

EI-987

PAULINE FRIEDMAN BOYMEL

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RESIDENCES:

HERZ: Good afternoon. This is Roger Herz for the National Park Service. Today is March 18, 1998 and I'm in Boca Raton, Florida at the home of Pauline Boymel, who came from the Ukraine in 1923 when she was 10 years old. Why don't we begin by giving—you giving your full name and date of birth?

BOYMEL: I am Pauline Boymel. My maiden name was Friedman.

HERZ: Could you spell that, please?

BOYMEL: F-R-I-E-D-M-A-N. And I was born in February the 6th, 1913 in the city of Kiev, which is the capitol of the Ukraine. We did not come here directly from the Ukraine, because at that time the country—when we left, the country was in the midst of a revolution and a civil war. So we left secretly.

HERZ: Okay. Can we just interrupt for a minute and can you tell me a little bit about what [clears throat]—excuse me—Kiev was like at that time—

BOYMEL: Uh-hmm.

HERZ: And the house you grew up in?

BOYMEL: Oh. Well, we were rather exceptional for a Jewish family in that we lived in a large city. The czarist government, the one was—which was in charge before the revolution of 1917, had limited Jewish occupancy to little towns all around the country in which the Jews could live. If you wanted to live in a large town, you could only do so if you owned a large, large business or had employment in a very large business. My father, who was a bookkeeper, was able to obtain a job with a large grain merchant in Kiev. And therefore, this is where we lived and this is where I was born.

HERZ: What was your father's name?

BOYMEL: Nathan.

HERZ: Can you tell us a little bit about him?

BOYMEL: Yes, Nathan was a prodigiously brilliant man. He had been a very promising student in this little town, which I'm sure you know is called, in Yiddish, a shtetl. And he was destined to become a rabbi. He was a favorite of the rabbi in the town. Unfortunately, he lost his faith at the time when he would have gone to the seminary or the yeshiva. And so that was out. He couldn't become a rabbi in his own conscience and so he tried to find another occupation. The country, at that time, was relatively primitive in the sense that the kinds of schools that he could attend were scattered and mainly in the large towns, so that access to higher education was very difficult for a Jew to obtain. And as a matter of fact, most Jews were barred from some of the higher education. However, the system did afford some outlets because there was a—a—what do you call it—by mail.

HERZ: Correspondence.

BOYMEL: Correspondence courses that were quite sophisticated and connected these little towns to education. And so my father became an expert bookkeeper and was able then to find this job in Kiev and to escape from the relatively limiting and terribly rigid system that existed in the Jewish community. As a matter of self-

preservation, the Jewish community was bound together very strictly by its religion, which enabled the Jews to survive as a community. And—

HERZ: This was in Kiev?

BOYMEL: No.

HERZ: Or not? No.

BOYMEL: We're still in the town, a little town.

HERZ: Uh-hmm.

BOYMEL: And so my father, together with a number of other young men, was very anxious to escape from that atmosphere and to go into the wider world. And this, of course, was also one of the reasons why, politically, a lot of—of turmoil was beginning in the Jewish community, much to the distress of the older generation, which wanted to keep things safe and secure and not take any chances. Shall I go on?

HERZ: Well, let me ask you—

BOYMEL: [chuckles]

HERZ: In—in Kiev, did you live in a Jewish community? Was there a—

BOYMEL: No, there—there was no Jewish community as such. There were a number of Jews and they'd certainly found each other. But we lived in a—a mixed neighborhood because the vast majority were non-Jews. And this was in a—an apartment house in a rather decent neighborhood. My father was apparently able to make a decent living on his job. He was respected for his good work and life was rather pleasant until the outbreak of World War I. At that point—he had gotten marri—he and my mother were married in 1911 and this is where they lived. In 1914, with the outbreak of the war, my father was recruited into the army and was made a supervisor of a building gang, which went up to the north to somewhere near Latvia. The job was to keep repairing railroads, which the Germans would bomb and they would fix. [chuckles] And then the Germans would bomb them again. And from then on, of course, life became increasingly disrupted. The Revolution broke out shortly thereafter. My father could not adjust to the Revolution. He didn't have any intellectual objection to it. As a matter of fact, a great many Jews were so oppressed by the czar's government that they rather

welcomed a change in the government. However, they—he could not adjust to the need for physical strength, because the country was so devastated by war and revolution and then, of course, civil war, that he had to—they needed people with muscle to build up the infrastructure. And this was a pencil pusher. He was not able to do any of the heavy work. So we had a rather rough time of it until a relative in America was willing to sponsor our crossing.

