

KECK-019

BARBARA BARONDESS

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RUSSIA (BORN U.S.), 1921

AGE 14

PASSAGE ON THE "CELTIC"

APPLEBOME: This is interview number 019. This is Edward Applebome and I'm speaking with Ms. Barbara Barondess on Thursday, August 15, 1985. We are beginning this interview at 2:15 in the afternoon. We are about to interview Ms. Barondess about her immigration experience from Russia in 1921. Tape one, side one. Ms. Barondess, could you tell us a little bit about where and when you were born?

BARONDESS: I was born in the United States in Brooklyn, New York on the Fourth of July. My mother says five minutes after midnight, and I have been very proud of the day that I was born on all my life because it gave me a very unusual life. When I was six months old both of my parents, who had been born in Russia

and who fell in love with America and wanted to stay here forever, applied for their first citizenship papers. And then my grandfather in Russia, who was a very big lumber merchant, persuaded my father and mother to come and bring me to Russia for the first formative couple of years so they could see their first grandchild and also I would learn a little about my origin. And so they persuaded my parents to wait for at least until I could remember my parents. And we stayed there. We planned to stay there about three or four years and then come back.

When I was four years old, my mother became pregnant with my second sister.

APPLEBOME: This is where in Russia that you had gone to?

BARONDESS: In, we were living in a town called Shitomir, which is just a little way away from Kiev in the Ukraine.

APPLEBOME: Could you spell the name of the town?

BARONDESS: Yes. It's, uh, S-H-I or Z-H, it depends on, of course, how you spell it, SHI-T-O-M-I-R. And I grew up with the curiosity of being the little American, always pointed at as the little American. I got used to being pointed at (she laughs) when I was a

small child. My father, who was the oldest son, was trying to teach his next brother how to manage my grandfather's business and so that was another reason to stay for a little longer. And with my mother's pregnancy, of course, we couldn't leave just at that moment. And they wanted to wait until my second sister was born and could travel because the travelling was not easy in those days, I'm told.

Of course, I can't remember that. Anyway, with the age of reason of seven, just as I became seven, in 1914, the war broke out. And that stopped our leaving immediately and very soon afterwards, of course, there was the Russian Revolution. by then my mother was pregnant again, and in 1918, unfortunately, my father was shot through the throat and it was a senseless kind of shooting, and I got the second bullet. I got in the way of it actually, by throwing myself at my father when I saw a man pointing a gun at him, and I got the second bullet in my right shoulder. It just left a souvenir of a little bump. I was not affected, except, of course, emotionally, by that.

APPLEBOME: What were the circumstances of this shooting?

BARONDESS: Well, we were, we were wrong on two counts. We were Jews and we were capitalists. And this was at the height of the Revolution. The czar had just been killed, we were hiding in the cellar for 21 days, which was typical of those days, with pogroms and the factions taking over the city of Shitomir. And my family were, of course, in an uproar, and there was nothing you could do. We tried to plan to get out, and, of course, 1918 when my father was shot he was taken to Moscow and operated on by one of the czar's doctors, and they performed the first tracheotomy in history in Russia on his throat. And he never regained his voice completely, but he did talk a little with a very raspy voice after that. We proceeded and made the decision to steal out of Russia at night. We had no papers of any kind except a little small certificate that my mother managed to save that had been made out by a midwife reporting my birth on July 14th to the Board of Health in New York. And with that little piece of paper, and travelling at night in the hay wagon for two weeks, with prearranged stops where we were able to sleep all day in some farmer's barn, be fed some hot food, and start out again at night. The five of

us, a little, my youngest sister was only two months old, my older one was six, and I was twelve. We got out of Russia.

APPLEBOME: Your grandparents had stayed?

