

KM-36

ANNE BELZMAN

BIRTHDATE: MARCH 5th, 1917

INTERVIEW DATE: JANUARY 27th, 1994

RUNNING TIME: 41:15

INTERVIEWER: KATE MOORE

RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME

INTERVIEW LOCATION: SAN MARCOS, CALIFORNIA

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: CATHERINE ROUNTREE, 7/2011

REVISIONS BY:

CZECHOSLOVAKIA, 1926

Age: 8

SHIP: *MAURETANIA*

PORT: CHERBOURG

RESIDENCES:

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

UNITED STATES: LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA

MOORE: Good morning. This is Kate Moore from the National Park Service.

Today is the twentieth seventh of January, 1994 and I'm in San Marcos, California at the home of, home of Anne Belzman, who came from Ches-Czechoslovakia in 1926 when she was eight years old.

Um, why don't you begin by giving me your full name and date of birth please.

BELZMAN: Anne Belzman. I was born um, March 5th, 1917.

MOORE: And um, what was your maiden name?

BELZMAN: Anna Goldmann.

MOORE: Could you spell that please?

BELZMAN: G-O-L-D-M-A-N-N.

MOORE: And um, where were born?

BELZMAN: I was born in Czechoslovakia.

MOORE: And the town?

BELZMAN: Uh... [not understood]

MOORE: Could you, spell that?

BELZMAN: Uh. (laughs) A-L-S-O, capital M-I-S-L-E.

MOORE: Mm, and wh- Do you remember what the town looked like? Could you describe it?

BELZMAN: It was a village. Dirt road. We had, well outside across the street from our home. And there was a river. I don't know at that time it seemed like a long way off, but I think it was maybe a mile from the home.

MOORE: And what the major industry in that village? I mean wh-what did people do in the village for a living?

BELZMAN: I really don't know. I know my grandfather had a flour mill.

MOORE: Flour.

BELZMAN: Yeah mmm. And but the other people, I don't remember... (laughs)

MOORE: What was your father's name?

BELZMAN: Max.

MOORE: Max. And what was his occupation?

BELZMAN: Uh... well, he was in the army in Hungary. Then he came to America. And he worked in and he was a, in the lighting fixture business here.

MOORE: And.

BELZMAN: He was here three years before we came.

MOORE: Oh yeah. Um. Well what did he look like? How could you describe how he looked?

BELZMAN: Oh handsome. (laughs)

MOORE: How tall and?

BELZMAN: Oh about 5'9 I imagine. And um, medium brown hair. I don't, really know, looked like a little bit like Roosevelt, Theodore, um, like um, Franklin.

MOORE: Franklin Roosevelt?

BELZMAN: Yeah.

MOORE: And what was his personality and temperament like?

BELZMAN: Very quiet. Had a terrific sense of humor. Never knew whether he was telling you the truth or not (laughs) because he was always telling stories. But uh, nothing really bothered him, very easy going.

MOORE: Was there a story about your father that you associate with your childhood at all?

BELZMAN: Yes, I remember he took me, I don't know where on the train, and he bought me a watch. And he told me, "Don't tell them," because he had to pay duty on it when he came back. And he says, I remember him telling everybody, says the first thing she says "Watch at the new watch my daddy bought me!" (laughs)

MOORE: Exactly what he told you not to?

BELZMAN: Yeah, exactly what he told me not to say. I think I musta have been about five years old to tell ya.

MOORE: (laughs) How about your mother's name? And what

BELZMAN: Dora Tronstein.

MOORE: Could you spell that please?

BELZMAN: T-R-O-N-S-T-E-I-N.

MOORE: And what was? That was her maiden name?

BELZMAN: Yes, uh huh.

MOORE: What was her occupation?

BELZMAN: A housewife.

MOORE: What did she look like?

BELZMAN: Dark. She almost, people used to take her for Mexican when we were here in America.

MOORE: And

BELZMAN: Uh.

MOORE: How tall was she?

BELZMAN: 'Bout 5'4". And a little bit heavysset.

MOORE: What about her personality and temperament?

BELZMAN: She had a temper. (laughs) But very... very, uh, I don't know easy going too actually. Very nice. Everybody loved her.

MOORE: What about a story about your mother? Do you remember any?

BELZMAN: I really don't remember too much. She was... in Europe, she was going back and forth all the time to my father, to my in-laws, and I then I'd stay with my grandparents in this village. So I really um...

MOORE: You stayed a lot with your grandparents?

BELZMAN: Yes, uh huh.

MOORE: Who-whose parents?

BELZMAN: Her parents. My mother's parents.

MOORE: Were you particularly close to anyone in the family then?

BELZMAN: I don't think so. I don't know. I

MOORE: [interposed] Were you

BELZMAN: Can't really remember.

MOORE: So was it your grandmother, grandfather took care of you?

BELZMAN: I guess. (laughs)

MOORE: Um. Could you name all your brothers and sisters in order of their birth.

