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ENDRE BOHEM
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ALLEE: This is Debra Allee. I'm speaking with Endre Bohem.

BOHEM: Yes.

ALLEE: The right way to pronounce it? To day is Thursday, February 6, 1986. It is 10:07 and this is Interview Number 140. Why don't we begin at the beginning with where and when you were born, and we'll take it from there.

BOHEM: I was born in a part of Hungary, which now is Roumania after World War One. They gave it to Roumania. The cities, were all Hungarian, the villages were all Roumanian. So it isn't right, whatever

country it belongs to, two countries it's wrong. The hungarians were a little bit more lenient because they even had Greek Orthodox Church for the Roumanians, they had school for them in their own language. Now the Hungarians are not permitted in Roumania, the Roumanians are very strict about that. I was born there, in a village. My father was managing a quarry. And the village was so small it had no midwife, so mother took me to the nearest, went to the nearest town where she got some assistance and I was born in Arad, A-R-A-D, in 1901, May 1. Then we moved to another city, went to high school, and that's called Szeged, and it's usually spelled S-Z-E-G-E-D. I wish I had known a little more about them than I had because I was really outstanding in mathematics throughout--and I went to a school which featured mathematics. But I thought, as a youngster, mathematics was only good for engineers or bank accounts and my contemporaries, the atomic scientists. They really, I was practically on level with them but I didn't know. I don't suppose they did either. Then the World War One came, my father who had very serious surgeries, was drafted, and after long suffering, he died. And I was the oldest so I was determined partly to help the family. There was no hope, no future there. And besides, even before that, I started to learn English by myself because I was determined to come here, and I thought there would be a future for me here. My English was kind of strange because I learned, Hungarian is phonetic and I learned English phonetically, and like it's not "New York, it's Neva York" and things like that. But when the time came and my father finally died, I set

out, I accompanied a cousin whose father lived in Vienna. And in Hungary there was communism, and after communism, white terror which was as bad as the Nazis. School was hopeless. The idea that from high school, which at Columbia I was accepted for two years college, provided I would make up for English. The European schools are a little bit ahead of this. I applied, in case I couldn't come out in Hungary. My name was posted outside the building, and since it starts with -B-, I was the first one rejected, because I was Jewish. And with classmates, who used to come house, very close friends, the stairs lead up to there, literally kicked me, and I rolled down the stairs, when it was found out that I couldn't go to university. Anyway, I went to Vienna and I mention Vienna because in Budapest there was no chance for me. There was no American representation. In Vienna they had an American Ambassador. And my English knowledge was strange. I didn't know the difference between Ambassador and Consul, I thought it was the same. So I wrote the letter to the American Ambassador that I'm a student, I would like to come to America, can cover some of the expenses because my city Szeged was very famous for paprika and they used to sell it to America, that they'll send me to renegotiate that after the War. And I was asked to see the Ambassador. I didn't realize how big a thing it was, that a kid goes to see the Ambassador. And he did know that I understood English, and they spoke it, after he heard me, he told his associate that, "If he had the proper paper, I think I'd let him go." And I started to speak English, gibberish. anyway, he signed a piece of paper and

in spite of not being an Austrian citizen. But by that time Hungary was separated from Austria, uh, "He's entitled to a visa." So that was practically life saving except that the visa cost ten dollars, and ten dollars was absolutely out, impossible. So I became a beggar. I went to big businesses and told them I can go to America providing I have ten dollars, and I managed to get together ten dollars, nine currency, nine pare and one silver. I went to the Embassy, they rejected it because it was manipulation with currency. They couldn't manipulate with silver because the silver dollar was only worth what the silver was worth. So that I had to go out and beg some more money to pay extra for the silver and finally I got my visa which was a separate sheet. Oh, I had another problem. My Hungarian passport said, Austria. And I went to the Hungarian Consulate to extend it to the United, to America, and they smilingly said, "Go back to Budapest and try to get it there." And I was friendly, I was associated with some of the outstanding writers there who were all Communists. And as a matter of fact, I think in Hungary, during the short time the Communists were in existence, I was elected as a student, the Soviet, the student representative. And all of this was recorded, and I didn't know, so there was no chance. And I tried to get a stamp because to extend a passport you put on the minister's stamp and write it and then write in the extension to the United States of America. The first man I went to said, "You know I should hand you over to the police." He says, "I;m Hungarian, I understand what you're doing, and this is highly illegal," so he wouldn't do it. Then

I decided, "I'll do this without the stamp, just in hand writing, imitating the rest of the passport." And when I wrote the first two letters, I saw I didn't do a good job, I just wrote in my own handwriting, so my passport was highly illegal. But finally I got my American visa, the Hungarian visa with my own extension said, "America." Now the question was how to come here? I didn't have any money. So I started begging again and finally begged enough money to be able to get to Paris. And I thought, "In Paris, maybe it will be easier." The French franc was much better than the Hungarian money, it was just probably in many thousands for a dollar. Normally it was five. So I managed to get enough together so that I would buy my ticket. I would have five French francs left. And after the adventurous business because I crossed the French border, in a train. I.m sure the train was about two days, I had no food whatsoever. But I was separated from the others because I didn't realize that this country, that Hungary was still enemy country, peace was aside. But finally they let me go. In Paris I had a letter of recommendation to Jean Longuet who was the editor of Populaire. There were two newspapers in, Socialist, that was a Socialist newspaper. And, L'Humanite, which while I was there became a Communist newspaper, they separated. I had this letter to this man, who was a son-in-law of Marx, this Frenchman and I came to the, oh, let me see, I found the office and they said he was out of town, I had no money. I didn't dare to go into any, this wonderful French bread, we had only black bread which was like glue. But I didn't know whether, my five francs seemed so small, compared to the

