

KECK-007

AARON CHEIFETZ

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RUSSIA, 1913

AGE 21

NAME OF SHIP: *CEDRIC*

ALLEE: This is interview number 007. This is Debra Allee. I'm speaking with Aaron Cheifetz. It's Thursday, January 24th, 1985 at approximately 2:25 PM. Uh, we're going to discuss MR. Cheifetz's immigration experience from Russia and in 1913. HE arrived in Ellis Island on December 20, 1913. Why don't we start, you tell me when you were born and where you come from, we'll just start this . . .

CHEIFETZ: Yeah, you want me now to . . .

ALLEE: Yes, fine.

CHEIFETZ: Well, I was born February 21, 1892. What else.

ALLEE: In, the town?

CHEIFETZ: In Russia, a small town, the name Mogilev, in Dnibnipre.

ALLEE: Can you spell it?

CHEIFETZ: D-N-I-B-N-I-P-R-E. Dnibnipre. that's a big lake, you know, they call like a hot snowy lake is the same thing like that. Well . . .

ALLEE: When, uh, how old were you when you decided to come to the United States?

CHEIFETZ: How long? When I was about twenty, twenty-one years old and I had, had to, to go to the, to the army, see, they had to check me for the army, see. Prior to that I used to work with my brother, he used to be in a musician. Very fine violinist. He used to have one of the finest jobs, so I used to, I used to play with him in the, in the, in Ukraine Harkov. There I got acquainted with the, the Kapelmeister, you know, the conductor from the army. And he heard me, he said, "If you go to the army I'm gonna send in a letter they should send me to you, for your benefit you should come to my, to my, uh, musical band. So I felt pretty safe, you know. At the end of the

season, that was summertime, at the end of the season I had to come to Mogilev for where I was born, to stand, stand for the, for the army, y, a checkup for the army. So when I came over there and they checked me, checked my health, checked everything, and they accepted me, but the only thing they asked me, I have to get certain papers in a different city, and I got all the papers and they asked me for, for the, I should get it for in another little town to get, get some papers. I says, I told them, I says, "I got plenty papers and I, I don't think I have to get it."

HE says, he said, "Bashowant." [ph] "Bashowant" [ph] means get out and go ahead and do it. So that means he insulted me. I felt an insult. That word bashowant [ph] is like a dog you say "get out." So I came home, that's right, I was married already at that time, that summertime I was married. And I had my wife, a young wife. So I said it well, I decided now to go to United States.

ALLEE: Did you know anybody in America?

CHEIFETZ: I had, had a brother. One brother. Uh, so I decided to go and I told them, I says, "I don't want to stay in Russia no more because I don't care for that." So

we made an arrangement with an agent. Paid him fifty dollars for the trip to go to Russia, I mean, to go from Russia to the United States. And, uh, in November, I think something, late in November, I went, I started to, for my journey to the United States. Of course, there's a long story to tell how I got it, you know I went first to Lublin, to Poland. And I had to go I had to penetrate the border from Poland to Austria.

ALLEE: Did you have to go, did you go illegally from Russia to Poland?

CHEIFETZ: That's right, illegally. Of course, if I would be caught there would be a certain punishment for that, see. So I went there, I stood there for about a day, two days, and some agent came along and took me, he says, "Come on." He says, "We gotta go." We went, we went to a big, we went with a lot of people there, the border with a lot of people there, by a certain woods, a certain forest. And we came to that forest and he says, "Now." The guide said, "When I raise the white flag you lay down. And when I take it off," he says, "you keep on going ahead." And that's the way we were walking for about, about five, six

hours, you know. By the time it came a little daylight already. All of a sudden, and I came daylight, he brought me to a certain place and I, all of a sudden the guide disappeared. He disappeared. So we got lost, you know. But I saw a gendarme, I saw . . .

ALLEE: Policeman.

CHEIFETZ: Yeah, military like, see? I saw them and I said, "Oh, wait awhile. Different material, different uniform, different, different faces. And finally I says, "You are now in Austria."

ALLEE: When you, when you went from, um, Poland to Austria, uh, that was at night, did you have to go over . . .

CHEIFETZ: Overnight we were in the woods, walking, we were walking that border. So . . .

ALLEE: Was it cold?

CHEIFETZ: No, it was November time. It wasn't too cold and it wasn't too warm, it wasn't too warm, but not too cold. So that's when I was very happy. Then we said, "Down with the Czar!" (he laughs) When we

came there.