BELZMAN: Oh. It was my old, uh, the brother after, I'm the oldest. There was my brother Leslie.

MOORE: How much younger?

BELZMAN: Uh, four and a half years.

MOORE: Mmm.

BELZMAN: Then we came to America and my brother Freddie was born. Nine months later. (laughs) And then two years after, my brother Eugene. And then I think it was almost ten years that my sister, Barbara, was born.

MOORE: Oh. Now if we go back to Czechoslovakia, do you remember your house?

BELZMAN: Yes. Uh, there was a... there's upstairs and downstairs. And un-un-downstairs they had a store, kind of like a little grocery store. I remember once I got the devil for opening the store one morning without my grandfather. I went and got the keys, and I was selling cigarettes. (laughs) There's six years old. I almost got killed for that. And then in the upstairs is when the living quarters. And there's a huge kitchen with a tile oven. And, that we could kind of sit up there, you know. I... it's to hard to

MOORE: On top of the ovens?

BELZMAN: descri- Well it was, hard to describe it I. But um, it was a big kitchen, I remember that. And then um, what else?

MOORE: How many bedrooms were there?

BELZMAN: Two. One was used as a bedroom and a... now, and then the. It was a uh, as you came in, there was an entry. And from the entry, you could go into the kitchen on one side and into a bedroom on the other side and then the other side of the other bedroom with uh... another big room. And I think that was, kind of like a farm though. Can't remember too much about it. And off of that room was another bedroom. I remember my aunt having her baby in there.

MOORE: [interposed] Yeah

BELZMAN: Screaming for three days. (laughs)

MOORE: How was your house heated then?

BELZMAN: Ah... who could, I can't remember that.

MOORE: How, what about the lights? How was it lit?

BELZMAN: Ah. kerosene lamps, I think.

MOORE: Mmm.

BELZMAN: And oh, there was an attic. We used to bathe up there. Outhouse in the back outside. No bathroom either.

MOORE: Wha, bathe in the attic?

BELZMAN: In the tub.

MOORE: So where would you heat the water?

BELZMAN: I don't know where they heated it. I can't remember. I don't even remember having a bath anymore. (laughs)

MOORE: Uh, did you keep any animals at all?

BELZMAN: I think we had a dog. And then they had chickens and geese. And oh big flock of geese. I remember taking them to the river once. I thought I lost them. But they knew their way home, so. (laughs)

MOORE: How old were you then?

BELZMAN: Oh, I don't know, I musta have been around seven or maybe younger. I don't know.

MOORE: And the grocery store was owned by who?

BELZMAN: My grandfather. And he had a mill in the back, a flour mill.

MOORE: I see. And how big? What did he sell in the grocery store?

BELZMAN: Gee, I don't remember candy and you know odds and ends I guess.

MOORE: It was flour?

BELZMAN: Flour, I imagine. Yeah, I really don't know too much about that.

MOORE: Who did the cooking in your family?

BELZMAN: Oh, my grandparents, mother and then we always had help.

MOORE: Mmm.

BELZMAN: The peasants there came in and worked.

MOORE: Where did your grandparents live?

BELZMAN: In uh, well this, my mother's parents lived in um, **Mishlay** [unknown location]. In the village.

MOORE: [interposed] And your

BELZMAN: That's Czechoslovakia.

MOORE: Who owned the, which parents owned the store?

BELZMAN: My grandparents.

MOORE: Which, whose

BELZMAN: My mother's parents.

MOORE: Mother's parents. They

BELZMAN: Yeah.

MOORE: Lived in the same village but not in the same building?

BELZMAN: Yes. We all lived. Ah, oh, you mean before that? Ah. I rea- I don't remember living any where else except in Kassa [a city in Slovakia, now called Košice] for a while.

MOORE: Where's Kassa?

BELZMAN: With. Well that was. I think it's part of Hungary. Really not sure.

MOORE: How do you spell it?

BELZMAN: Ss... Uh, well they call it Kass-itzine. Ah. Czech. The Kassin Hungarian. K-A-S-A.

MOORE: Uh. Now wh- er, the only thing I was asking was in this building with the store where you lived on top

BELZMAN: Yeah.

MOORE: Of the store. Did your grandparents live with you?

BELZMAN: Yes.

MOORE: Oh they did?

BELZMAN: Well they owned the building.

MOORE: So they lived, and so you had two bedrooms. And where did you live, you and your brother

BELZMAN: [interposed] I lived with my, I slept with my parents-grandparents sometimes. Sometimes in the other bedroom. I don't know. It was just, they pushed me around. (laughs)

MOORE: Um. Do you have any anecdotes about your grandparents at all?

BELZMAN: Not really. Our, only thing I remember getting bawled out for selling cigarettes that day.

MOORE: What about religious life at home?

BELZMAN: Uh, my grandparents were very orthodox.

MOORE: And did you um, was there anywhere, uh... temple nearby or a?

BELZMAN: No, they, my grandfather used to walk miles to go to the temple every Saturday.

MOORE: And what about your parents?

BELZMAN: I don't remember them doing anything like that.

MOORE: Um, did they, how did you practice religion in your home?

BELZMAN: Oh, wh-, my mother did like candles on Friday nights.

MOORE: Did you keep kosher?

BELZMAN: Oh yes.

MOORE: And, and uh, what about the high holidays?

BELZMAN: Oh, we kept all of those. Yeah.

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

BELZMAN: No.

MOORE: So um, what about holiday celebrations, what was your favorite?

BELZMAN: I don't know. I think Passover probably.

MOORE: And could you describe how, how you cele

BELZMAN: [interposed] I really can't remember too much about that. Yeah.

MOORE: Um, what about school life?

BELZMAN: I uh, went to school there in the village. And um, uh, they hit you on your hand with the ruler if you weren't good. I, I think I got hit once. I don't why for that, I did. And uh, all the children there used to go school barefooted except me. I

MOORE: Why didn't you go?

BELZMAN: I wore shoes. (laughs) I didn't like the gravel under my feet and. There was no bathroom. And there was a big yard in back of the school where they'd uh, had uh, bushes and kids used to go back there. So I never went. (laughs) 'Course I was allowed to go into the teacher's bathroom for some reason or other. And uh, see there's a caset. There was, you know, difference. They were the peasants and then there were the aristocrat. Or the upper class. And I re, I was considered more the upper class now.

MOORE: But you went to school with both.

BELZMAN: Oh yes.

MOORE: Was the school crowded?

BELZMAN: Uh too, I don't think.

MOORE: How were many people were in your class?

BELZMAN: See, I can't remember. It was, there was more than one grade in each room. You know.

MOORE: Do you remember any teachers or playmates from that time?

BELZMAN: Not really.

MOORE: What was your favorite subject?

BELZMAN: I can't remember.

MOORE: Okay, did you learn English prior to coming to America?

BELZMAN: No.

MOORE: Um, did your parents learn any English before they come?

BELZMAN: My, I don't know if my dad did, but my mother didn't.

MOORE: What did you do for fun and entertainment when you were a child?
What types of games did you play?

BELZMAN: Ah. To tell you the truth, I don't remember any of that. I do remember one aunt, she used to take me into the city once in a while. But I can't remember too much about playing.

MOORE: Well what about America? Whose idea was it to come to America?

BELZMAN: My dad's sister was here in America.

MOORE: Where?

BELZMAN: In Ca-, in California, in Los Angeles. And her, she was married. Uh... and her husband was very ill so her, to ask my father to come and um, work with him in the electric business. They made chandeliers, crystal chandeliers and all that kind of thing. So uh, that's why he, he was here. And then we had to wait three years for our quota. Before they let my mother and his two children come.

MOORE: So um, did you remember them discussing his leaving?

BELZMAN: No.

MOORE: Um... how did he, um, his passage was paid by whom?

BELZMAN: I guess himself. Yeah.

MOORE: And do you remember getting ready yourself to go? Do you remember your mother explaining anything to you?

BELZMAN: No, my, they never told us anything that much. (laughs) Parents today.

MOORE: What about getting um, packing and things like that? Do you remember that?

BELZMAN: Well. No I remember somebody giving me a farewell or- an orange. And then somebody else gave me a diary and they all wrote in it. I still have it.

MOORE: Oh, I see. And do you remember them hugging or?

BELZMAN: Oh yes, everybody kissed us goodbye.

MOORE: [interposed] How did your

BELZMAN: And tears.

MOORE: grandparents feel about it?

BELZMAN: I'm sure they were crying, you know. My mother was crying and I don't know. I just, I can't remember what I was doing. (laughs)

MOORE: And um, how much did you pack? Do you remember what you took with you?

BELZMAN: No.

MOORE: Did you take any personal besides your diary and that orange?

BELZMAN: Uh... I had a necklace I took. And they, my dad said "Don't bring anything because they had everything in America." So my mother left a lot of nice things there that. Sh-she did bring some, lot of linens of hers that she had from her trousseau. But uh, uh, that's about all.

MOORE: And who came on that, then, how, who came? Was your brother?

BELZMAN: My brother and myself and my mother.

MOORE: I see. And how, alright, what port did you leave from?

BELZMAN: Uh, France. Cherbourg, is it?

KM-36/BELZMAN

MOORE: Cherbourg.

BELZMAN: Yeah.

MOORE: And... how did you get from your home to this por- to Cherbourg?

BELZMAN: First we went to Germany. And then we, on the train I guess.

MOORE: And do you remember getting from your house to the train?

BELZMAN: Ah, we were in a wagon.

MOORE: Drawn?

BELZMAN: Drawn horse, horse drawn wagon.

MOORE: And who, who came with you to the station?