BARONDESS: Oh, yes. There were too many in the family and too much involved and they had no way of getting here. You see, my parents thought that perhaps their first papers would be recorded and that they could get into the United States. Because they had applied and gotten their first citizenship papers. But there was no proof except the records in a. There were no records in Russia, as you know. This is probably why I'm so interested in the origins of my family, my name, and have all of it now compiled for the book I've just finished, which is, I hope will be published by 1986 which is the year I'm shooting for. (she laughs) Anyway, so to go back to my life in Russia and getting out of it. We spent, we crossed a boundary line out of Shitomir, which is only, was fifty miles away from Polish line at that moment. That was 1919. Right, I'm not sure whether it was just after the New Year or it was just before. But it was between Christmas and perhaps

the first or second day in January of 1919 that we finally got out at night. When we arrived in Poland, just before we left the little town which was, I think, called Grodno, it was on the boundary Russian line. My parents decided that it was safer for us to steal across the boundary line to Poland by separating. So my father and I went in one wagon and my mother and the two smaller children in the other. The reason for it, they figured out, was because I could speak Russian and speak for my father if they stopped us. And that's what happened. We were stopped, my father and I. We landed in a Polish jail, and the Polish jail man couldn't have been nicer. He gave us hot milk and I told him about my father's being shot and that's why he couldn't speak, and I told him about, and gave him the address where we were to meet my mother with the other two children. And the next morning they took us there to verify the proof of what I had been telling. And I kept telling them that I was an American. And that my mother had a piece of paper but I didn't have the piece of paper. It was too precious for me to have it. But she had it so if they could get to my mother she could prove I was an

American and my parents were taking me back to my country. It's hard to remember it without . . . (she is moved) Funny, when you talk about it, becomes so clear. My father and I met, we had our reunion the next day and they sent the five of us to a town called Rovno, which was big enough to have the authority to figure out what to do with us. And my father was put in jail, unfortunately. Just to be held, as so we would be, more or less, immobile, until they got found out what to do with us. They wrote to the embassy in Warsaw. As you see by the passport which was issued to me in Warsaw, the man who was at the head of the American embassy was the great statesman Hugh Gibson who became very famous after that. He was a very young man. And he was the one that finally wrote to America, got the verification of my passport, and finally signed my passport. But it took almost a year-and-a-half. During that year-and-a-half, the Polish government finally let my father out of jail. During the time we stayed there we left, we lived in one room, there was one bed the first six months, that my mother used with my younger sister. And my middle sister and I, who were getting to be thirteen and then

finally fourteen when we, I was, when we left. And my sister was, went from six to eight when we finally got out of Poland. My mother was busy persuading the Polish authorities that at the time of her birth and my father's birth, because we considered, I considered them Russian, that actually that part of the Ukraine where they were born, she proved to them, was owned by Poland. So they issued them two Polish passports.

APPLEBOME: Why had they been holding your father but not your mother?

BARONDESS: Because she, the baby needed her, they couldn't, they couldn't let a father who couldn't talk feed and take care of a two-month-old baby girl and an eight-year-old girl and a thirteen-year-old girl. It was natural to let the mother, he was the only hostage. They didn't want to lock me up. He was the only one that they felt was logical.

APPLEBOME: I understand.

BARONDESS: They weren't cruel to him, but we made sure that he got the right food, because we were very worried about his health. So I walked every day the two or

three miles that it took to go to the jail to bring him the food that my mother prepared. And I would walk back home and stay home and take care of the children while my mother went to visit the authorities to prove to them that we were really, that they were Polish citizens and through, through that period, mentally. First of all, I didn't believe I belonged to my parents because we ended up with three passports with three different names. My mother and father were called Brandos, or Brandous, which, which was the name I thought was my name in Russia. And then finally when I saw that passport with the name, which I had to write in English, and in that period, from the time I was seven and eight, and the war started and the Revolution when I was nine, and when my father was shot and I could think, I was convinced that I was a foundling and I was, couldn't study English because they didn't teach English in those days. And our schooling was very erratic, and although I went to the Erasmus, to the Marinsk Gymnasia and my father was a graduate of the University of Kiev and we were a very educated family, I was learning French and German with a private tutor, but there was nobody to teach me