HERZ: Do you remember any of the—your childhood in Kiev, which probably the time you would remember would be either at the end of or at the—

BOYMEL: Well, yes. We—a lot of what I remember has to do with the fact that we had to leave the country secretly because the—the government, the new government had closed the boundaries and didn't want people leaving.

HERZ: When did—when did you begin to prepare to leave?

BOYMEL: 1921, the worst year of the—

HERZ: Hmm.

BOYMEL: —of the civil war.

HERZ: So you were already eight.

BOYMEL: [clears throat] Yeah. Oh, thank you, sir. [chuckles]

HERZ: I might just mention that we're joined by Mr. Jules Boymel—

BOYMEL: Yes. [chuckles]

HERZ: —in the room. Did—when—before you were eighth years old, do you remember going to school? Do you remember thinking—do you remember some of your playmates?

BOYMEL: I don't remember my playmates. But I remember being taken around to be sh—my parents, my mother was being shown the new schools, which were being set up by the Soviet government, particularly the beautiful kindergartens that were being created in the midst of all this horrible breakup of the country. The effort was constantly to keep the children in some kind of education. There was so much disease because the soldiers had brought back typhus, and so almost everybody succumbed to an epidemic because of the lice that the soldiers brought. And, well, my whole

family came down with the disease and we were—our lives were really saved by a couple of cousins who were in medical school and would come over and feed us and keep us alive.

HERZ: Did you have brothers and sisters?

BOYMEL: I have a—a younger brother, whose life was even rougher than that, because when my parents were ill they couldn't take care of him. He was an infant. He's five and a half years younger than I am. So they put him in a cresh [PH], a baby care. Well, unfortunately, there were no supplies. There were no—there wasn't enough food. A lot of the personnel was dying off in the—in the epidemic or being very ill. And so by the time my parents recovered and took him back, he looked like the typical refugee child. You know, the swollen stomach.

HERZ: Yeah.

BOYMEL: And the stick-like legs and arms. I had—I had begun school but the school was so poorly supplied. For example, in the really rough Russian winter they didn't have enough fuel to keep it warm. So children were asked to bring something for the teacher or for the school. I remember bringing a couple of pieces of firewood to keep the classroom warm.

HERZ: How—how many children were in the school?

BOYMEL: These are very vague impressions. I imagine a—as I recall, the classroom had about 15 or 20 children. But the next time I remember coming, there was no more school because the teacher had become ill and there was no place to go. So my father made sure that I would get private tutoring wherever we went. And so someone, usually acquaintances, young women that had nothing better to do and had no job, it was a very spotty education. They had not gone to teachers college. [chuckles] I assure you. But—excuse me—my father made sure that I learned to read quite early on and that was basic. They—the young women who tutored me tried to teach me math. To this day, I have a very hard time adding a column of figures. So all through my future travels, which I will tell you about, I was learning a new language in each country and falling behind further and further in my other studies.

HERZ: What—what was your mother's name? And was she also an educated woman?

BOYMEL: No, she was not. She had grown up in this small town in a very restricted Jewish community, which gave them the least amount of education to the girls. And although she came of a highly respected family and her father was quite a scholar, the women—she was one of 10 surviving children—they were very, very provincial. And she learned to read Yiddish. She could do, you know, small figuring, the sort of thing you'd need to be a housewife, and without any other preparation, and a very provincial attitude toward the world. I mean, it was a—a—what do you call it [chuckles] where you are close to your kin and your loyalties and your trust decreases as the circle widens. I think there's some kind of name that—for that. [chuckles] Anyway, when she came to Kiev, she was very much a fish out of water.

HERZ: And what was her name?

BOYMEL: Her name was Eva.

HERZ: So your—

BOYMEL: Eva—

HERZ: —parents were quite different.

BOYMEL: That's—that was the trouble. Yes, it—very different. My father was delighted to be in Kiev. The whole new world opened up, theater and music and this and that and discussions, endless discussions, of course. That was the—the staff of life. And my mother, although she read the best literature, never really took it seriously and be—she was quite separated emotionally from the circle in which she moved.

HERZ: And—

BOYMEL: And—

HERZ: I'm sorry. For—for you to get such a special education was—was unusual at that point.

BOYMEL: For me?

HERZ: Yeah, as a—as a girl, as a woman.

