KM-40
HERMAN (CHAIM, HYMAN) LEVY EISENBERG
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INTERVIEWER: KATE MOORE
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RUSSIA, 1922
AGE 4
PASSAGE ON "THE MAURETANIA"

MOORE: Good afternoon. This is Kate Moore for the National Park Service. Today is the 25th of April 1994. I'm in Chicago, Illinois at the home of Herman Eisenberg, who came from Russia in 1922 when he was four years old. Why don't you begin by giving us your full name and date of birth, please?

EISENBERG: My full name is Herman L., which is short for Levy, Eisenberg. The Levy was my mother's name, because when I went to college it was very popular to have a middle name, so I took the name Levy.

MOORE: How do you spell Levy?

EISENBERG: L-E-V-Y.

MOORE: And where were you born?

EISENBERG: I was born in a little town in Russia called Klatzk, K-L-A-T-Z-K, a town which I don't even know if it survives to this day.

MOORE: What is your birthday, then?

EISENBERG: I was born June 1, 1918.

MOORE: And how big a town was that little town you're from? Do you have any idea?

EISENBERG: It was a village. It was a village made up mostly of Jews with some Gentiles. It's claim to fame was they had a yeshiva. You know what a yeshiva is? Oh, a yeshiva is a theological school, and it was there for some few years before I was born. And, fortunately for them, they all escaped through China at about the beginning of the war. And I know nothing else about Klatzk. No one has ever been able to find it.

MOORE: Do you know the next biggest town?

EISENBERG: The only thing I know about it is it's in the state

of Minsk, so it probably is somewheres near Minsk, I don't know.

MOORE: What was your father's name?

EISENBERG: Uh, my father's name was Benjamin.

MOORE: Benjamin. And what was his occupation?

EISENBERG: He was a locksmith.

MOORE: Do you know from pictures, you mentioned that he died when you were very young . . .

EISENBERG: Yeah.

MOORE: Do you know from pictures what he looked like?

EISENBERG: He was a very handsome man. He had, at the time he died he was young. He was about thirty-six, and as far as I know he was somewhat darker-complected than I am. Otherwise nothing about his personal appearance other than what I see in pictures.

MOORE: Did they tell you anything about his personality or his temperament?

EISENBERG: The only thing I knew about him, he was a very gentle person. But my mother was boss, in the

family as happens in other Jewish families. And he was a hard worker, and apparently, from what all, they've all told me, very gentle and very easy to get along with.

MOORE: Is there any story they tell about your father that typifies him, something from your childhood or anything?

EISENBERG: No, nothing that I remember.

MOORE: What about your mother's name? What was her name?

EISENBERG: Rachel.

MOORE: Rachel. And what was her maiden name?

EISENBERG: Levy, L-E-V-Y.

MOORE: Right. And what was her occupation?

EISENBERG: Housewife, and she also did some small business, especially after my father died. She opened up a little store which was the usual type of country store, sold some flour, potatoes that farmers brought in, apples. I don't think they had much in the way of canned things, milk and cheese primarily.

MOORE: Your father died in what year?

EISENBERG: 1919.

MOORE: And from what cause?

EISENBERG: He died during the flu epidemic.

MOORE: What did your mother look like?

EISENBERG: Mother was short, rotund. She probably was no more than perhaps four feet eleven or five feet, round face, wore glasses, always overweight.

MOORE: And what about her personality and temperament?

EISENBERG: Tough. She was a very, very determined, very tough woman, as I said. Whatever she said was taken as being absolute in our family. She had to be that way in those days because she had to live through the era of the pogroms. Are you familiar with that term? She used to always say that some day she's got to write a book, but apparently there were pogroms around the years of about 1910 in Klatzk. She had a couple of other children other than those of us who came to this country who apparently died of whatever the causes were, whether they died of

some type of infant disease, or it had to do with the type of life they were leading, I don't know.

MOORE: So actually how many children were in your family?

EISENBERG: Well, there were three of us that came to this country. My mother had another child in this country when she remarried after she came to the United States. But three of us, I had an older brother, a sister and myself.

MOORE: And your older brother's name was?

EISENBERG: Isadore.

MOORE: And how much older than you was he?

EISENBERG: Isadore was about sixteen years older than I was, and my sister Bessie was twelve years older.

MOORE: Was her real name Elizabeth or Bessie?

EISENBERG: Bessie. Actually these were all Americanized names, you remember. The original names were Jewish names.

MOORE: When you, was there a story about your mother that you associate with your childhood, something typical that you remember vividly about her?

EISENBERG: If you're talking about the days before they came to this country, the only vivid things that I can think about her was the stories that had to do with the pogrom and how difficult it was for her to make a living during the time of the Russian Revolution, because in, around 1910 was when they had the trouble with the pogroms, and then less than ten years later they had the Bolsheviks. Neither side was very gentle. The pogroms, of course, the soldier that came through they just killed or beat up on whoever was around, and stole whatever they could. I can remember my mother telling the story about how she had to hide a goat in my bed so that the, she called them Cossacks. I don't even know if they were true Cossacks in those days, but so that the Cossacks wouldn't get the goat. And then following that, during the war she was always hiding whatever livestock we had to keep them away from the Bolsheviks.

MOORE: So if the Cossacks didn't get you, the Bolsheviks would.

EISENBERG: That's the idea.

MOORE: What did your mother do for chores around the house? Did she do the cooking?

EISENBERG: My mother did the cooking and the cleaning, whatever had to be done. The laundry was done in a washtub.

MOORE: Before she came here you mentioned children. How many children did she have before she lost?

EISENBERG: To my knowledge, other than the three of us, she lost two before we came to this country.

MOORE: Boys or girls?

EISENBERG: I have no idea.

MOORE: Never talked about it.

EISENBERG: Never talked about it.

MOORE: How did you know about it?

EISENBERG: Well, (he laughs) I learned about it rather curiously. She used to claim that here in the United States children were always sick, and I can remember my brother saying, "Well, they may be sick in this country, but at least they get well. In the old country when they were sick, they died." And

then he would tell my mother that, "Remember you lost two children."

MOORE: Did you ever ask your brother about that later?

EISENBERG: No. That was just, we never went into any detail about that.

MOORE: Now, what about the house that you lived in in that small town? Did they tell you anything about it, or have you pictures of it?

EISENBERG: No pictures of the house. Pictures in those days were rather uncommon. You took pictures only on very grand occasions, a wedding. Nothing of the homes there at all. All I know is, again, from what I was told, we had a very small home. Everybody lived in one room which consisted of a kitchen and some beds. We didn't have a stove in our home. Everything that had to be cooked, like bread, was taken to the baker's, and they had a great-big brick oven where you would put all, whatever you had to bake. Or for the Sabbath, for example, you have to prepare the Sabbath meal on Friday, and you take it there, let it stand on there, a big, brick oven, overnight.

MOORE: How was it heated, the house, then?

EISENBERG: As far as I know there was a little wood stove. I don't know anything more than that.

MOORE: And the house was made of what, construction?

EISENBERG: Wood.

MOORE: Wood. Do you know of any furniture that you had? Was anything brought over here?

EISENBERG: No.

MOORE: Was that small dwelling that you lived in in the town or out of town?

EISENBERG: In the town.

MOORE: And what animals did you keep, then? You mentioned a goat. What other livestock?

EISENBERG: There were, goats and chickens are the two that I can remember. Uh, nothing else. We, I think my mother said that we had either a cat or a dog at one time, but I don't remember about that.

MOORE: Your mother did the cooking. What was your favorite

food?

EISENBERG: Food.

MOORE: I mean, any food that she made that was particularly from that area, that you liked?

EISENBERG: We were brought up to eat whatever we were given, and I've grown up that way. There was no favorites in those days. My mother made soup out of any kind of a vegetable that was available even before some of the soups have become popular. For example, she would make soup out of squash, out of pumpkins. Things that, when I was younger, I thought were rather unseemly. It didn't seem that this was very popular in the United States until recently. Now if you go to a gourmet restaurant you can get that. But we lived on soup of that kind, rice soup, I can remember very specifically.

MOORE: Where were your grandparents? Did they live nearby in that village? Did they live in the village, or . . .

EISENBERG: As far as I know, yes. We probably were in that village for, I would presume, some generations

because there was a considerable amount of marriage among the people that lived there. For example, my mother and my father married another brother and a sister. In other words, my father's brother married my mother's sister, and that's the way most of the family were. I don't know if there were anything closer than that. I don't know if there was any true incestuous relationships. But these were small communities, and you didn't get around to very many communities. You remember this was in the Pale of Russia. I assume you know what the Pale is, yes? So you didn't travel very much.

MOORE: So back to eating then, what was mealtime like? Would you eat together, meals?

EISENBERG: I assume that, I have no idea what it was like.

MOORE: Later did you?

EISENBERG: Oh, yes, of course.

MOORE: So you sat down and had how many meals a day together?