one thousand, and that's all they allowed me, I didn't eat. And they said, "This man won't come back until tomorrow." And I broke down, I said, "I have no place to sleep, I'm cold, I didn't eat." And two girls that worked in the office put money together to put me up in a hotel close to the newspaper. I didn't realize that this hotel, I was probably the only person who stayed there overnight because it was just for brief visits. And I was, I didn't understand, the washbasin was close to the floor. The french people are very strange, I washed my face in it, I'd never seen a bidet before (he laughs) it was a bidet. I had no cover because I didn't realize that they had this cylindrical thing in which they, I didn't know that either. But anyway, so the next day, I the man came in, to my letter of recommendation, and was very kind. He said, "Oh, Maurice, a high ranking policeman, a close friend of mine, he will take care of it, that your stay here is extended and while you're here you're working for this newspaper." Actually, I got the same salary as people there and I wrote articles in French, which they translated into printable French because I had school French. He really took me to this, he was close with the Chief of Police, a close friend of his. He was very nice, very friendly. Later on, he invited me to his house too, but he says, "He's from an enemy country. I give him three days." At that point, they didn't know what to do, but an old man who worked for the newspaper, had a daughter who was married to an American who worked for the American Red Cross, and they turned to the American Red Cross, and the Red Cross took me under their wing. When the three days

expired, they came to the policeman, and it was extended five days, a week, and meanwhile, I had a wonderful time in Paris. I went to exhibitions, I went to shows, went to the opera, free, because as a newspaper man, they gave me tickets. But finally, the French Police, said, "Nothing doing. Red Cross or no Red Cross, this keeps extended." Oh, I think I lied to them, I said I had relatives here, and as I mentioned they weren't relatives but they were originally from my hometown. I think they owned the Ex Lax Company. And fortunately for me they were on a trip in Europe, so they couldn't say, "This is no relative of ours, this kid, we don't know him." But the French police said, "You've got to get out." And, oh by the way, I forgot to tell you that, I did have my American visa. So, the Red Cross, and these girls working in the paper gave me, put enough money together for me to buy a ticket on steerage to come to this country. And the policeman who kept coming every two or three days for me to get out, was the one who acted as porter and carried my luggage, and I got on the train. So, I got to New York on, I think around the middle of February in 1921.

ALLEE: Can I ask you--

BOHEM: Is it too (?)

ALLEE: No, this is just fine, it's very good. You, there were two things I wanted to ask you. You mentioned some

adventures getting to France itself, I'd be interested in hearing how you got to France.

BOHEM: It figures that when we crossed the border, in those days you had to get off the train and go to Customs and I was first in line, and I was the last allowed on because of my background. And, I told them that I didn't like Socialism, and I was just on account of, that's the only, my father was deathly sick, coming out of the army,and that was the only way I could help him, and all sorts of things like this. And then they cabled to verify that, and they finally gave me, at this French border, permit to cross France in forty-eight hours. I didn't tell them I didn't know where I was going because I had no ticket, boat ticket. Not much more serious adventure. I think I picked the story up somewhere. I was already in New York.

ALLEE: I, uh, can you tell me something about the journey to New York, the policeman helped you with your bags, onto the boat.

BOHEM: I got onto the boat, this is a mixed freighter, had only two classes. First class and steerage, and on, the steerage had hammocks so that you had to climb over four or five people. But there was a family there, on the, on the first class who was cheated by the people who sold them the ticket. They had a six month old baby I think they had a ticket,

and he had a berth. So, since they didn't speak French, I spoke enough French and English to help them. I was with them and they brought food there so the crossing was fairly pleasant. I was not, them, where I belonged, in steerage. Except that we had trouble because there was a big storm and the propeller broke and the trip that should have taken about seven or eight days, took three weeks, across the ocean.

ALLEE: Did you get seasick or anything?

BOHEM: No, no.

ALLEE: You're lucky.

BOHEM: I've never been seasick, 'cause I had to travel later on yachts here and I'm just very lucky about that. But when we got to New York, and it was one of the coldest winter, it was in the paper that there was an item that a car was blown off the bridge, the wind was so severe. There was typhus epidemic and the first class passengers were examined by doctors on the boat, and they were freed. The steerage on the other hand, had to go to Ellis Island, but there were, so many boats were held up like this that over two weeks, we were still in this boat, which was dirty. They lifted up the covers and they put, we had no cover, my blanket was taken while I wasn't sleeping in this hammock. I woke up in the morning, snow