BOYMEL: Yes, it was. And that was—I think your father is a key figure in—at least in that generation in creating the atmosphere for a girl to go on. And even my father had his limitations because, by the time I

reached the age of 18 and had been encouraged all through to excel, he felt that at that point there was a cutoff point and you could no longer go on. So, well, these are personal questions. So anyway, I went on from there. I married a feminist man and everything was fine. [chuckles]

HERZ: Can you tell us a little bit what you remember about the preparations for leaving?

BOYMEL: Yes.

HERZ: What the atmosphere was like?

BOYMEL: Yes, yes. The first thing—first of all, we had such trouble making a living. Pop had such trouble making a living. And also, we needed to be closer to the border to escape. And so we moved to a little town called Korstyn [PH]. And that's closer to the Polish border and that was the shtetl where my grandfather lived. And so we moved in with—with that family, with his family. And I—we lived there for about six months while we were getting ready, because whenever there is a need, apparently, a—a service springs up. The service, particularly, was one of—of smuggling people across the border. So we were smuggled across and got into Poland.

HERZ: Can you remember at all the time when you left Kiev? Was there any goodbyes? Did you take toys with you at that particular time?

BOYMEL: Not a thing. I remember very few toys that I had. I know that there was an exposition of some sort before we left Kiev because my parents went and brought me back some wooden toys [unclear]. So I know that part. I don't remember any dolls or anything else. And as a matter of fact, my parents were in such financial straits that, even in Poland where we were being supported by my American relatives, we could hardly afford anything. And the only time I received a toy was when my brother and I both came down with measles. And I wanted a doll very badly and my mother must have made quite a sacrifice, because I received one of those [clears throat]—the one—the dolls with the china head and the china feet and hands and stuffed with—I don't know what they stuffed the body with. But that was the doll. And preparation. Well, I participated in the life of the little kids in the small town. As a matter of fact, all children were kind of together, the little ones and the—and the bigger children because they had a club in which they produced a play. And even the little kids had walk-on parts or a few words to say.

- HERZ: This was the little town where your grandfather lived.
- BOYMEL: Yes.
- HERZ: Uh-hmm. Was he your maternal or your paternal grandpa?
- BOYMEL: Maternal. And there was both grandfather and grandmother and a number of sisters, a houseful of sisters.
- HERZ: Could you just spell the town, the name of the little town?
- BOYMEL: Korstyn—K-O-R-O-S-T-N, I guess would be the closest.
- MR. BOYMEL: R-S-T-Y-N.
- BOYMEL: Yeah. So this where we lived and—about six months. And then—
- HERZ: Can you describe that house or apartment for us a little bit?
- BOYMEL: It was a—a house. My grandfather ran a small grocery, of which the main product that I remember was hard candies. [laughs] And it was a very strictly orthodox family. He was highly respected as a scholarly and pious man. And there were all these daughters all over the place and he was poor as a church mouse. Church mouse? As a synagogue mouse.
- HERZ: Synagogue.
- BOYMEL: [laughs] And so, well, he was fine with me, of course. I was a—a granddaughter, a little granddaughter. And my brother, of course, was just still a baby. And the illnesses were very frequent because, as I said, the sanitation and the medical profession and everything was so badly disturbed by the civil war that you came down with diphtheria and what—all kinds of things. They had a very limited medical system. And I remember being treated by what they call a feldsher, which is really a—an army medic.
- HERZ: Could you just spell that for the—
- BOYMEL: F—I think I would do better if I could write it down and then I could spell it better. Probably a word of German derivation.
- HERZ: Uh-hmm.
- BOYMEL: Feld, of course, means field. So it's F-E-L-D-S-H-E-R. And he would come and he would swab the children's throats. [chuckles]

And he would simply chuck the swab out the door or out the window, which was, of course, very medically correct. Anyway, [clears throat] he lived a very limited, very domestic, very loving kind of life there.

HERZ: Do you remember leaving Kiev? Were you smuggled out of Kiev? Could you leave easily?

BOYMEL: Well, you could leave but you would have a hell of a time getting transportation. I don't know if you've ever seen pictures of the—of the conditions of travel during the—these years, people hanging onto the train, you know, on the outside. We mainly traveled with horse and cart. You hired somebody and you went that way.

HERZ: Uh-hmm.

BOYMEL: And that's how we left. And you kept your travels secret or tried not to become too—too visible because it was better not to be marked as their going somewhere.