English. And my father couldn't talk by then, and my mother didn't, wasn't that good at the little English she learned when she was here, because she had only been here a couple of years at the, before I was born. All this was very complicated and very erratic. So I was a very self-centered child who thought of myself as being very peculiar and unusual. First of all, I didn't belong anywhere. I didn't belong in Russia because I was the little American. They used to call me "Marinka Amerikanka." And I used to think it was peculiar that I was being pointed at and called the little American. And one day when I said to my mother, "Why do they do that, mama?" She looked at me and she said, "Because you come from that special, wonderful land. It's like coming from the moon, and someday you'll go back there." When I saw Armstrong step on the moon I knew what my mother meant. I'm fortunate to have lived long enough to remember all this. Anyway, we got back here, finally, and I can't, it would take you a week to tape this interview if I could tell you the details.

APPLEBOME: Explain the circumstances of how you were finally

able to leave Poland to come to the United States?

BARONDESS: Well, we had, of course, a little gold and a little jewelry and everything that we could carry on us, and when we got out of Russia. There wasn't much of anything but gold, and gold, and diamonds and a few things that the family all gathered together and gave to us to get out of there. Because they stayed and they hoped, of course, that some day they'd get back their property and everything else that was confiscated, which they never did. Because the Bolshevik government and that, confiscated everything. My father finally died, my mother died in 19, my grandmother died in 1918, and, as I showed you and you have the souvenir of the front page newspaper announcing her death. That is what you have for your records. Which not only proves our name but proves the importance of the family. Because, obviously, in 1918 no Jewish family got on the front page unless they were very important or very rich. So we got on the front page of the paper. I also learned by then, from my father, that the name originally was of Polish origin and Czechoslovakian. That there was a town called

Brandous in 1914 and it's in the records that the great Maharal of Prague, whose daughter's was, name was Gittel, married one of the Brnadouses who later ended up in Russi, Poland and Germany. And of the ancestors were my grandfather, and Justice Brandeis, and also Joseph Barondess, who was by then, at my birth in 1907, was the first president of the first union in the United States that was the Pins and Needles Union that he formed, with the help of Justice Brandeis, who was then a lawyer, because of the Triangle fire.

APPLEBOME: Okay, but you know what, we should . . .

BARONDESS: Now, let's go back, we go back to Poland. In Poland when the proof came through we were allowed to come to the Warsaw where the papers were all officially given us and allowed to leave for the long run through, through, uh, it was Germany and I remember my first banana in Antwerp.

APPLEBOME: Because your parents had finally received Polish passports.

BARONDESS: Polish passports and my American passport.

APPLEBOME: And how were your sisters travelling then?

BARONDESS: Uh, well, a husband and a wife could bring their children with them.

APPLEBOME: Okay. So you finally all had passports and you could leave Poland.

BARONDESS: We could leave Poland, and you will have the passports. Their passports, my father's, my mother's, the children, with them, and completely. We were able to leave Poland and we arrived in England and the American embassy verified all this and we were to leave by a boat. And unfortunately as we were walking onto the gangplank my younger sister tore away from my mother and ran down the gangplank and my mother ran after her and my father and I were at the top as the man said, "What's your name," to my father and my father couldn't speak fast enough and they took us off. And the boat sailed without us.

APPLEBOME: This was, in what Harbor were you?

BARONDESS: This was, this was in England, at Liverpool.

APPLEBOME: At Liverpool. What boat was it that you were

supposed to get on?

BARONDESS: I don't know that one. I never found out the name of it. But it was a little boat by White Star Line. We had second class passage. When we were turned back my, we were all horrified. Of course, we stayed in a hotel while my mother and father went to the American embassy and begged and told them that the wound was not fatal, that it was only loss of speech, that we had relatives in a. My mother gave them, by then the Red Cross and the American embassy in Poland had found the relatives' names and addresses in a.