covered. And people are vomiting all over and it wasn't cleaned up. And the American detective who was guarding us that we shouldn't sneak off the boat, was very kind and I talked to him, I says, "Is it possible, you see how people are sick here, and you see how they feed us, I'd like to write to the Red Cross, maybe they could help me." He says, "Have you got any stationery, I'll mail it for you." And I wrote the letter, my poor English, had every passenger sign it and this man mailed it. Then in a few days, all of a sudden, the lid was put on, the ship was warmed, cleaned and an inspection came and everything was right, neat. And they said, "Who is this man who wrote the letter?" And I stepped forward. They said, "This is nothing like what you represented in your letter." I said, "This was made this morning, obviously they knew you were coming." I was scared though, and all the people knew that I was absolutely right, and they went away. And that afternoon, two burly sailors took me, and put me down a motor boat and they started to go out towards the open sea, and I thought, "They're going to dump me." But this is, they took me to Ellis Island because I wrote to the Red Cross that I only came, want to go to America to renew some business, my passport says for a fortnight, two weeks. And I says, "Here, this thing is killing me, please help, help me to get to Ellis Island." So the Red Cross helped. I was taken to Ellis Island and these two French sailors and a special motor boat took me to Ellis Island, I didn't realize it. And then, I hadn't made it, I was dirty, I hadn't changed my shirt, I was very worried that they won't let me through, and I had a little volume

of Shakespeare in English, and I kept flaunting it to show that I was literate. But I was asked a few questions, they were very surprised that I spoke English, by that time my English was slightly better. And they wrote on a piece of cardboard, they wrote, "Okay." And of course, that scared me to death, because I know English but I didn't know if that meant five years or ten years. And at the head of the stairs, the man took this card from me and pointed that I had to go down a long corridor there, and I saw a lady who obviously belonged there, who worked there. I was afraid to approach her but I sort of hung around, I stood, no, I'm telling this right. Oh, you know, the lady came to me, she said, "Is somebody waiting for you?" I said, "Oh yes, the relatives, they're waiting for me." And nobody was waiting for me, nobody, I had nobody. Then I saw some of the, they approached another man and they asked him, "Are you Jewish?" and he said, "Yes," "Anybody waiting for you?" "No," he says. "Well we'll take care of you, we have a Hebrew sheltering organization," or something. "Come with us, we'll feed you and take care of you until your relatives pick you up." Then sheepishly I came to this woman, "I lied, after what I've been through in Hungary." And she put her hand on my shoulder, understood. I didn't realize I was free, I wasn't going to be in prison. And then they took us to a place where we sit here, and then we gather everybody from all the ships, we'll take you in. Well, by that time, I was admitted. And I thought, maybe up front they'd change their mind. And when the ferry left, I jumped in it, I almost fell into the water, and I came to New York. In New York, we had to

go through another series of examinations because, on account of the typhus, we had to undress and they examined our bodies because they put a mark on those who were suspicious and sneaked through. So, anyway, I managed to get through. And I had a letter of recommendation to the editor of the Forward.

ALLEE: Do you want to stop a minute and drink a little coffee?

BOHEM: And it was on Broadway and I found it and before I went there, I was a little bit taken aback because Broadway was a dream. Here was pushcarts, bearded people and (?) finally I just pulled myself together and said, "I'm on Broadway." Later on I found out this was East Broadway, there's a letter -E- in front of it and oh, I'm very clumsy. Thank you. I didn't know what the letter -E- meant anyway. So when I came to this newspaper editor, he was very nice and he says, "You can work here," he'd given me a job. But they found out that I don't read or don't write Yiddish. He said, "Well, our newspaper is printed in Yiddish," he said, "You can't get a job, but I, I'll take you someplace where they'll take care of you." And not far away was this Hebrew shop where they took me where they gave me a clean shirt, gave me a little money, gave me a bath. And I was worried that maybe they'd catch up, they'd find out that I'm not quite legally here, because my passport says two weeks and I landed here permanently. So I found out that you just didn't show off, because I went to Paris, I went to Vienna, the first thing I did, I went to the museum, I

went to the Louvre, and I saw the Louvre. And on the boat they told me, 'cause I was a little bit sick, that the German hospital near, without any question, that they'd take care of you. And toward evening, on 42nd Street and Fourth Avenue, I was half frozen, it was really a very bitter winter, and by the way, I had a hole in my shoe. A policeman, I went to a policeman and I said, "I'm here illegally and I'm frozen, I'm cold, and I can't find, somebody said they'd take care of me in the German Hospital, and I don't know where it is." And he shook his head, and he left his post and took me to the Horn and Hardart Automat. That was the most impressive thing that ever happened to anybody, he put down a dollar, and a cascade of nickels came and he gave me these nickels and he showed me how to operate the other magic, the coffee machine, the coffee and tea came out just exactly the right amount. He says, "You stay here," he says, "When I'm off-duty, later, I'll come for you." So, I was there all day. They came for me and took me out to Brooklyn, where he lived, and he said, "You know, you made a fatal mistake, my duty would have been to turn you over to the authorities when you told me your story and you would have been shipped back." But he gave me an address, he says, "I'll take you to a good place where they'll take care of you." Then he took me to New York, to the Hebrew Sheltering Organization where I was already registered, so I had to talk him out of coming in with me. I told him that I was already registered but I didn't think this was a good place. So I went in there and nothing happened and I sat down and started to write a letter to my mother and a big group of

people came in and I thought, "This is where they would have brought me from Ellis Island if I had stayed with them." But one thing I forgot to mention that I went to the Post Office which, I was very disappointed 'cause I asked, "Where is the main Post Office," and they pointed and I got in and it was a bank, and it was a very, very tall building, it was the Woolworth Building, you see. And I thought, when I got in, I thought it's only proper that New York should have a post office like this. But the post office was across the street, a two-story building. And I had a little problem there too, because I wanted to, I told my mother to write me Poste Restante, which is International General Delivery, and there was no Poste Restante, but there was something written there, General Delivery. I was a little bit surprised because I didn't think it was right that America was so military that they have a special window for the Generals. But when I saw from -A- to -J, from -K- to -N-, and the people go there and get letters, and there was a bunch of letters from my mother. So this more or less was my first day in New York. I'm afraid I'm telling it to you in too much detail.

