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NORMAN ADOLPH
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CZECHOSLOVAKIA (BORN FRANCE), 1920
AGE 15
PASSAGE ON "THE KROONLAND"

DALLETT: My name is Nancy Dallett and I'm speaking with Norman Adolph on Wednesday, May 21, 1986. We are about to interview Mr. Adolph about his immigration experience from Czechoslovakia in 1920. This is the beginning of side one of Interview Number 145. Can we start back at the beginning of your story and would you tell me where and when you were born?

ADOLPH: I was born in Metz, in Alsace Lorraine which at that time was under the auspices of the German Empire although it was originally French and now is again France.

DALLETT: Could you spell Metz?

ADOLPH: M-E-T-Z. And I was brought up in Pozsony, P-O-Z-S-O-N-Y, which was Hungary at the time but being part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, German was also one of the languages and schooling was bilingual for that reason. For that matter, in the streets, both languages were used and theatre season was German season and Hungarian season. And about 1918, after World War One, thanks to President Wilson, the city became Bratislava, B-R-A-T-I-S-L-A-V-A, and considered the capital of Slovakia although Slovakia was not an independent nation, it was Czechoslovakia. And I was just beginning to absorb the third language, when, the War being over, my sisters who were in America since before World War One, wrote, "Why shouldn't you come here too, and let's get the family together?" So my brother and I, my brother who was five years older than I am, decided to come here. Our mother had died back in 1911 and we had a stepmother and stepsisters and stepbrothers, all of whom were wiped out in the Holocaust, of course. But the family life was such that we were pretty happy to get out, although there was no anti-semitism that drove us or anything else. Lack of business opportunities certainly, not because of

any race but because we were not rich people. And my kid sister, in whose birth my mother died, said, "Oh no, she wouldn't leave mama," so she remained there. And we came over on the Kroonland, the picture of which I showed you. The trip was not what the Caribbean cruises that I've taken since then were like. It was a pretty rough voyage in both ways, weather-wise and condition of food and quarters. My brother and I were assigned one bunk in a double-cabin room, and of course neither of us slept, we kept pushing each other and punching each other during the night and some ladies, young ladies whose friendship we made, said, "Why don't you come and sleep in our room." And they each gave me part of their bedding, I slept on the floor of a four-bunk cabin with four young ladies. Being only fifteen and a half years old, there was no problem. And it was much more comfortable and much more congenial for me to have a place that I could call my own and put some things down. And when we got here, my grandparents, who had signed affidavits of support, were to wait for us. But we were told they didn't come because we had ben advised that I, having had something suspicious about my scalp, would be held up and I would have to be in the hospital to be examined and

determined whether I am suitable to enter the country. I didn't know of anything wrong but they thought so. And the hospital was so crowded in 1920 that two other young lads and myself were quartered in the Mental Hygiene Ward. Not extremely deranged people but they weren't all there, otherwise they wouldn't have been in the Mental Hygiene. And in that division, on Sunday morning, a reporter from the Jewish Morning Journal, came in to, you know, snooping around like journalists do to have some news items, and they found a little news item, three nice young Jewish boys, who seemed to be okay, are in the mental Hygiene Ward. And spoke with us in Yiddish, and we didn't know why and she said she'd look into it and see what she could do, and sure enough the next day, we were removed from there and put into a regular hospital ward. And there we were quartered for quite awhile before our names were recalled. And every morning we would go into the big hall and sit on our luggage, ready to go if our name is called. Wasn't called, back to the hospital room again. Finally, I think after the seventh or eighth day our name was called and I met my grandmother for the first time. It was my maternal grandmother and my stepgrandfather, my grandfather having

died and she remarried. And they took us on the subway and for the first time in my life I was in the underground and they couldn't get me to sit down. I stood and walked all over to examine things. And then we came to Corona, which was then just Corona, then later became the World's Fair site. And the site was called Flushing, no longer Corona. Corona was too dirty a little place. And then came the usual, oh there was nothing wrong with my scalp, I had no problems of any kind, and the struggle of making a living. I waited until sixteen to get working papers and then when I got my working papers, I opened the Jewish Morning Journal, I went into my uncle's house in Manhattan, so that when I get the paper, I'll be there, not having to come from Corona to answer the ad. And finally, got a job, and another job, and another job. I think it would be too monotonous for me to tell you everything I did. But one thing was very interesting, perhaps. It was at the time when the cigarette holders that you pressed and the punched out the stub of the cigarettes, came into being. And I had no job and a friend of mine was working in a place where they were manufacturing it, so he suggested that I take a couple of dozen cards and sign for it and