ALLEE: Do you know what town in Austria it was that you had come to?

CHEIFETZ: What time?

ALLEE: What town, or city you were in in Austria?

CHEIFETZ: I couldn't remember that name. I couldn't remember that name, see.

ALLEE: That's all right.

CHEIFETZ: I happened to be there. They brought me into some small town, not far away. I just stood there for about a week's time. Until they took me, then they took me over to Hamburg. And for Hamburg I stayed also a couple days. And then they took me over with a big, with a ship, to Liverpool, to England.

ALLEE: How long did that take, from Hamburg to Liverpool?

CHEIFETZ: Overnight, to Liverpool. I came to Liverpool. I happened to have a brother in England. I went there, saw him. He said, says I'm here in England so he says, "Come right away, I want to see you." So I went there for a couple days and, oh, I enjoyed it.

And then I went back. And then from, from Liverpool we went on a White Star line, the steamship was by name, by name Cedric.

ALLEE: (misundersting him) Sedwick.

CHEIFETZ: (correcting her) Cedric.

ALLEE: Is that S-E-D-W-I-C-K?

CHEIFETZ: What?

ALLEE: Do you know how to spell it? I think, I think we can . . .

CHEIFETZ: Cedric. C-E-D-R-I-K [sic, Cedric], I believe.

ALLEE: Oh, okay, I got it wrong.

CHEIFETZ: All right. The first day on the ship was fine. I enjoyed it, you know. We enjoyed everybody fine, the ship was going very smooth. It was a pleasure. We danced. We enjoyed a lot of more immigrants there were there. What we ate is herring (he laughs) and frankfurters, and coffee. That's what they gave us to eat. That was in the third class. After the first day it started to go bad, I started to get dizzy, that's all. And I was pretty sick for five

days. It took seven days to go there from Liverpool to New York. Well, finally, all right, on last day was started to get fine so I went up on the deck and we enjoyed it there, and everything was fine. And then we came to, we saw the Statue of Liberty, you know. Everybody was very happy to see it. Then we came to Ellis Island. Ellis Island, we came to, to certain planks, we went to every one of them, passed to the inside, and then . . .

ALLEE: Did you have to go from the ship onto a barge to get to the Island or could you just come right off the ship onto the island?

CHEIFETZ: Yeah, a little barge, a little barge, a little barge, yeah, that's all. And then we went into, into, in the house and started by soldiers. So I, I was waiting, waiting quite some time. Finally they called my name. They called me and they says, "You go over to the doctor. They'll examine you." So I got scared, one thing, you know, bothered me. At that time you had to show twenty-five rubles, dollars, which means dollars. Twenty-five dollars you had to show before you, you were released, before you go into the United States. That you had, they

wouldn't, you know, have some, some kind of a, some money for yourself. And I didn't have enough. I had about twenty-two dollars. And that bothers me terrible. I thought that they're gonna send me back. (he laughs) See, I mean, so I went to the doctor. They had the doctors. All right, sit down, after he examined me he says, "Sit down." So I thought that's the case. I betcha that's the case. I sat down there because I saw some people, you know, they rejected some, bad eyes, you see. So, and then he said, "What are you waiting, he says go down, go downstairs." I go downstairs. I went down. He says, "All right." I see a big line. There's inspectors along a big line. They would let them out, let them go. So I went, I came to my name, my next. I says, "I haven't got enough money." So the guy says, says, "Go ahead!" They wouldn't even count them. (he laughs)

ALLEE: Did they speak to you, uh, did you speak any English or . . .

CHEIFETZ: No, Jewish.

ALLEE: They were speaking Yiddish.

CHEIFETZ: Yiddish, yes. And he says, "Go ahead!" So I didn't ever show the money.

ALLEE: So you must have been relieved!

CHEIFETZ: I was. So I was very happy about it and I went there and sat around. All of a sudden I see a man. Comes to me and says, "Where are you going?" So I told him I got the address. Looks at the address: Avenue C, 120 Avenue C. (long pause, Mr. Cheifetz is moved) "Come, follow with me." I showed him the address. He said, "Follow with me." I don't know. That's an organization they used to take care of immigrants and bring them home. He asked me whether I had somebody. That's right, he asked me whether I, I says, "I have a brother here. And somehow I don't see him." He says, "All right, give me the address. I'll take you over." He says, "Follow me." So I went with him. I went with to East Broadway, Essex Street, all the streets, I used to wear the Russian clothes and people used to laugh at me, you know. (he laughs) So, when I came he brought me right into the house. Into my, and I see my sister-in-law. And I says, "Where's my, my brother, where's Joe?" Her brother,

her husband. I says, "I didn't see him." So there we are, I came over here and they were very happy to see me and he came, he couldn't, he missed me, that's all. He came back home and says, "I didn't see him." And he missed me, that's all. So that's the way I came in in United States.

ALLEE: Were you worried about him when you didn't see him?

CHEIFETZ: Sure we were, but . . .

ALLEE: And you were with your wife?

CHEIFETZ: Huh?

ALLEE: You were with your wife?

CHEIFETZ: Ah, no my wife, that's right, I left her, I left her in Europe. I left, that's a different, different chapter, you know, my wife, what she went through. Because when I came, I came, uh, December the 20th, 1913. And I left her because I didn't have enough money to take her along. So I left her. She was struck, you know, because the war started in the following year, in September, the first of September it started, the war. And then she got stuck there, and I got stuck.

ALLEE: So she came after the war.

CHEIFETZ: No, she, she came by the end of the war. She came three years. She was suffering three years over there without me. She had a child, by the way. When i came here, I found a card, a postal card, that she's pregnant. (he laughs) You know, and then when she came here she got my boy, my son, he was close to three years old. That's all. She had an awful time, a terrible time, because everything was cut off, I couldn't send her, I couldn't find anything out what's all about, and that's all. All right, and then different suffering right here in United States. I couldn't find a job here. In my line of business, see. I came, became a member, a union member, but that was union, a small union down on Houston Street was the union. So they wouldn't take a green fellow anyway. I didn't know what kind of a music they played, how did they play, what all. So I used to go to the union and stay there for a couple hours and then go home with nothing. Stayed there for about six months like that. I couldn't make any money. (he laughs) Up against it, that's all. Once in a while I used to make a five-dollar

bill. That's all, that was all right. Then, I had a brother in California, and I just corresponded with him, I told him, I says, "It's pretty tough over here and I don't know what to do about it." He says, "Come over to California." So that was, that was the following about six months later I went to California.

ALLEE: How did you get there?

CHEIFETZ: Well, he sent me a ticket.

ALLEE: And you went on the train.

CHEIFETZ: Yeah, with a train, with a train it took about five days to go over there at that time, to California. I came to California, all right, he greeted me, nice, fine, everything. But I took a transfer from this union to the other union. And, uh, over there is a rule, you know. A man, a newcomer can't get no job no matter whether they got plenty of jobs. They'll keep 'em away from jobs for about a year's time. See, so I was up against it over there, too. And here my wife, I had no money to send her. She was suffering, finally about six, seven months later I got a job finally. They gave me a job. In a movie,

see, a movie picture. I used to go, prior to that I used to go to the movies to pay there for behind the screen. All the old actors they used to have somebody to give them some, some . . .

ALLEE: Some background.

CHEIFETZ: Background, that's right, background. So I used to do that and make a couple of dollars. Make a ten dollar bill, that's all. Many times I used to go there. But after about six, seven months I got a job in the union. I got a job in the movie.

ALLEE: Do you remember which movie?

CHEIFETZ: The Birth of a Nation. I played the first one. I played it for about eleven weeks. I was very happy. And then after that I got another job in a movie, steady. On the cello, I used to play. I stayed there and then somebody approached me and said, "Do you want a job on a, on a boat that goes from San Diego to San Francisco?" And gave me more money than before, than I got in the movies. So I said, "Yes, I'll take it." So I gave up this job and I went on the boat. I was there all summer. Twice a week we used to go to San Francisco. And then from San

Francisco I came, I got back a job. But, I used to play for the movies and see New York, uh, pictures from New York in all this snow. I used to like it, you know, the snow, because I come from an old country, from a cold country, from Russia. So I'm longing to see snow, instead of having the sun shine every day, sunshine. I used to go, every day I used to go in the morning from the house and lay down on the lawn and warm up myself like that. So I got sick, I got tired of that. I started to long for snow, for something like that. So one day I decided, I says, "I'm gonna go back to New York."

(he laughs) My brother, you know, he was crying, crying, he says, "Don't do that, don't do that, you know, you'll be sorry." I says, "No, I can't, I can't, I can't, I'm longing here, lonesome here. I don't care for that climate any more." So I came back to New York. I came back to New York, that was already about two years, almost two years, you know, passed. I got right away a job, on Avenue B. A little movie, that's all. I got a little room myself next to the Avenue B. And there I played and every day I used to play there, that's all. All of a sudden I see, uh, early in the morning, my brother, I

had another brother here then, my brother and my sister-in-law came, he said, "Aaron, come to the, to the Ellis Island. Your wife is here."

(he is moved) You see, she was supposed to go to San Fran, California. She knew that I'm in California, my wife knew, see, but she came, and she saw me, she was so surprised about it. "How come, you were supposed to be in California?" I says, "I'm here now." You see, so I was very happy to see her, and that's all. It was a lot of struggle after that.

(he laughs)

ALLEE: What was it like to come to Ellis Island to pick somebody up rather than have to go through it. Did you, when you came to Ellis Island to pick up your wife, to meet her . . .

CHEIFETZ: She didn't know that I'm coming. She thought, you know, that my brother and sister-in-law were coming only. She was going to send me a telegram to California for me, see, but she saw me, she was so, so surprised. Of course, she was very happy about it. And I took her right away, took her off Ellis Island, without hardship.

ALLEE: When, you had been to Ellis Island before, so this, when you came to meet your wife it was the second time. How did, how did it, how did you feel to come back to Ellis Island three years later?

CHEIFETZ: Yeah, but I was, I was already a greenhorn. Not, no more, and I was young. You see that I was happy I was on the other side, the other side of the fence, don't you see. She, she was all still in the fence, you know. She picked up, she raised the boy, the boy, to show me him. Nice little boy. I was very happy to see him, that's all. And of course they let her out right away. So then I came here, we had no place to live, so I went to my brother, you know, he was living, he had only four rooms. So I lived there for a short time with my wife there. I didn't care to live there, the room was not so good. So I took an apartment in Park Avenue, Brownsville Park, where the train goes by.

ALLEE: Yes, Park Avenue. Park Avenue in Manhattan.

ALLEE: No, no, no, in Brooklyn. You know, the train goes in the middle right up and the, next to the train. I had a room.

: Pitkin Avenue.

CHEIFETZ: Yeah. (?) Not far from Pitkin Avenue, not far from Pitkin Avenue, that's right. It was very reasonable. I think about fifteen dollars a month I paid. But I lived there for a short time. I saw the rats coming at night, you know, when you sleep full of rats. Boy, I got scared and I says, "I gotta move out from here." So we moved to Williams Street.

MRS. SILVERMAN: Powell Street. That was when my mother came, she came to stay with you a little bit. Williams Avenue.

CHEIFETZ: So I took over there a room already on the third floor. I took over there. Was much better. As a matter of fact, her mother came at that time. And then she, she found herself a bedroom in my room, in my house. But I'll tell you another thing. I was working on 125th Street in a movie. I was playing there. And that was terrible traveling. I used to travel two hours to go home and two hours there, and play there. So I practically wasn't home at all. So I said we have to move over there. So we moved to 125th Street. A Morgan Place, small street. So I

found a house over there and we moved there. So that was all right. But my wife got sick, that was the epidemic in 1917, the flu epidemic. She got sick. She got, she was pregnant and she got sick, and there was no doctor to be gettin'. No doctor to be gettin', that's all. I had to tend her. I used to work in the movies on, the, on the intermission I used to come home, rub her with alcohol, with something like that, and that's all, and help her out. So thanks God she pulled through. Right after that she had, she was, it was a, she gave birth to that child. She gave birth to that child. (?) Esther was in Brownsville, I had her, Esther I had in Brownsville. She was the second of my child. Very happy about it, but she wasn't so good, you know. She had, she had full of blood from the medicine she had taken, that's all. Oh, that's the way it happened for many years. And then I happened to move again a little further up. There was no steam, that's right, in my, in this apartment. So I moved to two houses further up with steam over already. And I was more happy about it. After that I got another job, you know. I got a job in Fordham Road. Fordham Road I got a job, in the Fordham Theater.

Perhaps maybe you know it. At that time it was in a nice neighborhood that time. I played there for about, I think for a number of years I played there, that's all. Until, I played there until the movies started to talk, talk movies. And, see, they started to cut out the musicians from the, from the movies, from the movie houses. And I lost my job. And I had a few hundred dollars saved up. I happened (he laughs) to play a little stock to make, to get rich. And then, of course, it came. '29, 1929 came that time where I lost all the money (he laughs) and just left me about eleven hundred dollars for myself. So I was, I came home and I says, "I've got to commit suicide," to my wife. "I lost all the money, and the stock, I didn't even ask you what to do about it." She said, "Wait a while. We're young people yet and we have a few dollars. To hell with that money what you lost. We'll have a lot more money. We'll have other money. That's all, but don't have it near your mind, something like that." You know, so she made me feel better and what could we do about it? I had no job and I got three kids already. And, uh, I had to do something. So she started too look for a business. With eleven hundred

dollars, a business. Finally we went to a broker and the broker said, "A candy store." (he laughs) He brought us a candy store, a lemon. So, anyway, we didn't know that's a lemon. We didn't know it's bad.

(he laughs) We took it for granted, anyway. I used to take in money from the, from the wholesalers money. I see, I have a lot of money. But I didn't realize I got to pay back the wholesalers, don't you understand. I didn't realize it, that's all.

ALLEE: Where was the store? Where was the candy store?

CHEIFETZ: In the Bronx. What's the name of that store?
(voices off mike)

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

ALLEE: This is the beginning of side two with Mr. Cheifetz.
So the candy store was in the Bronx.

CHEIFETZ: In the Bronx. All right, then, then the same broker realized it was a lemon. He came and brought me a customer. And he gave me about a thousand profit yet.

ALLEE: He sold it again to somebody else.

CHEIFETZ: Yeah, yeah, he got another sucker. He gave me that and he says, "I got a better store for you. In, uh, the Bronx. In Ellis Avenue, that's right. In Ellis Avenue, I got a corner store there, that's all. And there also was not so good. It was a nicer, nicer store, I thought that appealed to me because it was a nicer store. So I took the store and I was very happy to take it but I found out it's also a lemon. All right, then I started to cry to my wife, "Will you tell him, another lemon." She said, "Well, we'll work it up, we'll work it up, don't worry about it, we'll work it up." So we started to work it up and we started to get in more and more, everything, we used to get more business and finally we working it up so nicely and we were very happy about it. Then we sold the store with a profit and I figured I'm gonna have now I don't want to have my wife to work. I want her to stay home. I'm gonna go and find myself, myself a little store. So I found just a store in that, uh, in, uh (?).

ALLEE: Was it also in the Bronx?

CHEIFETZ: That was also in the Bronx, a small little store for

myself, only myself. My daughter was already grown up, the elderly daughter, she helped me out and I stayed there. It wasn't a very, it's a local store, a local business, and that wasn't for me, and that was no good. So he brought me a customer, also with a couple dollars profit, and he got me a store in Rochambeau Avenue in the Bronx. That's New York, Rochambeau Avenue, New York.

: Washington Heights.

CHEIFETZ: Washington Heights. No, Washington Heights. (he coughs) Opposite, opposite a doctor's, opposite a hospital. Opposite a hospital.

ALLEE: In Washington Heights near the, near the . . .

MRS. SILVERMAN: The Rochambeau Avenue was before that little store with Esther, after you sold the Rochambeau Avenue store then you bought that little store, and from there you went to Washington Heights. Rochambeau Avenue was before that little store.

ALLEE: So then you had, you bought another store.

CHEIFETZ: I had a very good store over there, (he clears his

throat) a very good store. Near all the hospital trade, the hospital trade used to come into my store, that's all. And then I sold this store, he came, the same broker, sold him the store with a profit also, also with a profit. It was already a well-done good. (he laughs) And from then I got another little store for myself again. (he laughs) You know where that store, down the, down by the . . .

MRS. SILVERMAN: That was the store you had with Esther.

CHEIFETZ: All for myself, that wasn't so good, see. I sold it, that's all. Then I went, already in the market I had about five thousand dollars. I had a little bit more money. I went in the market and he bought me another store. He says, "I have a good store for you in the market." He says, "In the food and vegetable market, but you got to stay there all night, all night and all day, five days and five nights there, see. But you can't do it all by yourself. I've got two more partners for you, two partners."

MRS. SILVERMAN: The Newark Diner, first.

CHEIFETZ: The diner is later.

ALLEE: It's all right. So you had a store, was this, what kind of a store was it in the vegetable . . .

CHEIFETZ: A restaurant, restaurant.

ALLEE: Yes.

CHEIFETZ: A restaurant. So I stood there. No, first, no, no, that's right, from there he took me over to Newark. He said, "I got a good diner for you. But you gotta have three partners. It's a wonderful diner. It's very good." That was the end, the end of the war, by the end of the war. They used to make big business over there, very big business. About fifty thousand dollars they wanted there, for the business. All right, we went and took the store, all the three partners. And we gave him a deposit, something like, I had about already five, six thousand dollars. I put in all my money and they put it out, and that's all they rest for a mortgage. And we took the store. And the store was very, very good, excellent. One partner fell out. One partner says, "No, I, I don't care for this, for this particular partner." So one partner didn't like it, they didn't agree with each other. He says, "All right, either give me five

hundred dollars profit or else," he says, "I'm gonna buy it." So I agreed to give him, my partner and me, the younger partner and me, agreed to give him five hundred dollars to get out. So we made only two partners. We stood there twenty-one months. We went out with fifty thousand dollars from the store, both me and him. That's the way it was. So I went out already from there, from there I went with twenty-five thousand dollars already. See, I was a rich man. (he laughs) A rich man, that's all. So my wife says, "You want to go in real estate and get money." And I didn't care for real estate. I didn't think it, I didn't like landlords. Landlords, I didn't care, I hated. (he laughs) I didn't want to go. "All right," she says. "You'll be sorry, better go to the . . ." I got another little store in East Orange, in Newark. Fixed up and spent a lot of money there, and lost the money there. No good. So, and that's the way of, I went out from there and from there I went in the market. Stood in the market for nine years. And it was no Goddamn good, also no good. Took me three partners, no good. But finally I went out and got out my money back. I got my money, I got my money, and I closed the store. And

sold the, sold my mortgage to somebody else.

(he laughs) Let him have it. So I sold the store.

(he clears his throat) From then, (he clears his throat) I was already about sixty-two years old, so I figured I might as well retire. I retired, that's all.

MRS. SILVERMAN: What about the store at King's Highway?

CHEIFETZ: Huh?

ALLEE: That's all right. When you retired did you, is that when you went back to playing music or had you been playing music on the side all along?

CHEIFETZ: No, no, first I'll tell you what. I went to Florida. In the winter time I went to Florida for about five years. I had a car. I went to Florida. I enjoyed it, very fine, that's all. Summertime I used to go to in the country, and stayed there, and played. I used to play, I used to play the, the music there, I used to play. I used to give them, entertain them, and they enjoyed it so much, you know. So and then I went to Florida. I went to Florida. I, I know, I (he clears his throat) I realized my wife has a good, nice voice. I says, "Listen, you got a nice

voice. You got a very mellow voice. Why don't you sing something?" So she says, "Oh, I just started to sing certain songs and I enjoyed it so much." I helped her with the saxophone to sing and from then on we used to go to many hotels. She used to sing and I used to play. And we enjoyed it, that's all, you see. Then I came back to New York, I happened to meet a certain leader here. And he said, "I'd like to listen to you. Somebody told me that you play saxophone. I would like to listen to you." So all right, I went to listen to me and he says, "All right, I have a job for you." "All right. How much money?" He says, "About fifteen dollars for the job." Fifteen dollars. "All right, I go." So from then on I started to go with this fellow to jobs. We had to go to Long Beach, all the hotels we used to play there. Made a combination he was a violin, and a drummer, and a singer, and myself. And we had a combination already, so I started to make money, too. And that's the way that was.

ALLEE: And you still do it?

CHEIFETZ: And it's still there.

ALLEE: And that's what brought you back up here from Florida?

CHEIFETZ: Huh?

ALLEE: You came back from Florida.

CHEIFETZ: Yeah. But no more Florida, that's all. My daughter got in, my daughter is in Florida. That's the case of it. You see, Sunday I've got a job to go. (he laughs) I enjoyed it. Now, now with me it's a pleasure. Not because of the money, but it's a pleasure with me, because I enjoy music and I enjoy music that I play. So I found myself happy. That's the end of it.

ALLEE: I had, I had one thought as you were speaking. When you went across to California on the train, you must have seen a lot of the country.

CHEIFETZ: Oh, yeah, oh, yes.

ALLEE: And that was in the time that, it doesn't look that way any more. How did it look to you?

CHEIFETZ: Well, my God, it's a different, it's like a different world now. At that time Los Angeles was like a, like

a small little town. I used to walk, I used to live on Boar Heights, further up with the Mexicans mostly, I used to live there. For five cents you used to make a bus drive and go to downtown, see. So I used to, many times I used to walk because I loved to. My feet were all right and everything was all right. I walked downtown. And, but I didn't realize it, I didn't realize, now, just like day and night, a different city.

ALLEE: Did you see parts of the west as well? Did the train go through parts of the, of the west, like Colorado or New Mexico or . . .

CHEIFETZ: Yeah, sure, went down to Colorado, yeah, that's right.

ALLEE: And did it stop in any of the towns there, did you get to see any of those? Any of those cities like St. Louis or . . .

CHEIFETZ: No, I didn't see it. I seen it, that's all, but I didn't realize what it was. I was sitting in the window just enjoying it, that's all. Just enjoying the trip.

ALLEE: When you came from Ellis Island, when the man from HIAS, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, took . . .

CHEIFETZ: That's right, the HIAS, that's right, that's right.

ALLEE: When he took you, do you know they're still around?

CHEIFETZ: They're still here. Sure, sure, I know that.

ALLEE: When, when he took you over to Avenue C, did you have an impression about New York? Was it what you expected or different?

CHEIFETZ: Oh, oh, what's the matter with you. It was an awful impression. Because everything, you know, I look at the elevated, you know. By the way, he took me from Ellis Island to, to Avenue, to, uh, East New York, to, uh, no, to . . .

ALLEE: East Broadway?

CHEIFETZ: East Broadway, with a little bus, with a horse. A horse used to carry the bus at that time. An open bus, too, sure. That was everything. I used to go to Coney Island, that's right. Used to, oh, Coney Island, yes, we'd go. I played many times in Coney Island. Where they make the loop to loop I used to

play in the front.

ALLEE: IN front of the roller coaster?

CHEIFETZ: In front, that's right. A little band, they used to have a band. I used to play the clarinet, see. And made many times and once I went to try it myself, I almost fainted. Yeah. (he clears his throat)

ALLEE: And when you came to Ellis Island itself, the first time, did it, did it seem to you, did it seem to you crowded? Were there lots of people?

CHEIFETZ: That's right. Sure, sure, lot of people. There were many. Jammed with people, from all kinds of other countries, besides.

ALLEE: Could you tell what countries, did you recognize some other languages?

CHEIFETZ: Yeah, sure, the Russian, that's all. So I says, "I can't speak no English, you know." So they take me in a dormitory, that's all, at that time. And I took it for granted, that's all. Of course, everything was new to me. Everything was new, absolutely. And everything was wonderful. I mean, compared with the, compared with the, with Russia, I know about, now,

about Russia. I know they build up everything over there, too, but at that time just like a little thing village, that's all, certain cities.

ALLEE: So, so New York was just bigger.

CHEIFETZ: I used to be in Petrograd. I played in Petrograd with my brother. Petersburg. Now it's Leningrad.

ALLEE: Yeah, it's Leningrad.

CHEIFETZ: Leningrad now. I used to play on the Nefski Prospect. Nefski, that means just like Broadway. There was a Christisala, they used to call it Christisala restaurant. I used to play with my brother. We used to, hey he was a very well-known musician, my brother.

ALLEE: Were you playing the clarinet?

CHEIFETZ: The clarinet, at night. He also played the clarinet. Over here I picked up the saxophone. Cello, I used to play there, over there, here, too. So I went through plenty, plenty. And I told you just a little story about it.

ALLEE: When you went from Russia into Poland, did you also

have to hide out and sneak across the border
like . . .

CHEIFETZ: Yeah, about five hours we were in the woods, the
forest.

ALLEE: That's from Russia to Poland?

CHEIFETZ: From Russia, no, not from Russia to Poland, from
Poland, from Poland, Poland was Russia, belongs to
the Russia.

ALLEE: I see. So you were really going from . . .

CHEIFETZ: No, from, from Poland to Austria.

ALLEE: Yes, okay. I understand.

CHEIFETZ: They took me to a small little town, Galiziana, where
only the Galicia. They took me to Galicia. Small
little town. I was through there about four, five
days. I saw the way they're living, they also Jews.
I was Jew. I saw the different Jewish. To me they
looked like different Jews. Different sects, that's
all. The Galiziana. The Galicia, see. And, uh, I
was very . . .

ALLEE: They were different.