MR. BOYMEL: There's—there's Korstyn.

BOYMEL: Where, darling?

MR. BOYMEL: Not—not too far from Kiev.

BOYMEL: Yes, of course. And toward the—toward the west.

MR. BOYMEL: [unclear], yes.

BOYMEL: Toward Ger—toward [unclear]. Right. Well done, sir. Thank you. [laughter]

HERZ: Were—

BOYMEL: Yeah.

HERZ: Was there a great deal of—of religious persecution in the little town?

BOYMEL: No.

HERZ: And this was already 1921, right?

BOYMEL: There was no religious persecution whatsoever. It was an absolutely free—nobody interfered with religion whatsoever. And

my grandfather welcomed the revolution because he felt that the Jews would benefit by having greater freedom. Well, there was no problem. The only problem was one of reconciling a secular world with a religious world, and that was a personal kind of thing. And they said one time that life was so rigid. I don't know how true this story was. The woman fainted when she heard that her son was learning Russian because she was so afraid that he would be converted. Anyway, we—

HERZ: Who—whose decision was it to m—to leave? Was it a joint decision between your parents?

BOYMEL: I think so because it was my mother's sister who under—undertook to bring us out.

HERZ: She was already here?

BOYMEL: Oh, she had been here from the first immigration wave. They had come here well, well before we did. And my uncle was quite established in the real estate world. And I don't know how many years they had been here but all their children were—were born here. So—

HERZ: Do you remember at about seven or eight years old what you knew about America, what you had heard about America?

BOYMEL: [chuckles] They—there was a man who went around with a little hand-wound movie.

HERZ: Uh-huh.

BOYMEL: And you paid a certain amount and you looked into this peephole and it showed supposed scenes of America. And it showed these sleek carriages and the policemen stopping the traffic so that a nursemaid would go across—it was terrific and very, very—everybody, of course, was well dressed. Everybody was wealthy. That's all—that's what I heard about it. [chuckles]

HERZ: Did you believe those things?

BOYMEL: Well, a child, I mean—of course, I wasn't encouraged to discuss America.

HERZ: Uh-hmm.

BOYMEL: Because that was something that you didn't want known by your neighbors. It was fear of informers, as usual. So I was kept pretty much in the dark. I didn't know where—why we had gone to Korstyn. I didn't know why, one night, we got into a—my father had preceded us—

HERZ: Oh, I see.

BOYMEL: —across the border. I didn't know why we got into this wagon and—and with our things and went across and [unclear].

HERZ: To—into Poland?

BOYMEL: Yes.

HERZ: Yeah.

BOYMEL: Toward Poland and toward the border. At the border, there was a gathering point, a—a farmhouse where the people either had bribed the guards or—or secret. Anyway, you went into the farmhouse and it had a—a big old-fashioned wardrobe that was—passed through to another room where people waited for the crossing. And then at night the smugglers would—came over, guided us across the field. My—one of my aunts accompanied us because my mother had to carry the baby and me hanging to her skirts. And I don't know, [chuckles] this is pertinent. My little brother was devoted to his potty, would not use anything but that potty. So it was very tastefully strapped to her belt. Anyway, [chuckles] we went across and my aunt returned with the smugglers and went home. And the next morning my father somehow rendezvoused with us and took us into a town called Rovno, which was right on the other side of the border. And we lived there for many months.

HERZ: In—?

BOYMEL: In this little Polish town. We were waiting to get a visa to the United States. And just at that point, as we went into Poland, that's when the United States chose to close off the quota from Poland. So we were stuck and we lived there for a number of months.

HERZ: How—how did you find a place or how did your father find a place to live in Rovno?

BOYMEL: No idea, except that he and an uncle had gone together and I don't know whether there were some Jews among the smugglers. Who

would know about these things? And certainly, the Jewish community helped each other whenever such things occurred.

HERZ: Was there any particular organization of—of Jews that helped?

BOYMEL: No. Not that I know of. We—actually, our landlady was not Jewish. But she apparently knew the score and was willing to accept the money.

HERZ: Uh-hmm.

BOYMEL: And so we had a room. We all shared—the whole family shared one room. Another family we knew from Kiev. Another—

HERZ: Oh, that's—

BOYMEL: Oh, yeah. So it was—it was a community [chuckles] in no time at all.

HERZ: Okay. Let's just take a break for a minute and turn the tape over.