go around to candy stores and cigar stores and try to sell them. And I did. And I made fifty cents on every card I sold, and after awhile, there was no more places that I could walk to. Something else came up, eventually I even became an electrician and for about five years I did house wiring. And as a coincidence, one of the houses that I wired in Astoria, Long Island, was owned by a man whom I later on got to know and became very well acquainted with the family and he asked whether I would become executor, one of the executors under his will. Of course I told him, "What are you talking about executors, you're--." "Well," he says, "You never can tell, and when the time comes--." I said, "Well, of course I will, be glad to help you." And I found out that I wired the houses that he built and I became executor of his estate. And in the interim I found that electrical work wasn't my cup of tea, either. I saw no opportunity for advancement, real advancement, and I decided to try to go back to school. And when, about 1927, I went to evening school at NYU, pre-collegiate division, where I learned English composition, English history, American history and American literature. Those three courses were required, before you could enter a college, no matter

what education you had before. And I passed them, and I registered at City College Night School, in Bryant High School in Long Island City, where that school was maintained. And, but I had to get my one year pre-law, by September 1929, otherwise you would require two years pre-law. That would have made it still ore prohibitive for me because another year of working, and studying, and paying tuition, so I tried very hard to get that one year and I registered for a heavy schedule. Sure enough my name was called to come to the office, and I met Professor Healy, the most charming, blond, Catholic gentleman I ever met in my life. He says, "What are you trying to do, become President of the United States in two years?" I said, "No," I said, "I have a program that I want to fulfill and I just can't afford any longer preparation to get into law school," and I told him about the new law. "Well," he says, "Look," he says, "It's against the rules as a freshman in City College Night School to take more than six points but you're registered for twelve, I'll have to find some way of flunking you out of some." I said, "I'll try very hard not to give you a chance," and he never did. And then I went to summer school to finish up and again I had to take six

points instead of three, and I was called into the office and, "Oh it's you again," and I said, "yes, I'm just about to finish up that year, and then I'll enter law school." He says, "Well, you know, how could you do justice to all those courses? Let me look at your record," and he asked somebody to pull out my card and, "I don't know," he says, "You do some magical tricks," cause I had very good marks, I worked hard, I didn't want to flunk a course. I got my pre-law and I went into Brooklyn Law School in '29 and graduated in '32 and I was admitted in '33 and I was able to go to work for five dollars a week to clerk. But in the meantime I had gotten the opportunity to reach in a Hebrew School in Corona. I had a very good Hebrew background. Most of my education in Europe was Day Hebrew school. So I was able to teach and earn a living and practice law with a firm and get my one year clerkship in and as time went on, you meet people who make decisions about whether they think they would or could trust you, and I made progress and eventually got into the building business with some of my clients and just after World War Two when selling houses was no problem, just had to build them and the G.I's were there ready to but them. And we built on Long Island,

all the way out to Commack. When I decided, and I made some money, and I had two children by then, I said, "If I lose all that money that I made, I will kick myself for having wanted to be the richest man in the cemetery," I says, "I'm quitting building," and I went back to my law practice, and I practiced law until now, now I'm sort of semi-retiring.

DALLETT: Can you take me back to those earlier years, in Bratislava and fill me in with some of the memories that you have?

ADOLPH: Yes, well, the, one of the very heavy, difficult memories, is, of course, that I lost my mother there. There were five children, and the youngest was one day old and the oldest was thirteen years old and my father was a traveling salesman. So of course he had to remarry very quickly and he married a woman who had not been married, and the probabilities were that she would make a good wife and stepmother. But it didn't work out that way. The human being is a very complex piece of machinery. She probably tried. But when her child came along, the first one, that was the end of it, we ceased to exist. I remember an incident when we, she called the doctor because her little girl had an abscess over here on the chest, and he came into the living room where the child was brought to be examined, before he left he says, "Who is that breathing in

another room that I passed?" So my sister says, "That's my other sister, a little girl." He said, "I'd like to see that child." And they brought my kid sister in. She had pneumonia, that's all. But my stepmother never even called him for her. We were poor, the World War was difficult. The army just about supported the soldiers but not the families. What little we got, we got, and even if we had enough money, you had to stand on line with your ration ticket, and many times just as you got to the door, they were all out, that's it until the next morning. And my stepmother had a brother who was assigned to a task in a village, to a very large farmer, and the government, to make sure that they control what happens to wheat, that it's not sold on the black market, they had military personnel watching it. So he said, "Come out there one day, and I'll get you some stale bread." And I did, and I slept over and he woke me up at four o'clock in the morning and drove me back to the station and I came home with a large loaf of very stale bread, and my stepmother had to take a big knife and a hatchet and hammer it apart. Then of course we were able to dunk it into coffee, and it was very delicious and we enjoyed it very much, but that was how we had to cope for food. It was very, very trying, very trying.

DALLETT: Was it at that point that your sister had come to America or was it after the War?