CHEIFETZ: Different people entirely, different. Not my type of people, that's all. I was, I was strange there, that's all. I used to go by, they used even to, they used to pray to God in shul, like that, see, synagogue. So much noise, so much tumult, so much noise. Our Jews didn't realize what kind of a people they are. I come from White Russia, the Jews are plain Jews, they go to, they go to synagogue, they pray nicely, everything nice, they dress accordingly, and they behave themselves right. Over there, they didn't behave so well. So it appeared to me a different world. (he clears his throat)

ALLEE: Did you ever go back to Russia, or did you ever think about going to visit?

CHEIFETZ: No, no, I despise Russia. No. Russia to me is just like dead. It's Communist. I'm a, I'm a born democrat. Made here in the United States, democrat, even to the last day. Not even, I voted for democrats. Not because they're, not because I didn't care for Reagan, I am a democrat and I've got to be a democrat. That's my belief.

ALLEE: Oh, I should ask you, when did you become a citizen?

CHEIFETZ: 1917.

ALLEE: And did you have to study and pass tests and things
or . . .

CHEIFETZ: No, just a little thing, that's all. By the way,
when I came here I went to the, to English school,
for one week. And I started to read, and I could
read right away because according to the music, I had
it, see. According to the music. The, the letters
that, the layout is just like English. So I started
to read a paper right away. And I picked up the
English very fast, you know. So I just talk already
English.

ALLEE: Oh, we're doing the tape for the Ellis Island
history. Do you have any pictures in your mind of
what it looked like. Did the buildings seem large or
small?

CHEIFETZ: Large buildings, large buildings, sure. A large
building with a lot of people with a lot of offices.

ALLEE: A lot of different offices.

CHEIFETZ: Yeah, various offices, sure.

ALLEE: Did it seem in good condition or did it seem run down, or . . .

CHEIFETZ: Well, I didn't, I didn't tell you, I didn't realize at that time. To me it looked everything find. It's a big office, with a lot of people and a lot of immigrants and a lot of tumult. See? And they didn't know what it's all about, you see, they didn't care, you couldn't comprehend its size, what's going on here, there.

ALLEE: And you were worried about not having enough money.

ALLEE: That's, the main object, the main object in my mind, I'll bet you they wouldn't let me on because I haven't got twenty-five rubles. I've got only twenty-two rubles, you see? As a matter of fact, they didn't even, didn't even count the money. He says, "Go ahead." They let me out. I look at it! I didn't realize they was so nice to me. And evidently because I was passed the examination and everything, that's all. And perhaps you know I'm young and they were anxious to have young people here, you see. I was a young fellow, that's all, about twenty-one years old.

ALLEE: You must have worried when you didn't see your brother, too.

CHEIFETZ: Well, after that I was worrying about it, see. But right away that fellow gave me, HIAS as you say, that's them. He came and he says, "You have relatives?" I says, "I don't see him, I expect my brother, I don't see him." "All right, give me the address." And he took me over to East Broadway, they gave me a meal there, too. Gave me, (he laughs) and after that they took me over. We walked over there, to Avenue C, not far away, that's all, quite of a walk. And I was very happy about it, that's all. And at that time, when I came to my sister-in-law just happened to be having a birthday party for her first daughter. She didn't have the children to about a number of years and all of a sudden she had, she got pregnant, she got one daughter, that's all she had, one daughter. And that was a year old. And at that day they had a party, at that day, on the 20th December. So I had a chance to see all the family.

ALLEE: And have a party, too.

CHEIFETZ: And a party, that's right. That's all. I had my mother, you see, see, my mother was left, left in Europe. Then after she, they had to bring her over here. She was a very jolly woman, a wonderful woman.

ALLEE: And she came when she was old.

CHEIFETZ: She was old but, of course, old, she, she was about seventy-five years at that time when I brought her here.

ALLEE: And you and five of your brothers all eventually came here?

CHEIFETZ: I'm one of seven brothers. They're gone. All gone, to bed. The big violinist that I spoke, that I worked with him in Russia. He got paralyzed from a, from an automobile, ah. (he clears his throat) A big knock from an automobile.

ALLEE: An accident.

CHEIFETZ: Yeah, an accident, that's all. He got scared, that's all, and he got paralyzed from that. I had, I had one brother in the, two brothers I had in London, one brother here and one in California, and two brothers here, and one in California. Then we brought another

brother from England, from London, brought him over here, too. Yeah, the youngest brother. That was a job.

ALLEE: End of the interview with Mr. Cheifetz. It is now 3:27. We'll hear Mr. Cheifetz, Aaron Cheifetz playing the saxophone. (he plays Hava Nagila and God Bless America)