ALLEE: No. Do you want to pause a little?

BOHEM: It's a dormitory where they gave me a bed, bought me clothes, but I didn't have the nerve to ask for shoes. I managed to get a job in a Hungarian bookstore where I worked all day and all evening so I could get a room, and I

had enough money I wanted to buy a pair of shoes. And the hock shop, I saw a beautiful Cordoba which was American, and I wanted to be very much, very much an American. And I bought it, a size six, and I wore a size eight, but that was the only shoe they had, and I bought it. Maybe I wore that out I lost every toe nail, but they grew back. It was, it was agony each time I put the show on. By that time I was able to send money for my mother which is the main reason I came here, and so I managed by then, it seemed at, in this place there was a man who had a decent job, but he couldn't write the letters and was very anxious to write the letter and I told him I could type and that I could speak English. And they wanted to give me his job, and that was very upsetting to him and he said, "I'll get you a better job than this." And his girlfriend, who was a secretary at the Hungarian Miner's Journal, there were an awful lot of Hungarian miners and they had an establishment in New York where they put them up in a special--

ALLEE: Hungarian miners, coal miners.

BOHEM: Where they put them up by they went to Hungary, something like a hotel, and that was this newspaper,

Hungarian Miner's Journal, and it was a weekly colored paper, like, it had nothing to do with miners. Anyway I got the job and it was very pleasant. This when I got enough money, I had a dollar a day too, because I had no room because they had a home where they put up there miners so they gave me room there. But they moved on finally, they bought a mine in Kentucky, named after the man who organized it, then man's name Himmler, and they called it Himmlerville, and I went down there. And in Himmlerville I became, they printed a newspaper, I was a newspaper man and also a bank clerk and became postmaster in the fourth-rate office, which I found out later was illegal because I wasn't a citizen. And the way it worked was that I was paid according to the amount of stamps I sold. I just gave them a report that I sold so many and then they gave me one hundred-fifty percent for the first one hundred and I think one hundred percent for the next one hundred and seventy-five percent for the third and no more after that. You couldn't cheat because, I couldn't say that I sold more stamps than that because I sold the stamps. So, I had little difficulties because I had to send the money in.

ALLEE: Hold on a minute, we have to turn the tape. End of side

one.

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

ALLEE: Beginning of side two. Okay, we're in Himmlerville at the post office.

BOHEM: Somewhere I still have a money order that I made out for something like five dollars and kept it as a souvenir. Mail came carried by a mule drawn carriage, went to the county seat beyond it and I had to register every registered letter that came through here and back and forth. It was all right. It was a rather interesting experience. Most of the money orders I wrote out went to Sears Roebuck which was then only a mail-order store in Chicago. But of course, as pleasant as it was, there was no future for me. I was determined to come to Los Angeles, and I did. But I didn't want to waste money on it and I managed to get myself a job on a freighter. And the freighter, which was in New York for repairs, it was really an American-Hawaiian Line. So I boarded it on dry dock on the ladder and it was floated and--

ALLEE: You went back to New York to get the freighter?

BOHEM: Yes because I could afford to go New York but I couldn't afford to come to California.

ALLEE: What had made you determined to go to Los Angeles?

BOHEM: The motion picture industry.

ALLEE: So you became interested in that?

BOHEM: Well, as a youngster, I already sold a motion picture story there and I thought I wanted to become a serious writer. But I felt I want to write the motion pictures, and I couldn't afford that because I didn't trust my English. I felt that there you don't need English as long as the understand the action that you describe. Whatever the public will see, the titles are written by specialists so I didn't have to worry about that. I felt that that would be a good thing to be sustained, take care of my mother at home, until I can have enough self confidence to write seriously. So anyway, I came on this freighter, small freighter, to the Panama Canal, and to orient you in time, the news that came over on the radio, a man called Sparks was the radio operator, was that Hindenburg was

elected President in Germany and President Coolidge refused to buy Easter outfits for his wife, he was very stingy. So I still remember this. So the boat landed here, but I wasn't paid up until I got to San Francisco. In San Francisco I managed to get a ride down here and with a great deal of difficulties, I managed to get a job. First as an extra, then finally in the reading department where I recommended stories. And, it really hadn't led into any future so I prepared, there was novels, plays, that I synopsized, that I got a hold of and finally I wrote one about called "Sky Knights," it was a novel about the early aviation. And that was another synoption, I called it a novel, a synopsis of a novel but I was really cheating. It was my original story. And so I submitted the story myself, they just shrugged their shoulders, it was no good, you had to be an established writer. But when I submitted this from an established writer, they wanted to buy it, and this was great. I managed to get an agent in New York and it looked like I got it made but then there was a story in a weekly magazine, in Liberty, and they bought that and then I owned up, I said, "Look, they didn't buy my story but this story, I wrote it." And they said, "Oh, you should have admitted it, they would have liked it anyway

even if it was under your name." So they told me that I could get a job in New York. And I didn't understand why in New York because the business was down here. So once again I had to manage to go to New York. But that time, I had a different bad luck.