ADOLPH: Oh no, my sisters left before the War, just before the

War, and we came after the War and then, my kid sister, we brought over in '34, and then my father came over in '39. We had wanted to bring our father over for a long time, or some of his boys. But my stepmother wouldn't let them come, either all or nothing, and we didn't have the money to bring over four brothers and sisters and a brother-in-law and a niece and my stepmother and my father. We were hard working people. And we said, "We can't, we haven't got the money and we can't do it." Finally my father persuaded her to let him go and then he will bring the two boys over and the three of them will bring the rest. And in '39 we sent them tickets, a ticket. By that time we were able to afford a second-class ticket because we knew what steerage was like. And he came to Liverpool to board the ship and they told him. "Sorry Mr. Adolph, your ticket is for the next trip of the Queen Mary." He said, Well, as long as I;m here now, I might as well go now." "Well, there's no cabin for you." He said, "Well do you have a steerage cabin?" They said, "Yes, but you have a second-class ticket." "Well," he says, "Second-class ticket, to heck with it, I'll go steerage, you'll send my sons the difference." And he came and the Queen Mary went back painted gray. The War had broken out, he would never have come over here, he would have been swallowed up same as the rest of his family, every one of them. We never heard from them. What can I tell you about the years there? Like other little boys you know, you have girlfriends and the religion says you're not supposed to be running around with girls and you're caught and you're reported on. And I was also a great Zionist. I had hopes of someday

going to Israel and I learned some of the songs and so on and at time an author by the name of Max Brod, a Czech writer, but he was Jewish, came to our city to talk for Zionism and I had a pretty good voice. I came from a musical family. My maternal grandfather was a cantor, my brother was a cantor here, in the United States, all his life. And I was asked to sing a certain song and I did. And the next day I came to class and the teacher said, "What were you doing last night at the dinner for Max brod?" I said, "I was invited to come and sing." He says, "To sing, at a dinner for an atheist?" I said, "I didn't sing for him because it was religion, I sang for him because he is a Zionist and he wants people to have an opportunity, who want to go to Israel, to get a chanc to go to Israel." He says, "You can not study under me, I will not teach anybody like you," and he threw me out. By coincidence, his father-in-law who was a very old man, whose sight was poor, needed someone to walk with him every evening to temple and back and I happened to have volunteered for that. So he found out from somebody that I was thrown out. So he talked to his son-in-law, he says, "You shouldn't do that to a little boy like that. Look how nice he is, he comes everyday, takes me by the hand, then walks me to temple and brings me back." So they let me come back. Those things, in retrospect really are silly, almost, but it is an indication of how seriously certain people take certain things and how bigoted the finest people, a rabbi, somebody who was supposed to teach me how to be broad minded and fair and decent, to do a thing like that, and how it works on you. You say to yourself, "My God, what kind of

world is there, where can I turn to learn if the man who is my teacher, can't show me a better example." But you move on and you get more encrusted, and a little tougher and after awhile you learn to take it and say, "Well, not everybody can be perfect." You even want to admit that you're not perfect either.

DALLETT: Do you remember that period of time, when I suppose you got a letter from your sister and she said you should come to America? Did she paint a picture for you of what life would be like for you if you did come?

ADOLPH: They didn't do anything like that because that was not the issue, let's say, because my life was so useless there. Not everybody can become a rabbi, and I had not ambitions to become a rabbi, and all I was doing was studying Talmud. Now what sense does that make? But I had no other alternative, and I couldn't say to my father, "I want to go to the University," because he didn't have the money to send me to the University and I didn't have the preparation to go to University, I'd have to start with high school. I know what a child of a poor man feels like when there isn't enough money to give him an education that he can get in this country, poor or rich, you can get a college degree, and there you couldn't. So it means you're stuck, whatever happened will happen but there's nothing you can do and the result is you become despondent and you give up and sometimes

you even go off into directions that you shouldn't go because of that. Fortunately I didn't stay there long enough for anything like that to possibly happen. So that when she saw, when they saw an opportunity of getting a few bucks together and helping me to come over, it was never discussed. And of course I thought it was very, very pleasant thing to look forward to, to join my two sisters with another brother and we'll have the one little sister there whom we'll sooner or later bring over, and so it was a very desirable thing. And not only that, but then a fifteen and a half year old boy he likes adventure, he's going to America, my goodness, across the ocean, a ship, sure I want to go, and that was it.

DALLETT: Do you remember being picked up and ready to go and actually leaving, did your father send along something with you?