BOYMEL: Right.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

BOYMEL: Okay.

HERZ: Good afternoon. It's March 18th, 1998. This is Roger Herz. We're with Pauline Boymel and this is [clears throat]—excuse me. This is side two of tape one. The—we left off, you were in Rovno, which is R-O-V-N-O. And tell us what happened when you had to leave or when you're going to leave Rovno.

BOYMEL: Well, we waited for a long time and—and the quota was still closed. So it—it appeared as though we would be stuck for a very long time. And then my father heard that the free city of Danzig, which is now called Gdansk, was receiving visas, so that one could hope to get a visa to the United States. And so we moved to that town, which is very interesting. It's on the river Vistula. And it's one of the old trading towns of medieval Germany and one of the Hanseatic League, which was a trading organization in the me—Middle Ages. And it was a very historic northern city with an atmosphere of its own. We found a place on the—in the—in the suburbs of Danzig. My aunt and uncle had already found a place

there in a large house owned by a German family, which was having a hard time because of the serious inflation in Germany at that time. And so they were happy to receive the rent in the form of dollars, because dollars had a lot more value than the inflated money of Germany.

HERZ: These were the dollars that your aunt had sent—

BOYMEL: Yes, yes.

HERZ: —from the United—

BOYMEL: Yes. And so we settled in a room there. It was a beautiful house with a large garden. And it was one of the really joyful episodes of my life, because we were kind of out of the poverty zone or the sadness zone into a—an atmosphere where there was a little girl close to my own age, which was the grandchild of the landlord. And I immediately became part of a group of kids. And it was a place where you could walk and see trees and see flowers. And there was a river nearby. You could watch snails, for example. And the whole atmosphere was of a clean and beautiful German town. And it was a welcoming atmosphere.

HERZ: Was your education continuing?

BOYMEL: Yes, in—in Poland, my father had engaged a woman to teach me, not very effectively. She taught me—she was beginning to teach me Polish. It did not take. I think she was such a poor teacher and so negative in her attitude that she seemed to be adversarial instead of promoting. Also, my father, in Germany, tried to get me a teacher to teach me the piano because there was a piano in the room. Well, this too was not—not so good because, again, you had a—a sour kind of personality. And if she didn't like what you did, she smacked your hands. I mean, this [chuckles] is not exactly conducive to education. [chuckles] So—but in general, it was a happy time for me because she did get someone very good and—and pleasant to teach me German and reading and a little math, a little botany and all that.

HERZ: But there was none of the fear in the air that—

BOYMEL: Right. There wasn't, although it was a very interesting sidelight. The little girl, with whom I was playing so much, was apparent—had been exposed to anti-French sentiment. So even this little kid, you know, asked me if we were French. And I said no. And she said, "That's good," because she didn't want the damn French around.

The—"the ferfruchte Franchosen." [PH] So [chuckles] you got a kind of sidelight on, you know, the—the atmosphere. Anyway, we spent a lot of time there. As you can see, we—we left when—in 1921 and didn't arrive in—in the United States till 1923. So this extra time was spent in—in Germany and Poland, my grandfather's place and so on. We always had a very serious problem with money because my uncle did not wish to bring us over, did not want to support us, was afraid that we would be a weight on him. And my aunt chose to do it on her own so the only way she could support us would be by saving money on her household allowance. Well, she had an inflated idea of how much an American dollar could—could buy. And the result was that we were really, really in bad shape. And—

HERZ: Was your father able to find work or not?

BOYMEL: No work whatsoever. And one time he—well, it was an interesting thing. We finally got a visa.

HERZ: Uh-hmm.

BOYMEL: All we needed was money to pay for the tickets. He didn't have it. So of course he was almost out of his mind. He went to the bank to see if there was a—money had been sent. [clears throat] Excuse me. There was no money at the bank. And something interesting happened as he walked out of the bank. He saw an envelope on the floor. He picked it up, opened it and something strange happened. This was a man who was an agnostic. There was the money, the amount he needed. Well, he was so overwhelmed. He didn't know what to do because he was an honest man. He decided to ask a rabbi's advice. Should he keep it or should he give it back? So he went to the rabbi for advice. And the rabbi was a clever fellow. He said, "This is a gift to you from Him above. Take the money. Get the ticket and go." And so we went. [chuckles]

HERZ: So you were finally on your way.

BOYMEL: On our way.

HERZ: And do you remember anything about the trip to the port?