ALLEE: In Los Angeles, which movie studio did you work for, or--

BOHEM: M.G.M. But later on I worked for all of them because I made the synopsis, and with their knowledge I gave it Fox, I gave it to, I made fairly good money and sometimes I made fairly good money on fakes of originals that I put fictitious names. I got ten dollars, Metro paid six dollars for a synopsis, all the other studios paid ten dollars, so whenever I invented a story I made almost fifty dollars. But I had to write four or five synopsis. I lost track.

ALLEE: They were about to send you back to New York, there was a job for you there.

BOHEM: Yes. I somehow didn't like this whole arrangement, shifting back and forth. So I was in touch with a lawyer, a road man who was a brother of a rabbi in my hometown. Every year he used to be in the newspaper because the bitterest winter there they used to go out to Coney

Island to swim. So, but I still wanted to complete my education. He said, "You can work with us, and in the evenings and support you, go in the daytime to Columbia." And everything is fine, so I managed, this happened while I was still in Los Angeles, and I went back once again on the train and when I arrived in New York I found that the day before, they buried him. So, this opening was cut. And I continued working for the studios and I think I might as well skip now because there's too many minor details here. But, somehow I was able to make a living and finally the studios signed me up as a writer to come back here. Well, by that time I married, this was very courageous that I married, immediately had a baby who is now in the fifties. I has another child later who was killed in an automobile accident, with my first wife. This got me emotionally. Sorry, I forgot where I was.

ALLEE: You were coming back here?

BOHEM: Yeah, may I tell you something that has nothing to do with this? To explain to you why these occasional lapses. Two years ago I had a stroke, uh, in the part of the brain where they said I had no chance to live, and my wife, bless her soul, made an arrangement that they wouldn't take me to the hospital, if I survived, she didn't want the life support, I would just be a vegetable. But when they saw that I survived I was taken to the hospital, I remember nothing of that. But at any rate, the only thing

that's left is that my memory is erratic, as you realize.

ALLEE; Your memory doesn't seem to be terribly erratic.

BOHEM: No, the first thing is I started to tell you something and I side-tracked myself telling you something else and then for a moment I couldn't go back to where I was before. Maybe this was before but I'm just more conscious of it since I had the stroke. Oh, may I give you something very interesting about that stroke which is--

ALLEE; Yes.

BOHEM: By that time, you see, I started to write seriously when I was a young kid and when I saw that my life was going to pieces. I'm just in the motion picture business which has as much to do with serious writing as dishwashing has to do with cooking. So I started to write a novel, did extensive research on it. And the novel was about aphasia, it was symbolic, aphasia, you just block out certain things completely. It's different from the other one, the more familiar one, you see I can't find the ordinary words, not aphasia, it also starts with -E-.

ALLEE: Amnesia.

BOHEM: Amnesia. The only reason I'm telling you this, I came out from my stroke with aphasia. And it made my treatment a little difficult because I had read every available textbook on aphasia and since aphasia is a rare situation, I knew more about it than the doctors. And every time they did well-planned things to reassure me, I said, "Now, please keep this, I know the next thing you're going to do is that." And that made it difficult, but as you can see I recovered. But I have these little lapses for which I have to apologize. Oh, by the way, while I was in the hospital, I am told that when you're aphasic, first I couldn't move, I couldn't speak, and then the language comes back if you have acquired language like English for me, I was Hungarian, you don't speak your acquired language, you speak the original one. Well, I was contrary. My wife brought in some Hungarians to talk to. I didn't understand them, I said, "They're talking gibberish to me." With accents and oh, I only spoke English, I didn't understand a word of the language that I spoke all my life and I wrote in it. Oh, by the way, I resumed working on that, and I'm almost finished, but the irony of it is, that when I was very close to being finished, that's when I had my stroke. And when I came

back from the hospital at the beginning, my wife, I had my jacket on in such a way that experts couldn't straighten it out and I messed up my manuscript which was about fifteen pages away from completion. I threw out half of it, I rearranged it all, I didn't know what I was doing. And now I'm almost finished with it. Unless I get another major thing in my life I'll probably finish it, and I think it was worth waiting for it all these years.

ALLEE: Since we're at a break in your story for the moment, I did want to ask you--

BOHEM: This has nothing to do with my being an immigrant anymore, does it?

ALLEE; It's all right though. It's very useful to know what you did and I do know that, that you became successful here, and that's an interesting story in itself. I did want to ask you a little bit more about your experience in and around Ellis Island. You were on the ship, on quarantine, but they had taken the roof off. There you were for two weeks, in the Harbor, and there was the Statue of Liberty standing there, did you have any thoughts about that, seeing the Statue?