BELZMAN: I can't, I don't remember.

MOORE: Uh. And so

BELZMAN: But I can't remember

MOORE: Um.

BELZMAN: I know uh, there were several people there, but I can't remember exactly.

MOORE: But there were people at the station saying goodbye.

BELZMAN: Oh sure. Mmm.

MOORE: Yeah. And so you got on the train and the train took you where?

BELZMAN: I guess to Germany and then we. I remember going to France 'cause my brother, my dad's younger brother, youngest brother was living in Paris. So we stayed with him overnight. Had my first banana there.

MOORE: Mmm.

BELZMAN: Didn't even know what a banana was. And peanuts. (laughs) And he brought them in the shell. And I remember putting the whole thing in our mouths, we didn't know we were supposed to... It was horrible. (laughs)

MOORE: You mean putting the peanuts in the shell in your mouth?

BELZMAN: Er, yeah, right. But

MOORE: (laughs)

BELZMAN: Then he told us how to eat 'em. And um, that's about all I remember in Paris. 'Til we got on the ship. And came here.

MOORE: Alright so, you 'member the ship? What it looked like?

BELZMAN: Um, little bit. It uh, I remember the dining room had big, long, white table um, tables with white table clothes and. And we couldn't speak English. My mother met a man up th-ere, there that could speak

English and Hungarian so he kind of interpreted for her. And uh, 'course she was seasick most of the time.

MOORE: So what class did you

BELZMAN: Second class.

MOORE: Second class, I see. And um, what was the name of the boat?

BELZMAN: *Mauretania* [ship for the British Cunard Line]

MOORE: *Mauretania*.

BELZMAN: Mmm.

MOORE: And um, do you remember the day or the month the sh-, and the year the ship departed?

BELZMAN: That would be on there, wouldn't it?

MOORE: That would be checked later with the, with the uh...

BELZMAN: No, I don't remember. I know it took five days. And my brother got lost on the ship one day or he was. We thought he was lost. In fact, they almost stopped the ship because couldn't find him and they thought maybe he fell overboard. And uh, he had found his way back to the cabin and there he was fine. (laughs)

MOORE: So how long was he lost?

BELZMAN: 'Bout over an hour.

MOORE: [interposed] Did

BELZMAN: That we didn't know where he was. Everybody was running around like mad looking for him and.

MOORE: And he was how old then?

BELZMAN: 'Bout three and a half.

MOORE: I see. Did you look after him on the boat?

BELZMAN: Ahhh this... Somebody else, my mother, was talking to me or had to go downstairs for something and then someone else was supposed to be watching him. And you know, you turn your back on a kid and he's gone. (laughs)

MOORE: And and ah... do you remember what the accommodations where you slept were like?

BELZMAN: Not really. I guess they were. It was in a cabin..

MOORE: And uh, 'member if the food was any good or not?

BELZMAN: Well, I remember eating a lot of mashed potatoes because that's about all we knew how to say. And you had to order your food. And then I saw somebody had a jell-o mould. (laughs) So we pointed to that and said ah... "We'll try. We want that." I didn't like it. I still don't, not too crazy about jell-o. (laughs)

MOORE: So you, you were hindered a little by your language?

BELZMAN: Oh terribly, yes.

MOORE: Did you have a sense of humor about it or was it traumatic?

BELZMAN: I don't know. I guess it was alright. We got along. We didn't starve. And then uh... The night of uh... before we arrived, they had a big ball. And I got to go with them, watch 'em dance and have. My mother was sick. She was seasick most of the time. And my brother was asleep and she said I could go up and watch them dance.

MOORE: And what was that like? Describe the dance.

BELZMAN: Well... you know how they danced in 1920's.

MOORE: No, I don't.

BELZMAN: Oh no, you wouldn't. Well you've seen movies, you have that.

(both laugh)

BELZMAN: I guess, the Charleston. I really don't remember too much about it. But they were having a good time, so I sat there and watched.

MOORE: Do you remember... seeing land for the first time?

BELZMAN: Not really, I don't know. There was a lot of confusion. Oh, I remember um, another thing before we got uh. I don't remember if we got to America or before we got on the ship. We had been playing with some woman's children. She had five children. She was coming. And then, of course, they examine you for cooties and stuff.

MOORE: Cooties. (laughs) Before you got on the ship?

BELZMAN: Yeah. And... they had to shave her, they shaved h-. Oooh, I'm sorry. They shaved her head, and all the children. All five children they found lice. And then, we had been playing with them, so they said we had it too. But I didn't. So they shaved my brother's head. But my mother bribed them and. (laughs) They only shaved underneath my, just in the back underneath so they let. They didn't take all my hair off.

MOORE: So there were children on the boat who had shaved heads?

BELZMAN: Well, they. I don't know where they were after that. I think they were down in steerage or something. Because I never saw them again after that.

MOORE: How did your mother bribe them? With what?

BELZMAN: Money.

MOORE: Money. (laughs) You saw it?

BELZMAN: Ah, no. But that's what she said that. You know, I don't know if she did or not. But she was talking to them and talked them, I don't know if she bribed, gave them anything or not. But she did tell them, talked them out of shaving all my hair off.

MOORE: Mmm. So um, what oth, they, you said that they... Ah, they examined you for cooties, but wh-what, how extensive was that examination before you got on board?

BELZMAN: Ah, they just looked at our hair.

MOORE: I see.

BELZMAN: You know, and.

MOORE: Alright.

BELZMAN: For lice, I guess.

MOORE: Right, and.

BELZMAN: I found cootie.

MOORE: Alright. (laughs) Alright now. What else do you remember about ah, do you remember ever seeing the Statue of Liberty?

BELZMAN: Mmm, no, I don't.

MOORE: So you basically were probably asleep?

BELZMAN: Either that or my mother was trying to get in contact with. I have, had my brother, my father's sister and husband were living in New York. And my mother was planning on staying with them for two, couple of days after we got there. And then, come on to California. Well, our tickets... I don't know what happen, I, all I know is there was a lot of confusion and they took us to Ellis Island, Island. And then she called in from there and... and uh, trying to remember. Ah, I was reading my mother's, she wrote uh, kind of like a diary. She said that our tickets hadn't gotten to New York yet, to come to California. All

she had was a hundred dollars. I know if it was Hungarian money or American money. But anyway, it wasn't enough for us to stay in New York. So we had to stay over, a night in Ellis Island 'til uh, she got her tickets to California. So my aunt and uncle came and visited us there. And that's when my cute little brother took off his tag that they took on us, you know. And hung it on my uncle. So they wouldn't let him off the ship, I mean, off of Ellis Island 'cause. I know if it didn't have a name or just said, foreigner or I don't know what it said. But they had to go get his citizenship papers to show them that he belonged in New York.

MOORE: So your brother took his tag off and put it on the uncle. And th-they said he couldn't leave?

BELZMAN: Mmm.

MOORE: (laughs)

BELZMAN: Oh, he was a devil. (laughs)

MOORE: Your brother?

BELZMAN: Yeah. Oh, he was a devil, my little brother.

MOORE: But he didn't know that would happen?

BELZMAN: Nooo. He didn't. He was just fooling around you know.

MOORE: Um.

(both laugh)

MOORE: But then did they let, little boy go? Did they let your brother go?

BELZMAN: No.

MOORE: They should have taken him. (laughs)

BELZMAN: I don't know. They were stupid. I think. (laughs)

MOORE: Well what do you remember of Ellis Island? Do you 'member getting on?

BELZMAN: I remember my mother, seeing my aunt and uncle for. Then I don't know, they were busy talking. And then it was dinner and they had separate rooms. They had one room for the Jewish people, kosher food. And another room for the Gentile people. And I don't know how I ended up in the Gentile room. (laughs) I guess being blonde and they just herded us over there. Oh, they were very nice. They gave me a doll. They gave my brother some toys.

MOORE: And, on Ellis Island?

BELZMAN: Yeah.

MOORE: And who did that?

BELZMAN: Ah. I don't know if it was. Oh, I've got to get a Kleenex. (sniffs)

MOORE: What?

BELZMAN: My nose is running. Can I? Where was I? Ah.

MOORE: They were very nice to you, you said.

BELZMAN: Oh yes. And we slept in nice, clean beds. And the, I remember the tables, all the table clothes and food. My mother was looking for me and I was in the wrong room. Well being blonde, I guess, they figured.

MOORE: Yeah.

BELZMAN: Couldn't tell whether I was Jewish or not.

MOORE: Wh- um, do you remember being examined medically at Ellis Island?

BELZMAN: No.

MOORE: And you said that ever-, was it clean the nice that?

BELZMAN: [interposed] Yes.

MOORE: Very clean.

BELZMAN: As far as I can remember.

MOORE: So you stayed overnight.

BELZMAN: Mmm.

MOORE: And then what happened?

BELZMAN: Then they took us to the train.

MOORE: Whose they?

BELZMAN: Well, some man. I don't know who he was. I can't remember what he looked like, but.

MOORE: Mmm.

BELZMAN: They escorted to the train and. I remember walking through the streets and kids yelling at us foreigners. 'Cause we had these, still had our tags on.

MOORE: What did your tag say?

BELZMAN: I don't. I don't remember.

MOORE: So people were yelling "foreigners" at you?

BELZMAN: Yeah.

MOORE: From the street?

BELZMAN: Yeah.

MOORE: And. Was that on the way to the train?

BELZMAN: Yeah. I don't know. I guess... did it slip?

(pause)

MOORE: So they. They, is that all they yelled was "foreigners"?

BELZMAN: Yeah. Mmm.

MOORE: And when you got on the train, describe that trip then.

BELZMAN: I can't remember too much. Ah, it took five days to get to California.

MOORE: Did you have a sleeping place?

BELZMAN: I don't remember. It's funny, I can't not remember anything about that train. I don't know it's a blank. (laughs) But it just

MOORE: Alright, where did you go to once you get off the train? Who was it

BELZMAN: [interposed] Los Angeles.

MOORE: And who was there? Was anyone there?

BELZMAN: My dad. Was there, of course. And he took us to my aunt's home. And we, uh, they had just built a new hotel in that neighborhood. I don't know if you're familiar with L.A., it's called Boyle Heights section. It was very exclusive Jewish section in, in those days.

MOORE: Mmm.

BELZMAN: And uh, they built a beautiful hotel there and he had rooms there for us.

MOORE: And do you remember the reunion of your mother and father and?

BELZMAN: Well, I know everybody was crying and kissing and all that kind of stuff, but. And then I remember getting to my aunt's and she had five

children. One was, the youngest was still kind of a baby. I think she was maybe a year old. She had lost her husband in the meantime. He died. And uh. (pause) The children, we couldn't communicate 'cause we couldn't speak English and they couldn't speak Hungarian. My aunt spoke Hungarian, of course, but her children didn't. And uh, I didn't know, they started grabbing my doll that they gave me and I didn't know how to say "Don't take it." So I just let them have it.
(laughs)

MOORE: Do you mean you hit them?

BELZMAN: I didn't know... I mean, I let them keep the doll.

MOORE: Oh, you let them, let them have it.

BELZMAN: Yeah.

MOORE: Meaning you let them have the doll.

BELZMAN: Yeah right. And then my dad took us to, we stayed in a hotel. I don't remember how long we stayed there and. He found an apartment. It's a duplex and we moved there, and.

MOORE: How big was that place?

BELZMAN: Um... I think it was two bedrooms. Mmm.

MOORE: What about indoor plumbing? Did it have indoor plumbing?

BELZMAN: Oh yes, um.

MOORE: Electricity?

BELZMAN: Oh yeah. Mmm. It's nice place.

MOORE: Were there any things you'd never before in California?

BELZMAN: (sighs) Gosh, I guess I. The lights. The neon lights. They weren't that many like that, but it was so. Cars. We didn't have uh, cars where I came from. And the food was different.

MOORE: Now how did you learn English?

BELZMAN: Ah. Just picked it up, I guess. They sent me to school and.

MOORE: How was it in school? Did you have any, did peop-, children tease you in school at all?

BELZMAN: No, no, they were very nice. I um, I had to start from the first grade again. 'Cause I couldn't speak the language. And, but I guess children learn fast. And then, my cousins helped some. The teacher would tell them to tell my aunt what to tell me. So. But I don't know, all of a sudden, I could speak English. Only main thing I loved, chewing gum. My dad used to give me ten cents everyday. I'd buy three packs of gum. Those days, you could get three packages of Wrigley's (laughs) Juicy Fruits. And uh. I would, just love that.

MOORE: Then at school were pe-pe-, you said people, were they kind, how were they to you, toward you?

BELZMAN: I guess they were nice. I don't remember anybody

MOORE: [interposed] Teachers were, how did they help you in any way?

BELZMAN: I really don't remember that part of it.

MOORE: What was that, that you were in?

BELZMAN: Ah... Wilshire Crest. On Wilshire Boulevard.

MOORE: And... di-did you, how did your brother learn English then?

BELZMAN: I guess the same way, just picked it up.

MOORE: How 'bout your mother and father?

BELZMAN: Ah, oh, my father knew how to speak English, of course. And my mother learned gradually.

MOORE: So did you, at home what did you actually speak in Czechoslovakian? Did you speak Hungarian at home or?

BELZMAN: We spoke both in Europe. I mean in, when we were there. And then when we came to America, I, we just spoke Hungarian most of the time.

MOORE: You mean you spoke Jewish and Hungarian?

BELZMAN: I never spoke Jewish.

MOORE: You never spoke Jewish at home?

BELZMAN: No.

MOORE: So you spoke Hungarian?

BELZMAN: And Czech.

MOORE: And Czech.

BELZMAN: Yeah.

MOORE: I thought when you said both, I wasn't quite sure what you meant.

BELZMAN: Yeah.

MOORE: Hungarian an-and

BELZMAN: Czech.

MOORE: Czech. And when you spoke Hungarian.

BELZMAN: Mmm. Only time my parents spoke Jewish was if they didn't want me to know what they're talking about.

MOORE: So your parents did speak

BELZMAN: [interposed] A little. Yeah.

MOORE: A little.

BELZMAN: They weren't, real... And then eventually, we got so that my mother wasn't so religious [not understood].

MOORE: So what about religious life here in the States? Did

BELZMAN: Oh, we went to temple on high holidays. And she still lit the candles on Friday night. And then gradually, she... We got her away from keeping kosher. (laughs)

MOORE: So you abandoned keeping kosher?

