

KM-0002

JOSEPH LEICHTMAN

BIRTHDATE: FEBRUARY 1, 1906

INTERVIEW DATE: DECEMBER 4, 1993

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 87

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INTERVIEWER: KATE MOORE

RECORDING ENGINEER: SCOBIE

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: MELISSA PERLZWEIG

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:

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UNITED STATES: NEW YORK, NY; DELRAY, DETROIT, MI

HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Recording engineer Scobie speaks several times during the interview.

MOORE: Good afternoon. This is Kate Moore from the National Park Service and today is the fourth of December, 1993 and I'm in Southfield at the home of Joseph Leichtman who came from Hungary in 1913--

LEICHTMAN: [interposed] Right.

MOORE: [interposed] When he was seven years old. Why don't you begin by giving me your full name and date of birth please.

LEICHTMAN: Joseph Louis Leichtman. February the first, 1906.

MOORE: Could you spell your last name please?

LEICHTMAN: L-E-I-C-H-T-M-A-N.

MOORE: And where were you born?

LEICHTMAN: I was born in Hungary.

MOORE: Ok. In what city was that?

LEICHTMAN: Uh, [not understood] – don't ask me how to spell it.

MOORE: The next question was spell it please. (laughs) Alright, and what size town was that?

LEICHTMAN: Oh maybe – twenty, thirty thousand.

MOORE: And could you describe what the town looked like?

LEICHTMAN: Well, that was before my time but uh, it's still there. And one of m—oh two of my nieces – went to visit there. And the funniest thing is, they took a – uh, pictures – throughout the town, and there was my father's old store.

MOORE: Wow.

LEICHTMAN: Dry goods store. And that's right by the Catholic church.

MOORE: What type of store was that?

LEICHTMAN: A dry goods store.

MOORE: A dry goods store, right. And what was the major indu—industry of that town then?

LEICHTMAN: To tell you the truth I don't know.

MOORE: And did—and your father had a [not understood].

LEICHTMAN: No. No my grandfather was a uh, liquor merchant. He uh, manufactured liquor.

MOORE: Uh-huh. And um – let me just check this, make sure this is on. Um, what was your father's name?

LEICHTMAN: Berthold.

MOORE: And could you spell that – do you mind?

LEICHTMAN: B-E-R-T-H-O-L-D.

MOORE: Alright. And what was his occupation?

LEICHTMAN: Uh, he was a merchant.

MOORE: Alright.

LEICHTMAN: He had stores throughout Hungary. The only thing is, in 1913 uh, the uh, army was already recruiting. And my father found out about it. And he didn't want his sons to be uh, uh, [not understood]. That's the right word isn't it?

SCOBIE: Mm-hmm.

LEICHTMAN: So uh, he packed up everything and we came out here – seven children, my father, and mother, all at one time.

MOORE: And what did your father look like? Could you describe him?

LEICHTMAN: He looked like a real Hungarian. With a – a uh, handlebar mustache. A nice looking man. He was about five eight, weighed about a hundred and fifty pounds, but uh – he had a gift of gab and he spoke about seven or eight languages. [not understood]

MOORE: Sorry I keep adjusting as I keep thinking (trails off) [not understood]. Describe his temperament. What would you say his [not understood] personality?

LEICHTMAN: [superposed] Oh he was – he could charm a cow – a uh – a calf out of a cow. But when he got mad, don't be around.

MOORE: Is there a story that you associate with your father from your childhood? Any particular story you can talk about?

LEICHTMAN: Any particular story? Well he was a good man. Anybody came to him for help – he would believe – loan them money. Whether he got it back or not, it didn't make any difference. So he was well-liked. I wish I had his personality.

MOORE: What was your mother's name?

LEICHTMAN: Rose.

MOORE: Rose. And what was her maiden name?

LEICHTMAN: Schwartz. S-C-H-W-A-R-T-Z.

MOORE: And what was her occupation, if she had one?

LEICHTMAN: She was a housewife.

MOORE: What did she look like?

LEICHTMAN: What did she look like? Well, I wish we would have taken this in the other apartment. I have pictures there and everything.

MOORE: So how would you describe her if you could?

LEICHTMAN: She was a very nice person, but don't cross her.

MOORE: And what did she have, brown – what type of hair did she have?

LEICHTMAN: Brown.

MOORE: Brown?

LEICHTMAN: Yes.

MOORE: And eyes?

LEICHTMAN: Eyes? Incidentally my father was a blonde. I would say a reddish blonde. And he had blue eyes – the bluest eyes you'd have ever seen.

MOORE: And your mother?

LEICHTMAN: My mother had brown eyes.