ADOLPH: It didn't take very long to pack me up, there wasn't much to pack. As a matter of fact, I forgot to tell you about a certain aspect of my family life. My father was born in Poland, and when he was serving in World War One, his job was, he was much older than the youngsters, you know, so he had to do some work that wasn't in the field, you know, danger. His job was a transport master. If they caught a fellow, a kid, AWOL and the Austro-Hungarian Empire was vast, and a kid from, let's say as

far away from here to California, may have been, may have ended up in New Hampshire serving, and he goes AWOL so he goes home. He thumbs his way home, then he's got to be brought back to his regiment and you can't trust him so you have to send him with somebody. My father had that job, to take these boys back and he always had it fixed with his superior that when they had somebody who had to be taken back to around where we lived, he got that job and he was able to stop over and spend overnight with us and then go back the next day and that's how we saw our father now and then and he saw the children. And when he got this opportunity around vacation-time, he used to take me with him, drop me off at his mother's house and then pick me up at the end of the vacation and brought me back. That's where I got everything I had to pack. They always sent me back with a couple of shirts, with a couple of pairs of socks. And they fed me so that I gained a couple of pounds, and that was a very nice experience. And in our Jewish schools, here as well as there, we have two vacations, every half year. One around Easter time, for the Pesach holiday and the other around New Year for the New Year and Day of Atonement holiday. Each one is a month's vacation so that I had,

twice a year, a month in Poland. And I was past the age of half-ticket travel already and my father of course sent me with half-ticket. I was very short, still am, and he thought I could get away with it and why not. So the conductor started to question me in Polish, he says, "You're older than twelve years," he said, so I being a wise-guy, I answered him in Polish, "No rezumi por polski," "I don't understand Polish." "Oh," he says, "Next station I'm putting you off," so he went away and I said to the people who were near me, "Look, I have the money, don't let them put me off. If he wants to put me off, please, here it is, you pay for me," but he never put me off.

DALLETT: We just have to flip the tape over. That's the end of side one of Interview Number 145 with Norman Adolph.

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

ADOLPH: Before I left Europe, that it was announced in the press that the Emperor is coming to visit the regiment that was stationed in that city and he will also pay courtesy calls to the various faiths, and I knew

that from what I heard among my co-religionists, that he will come to the temple and he will stop in front of the temple and pay his respects. And of course the rabbi thought it would be only decent for him to come out and welcome him and give him the proverbial, not the proverbial but the common religious blessing, "May the Lord bless you and guide you," and so on. Of course everybody, Jew and non-Jew, was out that day. Those that were non-Jewish were lined up before the Protestant big church and the Catholic big church, and I lined up in front of the big temple, and I waited until the Emperor came in sight and his carriage, and the rabbi stepped out and blessed him and there was a photographer who took pictures of, several pictures of it, and somehow or other I laid my hands on one of them and I have, I saved it and of course, when I came over here I brought it with me as part of my treasure. As a matter of fact I brought with me quite a vast collection of picture postcards, all of Judaica substance, and I've been tempted to put it into some museum like the Jewish Museum on Fifth Avenue, but I can't part with it. I sort of feel, when my day comes, somebody will see to it that it will go someplace where it will be appreciated and be useful. And I still have that collection. And as I mentioned before, this Emperor, in those days, did the most unusual thing by passing a law that all students for the rabbinate, for the clergy, were to be exempt from military service, and that included Jewish young men who were studying for the rabbinate. Nowhere that I know of in Europe, nowhere that I know of in the world, I think that the United States did it. You went in and became a,

what do you call it again, the clergy had the certain rank in the army--

DALLETT: Chaplain?

ADOLPH: Chaplain, right. And you didn't need a hundred thousand chaplains so the result is that only a small number of young men who were students for the rabbinate became chaplains by entering the service. But there, every Jewish young man who was student in a theological seminary just didn't have to register and wasn't drafted. That's very, very unusual for that time, in that place. Matter of fact I don't know of any place in the world right now where it is, that kind of system.

DALLETT: So it certainly wasn't because of anti-semitism that--

ADOLPH: Oh no, oh no, no. Where I came from, you see, we weren't, there was no official anti-semitism and there was very little individual anti-semitism that I could have been subjected to because I lived in what was really a ghetto. Not a ghetto that was foisted upon me but a ghetto that we chose. My father came to that city from Metz. Well, he went to the temple and says, "I just came in from out of town, I have a family, I'm looking for an apartment, can you help me?" So of course the man took him to an apartment two houses away from him, and that's the way they all came and settled in one area, and it even became known as the Judenstat, the

Jewish City. And the main street was the Judenstrasse, the Jewish Street. And that happened in most European countries. But some of them, they were confined in ghettos and if they were caught outside the gates of the ghettos, they were in trouble. That was not that kind of ghetto where I lived, that was voluntary ghetto. You lived where you met people with common denominators, with common schooling, with common religion and it was much more congenial, and more friendly than strangers who lived differently. So I felt no anti-semitism at all.