APPLEBOME: Who had made the judgement that your father wasn't allowed to enter onto the boat to travel?

BARONDESS: The man who stood there and asked for the, his name and saw that the man couldn't speak. He said, "(?)" And I said my father's name, my mother used to speak his name fast and be the first one in line so they thought he was a henpecked husband. But since there was nobody to say his name fast enough, and they thought he had some infection. And the boat was sailing. So while they were going to

investigate we, our luggage and everything was back on the, on the, right there, next to the boat, as we watched it sail away in tears. The, the drama of all this was unbelievable. Then my father and mother persuaded, again, the authorities, and we got on to the next boat which was called the Celtic, White Star Line. But there was no room second class, so we went steerage. We were willing to get out any way. We got onto that boat and it was very hot. And, of course, it was very packed. But everybody by then knew the story of the little American girl. Fourteen years old, who was stuck in Russia those extra seven or eight years. And so everybody always came down, the pursar came down, and took my mother and father and myself and everybody else up to the second class so we could have our meals there. It was too hot and too uncomfortable to sleep and we were too tired and too, you know, upset to even eat the meals. And I slept on the deck. Because sleeping crowded with my middle sister in the bunk was too much, when we got to New York.

APPLEBOME: What else do you remember about the people on the

boat?

BARONDESS: That the pursar took me around to the first class and showed me the nicely-dressed people sitting in the restaurant. And I could remember my very early childhood and the opera and the ballet and the servants and the gorgeous summer house we had, the dacha outside of Kiev. And my grandfather's house in Kiev and our own house which was specifically built for us with the flat roof, I was told was like the an houses. And so I felt like a princess. And one day I knew I would travel first class. I was determined. So we proceeded (she is moved) you know, I never thought I'd get this emotional about telling my own story. Anyway, because I'm supposed to be an actress, remember, and I'm not supposed to get this emotional about telling my own story.

APPLEBOME: Would you like to take a break for a minute?

BARONDESS: Yes, for a second, please.

APPLEBOME: Okay. Why don't we do that?

BARONDESS: I will never forget my father's and mother's faces as my mother clung to my father, who couldn't speak

very well, and tears welled in her eyes and he put his arms around her and all he kept saying in his voiceless voice, "It'll be all right, darling. We'll get through." And my mother used to say something, that strangely enough, I never heard before or after. And this was, every time we left a town or arrived in a town she would say, translated, she said it in Russian, and translated in English it meant, "In the good and blessed hour, in the good and blessed hour." And she kept repeating that as we were leaving each town and arriving somewhere else. Their prayers and their hopes that my little passport would get them back to America, became the most important piece of paper that we ever owned. Uh, we never thought about money.

APPLEBOME: The piece of paper that you had gotten from the legation in Warsaw.

BARONDESS: That I got from the legation in Washington, which represented my passport, and a very unusual one which, of course, I'm going to give to the museum. I feel that's where it belongs. When we were finally allowed to go back by, to proceed with our trip on the next boat, the Celtic, and we finally

arrived in New York and I saw that fabulous canyon of steel, that skyline, I was so excited that it was the incredible feeling of elation. And, of course, because we were travelling third class, we had to be processed that way. And because we were processed third class my father was sent one way, my mother with the children the other way, and I saw the look on my parents' faces of despair. Because my father would be naturally asked his name again, and that this was going to be trouble. And the trouble became Ellis Island. We were put on a small boat and taken to Ellis Island. When we arrived at Ellis Island and when were processed through and they saw, again, the father went one way, a man went one way, and my mother kept describing to them and telling them to please, he couldn't talk. And the more she said he couldn't talk, the more worried they became over why he couldn't talk. And my piece of paper, she wouldn't let it out of her hand. She was so worried somebody would walk away with it and we would be sent back. So it was a very traumatic experience. And they didn't know what to do with us. I remember that we were taken aside and put the, uh, line went on. And we were put aside. And

they went into a big huddle because my passport had a different name and, of course, these people at the, at the door who were allowing us in, didn't speak Russian. And my mother spoke a little English.