BOHEM: Oh yes, and the light flashing on, "Lipton's Tea," and I just didn't understand why, this is in the middle of the Atlantic and this thing goes on and goes off and goes on. I saw this and I was on the edge of America and I didn't know whether I could get in or not, being shipped back. And I saw these great big liners going by and all this exciting life. And there were other, there were some stowaways on the ship. And we helped them, some of them, I met them later on. It's, it was a very sad, a very exciting thing but very painful because I was so close and yet I was so far. The chances were almost 99 percent that I would be shipped back. I had the wrong passport, my passport expired by the way. I was supposed to come here for two weeks. Incidently, I found out there was no quota at that time, that I was here legally and I didn't have to worry about it. I found this out when I came on the freighter to Los Angeles. I had to get a certificate as an AB seaman. And I figured, "That's the end, they'll find out that I'm here illegally after all the years I've been here." But they told me, "You're here legally," and I still have my AB seaman certificate. You can see what an AB seaman I look like. Well, Ellis Island was a very, very frightening thing because your whole life depended--there was a man there who would look at you, ask you questions, and your whole life depended on, "We'll let him go, or send him back." And he had every reason to send me back. But since I was flaunting a cheap edition of Shakespeare in my hand, and I was desperately trying to impress him, he must have, because he really should have sent me back. I even told him, that I came here, I says that I

had nothing to do with that business that I came here to renew, I said, "I'm not a businessman but that's the only way I could get an American visa," and maybe this is what appealed to him, that I tried to give him a --I was too stupid. Like I told that true story to a policeman of all people. I told it to a clerk, and I also told him that, "Look, I may be dirty because on that ship they didn't, no way of bathing, and we were in the harbor. The trip took weeks because the ship was in trouble because we lost a propeller in a storm. And then two weeks before you people allowed us to come here." Obviously it must have made an impression on him because he really shouldn't have admitted me. And it was like a court, because he was higher, you looked up to him, he was really like the Supreme Court.

ALLEE: Was he wearing a uniform?

BOHEM: No, civilian clothes. He was an employee of the Department of--

ALLEE: Immigration probably. Were there, you weren't on Ellis Island all that long, but did you have impressions of the place itself, of the people?

BOHEM: Oh yes, I was, before I came in front of him, I saw all these people. They were mostly, really, uneducated peasants. And they had

no worry because they were fully convinced that they were at the right place and if they were sent back they'll be sent back. But they were all looking at the tops of the buildings, and then we saw the ferries. And the ferries were a miracle to us because here is this flat boat and automobiles sticking out of the end, and they didn't know what that was for. The passengers could drive on that years ago. But it was so impressive. I figured out that that was for the police, in case they want to catch somebody, they can get out from this ferry and--. Very few people, maybe the people who had dreams like I did, travelled in a higher class. These people just came to make a living and they weren't really concerned about, almost everyone, including myself, they helped each other, it's very touching. We didn't realize what we were up against. But we made it. You see, the conditions of the other side, it's not like now, like nowadays. But then my mother would send me out with some money to buy bread, it wasn't bread it was meat. Bread, mother baked it and I had to take it to the bakery. But I had just enough money to buy as much as we needed, but by the time I reached through the long line inside, my money wasn't worth one hundred percent of what it was worth, but I joined the line. So, when I finally got in, I had to go away because I couldn't buy the meat because I probably would have gotten a few ounces. And these were the conditions there. Also, we had a preview of what happened later in Germany. I think Hungary was pioneering that. So, Ellis Island was a lot more than people who just come here for a better life. We really come here for life, not for better life, in America. And

the things that were terrible, I was standing in line to get up to this stand where this man who would decide on me, there's several of them, side by side. People came out and gave us sandwiches, gave us coffee. This again was a dream.

ALLEE: The people who came around to give you a sandwich and coffee--

BOHEM: I think ladies that belonged to some organization. But they were connected with the Immigration and they were permitted to be them and help these poor devils who were coming in. This was all, even higher than we ever dreamed about.

ALLEE: Do you, can you remember about how much time your, your passage through Ellis Island took, waiting in the lines and being asked the questions?

BOHEM: Oh, I think, no more than a half a day. Uh, because I didn't realize this 'til later that the Red Cross, this is why I was admitted I think, the Red Cross not only arranged for me to be taken off of that ship, and brought to Ellis Island, but the Red Cross wrote to the American Immigration authorities that this kid's been so long, don't hold him up much. They later on showed me a copy of the letter that I wrote.

ALLEE: You didn't know it then?

BOHEM: No, I didn't. And I felt like a cheat because my relationship with the Red Cross wasn't one hundred percent honest, it was based on quite a few lies. But I, later on I talked to somebody, "It didn't matter, we knew it. The agony and the hopelessness you lived through was true, and the details that you gave us are like the stories that other people told us."

ALLEE: Well, you were showing yourself to be resourceful.