DALLETT: Now when you made the big shift and came to this country, and you sister was settled in Corona--

ADOLPH: Yes, I got my share here. I had to go to temple every Saturday morning and I went later than my grandfather because I didn't want to get up so early. And on my way I passed a certain Italian neighborhood, and there were a couple of kids there who used to sort of lay out for me (he laughs). And I was not a good fighter, I wasn't a fighter at all, and I just had to run as fast as I could and when they got tired of chasing me and had landed a couple of blows, they left me alone. I finally changed my route of travel. I went a further distance by avoiding that particular street and had no trouble at all. But I wasn't subjected to any real anti-semitism in this country. I somehow or other, maybe it is because you're a person, you know that you're not wanted someplace, if you have any sense,

you don't foist yourself on people. I think I live that way. I never try to join an organization where Jews are not wanted. I knew they don't want Jews, I didn't join, and it doesn't bother me. There was nothing in me that would be fighting back and saying, "You can't do this to me, I'm as good as you are, I'm going to fight, I'm going to join you, I'm going to make you let me join." I wasn't minded that way and I, I'm not, I don't regret it at all. what would I have accomplished? Whatever progress was made in this country was made without the violence, without the fostering, it was done by thinking, by rational approach, by people of all faiths coming to the conclusion that you should be anything like black or red or white or yellow. A human being is a human being. If he or she is a nice person, what else can you ask for? It had nothing to do with the color. I have nothing to so with having been to a Jewish father and a Jewish mother, and that's the way it should be.

DALLETT: How about the experience when you first came. You had to pick up English.

ADOLPH: Yeah, I sure had to.

DALLETT: Was that a difficult process at you age?

ADOLPH: I think so. I don't think so now but I think then it

did. It wasn't easy, no, English is not an easy language to learn. Neither is German for that matter, but English, I had to of trouble with the -GH- sounds and with the -F- sounds and with the sex and six. Tell you a cute story. I told you about having to make a certain number of credits a year in order to get into law school by a certain time. And I took one course which was called Commercia Law. I knew that there was no homework in it, you just read in class, and you give an opinion and then look in the back of the book, and you see whether your opinion was correctly given. And I was called on one evening, my next, I read a case about a man who stumbled, tripped over the entrance to a church and he broke his leg. And the query was, "Is the church liable in negligence for not maintaining a proper step." And in reading I said, "As he entered the Episcopalian church, he fell." Well the class let out a roar, the likes of which you never heard in your life. I didn't even know why they're laughing. So Professor Healy was the one who was teaching that class, he had such a quick sense of humor and quick repartee, he said, "It is evident that Mr. Adolph is not a member of that church." And I found out, he said, "He's not a member of the Episcopalian Church," he said. And of course that rang and now since then I say "Episcopalian."

DALLETT: How about initially, when you came to Ellis Island? Were there interpreters to help you, to know where to go, where to stay?

ADOLPH: Yes, everybody who worked, was on the staff on at Ellis Island, spoke several languages, and if you were talking a language that he didn't understand, he would know what language you were speaking, he would say, "Just a moment, hey Jack,: and he would come over and he would interpret what I wanted to say. But you know, I don't want you to misunderstand me, but I think this country was built be immigrants. Nobody was born here before the first Englishman came over here, and there is no reason why it should be any different. As a matter of fact, we welcome now, people who sneak over the border because we look for cheap labor. Certain people can't do their business with the type of labor that they have to pay union wages, so they look for the ones that work for less than the union wages. And the railroads were built by immigrants. Everything was done by immigrants, this is an immigrant country. And you know it makes you feel good that you don't have to say, "Oh well, he's a native, I'm an immigrant." We're all immigrants, second generation, ninth generation. but whatever generation, we're immigrants. And the country developed with that spirit, into a wonder place, nothing like this in the world, nothing like it. I've been in many, many countries, I've traveled a good deal, for pleasure fortunately. And nothing like it. Everybody has a chance. I literally came to this country with a patch on my knee and on my rear end of my pants. And in time I even has a suit to wear, not just a pair of pants and a jacket from another suit. And in time, I was able to drive a couple of

Cadillacs, one after the other, since 1951, and it's doubly enjoyable if you do it yourself and you earn it. Who's the guy who's ad, "They earn it." (They laugh) That's what it is. When you earn it, it's an entirely different pleasure to enjoy, and there is an opportunity really for everybody. Nobody gets it handed on a platter but it's there. You just have to go out, seek it, follow, to a certain extent, and copy to a certain extent. The after you copied for awhile, then you can start using your imagination and improve on that, and that's when the big profit comes in, when you can think better than the next guy.

DALLETT: Can you think of any of the initial impressions that you had, the things you felt you needed to copy? Were there new customs, new things that you weren't so sure of how things were done that you needed to mimic?