APPLEBOME: Explain again why the passports had different names.

BARONDESS: Because the anglicized name was Barondess. And Joseph Barondess, when he came through immigration and was asked where he came from and his name said it very fast and said, "Brandes, Odessa." So he was written down as Barondess. And when I was born he was so important my father decided to anglicize our name in America and naturally wrote my name down as Barondess. So my passport, on the records, was Barondess, and his passport with his birth name, was Brandes, born in Poland. The papers for the first citizenship did not materialize until after we got into America, and while we were at Ellis Island. And the second day they had them ready. They discovered that by law they were void because we , they stayed away more than seven years. And that was the law at the time. So they didn't know what to do with us. And the immigration had to talk to

somebody more important.

APPLEBOME: Can you tell me a little bit about what had happened the first day you were on Ellis Island. What the examinations were like, what the rooms were like?

BARONDESS: Well, we were, at night, by the time they held us separately for a while, and all we remember is that we clung together and talked, tried to explain that the name of Barondes was my name because it was anglicized and that I had a relative, an uncle here, whose name was that, and that we were going to try to get to him. And also by then my mother's brother arrived, and they were a little worried about my passport because the original birth certificate that, the original certificate my mother had, still had, at the time, gave the wife of the midwife as Circus [ph]. And that was my mother's maiden name.

So they thought that perhaps it was a forgery. And they had to look it up and get in touch with the woman whose name was the same as my mother's, and it was my grandmother who was the midwife and brought me into the world, and she lived in Brooklyn, and she and her sons arrived at Ellis Island. So we had the reunion the first day we were there. It wasn't

until that night they were allowed to eat with us, which was an enormous, you know, an enormous room with long tables and it's, food was the least important thing at that point. But seeing the relatives and, of course, I couldn't speak a word of English. And my mother and her brothers, two brothers and her mother, who were there with us, decided that the most important thing was to look up our most important relatives in America. One happened to be Justice Brandeis.

APPLEBOME: Was your . . .

BARONDESS: Louis Brandeis. Who, with my uncle, this is fourteen years before, with Joseph Barondess, worked on the first union in the United States. By then Justice Brandeis was a judge and was by then very influential man and close to the President of the United States, that happened to be Harding. And the two men, Joseph Barondess came down to see us the next day. I know that I slept on a double-decker sort of double-decker bed, made of wire, with a pad and an army blanket. And . . .

APPLEBOME: Where was your father staying?

BARONDESS: In the men's department. He slept in the men's room department. We slept, my mother and I and the two younger sister, my mother slept with one on one lawyer and we, my middle sister and I slept on the second layer. And the next day the, Joseph Barondess came down to see us. Told us not to worry. And that we would, they were going to work on it right away. He was going to be in touch with Justice Brandeis. Now this was 1921, November.

APPLEBOME: This is the end of side one of tape one.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

APPLEBOME: This inside two of tape one. So you were going to tell us about what it was like on the time that you were staying on Ellis Island.

BARONDESS: When we got off, of course, we had visitors every day. My mother's brothers and two sisters who had lived here all their lives, who came as young people and who had by then spent seventeen or eighteen years of their lives here, brought us things to make our life a little more comfortable. So I had my first piece of chewing gum and the, actually the

