WEISS: Glue. That's how the bread was, like glue. That's the time she made up her mind. So she showed it to this woman, the peasant woman. So she says, "Look. This is what we get. Can you give me flour? Can you give me this? Can"—she says, "You make me dress. I'll make"—so that's how, from then on, she bartered for everything, even dishtowels. We went to the f—market. There was an open market twice a week and that's how we got whatever we could get. And foo—we always had plenty of fruits. That we had plenty, because everybody had—in the the—f—fruit trees. So that, we didn't have any—and chickens and this—but dairy food or flour or things like that, we didn't—that's—we had to barter for. But I'll never forget [chuckles] the time that oxen cart through the—I said to myself, 'Eight years of—how am I going to—how—where is she g—where is that two big oxen with the thing [unclear]?'

HAPEMAN: With the horns. [chuckles] Okay, Mrs. Weiss. I—I have just one last question for you. Are you glad you came to America?

WEISS: Glad. There's no word to express that, honey. There is no word to— to tell you the thrill. To this very day, I am so grateful. It sounds interesting as a story but you—it doesn't sound interesting when you live it. Okay?

HAPEMAN: Well, on that very poignant note, [chuckles] this is—

WEISS: I'm sorry I kept you so. This is—who can—who can have a glass of ginger ale?

SIGRIST: Wait. Let—let Mindy sign off, just for a moment.

WEISS: Oh.

SIGRIST: She has to say something before we can—

WEISS: Okay, honey.

SIGRIST: —[unclear], so—

HAPEMAN: This is Mindy Hapeman for the National Park Service. We're just concluding our interview with Margaret Weiss, who came to America from Hungary in 1925 at the age of 17. Today is Tuesday, November the—

WEISS: Seventeenth.

HAPEMAN: —17<sup>th</sup>, for—for—

WEISS: No, 18<sup>th</sup> today.

SIGRIST: Eighteenth.

WEISS: Eighteenth today.

HAPEMAN: Okay. Excuse me. It's the—today is [chuckles] November the 18<sup>th</sup>, 1997.

WEISS: Yeah.

HAPEMAN: And we're signing off with Margaret Weiss.

WEISS: I know that is my birthday—is my granddaughter's birthday.

EI-970/WEISS

SIGRIST: Okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW]