

KECK-0026

ALEX ECKSTEIN

BIRTHDATE: AUGUST 14TH, 1918

INTERVIEW DATE: 9/11/1985

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 67

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INTERVIEWER: WILLA APPEL

RECORDING ENGINEER: BOB BIELECKI

TRANSCRIPPT PREPARED BY: CAROLINE PETERS

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:

ROMANIA, 1926

AGE: 7

SHIP: *President Roosevelt*

PORT:

RESIDENCES:

ROMANIA, Kolozsvar

USA, Pittsburg, PA

Appel: This is Willa Appel, and I'm speaking with Alex Eckstein on Wednesday, September 11th, 1985, and we're beginning the interview at 11 o'clock, and- you said I could call you Alex, so I will call you Alex [aside] continue. You came from Hungary.

Eckstein: That's right. At the time I was born, it was Hungary, but shortly after it became Romania, as part of the settlement [unintelligible] of the first World War, so--most of my papers are actually Romanian.

Appel: And you were born in 1918?

Eckstein: Yes, August 14th, 1918.

Appel: And you came to America in 1926.

Eckstein: That's correct.

Appel: (deep breath) Do you remember much about Kolozsvar [ph] ?

Eckstein: Well I remember quite a bit, I was seven and a half years old at the time we came, I remember quite a bit about the city. I remember distinctly the apartment where we lived, it was on a second floor, um, couple of --stone buildings that had a inner courtyard and an outer courtyard, and we lived in the first courtyard on the second floor, and the apartment was on the left hand side (background noise). And um, the, most distinct memory I have, is of a ceramic—green ceramic-- stove, in the bedroom, that was from the floor to the ceiling, and on cold nights, I remember my mother holding up what we called a *pyrna* [ph]. A *pyrna* is a um, what's it called, a cover—a bed cover— and uh, warming it up against the stove, and then throwing it on top of us (laughs). Remember that distinctly—remember ,uh-- on the other side of the courtyard, there was a—a police station—on a—on a first floor. And I remember waking up and being waken at night, when the Romanian police, used to drag in the Hungarian peasants and beat 'em unmercifully. Lot of screaming.

Appel: And you would hear that?

Eckstein: And we would hear that, when we were kids. Then, underneath on the opposite side, there was a Turk, who was a candy maker--made hard candy--as a matter of fact when we left, remember he gave us a large bag, of hard candy, that we-

(background noise)

Eckstein: -carried with us (laughs), all the way to America. Oh, and I remember I had a very good friend of mine, lived on the, uh, I guess, the, on the left hand side of the apartment building, lived on the second floor, and – those people apparently had money, I don't remember their name- but I remember playing with the kid. And they were the first ones to have a car, and- imagine was a Ford- and, kids always got a kick out of seeing the car. Most of the traveling was done by carriage--taxi were carriages.

Appel: I'm just curious about, your mentioning, about listening to the Romanian police beat the Hungarian peasants. Did you know why they were beating them..?

Eckstein: (deep breath) No, apparently, um, apparently, when the Hungarians ruled-- under, the um, Austria-Hungarian Empire, (unintelligible), uh, they weren't-- particularly nice to the Armenian peasants, and I guess this is just retribution, uh.. As a matter of fact, when my sister t—told me—she had gone back to Kolozsvár and Hungary, uh, a few years ago, and visited. And um, when you asked a question in Hungarian, they refused to answer, you know—and of course my sister didn't know, Romanian, she knew Hungarian, so it was very difficult for her to get directions and uh, and um- normal conversations.

Appel: Were you afraid of the police-

Eckstein: No-

Appel: -as a child?

Eckstein: No, no, I didn't—to—to me, it didn't make—uh, it didn't affect us really. Um, 'cause it never bothered us. It was usually at night, when they did all the beating, during the day I guess—maybe they were never around.

Appel: Why did your family decide to leave-- Kolozsvár?

Eckstein: Well, (clears throat) uh--my father--had actually wanted to leave prior to World War One, that was even before I was born, and, he actually um, had started, toward America (unintelligible) (..) on a train. And, he met some gentleman, so ah—so the story goes—that uh, told him “Now why do you want to

go to America, it's a terrible place". And—he had a family back—back home, and I guess (unclear, his assumption?) why do I want to go?" So he came back, but (clears throat)—after the war, uh—the real problems, with the Romanian-government, they were already starting some of the anti-Jewish campaigns, and (clears throat) furthermore, (unintelligible) our relatives—many of our relatives-- had preceded us, and been here. (Then,) my dad decided to come. And it was difficult for him to get a visa for the whole family.

Appel: You were how many in the family?

Eckstein: Well, there's seven children, and of course, with my parents, it made nine. Uh-(clears throat) what happened was, um, my dad--started out in 1923, and managed to get a visa—as a Czech—it's Czech visa, not Romanian—because he was actually born in what is now Czechoslovakia. So, even though we lived in Romania, uh-he managed to get a visa—in 1923 as a Czech visa.

Appel: Was this when he started out on the train?

Eckstein: No, this was after the second war. The first time he wanted to come was before the war, and then he t—turned and came back, but in 1923, he actually—managed to get a Czech visa and —came to America. And uh, he lived for a while, with my aunt and uncle in Donora [ph], Pennsylvania, and worked for my uncle and aunt, and then um- shortly after- he moved to Pittsburg, and he was an outdoor salesman-- he sold furnaces, direct-- to the homes. My father—knew many—of the Middle Eastern—Middle European and Eastern European languages, as many people who were in business had to, so—Pittsburg is—has large populations of Eastern Europeans.

Appel: What had he—what had been his profession, or his business in—in Hungary?

Eckstein: He was a (clears throat) he—he managed a large—wholesale grocery chain. And um, when he—when he came to—to America—he worked for my uncle, who had a grocery store, but—he soon found out he could do better by himself—and for the rest of his life, that's before he retired—he was an outd-outside salesman.

Appel: (unfinished question, technical issues) How long was he- did he actually-

Eckstein: It was 1923.

Appel: How long was he—did he actually stay in the United States at that time?

Eckstein: It was—I mean for the rest of his life—

Appel: He stayed for the rest of his life—

Eckstein: Oh sure, he never came back.

Appel: So then your mother and the rest of—

Eckstein: (clears throat)

Appel: the family—

Eckstein: Yeah, uh—we managed to get a visa for the rest of the family, and—he of course sent the money, for the—tickets, and the expenses, for coming to America, and we left, oh, in—we left in, February of 19—26, and arrived in—in--- in Ellis Island, in March, 1926.

Appel: Do you remember-- the arrangements that were made, do you remember how you got, for example, from Kolozsvar to Bremen [ph] where you, which was the—

Eckstein: Uh, this picture—that shows (3x, probably audio recording issue)—this family, there is another picture, which I don't have a copy of, uh, that was, we had to go through Bucharest to get all our papers, it's the capital of Romania, and at that time, we had a family—uh, I guess it's a passport, it's a—picture, similar to this one over here. Now I don't have a copy of that one, but that shows only my mother, and then---the um, the seven children. So, we had to go to Bucharest,

and one of the things I remember, two things I remember, stick with me about that trip to Bucharest were, was one, (clears throat). We—we stayed at a hotel, and—from our window, we could see the old Queen Mary—Romanian—in her carriage, drive by (laughs). That was a distinct impression, and one of the that uh—the other thing I remember, my mother—took us to an outdoor café, and they had hot chocolate (laughs). Those are the two thing I remember about (Appel interrupts) Bucharest.

Appel: --Do you remember—do you remember much about Queen Mary's carriage, what did it look like?

Eckstein: Oh, well, it's ah-I've seen the (laughs)—I've seen the carriages that the British royalty use and it was very similar to it, in fact I think she was related to the British royalty, if I remember correctly. (long breath) So... but as for the trip to um, to-Bremun [ph], because we left Kolozsvar and—

Appel: Yeah, excuse me, so you went to Bucharest to arrange for the passport, then you came back to Kolozsvar—

Eckstein: Oh yes---

Appel: And then you went Bremen, some—months or weeks later?

Eckstein: Um, the timelapse I don't remember, uh, but it was--wasn't too long after—after we went to Bucharest. Um (Clears throat) I—I suppose we had to go to Bucharest because the American Consulate was in—Bucharest, and not in Kolozsvar, there wasn't any in Koloszvar, so that's where we had to make all our arrangements. Now—and by the way uh, um—my brother, oldest brother Albert, had studied English, and he was conversing in English, so it made it easier, to make these arrangements. (Sigh) Um, and I guess, next is the trip from Kolozsvar to Bremun. Uh, the—there's—a certain distinct—memories I have, that-- one was at the border, a place called (Vadaslaven, Bratislava?) [ph]. We arrived there, apparently we had a change of trains, and we arrived there in evening, and I guess it was early-- morning—when we were to take the next train out, and I remember th—sitting in this, uh, railroad station (sigh) that had very high ceilings, with a single light bulb—it was very eerie, and quite scary (laughs), so we huddled on the benches, you know, at the railroad station, uh—but that I remember, quite distinctly. And the other is, uh, we also had a stop in Prague,

and—we walked around in the railroad station, I remember how beautiful it was, and the wide square in front of the railroad station, with cobblestones. And, of course that railroad station itself had the glass-- roof, quite beautiful.

Appel: Do you—do you remember how you felt about leaving your home town—or how your siblings felt.

Eckstein: Well, I—I don't remember any feelings that I had, but I'm quite sure that—my—my older brothers and sisters, who had very dear friends, uh,— you know, felt some—some pangs, of—what would I call them--longing, for—when am I going to see them again, and so on.

Appel: Did you leave family behind, relatives.

Eckstein: Yes, uh—none of my mother's-- side of the family, ever migrated, except some distant cousins. So they were-- all remained, including my grandmother, whom lived in—in a (clears throat) town called Horvadt [ph]. As a matter of fact the day we left, my—my aunt, who's the older sister of my mother, stayed with us the last day and helped us pack and so on--my Aunt Sarah [ph], she was this tall striking woman-- and helped us pack, I remember that. But none of—none of my mother's family, uh, migrated, to America.

Appel: Was your mother eager to go to America?

Eckstein: (sigh) Well, uh (laughs), I suppose—she had mixed feelings, again, because her—her relations, her brothers and sisters and, her mother-- remained, and of course that—she was—(unintelligible, longing?)—restore the family, as—as an entity, you know, with my father, so—I'm sure there were mixed feelings, uh—she was very close to her mother, as a matter of fact, uh—(unintelligible) we arrived in 1926, and in 1930, my mother went back, because her—my grandmother, was sick. And uh, she died shortly after,(unintelligible) she wanted to see her, you know, before she died—(unintelligible) elderly woman, she was 94 years old when she died. M--

Appel: I had, interrupted you, asking about family and feelings—

Eckstein: Yes.

Appel: --about leaving. You said that you remember being in this train station in (Vadaslaven, Bratislava?) [ph]--

Eckstein: Yes.

Appel: --with the single light bulb—

Eckstein: Right.

Appel: --hanging down (laughs)

Eckstein: Yes. (laughs)

Appel: --feeling that it was very eerie and—

Eckstein: Oh yes.

Appel: Feeling a little---

Eckstein: You know—

Appel: --frightened.

Eckstein: Y—you know, the long shadows that it casts, you know, and uh, so—it's very frightening—you know, when you're—when you're small, a small child.

Appel: Do you remember more about the trip to—(Bremen?) [ph]

Eckstein: Th—th—the train ride, not too much about the train ride, but um—uh I was treated, when we arrived in Bremen, I was treated ah—to the first store-bought toy that I ever had (laughs), ah—my mother bought me a—a small, um—toy, it's a wound-up—a train, that you wind up and it—travels along, on the floor, or a flat surface. And I remember I played with that, uh—during the whole trip on the boat, and in Ellis Island—that train traveled up and down all the hallways (laughs) (clears throat).

Appel: Your ship, you have the uh—some of the souvenirs from the trip—

Eckstein: Yes.

Appel: --that was the Navy ship, the US Navy ship called the---

Eckstein: It's not--- not a Navy— US—uh, it's a commercial, a commercial—

Appel: A commercial ship—

Eckstein: A commercial ship— you know, the—

Appel: The S.S Roosevelt.

Eckstein: S.S Roosevelt, yeah, Steam Ship Roosevelt.

Appel: Named after, Teddy Roosevelt.

Eckstein: I presume so; it was—(laughs) before—

Appel: Before FDR—

Eckstein: --before FDR, right.

Appel: Were you—uh--- were you in steerage, were you in---

Eckstein: No, we were in 3rd class. Uh—our trip was, I'm sure, quite different than—some of the earlier migrations—and what I've read about people traveling in steerage. Uh—although we were crowded in the cabin, we had our uh—the children—we had our own cabin, th—the, 5 boys, were all in one cabin, and my mother and the—the two girls, had their own cabin. And um-- oh, th—the—I --- I remember, the first night, we ate in the m—the main dining hall, and um—y—you know, the table was set--magnificently, compared to th—the way we used to (laughs) set our—abundance of fruit, uh—in Europe, uh, (technical malfunction), in Europe, you know, when your family-- bought and orange and everybody got a slice, and aboard ship-- they had 'em in bowls, and—we used to just stuff 'em—the kids, we used to (technical issues with recording) never knew when you were gonna get another (laughs) piece of fruit, so we were—we always had fruit in our pockets.

Appel: What else do you remember about how the—I'm curious about how the table was set, and how it—struck you as—as different from anything you had seen.

Eckstein: Well, 'cause we had never (technical difficulties again)—people do now in a restaurant, you know, the table was set, you know, with—napkins, with silverware, as—as steamships, you know, luxury liners, are normally—set their tables. But you, I mean, and so on—(clears throat)— so, that was totally different, it was an experience that we'd never had before. And uh, you had-- multi courses, you know, everything was new—

Appel: Did you like it?

Eckstein: --so it was quite exciting. Oh! I'm sure I gained weight onboard ship! (laughs) Some of my-- brothers and sisters, didn't fare too well, because they were seasick most of the time. I fortunately, my-- younger sister, were the only ones

that never spent a moment being seasick. We traveled all over the boat, we had fun the whole way (laughs).

Appel: How long was the trip—how long was the voyage?

Eckstein: I imagine it's about, eight, nine, ten days, something like that, yeah. But-- getting back to dining—see, we had been—Orthodox Jews, and um—my mother found out that she could get Kosher—um—meals, onboard ship. But they set aside this very small little room, and from thereon, after the first night, we ate in that small dining room, and we had the same waiter all the time always wait on us. Most of the time it was chicken, but ah—the fruits, and so on and so forth were just as abundant in the small dining room as in the large dining room. But um—

Appel: And (Eckstein clears throat) you said that you and your younger sister—

Eckstein: Yes, my sis—my younger sister Irene—she's not younger than me—

Appel: (in the background) not younger than—

Eckstein: --my youngest sister—

Appel: --the youngest of the sisters because (something incomprehensible from Eckstein) you're the youngest—

Eckstein: --I'm the youngest---

Appel: --of all them--

Eckstein: In the family, right.

Appel: --children in the family.

Eckstein: Right.

Appel: Do you remember how you used to play when everyone else was sick? What you used to do on the ship?

Eckstein: Oh, just run up and down, and uh—we were in third, so we used to watch people on the first—in the first class, you know, lounging in the (their?) dais, out on the—on the um—on deck. But we just had, generally fun, running all over the--all over—the area that were permitted to us, you know, in the third class. And of course we ate fruit, quite a bit of it (laughs), as a matter of fact. But we really ah—really had a marvelous time.

Appel: Did—by any chance, when you went over, was there anyone else from your hometown who was also travelling on the S.S. Roosevelt toward America?

Eckstein: No,no— as a matter of fact, I—I don't know, I don't know of any other, no, I guess there were—there were other-- immigrants, that I, that I know now, because my doc—from the immigration service, got a copy of the manifest, and there were other people showed (technical malfunction) where they came from, so they came from various other --countries, but we were the only ones from Koloszar, or from Romania at that ti—on board ship, yep.

Appel: You spoke Hungarian—

Eckstein: Yes.

Appel: Did that mean that you could talk to anybody else, were there other Hungarians onboard, or did stick pretty much to yourselves?

Eckstein: I don't remember talking to anybody else, but of course, uh, at that time I only knew Hungarian, I didn't know any uh—maybe a few words of Romanian. In—

uh—back home, the school I went to-- I went for one year, and that was a (parochial) [ph] school, run by—by the Jewish organization—in—in Koloszvar, but they were required to teach Romanian, so I'm sure that I must've learned a few words, as many as you can possibly learn—in the first grade—so um—I—guess I did know a few words of Romanian, but uh—primarily we spoke in Hungarian.

Appel: Do you remember when you arrived, do you remember the arrival?

Eckstein: Oh, yes, yes I remember, uh—my brother, who of course was 10 years older, and had studied English, and uh—had studied American History, knew the significance of the Statue of Liberty, and as we arrived in the harbor, you know, he—he showed us this—pulled this—remember him telling us how wonderful, you know, what that statue meant, to everyone who arrived. And uh (clears throat) then of course, we were—ferried into Ellis Island, depart—depart in Ellis Island, and I don't remember how many days we were there, but (clears throat), the one thing that struck me, I have the most vivid memories of, is—when—we were required to go from one location to another, always have to go through a—a gate, and—there was always a guard, with a clicker counter, and this constant clicking, "*click, click, click*", you know, make sure that, the right number went from one place to the other. And of course I do remember each of us were examined, and were asked some questions apparently, I don't remember the specific questions, but I remember the—being a child, the immigration officer sat on a podium like-like a judge and uh—this child looking up, you know, it looked like, it was—way up in the sky (laughs), you know, it's ah—

Appel: Were you scared?

Eckstein: I—don't remember being scared, but obviously, my—my brother, uh—was next to me, Saul, had been quite frightened by it. And I might—might go back—just before, I guess, a year and a half before, we left for America, I had come down with diphtheria, and apparently I had a mild case, but my brother Saul, who—contracted it from me I guess—and uh, he um, was quite sick, and had lost a considerable amount of weight, and from thereon, uh, he was—not the same, same child apparently. And, at Ellis Island, uh, when he was asked questions, you know, he'd-- act as if he didn't know the answer, he was frightened by it, and um, for whatever reason they had, they said that he would have to go back. Well, that was quite traumatic I'm quite sure. I—I obviously wasn't cognitive of it, you know, how traumatic that would be, but um, my brother Albert, finally-- told him, that uh, if he had to go back, he'll stay with him, and he'll go back with him, and he'll—

Appel: This is your seventeen and a half year old—

Eckstein: M--my oldest, oldest brother. And on that basis, we were finally released.

Appel: Do you know why you were detained at all in Ellis Island, was it because of, of your brother's—

Eckstein: Because of—

Appel: --diphtheria—

Eckstein: Yes, yes. Um—he didn't had diphtheria then, but uh—I—I guess the—they must've felt, that he was, would be a burden, because mentally he was not capable and so on, which wasn't true, but uh, he had just been quite frightened, and uh—well, in any event, my brother, Albert, stayed with—with Saul, at Ellis Island, and we, proceeded onto Pittsburg with my father, who had come to New York to take his family to Pittsburg.

Appel: Just a couple more questions about Ellis Island, do you remember when the—you were being asked questions; were you being asked questions directly—

Eckstein: Yes.

Appel: --by the inspectors—

Eckstein: Yes.

Appel: Was that in—did they ask in Hungarian, was there a translator?

Eckstein: There was—there was a translator there, yes. And the questions they asked w—was according to your age, uh—In fact my brother Albert, told me that—the

question that um, they put to Saul, in Hungarian—how much is six and eight, you know, and there was a—simple math questions, you know, that a one—uh, one, uh, a first grader, should know.

Appel: Did—did your brother Albert or did your mother, tell you or instruct you how you were to answer the questions? Had your family had any caucuses about how to deal with the questions?

Eckstein: (laughs) N—I don't remember whether we had, but I – apparently they didn't know what questions were going to be asked either so I don't—I don't imagine we got any—prior training (laughs) yep.

Appel: And you don't recall how long you were actually—detained on Ellis Island.

Eckstein: ...no. No, I don't remember how many days.

Appel: Did you sleep there?

Eckstein: Yes, yes. Right on the benches in the hall.

Appel: In the Great Hall?

Eckstein: Yeah, yep, that's where everybody—stayed.

Appel: Was the whole family together?

Eckstein: Oh yes, yes.

Appel: The boys and the---

Eckstein: Oh yeah, we were all together, yeah.

Appel: Do you remember where you ate? Or what you ate?

Eckstein: No, that I—that escapes me, I—don't remember. There--there was a dining hall, I'm told, and we all ate in the dining hall, they fed us, obviously. Um, we probably still had some of that hard candy left that the Turk had given us (laughs). For kids I'm pretty sure that was enough.

Appel: Had you brought a lot of baggage?

Eckstein: Oh, oh yes (laughs). Um,-- my mother apparently didn't think that you'd be able to get pillows in um, in America, so—she had saved goose-- down, which um, most Hungarians-- save and make their pillows and *pyrnas* [ph] out of, and we had bags of it (clears throat), and everybody, everybody in the family had a um, a job-- to carry—we had a lot of bags, so everybody was assigned to certain bags and wherever we moved from one place to another, you'd have to carry that. I don't—I don't remember what mine---I probably didn't have it—I was the youngest so I probably didn't have a job (laughs). But all the others had a job to carry something.

Appel: Do you remember any of the medical inspections?

Eckstein: Not really, not really. But apparently uh—went passed it without any difficulty. Um, I—I don't understand, what I didn't understand was later, since—there's an in—this inspection, I was—the—surgical or the medical exam was conducted onboard ship. Now, and there was a medical examining in Ellis Island also, so I don't understand why there was in both places, you know, but that's this—

END SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE. BEGIN SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

Appel: --side two of tape one, of interview #27 with Alex Eckstein, and I was just asking, ("ok" in background) I was just asking Alex, about the medical inspection onboard ship. Were you all brought together in one room?

Eckstein: Uh, the medical examination was done in the—ship's hospital, we were all brought in, I guess, one at a time, and um—I—I vaguely remember the examination. Um, and uh—but I don't remember the examination in um—o—on Ellis Island, but I—understand we were given a medical examination there too.

Appel: Do you—think that the medical exam onboard ship, that they had noticed that your brother Saul had had diphtheria at that point, and that that might've been the reason that their second exam---

Eckstein: It—it could've been. As a matter of fact, um—while we were—while we were onboard ship, we thought the biggest problem will be with my older sister Lillian, who was sick as a dog on—(laughs) board --ship, and uh—never did come up on deck until uh—the very last day when we were pulling into the harbor, she had been just, absolutely seasick, and we thought that—she would be the one (laughs) that would give us the most problems, but uh—of course they uh—they must've understood, you know, people do get seasick.

Appel: And when you arrived on Ellis Island, you remember your father coming to greet you, or...?

Eckstein: Well...(coughs) yes, I—I, there was a—I—I do remember, a—barred gate, and you could only, you know, you could only communicate through the barred gate, h—he wasn't allowed into the—in--into the, like the main hall, you know. Uh, so that's the only way you could communicate, with ah—with my father.

Appel: But that was when you first saw him, was from—one side of that barred gate—

Eckstein: That's right, that's right, yes.

Appel: How did you feel?

Eckstein: Oh I—I—had, been very fond of my father, so I'm quite sure I was overjoyed, and in a way I—I guess, I was sort of (unintelligible, his pet?) anyhow, so I—I'm sure that uh, I had joyful feelings when I—when I saw him. I hadn't seen him for three years.

Appel: It sounds like it would be, to a child, perhaps scary, or maybe just exciting, to be sleeping in that Great Hall, on Ellis Island—

Eckstein: (unintelligible)—I don't remember being frightened by it—you know, it was something—brand new, that wasn't, there--really nothing frightening about it. Um—it—it was exciting, you get to look through the windows and see the ships going by, and from (coughs), and the—the, see that big city, which was something that we hadn't seen, you know, city of that size and buildings of that height, you know, it was uh—something really remarkable to us. So, it was all exciting, and it didn't—wasn't really frightening to me. It probably was different to um—my older brothers and sisters and my mother, who was probably worried when—when are we gonna all be together, and so on. Sure.

Appel: So, then your father took—most of the family, except for your older brother Albert, and Saul—

Eckstein: Saul—

Appel: --who stayed on Ellis Island. You went to Pittsburg and then stayed—

Eckstein: (unintelligible)—we took the—lighter, or the ferry, to um (coughs) to Jersey, um—somewhere—on Jersey side, probably Hoboken, and we took the train to Pittsburg from there, yes.

Appel: Where were your first images and impressions of America?

Eckstein: Well there—didn't have any—a--actually, until we arrived in—in Pittsburg. And um, my father had rented a house, the people who owned the house lived

next door, and uh, it's the first time that I—you know, in my lifetime, that I'd ever lived in a house, we always lived in apartments. And uh, it was a house with a-- trees and uh—the yard, and so on, which was totally different than I had experienced. And um, the young boy, um, lived next door, was about our age, m—my brother Saul and I--- my age. We had a playmate built in. One of the things that's most peculiar i—is that I—once having arrived here, I don't recall—how—difficult the transition was, from—from Hungarian to English, it seemed like I've always talk—English—and I—I –I don't recall any difficulties, um, in making that transition. It—it's as if at once we got off the boat, I spoke only English, you know, of—of course, it didn't happen that way, but uh—the transition from Hungarian to English, uh, a—although I'm sure it took over a period of time, it uh—it almost seemed—now, like—instantaneous. It's peculiar.

Appel: When you—before you came to America—

Eckstein: Yes—

Appel: Did you have any ideas of what America was supposed to be like? Did you have any expectations?

Eckstein: I don't know, at seven and a half you wouldn't—I—I wouldn't have any expectations and um, not really—my older brothers and sisters, uh, I'm sure had—

Appel: But you didn't talk with them, y—you didn't get from them, what their expectations or thoughts were about this trip, or about coming to America. It sounds—it sounds like, you really uh, didn't communicate that much with your older brothers and sisters. That you were in your own world.

Eckstein: Well, oh—let's see—I don't think we ever discussed what their expectations were, um, once having arrived—you know, each one of us had our own ambitions, and we—we pursued them, to the degree that we could. My oldest brother uh (clears throat), is a doctor. My— brother Lou, it was interesting, he had—he had been apprenticed out, in Europe, a—as, to a jeweler, and he learned jewelry manufacturing. And he was—a—an excellent jeweler, as a matter of fact, and—when he arrived, he was—he was only, uh 16 years old, and, shortly after he arrived, he got a job as a jeweler, and from thereon in, he's always worked as a jeweler. Um (cough)—my um, my sister Lillian, next, she

went as far as the---she went as far as the 10th grade, and then—left school, got—shortly after that, came the Depression, after we arrived, and almost everyone they could had to work to help support the family. And that was true of my brother Ernest, who's next in line, and the (coughs) Irene, graduated, uh, graduated high school, and my brother Saul (coughs)—graduated high school, and I went through high school. And, I went through college as an engineer and my—sister Irene, uh, after the war, when the GI Bill, uh, went through um, Physiotherapy, and it—went through NYU and graduated from NYU.

Appel: Do you recall, just going back for a moment (background noise is heard), do you recall—how long it took before Saul and Albert joined you in Pittsburg, do you know how long they were on Ellis Island—

Eckstein: ---that was—it was less than a week, it was less than a week. In fact, just a couple weeks ago, um, that was vague in my memory, and uh, I knew—we were gonna have this interview and I asked uh, my brother Albert, and he said it was less than a week.