guards were very nice to us. The food is really unimportant and I can't remember it because it was the least thing. The sleeping accommodations were clean and clinical and not the luxury, but after two years in Poland and sleeping on the floor with all the crawling bugs that I had to deal with at the age of, between the age of twelve and fourteen, Ellis Island seemed like a clean jail. And, uh, I didn't mind it. Particularly since they, we were such a hot potato, the family. Uh, my father was allowed to be with us all day and they were convinced by then that eh didn't have a communicable disease. And my mother was busy with the baby. The other people, it was like, to me it was like the house of Babel. Because there were so many languages and so many people and everybody huddled together and it was so full of fear. It was pathetic. Because the ones that were being held there could be deported. And so we were lived in the constant fear that they could be deported. I was told that I could get off with my uncles because they couldn't keep me, but I refused. I said I would not leave without my parents. This was my country and I was born to them here. I was conceived here. I was born here. And

I was going to stay until they were allowed to come with me. I had that much sense. And so I was not badly treated and they would allow me to walk outside. So I used to go and look at this beautiful, fantastic building that as we were arriving looked like a palace and inside looked like a bare jail. And I would ask if I could go out because it was beautiful weather in November. Just to see the Statue of Liberty and to see the skyline of New York. And the guards would let me walk. I had my first present on the first day. An elementary school book on English that my uncle brought me. And I sat there trying to learn English by myself. And I learned the first few words like give me bread and butter. I had no accent to go by because my mother spoke with a very thick accent all her life. And my burning ambition was to be an American and sound like an American, because I was an American. And I was determined that once I got off there I would learn to speak English. And I was determined that once I got off there I would learn to speak English. First, the very first ambition was to sound like a real educated American. Well, I didn't have to wait too long to get off. We were convinced

that some miracle would happen and we would be able to get off. And the two influential uncles, the Brandeis and Barondess put their heads together, got to President Harding, and two weeks later we were allowed to leave. However, without terrible drama.

About three days before we were to leave and while I was spent almost the whole night outside of the building praying to the Statue of Liberty who I called my first girlfriend, and saying, you know, reaching to the sky, please reach us. My middle sister, who I was sleeping with, was running a terrible fever. And she was so hot I couldn't sleep with her. And we were trying not to let anybody know that she was running a fever. And she started to break out and she had measles. And we were terribly afraid that she would, that they would keep us there because of it. And, of course, the day we were leaving the nurse, the, somebody noticed she was running one hundred and two fever. And the nurse came to look at her, ad the nurse that came was a big, black woman. And we children had never seen a black person. Because there were none in Russia or Poland where we were brought up. And this lovely looking big black woman took Rosalie, my

sister, and put a thermometer in her mouth and saw her fever and took her away from us. And this child was absolutely petrified. She thought she was leaving us forever. They took her to the hospital and she had measles. She was quarantined. So the day we were to leave, which was the next day, we had to leave without her and we couldn't go to see her.

And, of course, there were no such things as telephone communications and my sister couldn't speak English and the nurse couldn't speak Russian.

So this was a terrible trauma for my sister who never got over it, and for us. But we knew it would be all right because there was a telegram from the President of the United States, signed by President Harding. That said my father was to be appointed, he was examined by doctors, he was perfectly all right. Then Joseph Barondess guaranteed that we would never be wards of the State. And that he could become my guardian because I was under age. And the husband is allowed to bring in a wife and two children. So the law was used that way and we were allowed into the arms of my grandmother and her two brothers, and my mother's sisters, and taken to Brooklyn, where we lived for two weeks with them.

And then my father went into a little business of his own and we were on our way. Two years it took me to go through. We moved three times during that period. My father bought a little business. It was a candy store with newspaper stand. And he worked very hard and so did my mother. And I helped when I wasn't going to school. And in one year he made it into a very big paying business, sold it at a profit, moved us into a decent apartment, and . . .

Do you want to stop because of that telephone?

APPLEBOME: So you're going to tell us any other memories that you have about the time that you spent on Ellis Island?

BARONDESS: The time that I spent on Ellis Island seemed like the longest waiting period for me, because of the regiment. And naturally there had to be a regiment. It was no way that they could handle that many people, I can realize it now, in retrospect. But at the time it was in a way a nightmare.