ADOLPH: You're a good interviewer, you know, because I wouldn't think of half of the things that I'm telling you now. Yes, very much so. I missed knowing how to dance, I missed knowing how to play basketball, I missed knowing how to play pool, tennis. I'm mentioning those things that I did learn. I never did get into playing baseball, but I got to enjoying watching baseball and following baseball. I'll tell you a very good story about that,

that I think you might like it. When I was teaching Hebrew, obviously I wasn't a professional teacher, I taught with my brain, rather than my training. And the kids had to go to Public School in the morning, you know, and then when they were all tired out by one o'clock or two, then first they had to come to Hebrew school at four o'clock for another hour of classes, and there wasn't a kid that enjoyed it. You had to, you had to learn to get around them in order to make them like you and what to accommodate and want to listen to you. And I was racking my brain, I said, "How can I do it, how can I do it?" One day I overheard two kids arguing what the batting average of a certain baseball player was, and the other one said, "You're crazy, he doesn't even bat three hundred." I said to myself, "This is it, from now on when I get my Morning World, I'm going to read (?), and I'm going to read all about the ball games, I want to know something about it." And I did that. I made it my business to remember and the next time I had an opportunity, I said, "You're both wrong, he's batting so and so." "How do you know?" I says, "Here's a nickel, go out and get me the paper." They went out, brought me my two cents change, and I turned the pages and showed it

to them. Well they looked at me and says I'm a wizard. And in that way, I introduced drama into a Hebrew school, which was in those days, very unusual. I would get kids who had some ability and wanted to put on a play once a year. And the parents, of course, loved it too. And then as a reward, I would take them to Greenwich Village, to a play for which the sisterhood paid. And before that I took them to the Jumbo Shop, I don't know whether it's still there, for dinner, and you know, they said to themselves, "Gee." They were kids who used to pass a Hebrew school in Corona and not go there but come to my school which was further away from home because they knew that my school was a lively school, a school where things are happening. And those are the things that I had to learn, how to copy. We used to have a YM and YWHA in Corona. We bought the Foresters' Hall from the Foresters' when they were going broke, and converted it into a YM and YWHA. And upstairs there was a pool table, the Foresters' had it. So some members said of course, "We've got to throw that out," so some of us said, "What do you mean throw it out, what's the matter with a pool table, you know, let the kids, whoever wants to play, let them play." And sure enough we all learned how to shoot

pool in an atmosphere that was desirable. Not in a pool parlor on the corner or under the corner and that was all part of my learning, my--and dancing, my goodness. I had a young aunt, fortunately, who was young enough to want to bother. She was still single. And she used to teach me and I learned how to dance and when I went to a dance and I asked a girlfriend to dance they said, "I didn't think you knew how to dance," I said, "Well, come and find out, you know," and I danced. Became a pretty good dancer.

DALLETT: By the same token, were there some customs that you kept alive, in this country?

ADOLPH: I'm still a member of my temple in Great Neck even though I don't live in Great Neck now for nine years. I don't even want to change to another temple, and I go there every holiday I can possible manage to go there. As a matter of fact, my rabbi and his wife are guest here tonight, that's what my wife is working on, and a couple of friends of ours from the temple. So we're going to have a very nice reunion. I did not continue with prayer, with phylacteries and the shawl, much past my

grandmother's death. It just, it just was too much for me to accept that you can't pray without that, that you must wear that to pray. It didn't ring true to me. But that didn't mean that I gave up everything. On the contrary, I think I became a Humanist Jew rather than just a Jew, and I think it's an improvement. When you went to the bathroom you passed a whole closet of Judaica. That whole shelf on the bottom, up to the graybacks, those are, each one is a different chadgadah, you know what a chadgadah is? And each one is a classic chadgadah, some with very fine art and some of very, very great age. There are some books on the other bookcase that come from my wife's grandfather, from 1820, from Warsaw, and that fine parchment paper, which when it gets old, it gets crinkly like an old person's face. I had it rebound, I had them rebound, in the original backs but with new binding in the back. I have a book here that my grandmother used to read every Saturday. It's a Yiddish version of the Bible, of the five books of Moses, with stories, parables. And she not being a male who was educated in Hebrew the way I was, she resorted to that book, and I have that book.

DALLETT: Were some of these books you brought with you or you collected them since?

ADOLPH: No, this is from my grandmother here, no, and those are all from here. I didn't take any books from there. My father was not a bookworm. My father didn't, traveling salesman, you know, don't have much time to read. And I did my reading from eight in the morning till twelve, until two, until six, six days a week, in the school. And the lettering is very, very tiny and a pretty good strain on the eyes, and when you're finished for the day, you say to yourself, "That's enough, tomorrow is another day." No, I didn't, here I started to read. I went to the library, and I found German books and I read them, and one day I walked in and there was no more book that I hadn't read, and I said to the librarian, "Don't you ever get any new books?" And she said, "Well, yes, in time we do, but we haven't go any recently, why?"I said, I told her, "Well, why don't you start reading English books, after all you should learn," and I said, "I can't read English, I don't know how." "Here," she says, "Read," so I read and read about four words, and I said, "Now I don't know this word," and she said, "Well, read on," and I read on to the end of the sentence. And she said, "Now you know what the word means?" I said, "Yes," because by the context I was able to make up my own mind what it meant. "Well," she said, "That's how you're going to learn how to know more and more English words." So I was a good listener, so I started to read English books, and when I

got a book of Hall Cain, I don't know if you read anything by Hall Cain, I read every book on the library shelf by Hall Cain because I liked it so much. I started to read here, in this country.