BOHEM: Well, I was a twenty year old kid. Maybe, I don't know if I told you that one of the first things I did after I got my mail, before I even went to the museums. I went to get my first paper, and to indicate how my English was. On the boat, I met a teacher from Springfield, Illinois. And she asked me what I was going to do when I come to America. And I said, "the first thing I'm going to do is to take steps to become a 'Statesman'." Well, she smiled, and it was quite some time before I realized what I said. You see, I figured a "Man of the state" is a "citizen" so that's--. I went to get my first paper, I think I mentioned that before. And I had to get a first paper, I have to be here five years and you could apply for citizenship. And they came around and took pictures of me, flashlighted,

and I didn't understand that either, but there was lines about this much in the paper. The kid was so anxious to become a citizen that he hasn't got a place to live in, he came here and got his first paper. To me that was part of America. I thought they did something like that for everybody, and so I was very much impressed with it. But then later on I realized that it must have struck him rather unusual because he asked me where I lived, and I said, "I don't know, I just got off the boat." And he said, "Haven't you got any relatives?" and I said, "Nobody." So obviously that was just very brief item, but newsworthy, that a young kid thought he was so anxious to become a citizen that he got his first paper before even a roof over his head. The fifth year you got them, the anniversary of the fifth year, I did become a citizen, which, by the way, it was much easier in those days. You didn't have to go to school. Now they have to go to school to learn American History.

ALLEE: You didn't have to answer any questions about America?

BOHEM: Yes, I had to answer questions but no difficult, since I didn't have an interpreter, I spoke English, which sometimes they understood, sometime they understood it if I wrote it down.

ALLEE: Were you able to bring your family over?

BOHEM: Yes.

ALLEE: We're getting back then, to your subsequent history.

BOHEM: I was able to support my family over there, and I was very upset. I brought out a brother who is still here, I brought my mother, and my older brother who was in between me and this one that I brought out, who was returned here to a very pleasant life by then. I said I wanted to give him a better life and I didn't bring him out, and then came this awful thing and he was butchered by the Germans. And somehow I feel a great sense of guilt that I probably could have brought him out and could have saved him, but it was inconceivable that things like that could have happen over there. And my mother died here, my brother is still here. He became a principal in a school and now retired. So I finally managed to get into the motion picture industry. Well, they signed me up as a writer because, well, I had a very good analytical mind, and when they asked me what I thought about somebody else's screenplay, I said, "Well, that was fair but if I had done it, I would have done this, would have done that." So finally they pulled me out of writing and most of the time I was executive assistant, being in charge of other writers because I had an impressive knowledge of the business. I was never quite happy, never liked this job, never liked the business. The more I knew it, the less I liked it. By a miracle, a few worthwhile things happened but it was really very bad. So I stayed in it, I

was in the motion picture business, I wrote, I saw screen credits, and I have a poster out there. Just before I retired, I went to Hungary to make, you know, a movie about a playwright who worked on five or six plays. His plays are now forgotten but he wrote a magnificent juvenile story. I made a film about that in English. It was nominated for an Academy Award. That was the last thing I did in the picture business. I'll show you later on, the poster.

ALLEE: What was the name?

BOHEM: "Boys of Powell Street." It was really a magnificent story because it was a group of kids who grow up in the city and had no playground. So on vacant lots, they fought for vacant lots. They made an army, and the hero of this novel, is the only private in the army, and is desperate to become an officer. And, he sneaks into the enemy camp and overhears, sees that one of the ranks is a traitor and overhears plans and is courageous enough to jump down and denounce them. They threw him into the waters, early in the spring but they had great respect for him. But anyway the fight goes on, it was a beautiful fight. No guns or anything. Just, almost wrestling you'd see in this picture. The poster says, "The Army That Had To Go Home In

Time For Supper." But it looked like the fight was to get this vacant lot. And it looked like they're losing, when this boy got out of bed, in nightgown there, he's such an apparition that the others are all startled and that turns the battle, he doesn't really win it but it turns the battle and they retain the place. And then he's dying, the heads of the opposing army is at his bedside, and he dies, because he caught pneumonia. And then these people go back to this lot for which they fought, and they see these steam shovels and they're building a big apartment there, they fought for nothing. That's roughly the outline of the story. We feel we made a beautiful picture. We got an English cast, we went to London to pick up some youngsters and shot it in Hungary. So, I was sort of alternating, I produced an Edward G. Robinson picture and a few others but they wouldn't let me produce very long because they always wanted me to be an executive, and I didn't like either one of them very much. But at least you had a little more freedom as a producer. I don't think this part of the story is--

ALLEE: You got into television too, yes?

BOHEM: Oh yes. I got into, I forgot that. I got into television. I produced a western, Rawhide.

ALLEE: Oh, we've all seen it.

BOHEM: It was very successful, and it could have gone on longer but CBS was color blind. You know, they all invested a lot of money to develop the color system and CBS spent a lot of money and they didn't get it, NBC got it and CBS decided color was no good and they didn't make any color pictures. It would have cost only a few dollars more to make the picture in color but so that sort of put an end to it. The reason that I succeeded in that is I was able, I used to write stories about Hungarian peasants. Uh, the Hungarian peasants, they were cowboys too, except that they used a long-handled whip which they could like lash out and have it around the neck of a cow, hold it like a lasso. And I knew, I knew that and I decided that the American cowboy couldn't be any different. And I wrote with that philosophy, I wrote or controlled and Rawhide was a big success. Also, I want to take credit for one thing that in Rawhide there was minimum of killing. Which all westerns, they keep shooting each other left and right. It was probably very glorified. Oh, another thing that I did that I forgot to mention to you, but I tried to learn the business, how to produce, I ran into Metro short department. And I made these scientific short, U.C.L.A. is still showing some of them to the students. And for instance, I

made a short on the Curies, and Metro liked it so much that they made a feature out of it. Now, in the feature they were developed, tried to develop this great ground-breaking thing, and in the meanwhile they look at each other and say, "I love you darling, I love you darling." In mine it was a documentary story that told the true story, but that happened a great deal, learning about--and of all the work I've done in the motion picture business, I liked most when I was making documentaries. But I'd forgotten to tell you that.