Appel: And—did he happen to tell you, or do you know, how he managed to get Saul out of Ellis Island and convince immigration that he should not be sent back?

Eckstein: No—they just, further examination showed that it—you know, there was not, anything wrong—mentally— with my brother Saul, and uh, just—additional examinations. Well, I—the fact that he was able to speak English, and converse, obviously, asked them to further examine him, I'm quite sure, and um—that helped and um—further examinations showed there was nothing mentally wrong with him. So they—released him, and uh—he came to Pittsburg (laughs). Took the train and came to Pittsburg, right.

Appel: I don't know if I have any other—questions. Uh, um—a—about your voyage or your experience or your—what happened to your family—

Eckstein: I'm trying to recall, is there anything that um—might be of some interest—um—

Appel: Do you remember, for example, I—it—you said you didn't really recall any transition from speaking Hungarian to speaking English, do you remember feeling different, when you were in school, or...did you feel like an immigrant—in any way?

Eckstein: Uh—I—gee—only—only through my cousins, who were born, born here. Uh, they u—I—had relatives from nearby towns in Pittsburg, Donora [ph], Charloy [ph], so they used to come in on weekends and visit us, and—originally when we arrived, my mother had made all our clothes, and they of course had store-bought clothes, which were something that we had never had, and you know, there was a difference, you know, as—and—they used to tell us—I remember how much we got—we were able to communicate, you know, those are not the kind of clothes that you wear (laughs) you know, it's only, uh, greenhorns, wear clothes like that. And that was the expression normally used, you know (coughs). But shortly after, of course, we discarded our-- the homemade—my father bought us—regular clothes. (background noise heard) Oh, yeah—my sister Irene, apparently, remembered, that uh, (coughs) she—she was ridiculed, uh, in the—in school, you know, shortly after we arrived. And uh, running out of class, going home and telling—my mother, she's not going back to school, but my sister Irene is rather outspoken, individual, anyhow, but of course she did go back to school (coughs). But um, she apparently remembers, this—experience of, greenhorn, in—

Appel: You had mentioned too, um, that you had--- your family had been Orthodox—

Eckstein: Yes.

Appel: -in Europe, in Hungary, and that you were--- ate in a separate dining room onboard ship. Did you continue to keep a Kosher household in America?

Eckstein: Yes—my father, and mother always maintained, and uh, my father, (coughs) even though he traveled, as, as a traveling salesman actually, uh, and he traveled out of town, sometimes as long—for periods as long as two weeks, he always, bought canned food, and uh, just—ate uh, cheeses and canned food, tuna, things like that, but he—he always—and he never work, never worked a day in his life on Saturday. And he went to the Synagogue, on Friday night and on Saturday. From—long as I knew him, to the day he died. And uh, my mother, of course, kept a Kosher home, yep.

Appel: Well, you have amazing amount of—of recall, given the fact that you were so young when all this occurred, um, remembering what it was like in your hometown, and remembering the passage on the ship it's been very interesting.

Eckstein: --most of my brothers and sister, keep telling me, they says "you can't remember that you were too young", but uh, but I do remember it, you know and—some of them are quite vivid, recall. There's a lot of thing I don't remember that I probably should remember (laughs), but that's—something else.

Appel: Well it's been very—it's been a very interesting interview.

Eckstein: Thank you.

Appel: Uh—the--the people at the National Parks Service are going to be pleased that we spoke with you.

Eckstein: I hope so. You probably— you know, it's a shame, a—actually my brother Albert would probably be a better source of what really transpired during the—the tri—

Appel: Well, I think it might be very interesting to interview him, because here are several members of the family—

Eckstein: Right.

Appel: --travelling with different impressions, it was the same—story, but everyone has a different memory of it—

Eckstein: Yes.

Appel: So I think would be interesting from that point of view.

Eckstein: Yep.

Appel: This is the end of the interview with Alex Eckstein.

END OF INTERVIEW