DALLETT: Were there any other people, like that librarian who took the time with you, who were so influential to help?

ADOLPH: Oh, there were a lot of people who kept after me to go back to school, to learn, to stop playing pool in the Y but go to night school. Oh yes, my grandmother was after me, an aunt of mine was after me. I had an uncle who was a dentist, and every one of his friends, I used to wash their car, to Simonize it for two dollars, before I had a job you know. And every time they gave me the two dollars, they said, "How would you like to earn twenty dollars?" I said, "I'd love to," he said, "Why don't you go to school at night and become something, you could become a dentist like I am," he said, "I went to school at night." You know and I found that people were very, very anxious to help me improve myself, but nobody can say, "I'll support you to go to school." None of them were that wealthy. So I just had to take time and when my grandmother died, there was no environment, a furnished room is not as pleasant as a room in a house where your grandmother and grandfather lives, and cousins visit and aunts live there, it was much nicer. So I liked to stay home and socialize. But when she died, the house broke up. Everybody, one went this way, one went that way,

and I went to a furnished room. And from that furnished room, I was very happy to go to school. I sold my fiddle, I was learning how to play the violin, and I bought myself a radio. And that was my company, you see you're too young. You don't know any of the old programs. There were some programs, semi-classical music every night at ten o'clock, slumber music it was called on WJZ and you don't remember the Happiness Boys do you?

DALLETT: No.

ADOLPH: The Happiness Boys were two negro gentlemen who, they may have been white for all I know, but spoke like negroes, and they were very funny. I was entertained by them for a long time, until I finally found that it was time to seek something a little better.

DALLETT: That's the end of side two of Interview Number 145 with Norman Adolph.

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

DALLETT: This is the beginning of tape two of Interview Number 145

with Norman Adolph. Today is Wednesday, May 21.

ADOLPH: On the first Sunday on Ellis Island, a Jewish actor by the name of Maurice Schwartz came to the Island with a group of younger actors and actresses and they entertained us by singing different songs, a little bit of English to introduce to the English language and some Yiddish songs, and by poor judgement in my opinion the, and I still think so, he sang a song called Eli, Eli. I don't think you have ever heard the song. It's a sad song, and it deals with the suffering, and trials and tribulations of the Jewish people throughout history. For instance, in Fire and in Flame, they burned us, etc. And you never heard so many people cry so loud and so hard as I heard on that day when that man sang that song. Now that was very poor judgement. There wasn't anybody in there that came on the Queen Mary, we all came on tubs, and waiting to get off, waiting to get off to better times, to better company, and here he reminds us of all the tzuras we had all our life. Well, there wasn't a soul on there afterwards who thought it was pleasant to listen to that song. That was the only other incident that I remember. There wasn't anything--we slept on straw, in wooden bunks and the straw was wrapped in burlap, and the dinning room was a large, large room with long tables and also burlap table covering, not white cotton, or never mind linen. But that didn't interfere with us, that didn't--what bothered us, how many more days do we have to be here, how many more days. That worried us. The song bothered us but not

the quarters or the menu.

DALLETT: Was there anyone that you could talk to that would explain why you were being held or when you might be free?

ADOLPH: No one, no one took any, only that journalist from the Jewish Morning Journal is the one who talked to us and promised that she would see what she could do, and she did, apparently. Well, the other two boys and I, we talked, but what did we talk about? About our troubles, about, "What are they waiting for? What's wrong? Why do we have to wait? Why don't they have room enough for three more people and why do they put us into this insane asylum?" But you see, I don't, I never had any complaint about it. I never boiled inside of me because of it. I always felt, "Well, we passed and it's different now, and that's the way." I think it's much better for us if we oblige than to be boiling, boiling, and boiling. There were old people and young people, there were males and there were females, everybody went through the same thing. There were no preferences, there was no personal courtesies, and the people who were on staff, what could they do? They couldn't do anything. The wheel had to be kept turning, and as names came ny, they called them out, and when they called, you know that, I didn't hear it the first time. I was so tense that I didn't even hear it and one of the people that was sitting near me said, "Adolph, thus is your,

they just called your name." So I got up and the man saw that I'm getting up but I'm not coming over, so he repeated the name. I ran, I grabbed my bag and I ran.

DALLETT: And this was literally the day after the woman from the Jewish, it wasn't the Forward, it was--

ADOLPH: No, the Jewish Morning Journal. She only, they very next day we got out of the Mental Hygiene Division, into where we belonged to start with. But we weren't, we were on Ellis Island about eight days, from, I don't remember the days, but over a week we were there. And my poor brother, who was nothing wrong at all, he had to suffer because of me.