BOYMEL: To the port? No. I had only seen the port once when my cousin had taken me there, had taken us just to see the Danzig port. And it was very overwhelming, all those huge ships and the storm coming up in the northern—excuse me, a northern climate. No, I

remember being on the ship and my aunt came to thank us, the aunt who had come over about the same time with us. And she gave me some souvenir things, a little silver wine cup so I would remember her. And she—

HERZ: Was it a kiddush cup?

BOYMEL: —gave me an orange, which was a marvelous, marvelous [chuckles] special thing. And we were not steerage passengers. By that time, things had become a little more civilized. We had a cabin for our family but it—it didn't have beds; it had bunks. I remember that crossing, a lot of seasickness on the way because we were going on the Baltic in that, you know, area.

HERZ: Do you remember the name of the ship?

BOYMEL: It was called the Baltic and it was, I think, the Cunard Line, if I'm not mistaken. I do remember on the shipboard the gayety of the peasant people crossing. A guy with a—

HERZ: Accordion?

BOYMEL: —accordion playing and the—and the younger peasants dancing, and just generally socializing. And there was one overwhelming fear that all of the people coming over had. They knew that if—if the person going to the United States had any kind of illness or was—had the dreadful thing, a louse on him, out. They wouldn't be permitted. So the amount of scrubbing and the amount of doctoring and the treatment of the eyes, whether you needed it or not, because there was one illness called trachoma—I don't know what the heck it is, but if you had it you were in bad shape. Anyway, careful to a high degree about being clean and—

HERZ: Before you left Gdansk or Danzig, did you go through any medical examinations?

BOYMEL: Well, I remember going to a doctor. I don't know whether it was a formal thing or whether it was just that my parents chose to have this in—as a safety device. [clears throat] So anyway, I think we were seven days on—on shipboard. And when we came to New York, the interesting thing was that they would not disembark the passengers until they disembarked the hold, which had goods. So we had to be stuck there listening to chains, you know, lifting stuff. And [clears throat] the rest of us were—were lined up looking across at the shore and all the Americans who came to greet. And for some reason, they—they kept chewing. We didn't know what

they were eating because they never swallowed anything. They just kept chewing. [chuckles] We didn't—had never seen chewing gum. [laughs] So—

HERZ: Do you—do you remember just a little bit about the ship, what it was like what—

BOYMEL: Very, very little. Had a dining room—

HERZ: Did have a—

BOYMEL: —with long, long tables. Everybody sat at one—

HERZ: Uh-hmm.

BOYMEL: —communal table. As I said, our—our—we had our own place, our—

HERZ: Uh-hmm, cabin.

BOYMEL: You know.

HERZ: Uh-hmm.

BOYMEL: And very pleasant help and that's about it. Of course, we, you know, got to know the other passengers. At one point—my mother always had to have something that made life dark for her. You know, somebody gets a—a fever in the middle of things. So I remember borrow—her borrowing a thermometer and the—making sure we were all right. It was real—really very tough on her. When we're done with this, I'll show you a photograph that was taken of my mother and me and my brother. And you'll see on her face how drained she was, how exhausted.

HERZ: And your father? How was he dealing with this? Was he excited?

BOYMEL: Very, very excited. The strain, of course, of all that travel and worry about getting tickets and everything else and carrying heavy baggage. This man was—he was a healthy enough man but he was carrying things he wasn't able to. He wasn't used to physical labor. And it—it tolled on him too. He—but he was delighted. I remember when we arrived in New York and we were met by the Jewish organization. What was it called?

MR. BOYMEL: HIAS.

BOYMEL: HIAS. HIAS representatives took us to their house, which was the staging area, until the relatives would come and pick us up. Well, my father didn't want to stay around and—and wait. So without English, he had the address of his relatives in Brooklyn. And he marches out and he goes to Brooklyn. [chuckles] And they almost fainted when they saw him on the doorstep. [clears throat] When they asked him how in the world he was able to find it, he says, "No problem. There are plenty of—of orthodox Jews, easily recognizable. You go up and you ask in Yiddish and there it was." So that's how he traveled. [chuckles]

HERZ: Let's go back to the ship for a minute. Do you remember what it was like for you when you first saw the Statue of Liberty?

BOYMEL: I was a little kid. I saw a statue.

HERZ: Okay.