MOORE: And um, describe her personality and—

LEICHTMAN: She was a very, very nice person.

MOORE: And what were here chores around the house?

LEICHTMAN: Well, she cooked, she baked, she washed. And in Europe she didn't do all those things, but here she had to.

MOORE: Is there a story you would associate with your mother from your childhood?

LEICHTMAN: Well, all she had was twelve children – I'm number twelve. But in those days, infants didn't do very well.

MOORE: And could you name – this is a little sadistic – but could you name all your brothers and sisters please, since you had so many? (laughs)

LEICHTMAN: [superposed] Sure. Alright I'll start with my oldest sister, Lily. My oldest brother, Alex. Next oldest is Andrew, then Nick. Oh I left out Margaret – Margaret comes after Lillian.

MOORE: Uh-huh, alright.

LEICHTMAN: Alright. Andrew, and then Nick, my sister Helen, and I'm the last one.

MOORE: And – [not understood]. Describe your house – what kind of dwelling did you live in?

LEICHTMAN: In Europe or here?

MOORE: In Hungary.

LEICHTMAN: In Hungary – well it was a stone house -- a brick house, yes.

MOORE: How large was it?

LEICHTMAN: Well they had a lot of children so it had to be a l—large house.

MOORE: And how many rooms were there?

LEICHTMAN: I don't recall. How old was I then? All I do – I remember going to kindergarten there, and the first grade. And it was a very liberal country. They would have oh -- priests and ministers in on certain days (pause). They would have uh – oh the uh – rabbi on Fridays – in a public school. And it was compulsory to go to school there – in Hungary -- of course in the large cities. In the small towns they didn't enforce it. Usually what they had – in those small town there – as a Catholic church – or Protestant, or Baptist.

MOORE: Back to the house for a second. Was it – how was it heated – your house?

LEICHTMAN: [recording skips] Wood stove.

MOORE: Wood stove. Was there a garden, do you remember?

LEICHTMAN: Oh yes, there was a garden. [recording skips] And uh, we had outside cooking, inside cooking.

MOORE: And what – what did you grown in the garden, do you remember?

LEICHTMAN: No.

MOORE: And what kind of furniture did you have in your house?

LEICHTMAN: Typical. Whatever went with the region.

MOORE: And uh, was it—

LEICHTMAN: [interposed] Heavy furniture.

MOORE: Heavy furniture.

LEICHTMAN: Mahogany furniture.

MOORE: And was this house inside or outside of town?

LEICHTMAN: I think it was inside of town.

MOORE: Did you keep animals?

LEICHTMAN: We always had a dog or two. And my father liked animals so we'd have cats.

MOORE: No domestic animals though – cows or—?

LEICHTMAN: No, no. No we were city people.

MOORE: Who else lived in the building? Just your family or --?

LEICHTMAN: Just our family.

MOORE: And who did the cooking in the family then?

LEICHTMAN: We had cooks.

MOORE: And what was your favorite food?

LEICHTMAN: Well – look I'm Hungarian so, chicken paprikash, Hungarian goulash – are you Hungarian?

SCOBIE: Uh no, I'm Polish but –

LEICHTMAN: Yeah. Stuffed cabbage, palascinta – you know what this is. Crepes [not understood].

MOORE: Oh yeah.

LEICHTMAN: Yeah. Dobos torta, [not understood]. And we have noodles, that we would put nuts on, or – uh – or – nuts and noodles. A lot of good food.

MOORE: Did you ever help cook at all at home?

LEICHTMAN: No, no. If I would do that here, I could save myself a lot of money. I don't know how to cook. I don't know how to take care of myself.

MOORE: The kitchen – what was meal like time at home?

LEICHTMAN: Pardon me?

MOORE: What was meal like – mealtime like at home?

LEICHTMAN: We would all sit down together.

MOORE: And you were served by someone?

LEICHTMAN: Yeah.

MOORE: Were there other families who lived nearby? Family members?

LEICHTMAN: Oh – oh sure. We always had my grandmother, who at that time, in 19—
oh, eighteen – was something like, ninety years old or ninety-four.

MOORE: What were their names? Do you remember their names – your
grandparents?

LEICHTMAN: Ah you got me. See I never knew them. The only one that I knew was
my mother's mother.

MOORE: What was her name? Grandma.

LEICHTMAN: Grandma, yeah, that's about it.

MOORE: You saw them often – your grandparents – before you left?

LEICHTMAN: Oh yes. She used to live with us.

MOORE: Who are you particularly close to in the family – especially close to?

LEICHTMAN: Oh my son. Incidentally my son is a professor at University of Michigan medical school. He uh – he got a fellowship at Harvard and he’s a nephrologist. Do you know what that is? Kidney man.

MOORE: Ah.

LEICHTMAN: Very kind, caring person. And he has three youngsters. He has a ten year old, that does ninth grade math. And he has a six year old boy who’s a scoundrel – but bright, and pretty – handsome. And then a four year old daughter that can converse with you like – oh – a grownup.

MOORE: When you were a child who were you closest to in your family – when you were younger?

LEICHTMAN: I had a sister, Helen, who was up to something all the time. And – and my oldest sister, Lillian – they used to call her Steve. She was a tomboy. She had a rooster that used to follow her all over. You’re laughing.

MOORE: (laughs) Um, how about – do you have any other anecdotes about Helen, your older sister, or your brothers?

LEICHTMAN: Well Helen was a sort of gal. If she would walk into a – she was attractive. But I wouldn’t say she was pretty. If she would walk into a room with uh, six men in it, and three other women, everybody would be around Helen.

MOORE: What rel—was the religious life – turning to your religious life – like?

LEICHTMAN: I was never religious. I mean I always knew there was a god. I believe in God, but I was never religious.

MOORE: Were your parents?

LEICHTMAN: My father, yes. Oh I got something to tell you. This is gonna be very funny. My mother used to buy expensive French hats. And in those days if you paid twenty five dollars for a hat, it's like two fifty now, or more. So my father always had cats in the house – I told you. So my mother was hiding a hat from my father and she put it under the bed for safekeeping – in a box. So there's a holiday – my mother wanted to get dressed up to go to synagogue. So she puts the hat on.

MOORE: There are kittens in the hat?

LEICHTMAN: (laughs) My father said "Regardless of what that cost you, I'll pay you double." He got such a big kick out of it. [not understood] that's different.

MOORE: (laughs) Well when – the synagogue – how close was it to your house? Do you remember?

LEICHTMAN: Uh – in Detroit here? I would say four or five blocks. Are we being timed?

SCOBIE: No, it just made a click noise—

MOORE: Is it alright?

SCOBIE: Yeah, it's still going.

MOORE: And um, if you – what was it – could describe the synagogue? Do you remember it at all as a child?

LEICHTMAN: It was small.

MOORE: Very small.

LEICHTMAN: Yeah, it was small. And it was a house originally. And then what they did – they built onto it. And it was on [not understood] Street in Delray, Michigan.

MOORE: Oh in Delray. And could you describe how you practiced reli—religion in your house? Did – d—did it change when you came to the States?

LEICHTMAN: Uh, no. No. My father wasn't particularly a religious man but he knew all – he knew all the right things. And he belonged to a synagogue all the time.

MOORE: And did you experience any religious persecution or prejudice of any sort?

LEICHTMAN: Oh. You always get that from a – but uh, they weren't bad in Delray.

MOORE: And um, describe like – a holiday celebration in your family – take on food, music—

LEICHTMAN: [superposed] Oh yeah. My mother was an excellent cook and baker. And music – well, we used to go to Hungarian Village and listen to the gypsy bands. Ever year of the Hungarian Village?

MOORE: Yes. And um, what did you – do you have any religious holidays that you celebrated?

LEICHTMAN: Oh yes, yes. Yes there was several which I still celebrate.

MOORE: Uh-huh. Which ones do you celebrate now?

LEICHTMAN: Yom Kippur, Rosh Hashanah.

MOORE: And um, what do you do – when your family would get together for Yom Kippur what would you – what would you do?

LEICHTMAN: We'd have a nice big meal and we'd get together.

MOORE: Did you give – were there any rituals that you go through?

LEICHTMAN: Oh yes. Like any religion. The only thing is, in our religion, I think they're a little simpler.

MOORE: What about your school life? Did you go—did you go to school?

LEICHTMAN: Yes, high school.

MOORE: And where was that school?

LEICHTMAN: Southwestern High School.

MOORE: But when you were back in Hungary did you go to school?

LEICHTMAN: I went till the first grade.

MOORE: Till the first grade in Hungary?

LEICHTMAN: Yeah.

MOORE: And where was that school?

LEICHTMAN: In Budapest.

MOORE: Was it crowded – the school?

LEICHTMAN: Oh yes. I told you it was compulsory to go to school – Hungary. It's the first country in the world.

MOORE: Do you remember any specific teachers or playmates in Hungary?

LEICHTMAN: No. That was so long ago!

MOORE: Did you learn English before coming to the United States?

LEICHTMAN: No.

MOORE: W—back – still back in Hungary, what did you do for entertainment as a child in Hungary? Do you remember anything?

LEICHTMAN: We would go to shows. There was always picnics. And musicals in a park – you know the band?

MOORE: [interposed] Mm-hmm.

LEICHTMAN: [interposed] Plays on?

MOORE: Mm-hmm. And um—

LEICHTMAN: Now this is city life. Country life is something else.

MOORE: Right. And um, do you have any favorite childhood story before coming to the States? Anything you remember back then?

LEICHTMAN: Learned a couple of poems in Hungary -- kindergarten, I guess. But—

MOORE: Ok um, about coming to America – who decided to come to the United States?

LEICHTMAN: My father.

MOORE: And did you already know someone who was here before you came?

LEICHTMAN: He had friends. And he had a brother here in Nashville, Tennessee.

MOORE: And did—

LEICHTMAN: [interposed] David Leichtman.

MOORE: David Leichtman.

LEICHTMAN: Yeah.

MOORE: And—

LEICHTMAN: [interposed] Yeah. And a sister also.

MOORE: And did they send funds for you – money for you to come here?

LEICHTMAN: [superposed] No, no.

MOORE: Oh. Do you remember getting ready for or read the papers and all the preparation to come?

LEICHTMAN: Yes.

MOORE: Could you describe that, do you think?

LEICHTMAN: (pause) It's pretty hard. It was over seventy years ago. I know we were pretty busy. What to take – what not to take—take. What to give away – what to sell.

MOORE: And you were how old at that time? Six or seven right?

LEICHTMAN: Seven years old.

MOORE: Did you want to come to the States? Do you remember how you felt?

LEICHTMAN: I suppose so. Yes.

MOORE: Did you feel – w—what was the family's feeling about coming? Was it—

LEICHTMAN: [interposed] Well, anything new is good.

MOORE: What did you know about America before you came?

LEICHTMAN: It was a big country, it's a free country, and they used to say that gold grew on the street.

MOORE: How did your mother feel about leaving, do you remember?

LEICHTMAN: My mother was in this country before – one time before. She came to visit some relatives. And then went back to Hungary. She knew a few words of English. Course she didn't stay here very long.

MOORE: How did your father feel about coming?

LEICHTMAN: Well he wanted to save his boys. So, he wanted to come.

MOORE: What do you mean by save his boys?

LEICHTMAN: You see they were recruiting for the army already.

MOORE: Right.

LEICHTMAN: Getting ready for a war.

MOORE: And your father was trying to prevent the sons from joining?

LEICHTMAN: [superposed] That's right – from being soldiers.

MOORE: And, did anyone give you a goodbye party before you left? Do you remember?

LEICHTMAN: I think some cousins did.

MOORE: And do you remember very much about that at all?

LEICHTMAN: Not too much. My cousin who was oh – eight, nine, or ten years older than I – we brought him out and – from the old country. And he used to remind us of his parents, his family. He used to live in Windsor. He'd come across and tell us about his family. They were well-educated

people. One fellow was a professor. I think he – oh gave classes in ten or eleven languages, including Armenian.

MOORE: Hm. When you go back to this time do you remember what luggage you packed – or the family packed?

LEICHTMAN: Well we had suitcases -- big ones. And we had a steamer trunk. And we packed all our clothes and a few valuables.

MOORE: What valuables did you take, for example?

LEICHTMAN: Well candelabras, motor – what else comes with a mortar? Candlesticks and mortar. I think that's it, isn't it? In the old days?

MOORE: Well, what did you take as a small child? Do you remember what you took?

LEICHTMAN: Maybe a toy of some kind.

MOORE: You – you don't have it still, do you?

LEICHTMAN: No.

MOORE: What did you leave behind?

LEICHTMAN: We left our furniture behind. Left clothes behind, left pictures behind. But I think you would have been interested – some of the pictures that I had – that I have. But they're not over here yet.

MOORE: You just got here.

LEICHTMAN: Yes.

MOORE: Um, did you take any food with you?

LEICHTMAN: You always took food in the old days. Because restaurants weren't around the corner. You always had some biscuits of some kind or – I know hard boiled eggs was a big pastime in those days. You traveled, you took hard boiled eggs.

MOORE: (laughs) Did you take any special belongings? Do you remember – do you have anything you still had then?

LEICHTMAN: Yeah we have the mortar and the candlesticks. And the powder.

MOORE: Um, who came to America with you then – the entire family or--?

LEICHTMAN: The entire family.

MOORE: Twelve children?

LEICHTMAN: No, seven.

MOORE: Seven.

LEICHTMAN: There were only several left by then.

MOORE: I see.

LEICHTMAN: Because the infant mortality in those days was very big, especially if you didn't live in a city. And, anything else you want to answer?

MOORE: Yeah. What port did you leave from? Get to the voyage now. What port? Do you remember that?

LEICHTMAN: Ah – Italy. [not understood]

MOORE: [not understood] we have it here actually. On the –

LEICHTMAN: Trieste.

MOORE: Yes. Ok yes.

LEICHTMAN: Is it?

MOORE: Yeah, Trieste or Fiume.

LEICHTMAN: Fiume.

MOORE: Yeah. You went to Italy first then – is that it?

LEICHTMAN: Yes.

MOORE: By – how did you get to Italy?

LEICHTMAN: Went by train.

MOORE: I see.

LEICHTMAN: You see at that time, Austria-Hungary owned Trieste and Fiume. It was their port.

MOORE: What was the journey like to – that train trip? Do you remember anything of that?

LEICHTMAN: Well I was [not understood] but it was nice. An area – our whole family – you always had something to do.

MOORE: Do you have any stories about that process at all?

LEICHTMAN: All I know – it took us twenty eight days.

MOORE: To get from the train trip to the – to the boat?

LEICHTMAN: No.

MOORE: Across the ocean, once you got there.

LEICHTMAN: [interposed] Yeah.

MOORE: Alright what was the na—um, what was the name of the ship?

LEICHTMAN: Ultonia.

MOORE: Ok could you spell that, do you think?

LEICHTMAN: U-L-T-O-N-I-A. I might be wrong, but it's close enough.

MOORE: When you got to the port, did you have to wait for the boat, do you remember?

LEICHTMAN: [interposed]Yes.

MOORE: How long did you have to?

LEICHTMAN: Two, three days.

MOORE: And where'd you stay then, in that time?

LEICHTMAN: Uh, I think it was a hotel.

MOORE: And with whom?

LEICHTMAN: All of us.

MOORE: All of us. And it – it three days right?

LEICHTMAN: Yes.

MOORE: And how was that – waiting for the boat?

LEICHTMAN: Well I guess we were anxious to get to America.

MOORE: Did any family members come with you to see you off?

LEICHTMAN: No. They all stayed in Hungary. They had a depression at that time.
That's why they were starting a war.

MOORE: Mm. Well when – when did the ship depart? Do you remember the
month and year when the ship left?

LEICHTMAN: Well we arrived here in (pause) June or July in 1913. I guess [not
understood]. I think the trip took us one month, completely.

MOORE: And – going back to the ship now, what was it like on the ship? What kind of accommodations did you have?

LEICHTMAN: Well they – were divided in different classes. And we had good accommodations.

MOORE: And what class did you travel in, do you remember?

LEICHTMAN: No, I don't.

MOORE: Um, describe the din—could you describe the dining room or you slept on that – in that?

LEICHTMAN: The dining room was big. Had long benches and every nationality usually stuck together. The Italians, the Hungarians and – I think the boat came from Russia. You know they run along a course. All I know is that the Ultonia was sunk. It was a British ship – by the Germans – in 19—uh, '13, or '14, or '15.

MOORE: Not while you were on it, obviously.

LEICHTMAN: [superposed] No, no.

MOORE: What was the food like, do you remember?

LEICHTMAN: The food?

MOORE: Yeah, do you remember anything about the food on that ship?

LEICHTMAN: I don't remember much. I know they gave you adequate food.

MOORE: And were you allowed on deck at all?

LEICHTMAN: Oh sure.

MOORE: And what did you hear or see or smell at that time? Do you remember the deck – being on the deck of the boat?

LEICHTMAN: Well none of those boats smelled good, I can tell you that much.

MOORE: (laughs) Was it – was it rough or smooth, do you remember?

LEICHTMAN: [superposed] Rough.

MOORE: And, do you remember anyone being ill – any of your family?

LEICHTMAN: I think my mother and I – my – I don't – m—my – I might've been. Because I was the youngest.

MOORE: And of that all experience on the boat, do you remember anything – a story that sticks out in your mind about that trip?

LEICHTMAN: Well, all of the women that came to say goodbye to their families. All they wanted my mother to do was take care of their sons. See that he – his clothes were washed, he was eating right.

MOORE: Are – these are boys that are without families then.

LEICHTMAN: Yeah, without families.

MOORE: And was that moving? I mean did you feel m—was a very moving or tearful time or--?

LEICHTMAN: Oh it is all the time, when you say goodbye.

MOORE: Were there any activities on the boat?

LEICHTMAN: Oh yes. They had music and singing.

MOORE: And did you play any games or--?

LEICHTMAN: Kid games.

MOORE: Were there many children?

LEICHTMAN: I guess so.

MOORE: And how long – you said the v—the voyage was?

LEICHTMAN: I think the whole trip t—took us twenty eight days.

MOORE: Now when you got to – see the st—d—s—do you remember seeing land for the first time?

LEICHTMAN: Oh yes. That's an experience.

MOORE: W—How was it?

LEICHTMAN: Well everybody was – “Hooray!” – cheering – “We're here!”

MOORE: Where were you when they first sighted it? Were you inside the boat?

LEICHTMAN: I was on deck.

MOORE: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty for the first time?

LEICHTMAN: Yes, I do.

MOORE: What did it – what was it like?

LEICHTMAN: Oh, it was heaven. New experience.

MOORE: And did everyone on the boat have a similar reaction?

LEICHTMAN: Oh yeah. And they didn't want the boat to tip over. So they told people to get out. One side of the boat or the other.

MOORE: Because they were rushing on deck?

LEICHTMAN: Yeah.

MOORE: Um, and so everyone was basically very – very happy.

LEICHTMAN: Yes.

MOORE: What was your first impressions of seeing New York City from the boat?

LEICHTMAN: Busy.

MOORE: Could you see the sky scrape--?

LEICHTMAN: Oh yes, skyscrapers. The (pause) skyscrapers, the tall buildings – that's the same thing. Traffic (pause)—

MOORE: When you arrived at Ellis Island, how did you get from the ship to Ellis Island, do you remember?

LEICHTMAN: I think they – they what do they call those boats that go between--?

MOORE: Like a shuttle back and forth?

LEICHTMAN: Shuttle, yeah.

MOORE: And when did you first – do you remember seeing Ellis Island for the first time?

LEICHTMAN: Yes.

MOORE: And what did you see?

LEICHTMAN: I saw a great big building and lots of big buildings. And it was very, very busy. People were going this way and that way. Some people were getting off the island, some were coming on. And – oh – it's a big city.

MOORE: What was the inside – remember Ellis Island – do you remember inside the building at all when you got in there?

LEICHTMAN: [superposed] Yeah, they had cages. Not cages, just separations. And they – the – all the immigration inspectors – agents – talking to people. And it's funny how they come by names. If the other guy was Cohen and they just had a Cohen, and they c—couldn't pronounce the name – they put down Cohen for the—

MOORE: [interposed] Yeah I see. How – how did you feel when you saw those cages, as a young child? What was your impression of those cages?

LEICHTMAN: Well I was well protected. I had my family there and I had my mother. I had a security blanket.

MOORE: Were you excited?

LEICHTMAN: Oh yes. I wanted to see my dad.

MOORE: He was waiting there?

LEICHTMAN: Yeah.

MOORE: So your dad didn't come on the voyage with you.

LEICHTMAN: No, he was already here. He came here three months before.

MOORE: And he – he sent for his family?

LEICHTMAN: Yeah.

MOORE: I see. Um—

LEICHTMAN: Now there's something that – that we have to correct.

MOORE: What?

LEICHTMAN: We had a big flat. He bought furniture. We had a great big meal. We arrived at the – at our house – and New York City – I forgot whether it was 78th or 79th or 84th Street and First Avenue – between First Avenue and Avenue A. There's something that I want to tell you. (pause) My father would never work for anybody in his life – got a job for eight dollars

a week. Working for a dry goods store. And he was with them for a year and (pause) then he bought his own place. He bought a store on 64th First Street – 64th Street and First Avenue. Do you know the section?

MOORE: Mm-hmm.

LEICHTMAN: It's says they're very, very expensive there right now.

MOORE: Yeah.

LEICHTMAN: Yeah. He had a dry goods store that was doing alright. We made a living. But he had a friend in Detroit so he came to visit his friend and after – my father saw how many Hungarians there were in Delray, he didn't even go back to New York. All he had us do is pack everything up and he rented a store in Delray. And we were successful there.

MOORE: Hm. Um, back a little bit to – there are some question they've asked me to say. Um, when you got to Ellis Island—

LEICHTMAN: [interposed] Yeah.

MOORE: [interposed] Do you remember what everyone was wearing there? What were the clothes of the time, or --

LEICHTMAN: Well, it was what everybody wore. They had suits, some of 'em wore little belts, men's suits. They had corduroy trousers – it's according to what country they came from.

MOORE: And what were y—what was your family wearing at that time?

LEICHTMAN: Wearing pants and jackets.

MOORE: And were they dressed for – um – when they got into Ellis Island – did they dress up to get into Ellis Island or--?

LEICHTMAN: Well you put on your best suit.

MOORE: Was it crowded when you got in?

LEICHTMAN: Oh yes.

MOORE: Was it clean?

LEICHTMAN: Uh, for the time. For those times, it was clean. Nowadays I wouldn't say it would be clean.

MOORE: How were you treated by the staff there?

LEICHTMAN: Treated nicely.

MOORE: Did you – were they – they were polite and--?

LEICHTMAN: Oh yes.

MOORE: And –

LEICHTMAN: [interposed] Let me tell you something. They were much polite there – much more polite than they are today.

MOORE: What about medical examinations? Did you get a medical examination?

LEICHTMAN: [superposed] Yes. Otherwise they wouldn't let you into the country.

MOORE: And what did they do?

LEICHTMAN: Oh they inspect you for diseases. Lung disease (pause) – if you had any scabs. They did a lot of things.

MOORE: And where did they do this examination?

LEICHTMAN: Oh they had a place that was corded off.

MOORE: And did everyone have the same examination?

LEICHTMAN: Yes.

MOORE: Describe any of the people or things that you saw at Ellis Island when you were there. Do you remember?

LEICHTMAN: Some people were not allowed to come into the country. They were shipped back. Was a lot of crying and – oh, howling. And it was a confusion.

MOORE: Were any of you frightened you would be rejected?

LEICHTMAN: No.

MOORE: Were you detained at Ellis Island?

LEICHTMAN: No.

MOORE: Were you entertained at all while you were at Ellis Island?

LEICHTMAN: No. They gave us a meal, or two.

MOORE: I see. And who came to meet you?

LEICHTMAN: I think my father and his friend.

MOORE: And how did you leave Ellis Island, do you remember?

LEICHTMAN: Subway or – I think so.

MOORE: You took a boat to the subway?

LEICHTMAN: [superposed] Yeah.

MOORE: What – what were your expectations about America when you first came? You were a child, so--

LEICHTMAN: [superposed] I think – well I was interested in seeing other children.

MOORE: So when you left, where did you go after Ellis Island? When your father came to greet you, where did he take you?

LEICHTMAN: He took us to our apartment.

MOORE: And how many rooms in that?

LEICHTMAN: It was big. Big, cold water, flat.

MOORE: And how many people were living in it?

LEICHTMAN: Well there were seven children, my father, and mother.

MOORE: And how was it furnished, do you remember?

LEICHTMAN: Uh, old fashioned. Uh, had a leather – leather so—I—leather sofas.

MOORE: And was it – how was it lit?

LEICHTMAN: Well like – not like – gas heat – gas light.

MOORE: Gas light. And how was it heated?

LEICHTMAN: Heated? I guess a coal stove in the kitchen.

MOORE: And was there indoor plumbing?

LEICHTMAN: Oh yes, absolutely.

MOORE: What about the neighborhood at that time – how was it?

LEICHTMAN: It was alright.

MOORE: Describe it a bit like—

LEICHTMAN: Well, as I told you before, most of these people – they were ethnic. All the Hungarians would be with the Hungarians, the Russians would be with the Russians, and uh, they got along. They all had their own miseries.

MOORE: Did you get along – did you have any family members living nearby besides [not understood]?

LEICHTMAN: My father had some cousins. They came and stayed with us, I guess.

MOORE: And did you get along well with the neighborhood?

LEICHTMAN: Oh yes.

MOORE: What type of job did your family members get, when they got here?

LEICHTMAN: Oh there were clerks, and – and when my father went into business they worked for my father.

MOORE: And um, did you – you were too young to work when you got here.

LEICHTMAN: [superposed] Yes.

MOORE: Did you go to school then, immediately?

LEICHTMAN: Oh yes.

MOORE: And which – which school – which building class were you in?

LEICHTMAN: That's something that I haven't talked about in sixty-five, seventy years.

MOORE: So you don't remember the school, do you, at all?

LEICHTMAN: No, but I went to the neighborhood schools wherever we lived.

MOORE: Did you remember feeling that you – was a good experience when you came here?

LEICHTMAN: Yes. Very good experience.

MOORE: Do you remember any of your teachers at that time?

LEICHTMAN: No. But I remember some people who were nice to us.

MOORE: And who were they?

LEICHTMAN: Well, a butcher that my mother went to, the grocery store that my mother went to – were real nice to us.

MOORE: So you felt welcome when you got here?

LEICHTMAN: Yes.

MOORE: Now how did you learn English?

LEICHTMAN: By going to school.

MOORE: And do you remember first not understanding at all?

LEICHTMAN: Uh, well you learn fast.

MOORE: At that age, yeah.

LEICHTMAN: Yeah. Like I had a neighbor – he didn't know to ask to go to the bathroom so he made in his pants (laughs).

MOORE: Was it a difficult time – learning English – for you?

LEICHTMAN: I don't think so.

MOORE: How about your family members – how did they learn?

LEICHTMAN: By going to night school.

MOORE: Any associated – any stories that you associate with learning English in the family?

LEICHTMAN: I can tell you one but it isn't nice.

MOORE: (laughs) It isn't nice? That's alright, it doesn't have to be nice.

LEICHTMAN: I don't know what else to tell you.

MOORE: Did you experience any bigotry or persecution?

LEICHTMAN: You do that – every neighborhood you go to.

MOORE: Yeah.

LEICHTMAN: You have to – oh roll with the times.

MOORE: What about religious life here? Did you – did your religious life change when you came to America?

LEICHTMAN: No.

MOORE: Did you live near a synagogue here?

LEICHTMAN: In Detroit?

MOORE: Yeah.

LEICHTMAN: Yeah, there was a synagogue in Delray.

MOORE: And who was more religious – your mother or your father – you said?

LEICHTMAN: My mother.

MOORE: Here?

LEICHTMAN: Yeah.

MOORE: Your father was in Hungary – more religious?

LEICHTMAN: Yes.

MOORE: But here your mother was?

LEICHTMAN: Yes.

MOORE: When you were – what year did you move from the New York address— address to the Delray one? Do you remember what year that was?

LEICHTMAN: Sixteen.

MOORE: 1916. And how long did you live in Delray then – your family?

LEICHTMAN: From (pause) sixteen to thirty two or thirty three. S—about sixteen years.

MOORE: And – I'm just gonna put you a little bit closer here – and what was the address there in Delray? Do you remember?

LEICHTMAN: Seventy nine eighteen or seventy nine twenty four. West Jefferson Avenue.

MOORE: What did you do for entertainment back then, when you lived in Delray?

LEICHTMAN: Well we had the Hungarian Village, we had shows, there were football games.

MOORE: And um, how did your family members – your father, your mother, your brothers and s—s—sisters – how did they adjust to life in America?

LEICHTMAN: Uh, pretty well.

MOORE: Was it relatively easy for them?

LEICHTMAN: Yes. I know when there's a large family one helps the other.

MOORE: Did anyone return to live in their country? In back – go back to Hungary – did anyone?

LEICHTMAN: No.

MOORE: Um, was your family satisfied or dissatisfied with America?

LEICHTMAN: No. They weren't.

MOORE: They weren't – they weren't what?

LEICHTMAN: Dissatisfied.

MOORE: I see. And your father and mother – did they adjust to life differently?

LEICHTMAN: They all do. In those days you know, the man was the strong one.

MOORE: (laughs) And um, did you have any family tragedies during those years in Delray?

LEICHTMAN: Well every family has a tragedy, and it's something that I'd rather not talk about.

MOORE: Alright. Um, ok (not understood). Alright um, could you tell about your life here in – in – in America – or what happened – you got married – if you got married? If you had children?

LEICHTMAN: [superposed] I got married, I got one son that I told you about, and he's a very nice gentleman. You can't beat him for a son.

MOORE: Was – was your wife Hungarian?

LEICHTMAN: No, she was Russian descent.

MOORE: Russian descent. How did you meet?

LEICHTMAN: We went on a – a fr—a friend of mine had a boat on the Detroit River and the girl that I took he married, and the girl that he brought I married.

MOORE: And um (laughs) and you had one son and does – did he speak Hungarian?

LEICHTMAN: No, not a word.

MOORE: Did he ever go back to Hungary to see where you're from?

LEICHTMAN: No.

MOORE: So basically he's – he's very American in – in –

LEICHTMAN: [interposed] Yes.

MOORE: And um, are you happy you came to America?

LEICHTMAN: Oh sure. Where would I be today? I wouldn't be alive, I'm sure.

MOORE: Were your parents, or brothers, sisters – were they all happy? Or how did they feel about coming to America?

LEICHTMAN: [superposed] They were all happy.

MOORE: Ok. Is there anything else you'd like to say – anything about your experience living in -- America as a young man or—is there – how did –

LEICHTMAN: All I can tell you is, this is the most wonderful country in the world. And I wish everybody had it as easy as we Americans have it here. Even with hired work, laboring all hours of the – of the – of the day it's much better being here, under stressful times, than it is to be in Europe under good times.

MOORE: Well that's a good place to end this interview. I wanna thank you for taking time to come out [not understood].

LEICHTMAN: [superposed] Now what happens to this? Just file it and that's all?

MOORE: No, no wait. Well, um, we'll talk about that in a moment – what we'll do with the interview but um, we – we just want to say on behalf of the archives we appreciate this. And what I have to say is this is Kate Moore signing off with Joseph Leichtman on December 4th, 1993 for the Ellis Island oral history project.