EISENBERG: (he laughs) I haven't the vaguest idea. Whatever, oh, in this country, naturally we had

three meals. We ate like Americans. We had breakfast, lunch and dinner.

MOORE: Sit-down?

EISENBERG: Oh, yes, absolutely, of course.

MOORE: Who were you closest to in your family, as you look back?

EISENBERG: My immediate family? My mother.

MOORE: Your mother. And do you have, did you have any other family members who came to this country?

EISENBERG: Other than my immediate family, no. Not that I, not at that time. We came to this country because we had relatives that brought us over here, sent us the, whatever it was, the five or ten dollars, whatever it cost in steerage.

MOORE: When you were, what did they tell you of religious life at home in that small village?

EISENBERG: Well, everybody was orthodox. There were no questions in those days. We had a small synagogue there. I don't recall anything about it except, and again this may be hearsay from what others have told

me, except this was nothing much more than a wooden shack. And, of course, the Sabbath was very important to all of the people in town. And I know this, my mother continued this practice even when we came to this country. Everything was prepared Friday, and the Sabbath was very important.

MOORE: And you kept kosher?

EISENBERG: Oh, yes.

MOORE: And after you came to this country, did you continue eating . . .

EISENBERG: We still have a kosher home here.

MOORE: And what about, particularly your holiday celebrations? What was your favorite? Now, what did you enjoy. Forget about the word favorite now, just wipe that out. What about, what type of holiday celebrations that were feast days did you celebrate?

EISENBERG: Are you talking about before we came to this country?

MOORE: Well, if you knew of any before.

EISENBERG: No.

MOORE: All right. Did your brothers and sisters talk about going to school at all in Russia?

EISENBERG: In Russia, no. They didn't go to school. They went, they went to the, now it's called Hebrew school. In those days it was called cheder which, translated, it merely means a schoolroom . . .

MOORE: And, uh . . .

EISENBERG: Where you learn prayer, and to read. That was it.

MOORE: So who decided to come to this country, then, first?

EISENBERG: Well, I assume my mother. She had relatives here, and the circumstances there were not very good after the Revolution. And, as I said, they sent her whatever it took to get us steerage. It wasn't very easy getting out of the country because wherever you went in those days it required bribery, and I know from the stories that I've heard that they had to sneak across the border, for example from, it was from Russia to Poland and to Germany, and to, I don't know which seaport it was from Germany. I know that eventually they got to Liverpool, where we

came on the Mauretania to New York. But most of it was done with bribery, and consequently my mother, when she arrived here, had very little in the way of personal baggage. Some clothes, some, I think she brought over some down pillows that she treasured. And it's possible that she may have had a watch of my father's because my brother kept asking me, "Whatever happened to Papa's watch." I haven't the vaguest idea.

MOORE: Now, you were four. Do you have any recollection whatsoever of packing up or leaving Russia?

EISENBERG: No. The only thing I remember is that I was very unhappy at Ellis Island. I can remember my mother and my sister having to reassure me that everything was going to be all right. I don't know exactly what the circumstances were, but that I do remember.

MOORE: Do you remember the boat trip?

EISENBERG: Yes, I fell on the boat trip. I remember somewhere's I have a scar. I remember a fall where they made a fuss over me because I had a laceration of the scalp. That's the only thing I remember about the boat trip.

MOORE: What did your brother or sister or mother tell you about the boat trip? What happened there? Who took care of you? Who tended you?

EISENBERG: My sister and mother, I assume. The only thing I know about the boat trip was that it was terrible.

MOORE: And that people were sick?

EISENBERG: Crowded, sick, vomiting. The steerage, from what they told me, was terrible.

MOORE: Do you remember any reaction to seeing the Statue of Liberty or land for the first time?

EISENBERG: No.

MOORE: What do you remember about Ellis Island?

EISENBERG: All I remember is what they told me, that it was terrible.

MOORE: And what else did they, how did they say it was terrible?

EISENBERG: It was crowded, and I know we were kept there for, I think my sister has it on her tape, for a number of weeks. My mother was afraid that my brother was

going to be sent back because they thought that he had an eye infection, which it turned out apparently he didn't because we weren't sent back, but we were kept there, I think either they must have had some people there in isolation while they were observing them.

MOORE: Were you taken from your mother at that time, or were you with your mother?

EISENBERG: To my knowledge I was with my mother. I don't know.

MOORE: Do you remember, what's the first, all right, so you remember things back in Russia, then. You said you remember there were chickens.

EISENBERG: Yeah, well, again, it may have been stories.