APPLEBOME: What were some of the activities they had you doing that were so regimented?

BARONDESS: Well, the way they were, you were regimented to take

a bath. You had to wait in line to get the food. You had to get in line to get a blanket. And you had to be examined physically. And they weren't unkind, but you had no communication with the people who took care of you. And they had so many people to take care of. And you had no communication with the other people that were there because everybody was so full of their own fright.

APPLEBOME: So you didn't play with any of the other children.

BARONDESS: No, we never played with other children because I had a baby to more or less look after when my mother went pleading for special treatment. And because we were lucky enough to have relatives visit us, they were with us in the waiting visiting room most of the time. And we were allowed, because we were lucky enough to be special, for that particular reason. And the special thing was my American passport.

APPLEBOME: So you would sit with your relatives in a visiting room during the day.

BARONDESS: In a visiting room. And there would be other people with visiting rooms, but not as many, because many

people didn't have visitors. Because many people were held because they couldn't find relatives. Or it took them several days to find the relatives. We were lucky because our relatives were near, in New York City, and in Brooklyn.

APPLEBOME: Was there a guard that watched you when you had visitors?

BARONDESS: Well, not really. Because I don't remember any guards because, remember that there was no way that we could get off it. We were on an island. Unless you threw yourself in the water. So they would let me walk out and take a walk, because for exercise I walked around Ellis Island and I would want to get as close as I could to the edge so I could see New York. This was a wondrous sight, the sight of the New York skyline.

APPLEBOME: What did your mother and father do during the day?

BARONDESS: Talk about what we were going to do when we got off. Make plans. Make plans for school. And give us courage. Talk to us to give us courage. My father, of course, couldn't speak much. He wrote. he gave me his ten commandments. Told me not to blame

anybody for anything. That these are circumstances that we couldn't do anything about. To have no bitterness. To be grateful for the marvelous luck of having been born here. And, of course, I never stopped being grateful for having been born here. One of the reasons I am so fortunate to still have my vitality and my health is, one of the fortunate things about being my age, is that when people say to me, and my good friends say, "Don't tell everybody your age, you don't look seventy-eight." I say, "I may not look seventy-eight, but I know I am, and I can't possibly lie about my age because if I did I couldn't talk about remembering (she laughs) Ellis Island and being grateful for being born when I was. If I had been born ten years later I wouldn't be here. So I'm grateful for all my blessings. And I'm even glad for having been on Ellis Island, believe it or not. Because if I didn't have that as a measuring stick I wouldn't have been able to do what I did with my life. I put all the frustrations behind me. I have them as a commandment.

APPLEBOME: Do you have memories of what Brooklyn looked like

when you finally got there?

BARONDESS: Oh, yes. I remember Brooklyn and I remember going to school. And I remember the school I went to. And I remember the first day I arrived at the school and was called the greenhorn. And I was determined because I was put into 1A that those kids would remember who I was. They thought I was a greenhorn because I was fourteen and they were seven or eight. And it wouldn't take the greenhorn long. I went through public school in one year, through Erasmus Hall High School in one year as an unmatriculated student, and two years after I was in this country I spoke English as I do today and no one even believed that I had come from Russia and couldn't speak English. I enrolled at NYU for special English lessons and to learn how to speak and have perfect diction. So when I was sixteen years old I decided that I wanted to be an actress. And I got a job at a bank, I went to college at night, and by a pure fluke of accidental being where I was at the right time at the right moment, I was swimming in Luna Park in the Luna Park large pool, when I was chosen by somebody who fished me out of the swimming pool

and stuck into a beauty contest. And won the title of Miss Greater New York and Modern Venus and became a celebrity overnight. I have a film of the newsreel. And in those days we had no television. We had newspapers. And thirteen New York newspapers ran my picture on the front page the next day. That was enough curiosity for the newspaper to adopt me as their mascot because they couldn't believe that I was the girl who got off Ellis Island just four years before. And couldn't believe my English. And the Shubert's put me into my first show in 1926, the year I became Miss Greater New York, five years after I got off Ellis Island.