ALLEE: End of tape one.

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

ALLEE: This is the second tape of our interview with Endre Bohem. This Debra Allee, it is February 6, 1986, Thursday. And I think we can start the second tape.

BOHEM: I think I can remember, I was talking about--

ALLEE; About your name, yes.

BOHEM: Well, I desperately wanted to be an American, so I translated Endre into English, which is Andrew. And I also saw that most Americans had a middle name, and I didn't, my parents were stingy. So, I picked a middle name, and I picked on of Byron's first names, Gordon. So in my passports I'm Andrew Gordon Bohem. And whenever, or it's entered Bohem, a/k/a/, also known as, and this, I could be like Americans, this was really, went very far 'cause I saw in a subway, in New York, everyone was going like this, so I felt that in order to be an American you have to shew gum. And I hated it but I chewed desperately, (they laugh), with the result that now, I can't stand other people's chewing gum.

ALLEE: I'm trying to think if I have a couple more questions.

BOHEM: Is it really worthwhile to talk to me, because when my wife submitted my name, I thought she may have made a mistake.

ALLEE; Was it worth it?

BOHEM: Well, 'cause I'm not giving you some very exciting information.

ALLEE: Uh, I think you are, and a very clear history of your

experience.

BOHEM: I try to give you an impression of my attitude towards it.

ALLEE: Yes, you did.

BOHEM: Even before I came here.

ALLEE; Yes, you said to me that you were determined to come here and that you thought your life would be better here.

BOHEM: That life would be possible here.

ALLEE: Life would be possible, life would be life. Uh, looking back, on your early determination, as a young man, uh, and your life here, do you have any thoughts about that, do you have any--

BOHEM: The only thought I had is that I probably would have fulfilled, my real talent could have surfaced, I really would have become a noteworthy writer. Because, as I told you, writing, only writing for motion pictures, particularly in that period, was really below criticism. I felt that I had to put in more effort for a whole work in an Hungarian composition than write a script that they shot here.

ALLEE; And do you feel that, that was a sort of uniquely American use of a writer's talents, in the movie industry, or misuse, should we say?

BOHEM: I definitely feel it was misuse. The American talent was as great as any talent anywhere else, as a matter of fact, in many ways it has a broader aspect because so many Americans are like myself, of foreign decent and that brings in, I think American literature right now, is probably tops in the world. And it was that, even higher, because of the great men, looking back, Hemingway, and others, they were flourishing then.

ALLEE; Well some of them came a cropper in Hollywood, also.

BOHEM: Yes, but they just came here to stay, pick up a few larger dollars and didn't, those who stayed didn't remain good writers.

ALLEE; When you--

BOHEM: It's the commercialism that caused this, because you see, these people who came into the motion picture industry to run it. They were petty businessmen and all they saw the dollars, of which they get the most dollars. The talent was here, it's not the fault of the writers, not the fault of the directors either. And this is coming to the surface now. More

worthwhile things showing up now that there are no legitimate studios anymore. Louis B. Mayer was a dictator, not only his own studio, but he dictated other studios too. The only thing that he did nicely that for thirty-five cents, uh, on the menu they had a chicken soup, with lots of chicken in it, which he had for sentimental reasons because he was a starving youngster. That's all he could get in Canada where he grew up. And that's the only thing that he's done.

ALLEE; It's the chicken soup in the commissary?

BOHEM: Yeah, in the commissary. It was very good too.

ALLEE: Helene, had you thought of any questions you might like to ask. (Someone off-mike answers.) No.

ALLEE: I think you've really about covered it. If you have anything else you'd like to say, or--

BOHEM: No, I think I've already said too much.

ALLEE: Not too much at all. Well, this is the end of the interview with Endre Bohem. It is now 11:21 or so. This is the end of the interview with Endre Bohem, it is 11:21. Okay.

BOHEM: Early in the morning, this little freighter started, and we saw, I had my first sight of Ellis Island, and I knew of Ellis Island but that it was life or death. This is, I knew that as a third class or steerage passenger, I would have to go there and they won't be as lenient as if I were a first class passenger, they'll find out that I really haven't got the proper papers. So, anyway, it was like the gates of heaven. I didn't think I could get in. And, when I saw the Statue, I was up all night, and as morning came up, you could see through the mist, it sort of came to life. And, probably in your life you have one, or two or three impressions that are the biggest impressions of your life, and that was one of them. Just to see the Statue there, hoping that I got passed it. I never had the nerve to go out to the Statue, because even now, every time, because at the beginning, before planes, I went to Europe a couple of times, and I always pass it. I never could pass it without crying. And even before, when I was younger, I wasn't as emotional as I am now, I was in very good control of my emotions. There's nothing in Europe that compares to that, to a certain aspirant, potential immigrant, has to confront the Statue--I think. I didn't

do this very much, (?) in my life but I think I was very close to praying--. That's all I have to say about that.

ALLEE: This is the end of the interview with Endre Bohem, it is now 11:25, Thursday, February 6, 1986.