MOORE: Yeah, it's hard to tell. What happened when you got off, finally were let loose, excuse me, released (she laughs) from Ellis Island?

EISENBERG: We went on a long train trip to Madison, Wisconsin.

MOORE: Do you remember that?

EISENBERG: No. I remember getting to Madison, and I remember thinking that it was great to be in town like that.

We were very happy to arrive there. That's all I remember, the pleased expression that my mother had when we finally arrived there.

MOORE: And did relatives, relatives you said that were in the States. What relatives were they? How were they related to your mother?

EISENBERG: My mother had a married brother who was in Madison and her sister was married also in Madison. They're the ones who brought us over to the States, yes.

MOORE: Sponsored you. And they paid your train trip as well, you presume?

EISENBERG: I assume someone did. I'm sure we didn't.

MOORE: What belongings do you have left from before you came? Did anything survive? You mentioned the pocket watch.

EISENBERG: Yes. No, the pocket watch that my brother thought survived, but we have no, no knowledge of it. I have somewheres in my various possessions probably about a dozen or so Russian coins from those days that I never parted with. My mother may have brought over a few things like, I'm not sure whether

the candlesticks that she used were from the old country. They went with my sister when my mother and father died.

MOORE: Did your mother know any English? Did anyone know any English before they came here?

EISENBERG: Oh, no.

MOORE: And what did you speak at home?

EISENBERG: Yiddish.

MOORE: Yiddish. Did your mother know Russian well?

EISENBERG: I have my doubts, but I can't say for sure because we never used any Russian that I know of once we got here.

MOORE: And did you, did your older brothers and sisters know any Russian?

EISENBERG: I don't know. I assume they may have known some, but the way we lived in those days, there was pretty much of a separation there. My mother used to say that the, that the Gentile people around her were friendly people, but there was no, there was no mixing.

MOORE: I just thought she had a store, and if she had a store she might have to . . .

EISENBERG: No, the kind of store she had, probably she had only Yiddish customers.

MOORE: Did you continue using Yiddish at home once you came to this country?

EISENBERG: Yes.

MOORE: Did your mother learn English ever?

EISENBERG: Oh, yes. She went to school. She went to night school. She was very proud of it.

MOORE: Do you have any recollection of them giving you a goodbye or a farewell party in your town before you left?

EISENBERG: I have my doubts. (he laughs) I don't think, the only kind of a goodbye is probably a good many tears and cheers for getting out of Russia.

MOORE: You named the ship. What month and year did that ship depart?

EISENBERG: It had to be in early spring sometime, because I

think the time we arrived in Madison was in April or May.

MOORE: Okay. Now, you say you got to Madison, Wisconsin, and you said that your mother was pleased. What, do you remember anything about where you lived first in Madison?

EISENBERG: Sure.

MOORE: Can you describe that?

EISENBERG: Well, we came to Madison, the family got us a small apartment above a grocery store in Madison. It was not very commodious, but it was greater than what we had . . .

MOORE: How big, would you say?

EISENBERG: Oh, probably from what I recall, either three or four rooms.

MOORE: And how was it lit?

EISENBERG: Electricity. We were in the United States.

MOORE: And at home you used what in Russia before that? Do you know what the lighting was?

EISENBERG: Lamps, kerosene. I presume kerosene lamps or candles.

MOORE: And how was your apartment heated?

EISENBERG: Here?

MOORE: Yes.

EISENBERG: You know, I really don't know. I imagine with steam heat. That's what was popular in those days.

MOORE: And did you have indoor plumbing?

EISENBERG: Of course. We were in the United States.

MOORE: Not everybody did at that time.

EISENBERG: Oh.

MOORE: Okay. Now, how far were family members living then from you? It was in . . .

EISENBERG: In Madison, oh, sure.

MOORE: In the city itself?

EISENBERG: Oh, yes. It was within the city. Our family relatives were all within a couple of blocks. I mean, we were all in very close proximity.

MOORE: Did you get along well with your neighbors?

EISENBERG: For the most part, yes.

MOORE: What about the least part? (she laughs)

EISENBERG: Well, I'm sure neither one of you were ever called a kike. I was.

MOORE: So we will get to that in a moment. So that when you came to the country, did you experience persecution?

EISENBERG: No, no. I wouldn't say anything like persecution. There was a fair amount of bigotry, as there always is, but otherwise, no. As a matter of fact, my boyfriends were Gentile boys. One was a Catholic whose folks were great. They used to have me over every Christmas to admire the Christmas tree. And my other friend was a, came from a Presbyterian family. So we were close with the kids. It was just the adults.