BOYMEL: It didn't mean a darn thing. But I remember, as my father stepped off the ship onto American soil, he stamped the ground and he said, "Is it really true? Are we really here?" And that was such a relief to him to have finally made it safely. And then we went to—

HERZ: Did you—did you go to Ellis Island?

BOYMEL: We went to Ellis Island, yes. And we were processed. All I remember is a huge, huge room with lots of tables, with lots of people writing things. And you went over. You were looked over to make sure you were acceptable physically and registered and that was it.

HERZ: When you say acceptable physically, you meant medically?

BOYMEL: Medically.

HERZ: Were you examined?

BOYMEL: Yes, yes.

HERZ: Did—

BOYMEL: And then—

HERZ: Did you get anything to eat?

- BOYMEL: I don't remember. Not a thing. I don't remember at all. I must have. [chuckles]
- HERZ: Were you there for more than a day?
- BOYMEL: At Ellis Island?
- HERZ: Yeah.
- BOYMEL: I don't believe we were there that long. I think we came from the boat to Ellis Island, were looked over and I guess the HIAS people must have picked us up right there, because I don't remember any—any stay over of any sort, just that we came to HIAS. And I don't remember whether we stayed there overnight. But I know that our Brooklyn relatives came barreling over, and then my aunt and uncle from Philadelphia came with a very plush car and took us to Philadelphia.
- HERZ: That was your first time in a car?
- BOYMEL: Yeah.
- HERZ: Do you remember what that was like?
- BOYMEL: Very exciting. Very exciting. And another thing that was exciting was hearing my American uncle talk. [clears throat] My aunt and uncle—well, we passed through a section that was being built up toward the edges of the city. And I heard my uncle say that Mr. McClatchy [PH], the builder, was worth several million dollars. And I was amazed at the word; he was worth that much money. I mean, not the amount but the fact that a man was measured—his worth was measured that way, that he is worth. I only knew that, you know, a person was a good person or a bad person. He wasn't worth in terms of money. And a little kid was struck by this, a different kind of a use of the language. Anyway, my aunt and uncle were building a sumptuous house in the suburbs but it wasn't completed yet. They were living temporarily in a ordinary, I think, six or seven-room house in Philadelphia. And we piled in with them, not to my uncle's delight.
- HERZ: Did—did you know any English at this time?
- BOYMEL: No, not at all. And in fact, this was, of course, a problem. But that already reaches into our adjustment to the United States. And I don't think it's part of the project here. Is it?

- HERZ: No, I—I'm just interested in one thing you said and that was the question of the man being worth so much money.
- BOYMEL: Yes, yes.
- HERZ: What was your impression of—of America on your drive from New York to—
- BOYMEL: Oh, the—well, it was all very exciting and it was new and the people were well dressed. And it just—everything seemed large and expansive. And as a kid of 10, I don't think—oh, yes, I was very impressed, even starting in Europe when we had to stop over in Liverpool.
- HERZ: Uh-hmm. Hmm.
- BOYMEL: Because we had crossed the Kiel Canal. The next stage was Liverpool and, from there, we went on to our boat. But that was—in England, the first town I saw a moving ad, electric ad. And that was very exciting, you—all this stuff chasing each—itself. [clears throat]
- HERZ: Did you—did you start school right away in Philadelphia?
- BOYMEL: What they had was introductory courses for children of foreigners. Enough, apparently, were still coming in that they felt they needed special Englishing schools. So we had a whole room full of children of any age, from six up to 17. And we were all being taught English and patriotism, and American ways of keeping house and American ways of self-care. For instance, Mr. Colgate sent representatives and handed out toothbrushes and toothpaste and we were told how to brush our teeth, as though we'd never seen a toothbrush before. Of course, it may be that some of the kids came from places that didn't have—but to me, it seemed very strange that we were told that we needed to brush our teeth. [clears throat] We were also given all kinds of instruction about how to make a bed, how to treat a sheet that had lost its strength in the middle. You split it. You turned it around and put the outside edges together and you had a new center for the sheet. That kind of thing. We were taught American songs. We didn't understand. We learned by rote. So all this, we—we sang songs, "America the Beautiful," which I still love. [chuckles] And it wasn't until later that we learned what these words mean. And whatever appeared on the board, we copied. We were taught the Pledge of Allegiance and the language as much as could be taught to a variety of—of language kids, because we had everything there under the sun. And after about six months, we were presumed to have a little bit of English. We did.