DALLETT: So was there any communication with your sister, who I assume--

ADOLPH: No, no communication at all, no mail, it would have cost the government a fortune to try to deliver mail from us and to us because the population kept changing constantly, everyday. Some came in, some went out, it just wasn't feasible to have correspondence. It was not possible.

DALLETT: How about when your name finally was called and you heard it the second time around?

ADOLPH: I don't even remember how I felt but I do know this, that I was so tense that I didn't even hear the name the first time it was called. I couldn't believe it, and the man, don't forget, it was an American who did the calling and the names were all foreign names. As a matter of fact, to this day, I'm called Ehdolph, A-dolph, every which way a name is pronounced, so that he too, he called my name as if he had potatoes in his mouth.

DALLETT: Then did you have an opportunity to contact your sister? You weren't released on your own?

ADOLPH: No, my grandparents were there waiting forme, they came everyday, and when we didn't come out they went home empty handed. And they took us home, and then home, one of my sisters, who was married already, was able to come over to my grandmother to say hello, and the other one was working so she came after her working hours.

DALLETT: And that doesn't, just those initial impressions of New York as you came through, you said you were excited about the subway ride, I

guess that was your first subway?

ADOLPH: The Statue of Liberty was a very, very moving thing. You see, there's always somebody who is well=versed. And people who something like to tell that they know about it, so it just kept going from one person to the other what, how this happened, who it is, how did it get there. And that was very moving that a nation like France about whom we learned very little that was kind. We remembered the Dreyfus story about in France. We didn't remember the Statue of Liberty in France. So as a result it was stunning, to hear that the French people should do a thing like that. And to see it and it is something really beautiful to look at in the water, out there, and what it's supposed to represent, and I say, use the word "supposed to represent" because it doesn't always represent. But freedom and liberty and there it is, finally you see it. Finally you arrive and you can't believe it. And you can't speak. You can't, what are you going to say, you just feel it. And there's nobody else to tell it to, because they all felt the same way. There wasn't one sarcastic son-of-a-so-and so who said, "Big deal," you know, "Why don't they give me another cup

of coffee instead of that?" Everybody was impressed. And I got one letter, the first letter I got from Iacocca. I immediately wrote a check and sent it in. Of course I don't send in a check every time I get a letter because that's only a beginning. But I immediately sent in a check because I think that's very, very important, very important that the world should know and see as much as possible. I wish, I wish there would be a program that needs to be supported, I would gladly contribute some money to that too, because how can everybody get down there? It's impossible. I'll tell you the truth I wouldn't go anywhere near it, I would be afraid. How would I get there and out. I'll watch it on television, and that's why I think it should be covered by television, practically by every station. You can't know how it feels unless you are there and never saw it before and you're coming to America. And nobody comes to america because he left a beautiful mansion on the Riviera, and he's coming here to come down from that step. Everybody who comes here, comes here to improve his physical existence, because spiritually. it's very hard to enjoy spiritual life if you suffer physically. So the first thing you got to do is have the physical

means, then you can determine and find out what you are, who you are, whether you are living only to push food into you and wear fancy clothes or whether you're a person who also admires the Statue of Liberty and the people who gave it. But you can't appreciate that, really appreciate it unless you suffered and came here with less, and everybody who comes here. comes here with less. It's just, there's no reason why they shouldn't. Why should an Englishman whose ancestors lived in England, let's say two hundred, three hundred years, four hundred years, why should he come to America, what does he need that he hasn't got? And the ones that do come are looking to improve their physical life and they're entitle to it, and welcome to as far as I'm concerned.

DALLETT: Okay, I think I've asked you everything I need to unless there's anything at all you'd like to add.

ADOLPH: I really can't think of anything. You've been bringing some things out of me by asking me the questions that reminded me of this, this. But I'm really at the end of what I can remember. I, it's very hard to write a book you know, just like this. I told you that I am writing a book, my biography. At least I'm trying to, and those are the things Id

like to write about, those are the things that made a big difference in my life. Look, I wouldn't even be here talking to you, had I not come here to this country. And this is some thought to live with, it's just like picking, throwing up a coin and heads or tails there's nothing that I could have done had I not been brought here by my sisters. And if I hadn't been, there would be no way, there was maybe one in ten million that I would have "survived" quote, and of quote. So that's a very nice thought to live with. And it also, if you're open minded, if you don't have a fence in front of your heart and mind, it also makes you a different kind of person, and that's enjoyable. And I want you to know, well, maybe you shouldn't put that on the tape.

DALLETT: Okay, there's just one quick question that I need to ask and that is the name of the boat that you were traveling on.

ADOLPH: The name of the boat was the Kroonland. In English you would say Kroonland.

DALLETT: And that was the Red Star Line?

ADOLPH: Of the Red Star line.

DALLETT: Okay, thank you. This is the end of tape two of the Interview Number 145 with Norman Adolph. It's 2:35, May, 1986.