BELZMAN: Mmm.

MOORE: When then?

BELZMAN: Oh, it was few years after we got here, I think. But she still, we still, celebrated all the holidays.

MOORE: And um, would you, who was more religious? Were either of your parents more religious than

BELZMAN: [interposed] My mother.

MOORE: Your mother

BELZMAN: Mmm.

MOORE: was more than your father. Um, when you came to California to live, what was your father doing for work?

BELZMAN: He, h-he was partners with my uh, he took over with my... uncle's business, electric business.

MOORE: Is this the uncle who was married to the aunt with five children?

BELZMAN: Yes. Mmm.

MOORE: And so when he died

BELZMAN: Yeah.

MOORE: your father took over?

BELZMAN: Ah yes.

MOORE: Is that correct?

BELZMAN: Y-yes. Uh huh.

MOORE: And um, what um... did you stay at that address, that apartment very long?

BELZMAN: Um... trying to remember how long we were there. We had a maid there too. My brother was born, Freddy. Then my dad bought a h-, I. No, I don't think so, maybe couple of years. Then he bought a house.

MOORE: Where was that house?

BELZMAN: In L- Los Angeles.

MOORE: Same neighborhood?

BELZMAN: No. It was uh... well. West Adams neighborhoods.

MOORE: West Adams.

BELZMAN: Section. West Adams and trying to remember the other street there.
But we had a lot- beautiful home. And uh.

MOORE: How big was the home?

BELZMAN: Uh... two bedrooms, bath, nice kitchen, dinette [small informal dining space off a kitchen], living room, sunken living room.

MOORE: What was the house made of?

BELZMAN: Um, plaster.

MOORE: Plaster right?

BELZMAN: Mmm.

MOORE: And um.

BELZMAN: It's still there. (laughs)

MOORE: [interposed] How did

BELZMAN: I think.

MOORE: your fam-, did your grandparents eventually come over?

BELZMAN: No.

MOORE: So how did your parents adjust to life here in the United States?

BELZMAN: Oh just... I guess they... Just like any other family. We went to school. She raised her children. 'Course during the Depression, my father lost everything. We lost our home. And that was rough. And we had to rent, we rented and things never got really good after that.

MOORE: Do you- did your parents ever... say why they came to the States? They ever discuss any reasons besides knowing someone?

BELZMAN: No.

MOORE: When did they were here did they ever discuss life or any... anything about going back ever?

BELZMAN: Well to visit, but not to stay.

MOORE: So they, they, they basically viewed this as their permanent home?

BELZMAN: Oh yes.

MOORE: And do you think, how did they think about their original decision to come here? Do you think, at the end of their lives, do you think?

BELZMAN: Um, never ment-, said much about it. They were glad they were here.

MOORE: And they never expressed any misgivings about that either during the Depression?

BELZMAN: Oh no. 'Course then we lost my, all our family during the Holocaust.

MOORE: Back?

BELZMAN: In Europe. Mmm. In Hungary.

MOORE: Your grandparents?

BELZMAN: Yeah.

MOORE: You lost everyone in the Holocaust?

BELZMAN: All except one aunt and a cousin.

MOORE: Where? What happened to them? What do you know about that?

BELZMAN: They were taken away by the Germans. As far as we know. I do have uh, one aunt. They never want to talk about it. My aunts. She did, Alan, my brother- my father's one brother... was saved. And 'pew-, uh, nephew.

MOORE: Where, which brother? The one in France?

BELZMAN: No, the one in Hungary. The one in France died when he was very young. He and his bride were uh... what's that gas... in their room.

MOORE: A-a-ph

BELZMAN: Asphyxiated.

MOORE: Yeah.

BELZMAN: Mmm.

MOORE: Um.

BELZMAN: But that was years ago. But had, he had another brother that survived the Holocaust. And my mother had a sister that survived.

MOORE: How did they survive.

BELZMAN: Escape. Well, she was a nurse, working in a hospital and, and told 'em that she wasn't Jewish. I don't know how she got away with it, but she did.

MOORE: So in that sense, they realized it was better being here.

BELZMAN: But it's... they just never liked to talk about it. Like my cousin, I have two cousins in Israel now. This one aunt's son and another aunt's son escaped somehow. But they don't talk about it too much. They just said it was horrible.

MOORE: Right.

BELZMAN: But. And then I have a cousin in Hungary that I just visited. And uh, she doesn't talk about it. Mmm.

MOORE: Um. What about yourself? How did, did you feel, how do you now feel when you look back on your life and your parents' decision to come here?

BELZMAN: Oh, it's wonderful.

MOORE: Do you think that they had a... What were their expectations in first coming? Did they say anything about America to you when you first came?

BELZMAN: No. Just my father was here and this is where we belong with him.