You know, when I hear about this dual language education, to me it's a bunch of baloney because I learned to speak English very well within less than six months. All you have to do is leave a kid with a bunch of other kids. They begin to talk. Anyway, I learned very quickly and my parents, of course, had a harder time of it. They too attended schools, trying to learn English and, especially, preparation for eventual citizenship. And they became citizens five years after we arrived. But it—the early years were difficult, very difficult, because my father had no English. And so he couldn't undertake bookkeeping. He couldn't get a job in an office. And he had a hard time because he had to take menial jobs. And he was unable to sust—sustain that hard labor. So it was a pretty rough period of time. But, like most foreign kids, we learned English very quickly. In fact, we were so fascinated that we became the excellent English speakers compared to kids [chuckles] who just took the language for granted.

HERZ: I was going to ask that you came from a large city, probably unlike most of the children in your class.

BOYMEL: Uh-hmm.

HERZ: And you had—had quite a bit of education already. Did you find yourself very different from a lot of the children?

BOYMEL: No, not really. I didn't feel self-conscious. It just—so much of life went on without my understanding. They had a fair in school, in the foreign school, in which we were all to represent Mother Goose characters. And we learned it by rote. We made costumes out of paper and everything. But we didn't know what the hell we were doing. [laughs]

HERZ: Hmm.

BOYMEL: No. At that point, I did not find myself different. It was later on, as I began to know English and was drawn more and more to literature, that that's when the differences began. My uncle had an extensive library. He was an educated man and he collected these sets, you know, all of Tolstoy and all of Tregenu [PH] and all of Dostoevsky [PH] and everything. But his kids didn't care about it. So Pauline would come to visit, constantly borrowing, after a while, the whole library. [chuckles] They had to ask me to please bring it back. And I did not fit in with the group that my cousin ran with. They were a special well-to-do bunch of Jewish kids. And as we got older, you know, the fraternities began to be—these things were so far from me. And I was in a poor family. I was intellectual, had absolutely

no meeting of minds. And it—after a while, I found my own level and was glad to be out of that particular atmosphere. And—

HERZ: We have about two minutes left. Could you just tell us, if you'd like, how you met your husband and a little bit about your family?

BOYMEL: Oh, yes. Yes, yes. I don't know why. My girlfriend, who was far from being intellectual, invited my husband and his friend, and they were the stars of the high school. One was the—the lead in the school play, very handsome guy. And Jules was the ad—the editor of the publications. I mean, this was very high—very rarified atmosphere. Anyway, the guys came over, apparently just as impressed by my girlfriend and me as we were by them. So we paired up. I got the actor. And my girlfriend [chuckles] got the intellectual. And after a while, things began—kind of—they were out of sync until we exchanged. [laughs] And it worked out very well. And we were completely in the right mood together because our families, strangely enough, came from about the same area of the Ukraine. And so we all understood each other and, nice.

HERZ: And you have two daughters?

BOYMEL: I have two highly admirable daughters. Both are [laughs]—both are professors, tenured professors, at New York and in Buffalo, and highly intellectual ladies but with a great deal of charm, and devoted to their parents. And they have made us very, very happy.

HERZ: Well, I'd like to thank you very much. Just [clears throat]—excuse me—in summing up, is there anything that you'd like to say? Just your follow-up impressions of America and how—

BOYMEL: Uh-hmm.

HERZ: —you viewed your life here, as against what might have been?

BOYMEL: Yes. I think that one of the interesting thing was that the Americans immediately, the first day we arrived, asked us how we liked America. And my mother said [chuckles], "What do they think"—

HERZ: A good answer to my question.

BOYMEL: Right. And we were simply unable to answer. We took these questions [chuckles] seriously. And then, of course, we had to cope with the whole prejudice and, even among the kindest people, that somehow you were coming from a God-forsaken land, which didn't know anything. They had no idea of the degree of civilization

and thought that we were all coming from a primitive farm somewhere with no knowledge of how to live. So this was a rather difficult thing because I think they tended to make the so-called greenhorn feel very inferior. Well, that plus one's poverty didn't exactly build up one's self-confidence. It took a great deal of maturity to—to put things in perspective. But having made it, and my—I know my parents were very happy to be here. Of course, for me this was the place where I was growing up and it became my country and that's it. [chuckles]

HERZ: That's it. Well, thank you very much.

BOYMEL: Okay. My pleasure.

HERZ: We've been talk with Pauline Boymel. It is March 18, 1998 and this is Roger Herz for the National Park Service.

[END OF INTERVIEW]