APPLEBOME: So you were how old then?

BARONDESS: In 1926 I had just turned nineteen years old, four years later. I was Miss Greater New York. I went into a Broadway show and I never stopped learning. I have the program of the first show I was in, which was at the Winter Garden Theater. The next show I was in, three months later, was on 42nd Street in a play called "Crime," with Sylvia Sydney, Douglas Montgomery, and a great many of the fine actors and stars of the stage and movies. The third play I was

in was "Crime" for the Sellwyns, who was big, big producers on Broadway. I, also, in 19, November of 1927, I travelled to Paris on the maiden voyage of the Ile de France, first class, as the star singer of their gala night, and I have the program to prove it. And after I came back, after singing in Paris for two weeks at the Florida Club, I came back on the Paris again as the star singer of the gala night. First class. Then I was in a play and appeared at the Helen Morgan club for three months.

And went into my first hit on Broadway, big hit, as the ingenue lead, called "Topaz." I played in that for two years and was invited by MGM to come to Hollywood where I made twenty-nine pictures altogether, between silents in New York and the first talkies. After that I decided that I would quit as an actress and try one of my peripheral talents, which were as an artist and designer. I went to college and studied interior design and architecture and I became a nationally known interior designer in the next forty years. I had the pleasure of doing our present President's house, Mr. Reagan's house, when he was married to his first wife, who was a very fine actress.

APPLEBOME: That was Jane Wyman?

BARONDESS: Jane Wyman. And got my first cover of House Beautiful.

APPLEBOME: What year was it that you did . . .

BARONDESS: 1942. In 1938 I became an interior designer. I became also at that same time I was interior designing, I was designing fabrics for Shoemaker, clothes for a very large firm called David Crystal. I designed clothes for five years. Designed fabrics for two years. Decorated for forty. And tried to retire before I opened and started my Foundation for the Performing Arts. I am now the President and founder of the Barbara Barondess theater Lab for professionals. I'm trying to pay back to the theater and to my country. In some way I want to pay them back with my knowledge and my experience to give the young and the old the inspiration to keep going and keep trying. Because everything is possible in the United States if you're realistic. If you're willing to work, you can be anything you want. My father used to say, "except President of the United States." But if he

was alive he would probably see the day when there might be a woman as President of the United States.

But I really believe that we can do anything if we apply ourselves. And if we are realistic about our talents. Because ambition is not always as big as your talent. But if you are realistic and you try, there is so much satisfaction. And I think that this is the only country in the world that gives you the opportunity and the education. It's available to anybody. There are schools to go to, night schools to go to, free classes, books to read. And everything I own, because of my tremendous pride at being a real American, I earned. And my estate is divided by percentages to all the public institutions in New York, my city. And I am leaving all the memorabilia that could possibly interest the Museum of Ellis Island, to them. And they can choose anything that I have that they want. I'm leaving a quarter of my estate to the Public Library that I owe a great deal to. The, I'm leaving an award that will be given to the people who give their time to the non-profit sector of the theater that will be distributed by the library and the theater library at Lincoln Center. And the New York

City Museum is getting some of my things. The clothes I designed are going probably to the Metropolitan or Brooklyn Museum who has a clothes collection. And everything I own will be left to people who can go and see what I spent sixty years of my life working on. And it's all going to happen, in 1976. And my best girlfriend, the Statue of Liberty, is probably gonna get my ashes because I refuse to be buried anywhere but have my ashes dropped in front of her. What else can I tell you?

APPLEBOME: Thank you very much. That was very interesting. You've had a remarkable life.

BARONDESS: I'm grateful for it.

APPLEBOME: That's the end of tape one, side two.