MOORE: And do you think that um... you mentioned some of the obstacles, the Depression, things that happened, do you think that they ev-ever thought it would be as difficult as you just described when they came?

BELZMAN: No. No. My father said everything... of course, then we were well off.

MOORE: Then being when?

BELZMAN: Oh then... you know until the, the Depression. We weren't rich, but we weren't what you'd call poor. We had help in the house and had a beautiful home. And uh, things were, you know, nice. But then, my father wasn't one who could save money. Spend it. (laughs) You got it, spend it! So. During the Depression, we just lost everything.

MOORE: And did he ever comment on that? How life was for him?

BELZMAN: No, but it changed him. He kind of, went downhill after that. Mmm.

MOORE: Um... Any other family tragedies that occurred in the United States after you came here?

BELZMAN: Well, my brother, the one that came here, he died when he was only forty two years old. Had a heart attack. Just... talked to him Monday morning, Tues- Monday night he was gone.

MOORE: Leslie?

BELZMAN: Leslie.

MOORE: Yeah.

BELZMAN: Mmm.

MOORE: And uh, where was he living?

BELZMAN: In Fullerton [Orange County, CA].

MOORE: Well could you describe then uh, is there anything else that happened like this that was surprising in the family and?

BELZMAN: No, not really, everything just, you know...

MOORE: What about your life, could you describe your life? I see uh, a mantle with er-er, I see pictures of family members and.

BELZMAN: Well, I have three boys. Steve, the eldest, he's fifty four? Oh my goodness. (laughs) And Robert is forty, uh, fifty. And Rick is forty.

MOORE: And did you marry? Did you marry?

BELZMAN: Well, my husband, we've been married for fifty five years.

MOORE: So how did you meet your husband?

BELZMAN: Oh! I was uh, I was working in a dress shop and a girlfriend of mine uh... uh... We used to go to her in-laws and play cards Friday night. And my husband was there. He used to be there with all his friends. And then, he came and. One, I remember Easter Sunday, he came with his other friend. And his friend came to the door and wanted to know if I'd go out with him. With Ted that day. And I said "O.K." So we went out and he saw me every day after that, he would. (laughs) And we went together for two and a half years. And then, finally got married. And... been married fifty five years.

MOORE: Wow. And, and before that, how old were you then when you married?

BELZMAN: Twenty one.

MOORE: Twenty one.

BELZMAN: Mmm.

MOORE: So you worked in the

BELZMAN: [interposed] Yeah. No. I was saleslady.

MOORE: I mean saleslady.

BELZMAN: Yeah.

MOORE: Sorry.

BELZMAN: Five dollars a week.

MOORE: And did you work after you were married?

BELZMAN: Yes. Not right away, but. 'Cause I got pregnant right away. And uh, had my son. And then uh... uh... I worked part time.

MOORE: And, and what did you do?

BELZMAN: Saleswork. Same people. I went back to where I

MOORE: [interposed] Where was that?

BELZMAN: In Los Angeles. Um, 41st and Broadway. And um, I worked there on and off for almost thirty years.

MOORE: And what was the place that you worked at?

BELZMAN: At dress shop.

MOORE: A dress shop right?

BELZMAN: Uh huh. And then during the Watts Riots [violent riots in LA in August of 1965], they burned it down. So that's when I didn't have a job anymore. And then uh, I stayed home for a while. And then I went to work at the airport for few months and that was a rat race. I didn't like that. And then I got another job in Torrance [city in the LA county district] and stayed with them for twenty years.

MOORE: Doing, doing?

BELZMAN: Saleswork.

MOORE: Saleswork.

BELZMAN: Mmm.

MOORE: You seem to be cut out

BELZMAN: Yeah.

MOORE: For saleswork.

BELZMAN: Yeah.

MOORE: And for, who were they in Torrance?

BELZMAN: Uh, it was a boutique.

MOORE: A boutique?

BELZMAN: Yeah.

MOORE: Oh. And when you look back on your life now um, do you still in any way feel uh... that you're from Czechoslovakia or Hungary? Do you have any identity that you chose? Pass on language to your children?

BELZMAN: No, we didn't. And uh, I'm sorry I didn't, I'm sorry I forgot how to speak Hungarian. I speak a little bit, but very badly. And Czech, I've forgotten completely. Eh.

MOORE: Do you uh, how do you identity yourself now that?

BELZMAN: I say I'm Hungarian.

MOORE: Mmm. And do you consider

BELZMAN: [interposed] American. But.

MOORE: And do you think that your parents' decision was a sound one to come to this country?

BELZMAN: Oh definitely. I don't think I'd be alive today if I, if we hadn't come here.

MOORE: Well I'd like to thank you on behalf of Ellis Island for helping us with your story

BELZMAN: Oh you're welcome.

MOORE: And uh, we'll send you a copy of this actually.

BELZMAN: Oh great.

MOORE: So um, this is Kate Moore signing off from San Marcos, California on January 27th, 1994.