MOORE: That didn't mix very much.

EISENBERG: That's right.

MOORE: What did your mother do when she got here for a job, to support her?

EISENBERG: No sooner did my mother get to Madison than she was married.

MOORE: How did that happen?

EISENBERG: Do you know what a schidoch is? (he laughs) By matchmaking. There was a . . .

MOORE: How do you spell it? How do you spell that, though? It's a Yiddish word.

EISENBERG: I'll have to write it down. When she came there there was a Hebrew school teacher who was an old bachelor. No, he really wasn't old, but, and anyway I considered him my father from that time on. Anyway, they made a match and my mother married him, and as a matter of fact, I don't even remember any time truly before their marriage when we were in Madison, because it seemed as almost immediately I had a father.

MOORE: And so did he support the family?

EISENBERG: Partially. He was a Hebrew school teacher. Hebrew

school teachers didn't make much money, but no sooner did we get settled than did my mother start to cook meals for students who wanted to have kosher meals. And from that apartment, that small apartment, we bought a house, or she bought a house that was about a block away that has like six or seven rooms. So then she rented rooms to students and cooked meals for them.

MOORE: Do you remember going to school?

EISENBERG: Oh, yes.

MOORE: In kindergarten. You started kindergarten soon after you got here.

EISENBERG: Almost immediately.

MOORE: And how was that experienced? Did you know any English before you went to kindergarten?

EISENBERG: Not much, but apparently I learned. I was registered in kindergarten by my new father. From that time on I called him "father." And he took me to school, and tried to register me under my Jewish name, which is Chaim. So they must have objected. I don't recall exactly what was, what it, what

happened. So they changed it to Hyman, which was a popular name.

MOORE: How do you spell Hyman?

EISENBERG: H-Y-M-A-N. But the grocer on the corner asked to see my card from school, and he said, "Hyman is a dirty name." So he changed it to Herman. And they thought that my father did that, so I became Herman from that time on.

MOORE: How were you treated by other classmates? Were there other foreign children in school?

EISENBERG: I don't recall. Oh, sorry. (referring to the microphone) I don't recall at that time. I got along well with the kids in the neighborhood, that's all, that I knew. I got along well in school.

MOORE: Did they call you derogatory names any more?

EISENBERG: Oh, no. No, no. I never had trouble with children. Not until later on when I got a little bit older, then there were, there were problems. But, no, my problem at that age, when I first became friendly with some of the neighborhood boys, one of them particularly had a father who was very intolerant,

and he's the one who called me kike. And I learned after a very short time that it comes about, I don't know what it was, five o'clock or so, that it would be best for me to go home before he got there.

MOORE: He just looked at you and said, "Hey, you're a . . ."

EISENBERG: No. He just said, he would say to my friend's mother, "Get that kike out of here."

MOORE: Nice guy. (she laughs) All right. So at school did you find yourself in any way handicapped because of language at the beginning?

EISENBERG: No. As far as I know, I must have learned fairly rapidly because I had no problems and I went through school very nicely.

MOORE: You mentioned your mother was proud of going to night school for English. How did she do in English?

EISENBERG: Well, she died in 1966, so that means she was here for, what would that be, forty-some years, and she still spoke English with a terrible accent. But she would read the newspaper, and she could speak to

people on the street like many foreigners do. She even went to dancing class.

MOORE: When you talk about religious life, how, what would be different here than it was? You didn't remember very much how it was. How religious was your family?

EISENBERG: Well, the family were very religious because my father was extremely orthodox. My mother naturally was orthodox coming from the old country. So . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

MOORE: So when you say you lived a very strictly orthodox life, what about Friday and Saturday? How did you observe that?

EISENBERG: Well, Friday is when my mother prepared for the Sabbath. And, being the youngest member of the family, I was the one that washed the kitchen floor. And you're too young to remember, when the kitchen floor was washed you put paper over the floor so the floor wouldn't get dirty until evening when it was the Sabbath, and before that time, then you'd take

the paper off so you'd have a nice, clean floor. Nobody does that any more.

MOORE: What about in terms of communications and things, you became incommunicado a little bit, right?

EISENBERG: Well, more or less. I mean, you didn't use the telephone. We would go to the synagogue Friday night, Saturday morning. I imagine I was more often coerced to go. It wasn't quite the fun that it was supposed to be. You had to remember that in the old country going to the synagogue was a social center. There was no other social center. There was nothing else to do. You didn't go to movies or anything. Once we got here, and I'm sure it didn't take me very long before I learned that it was more fun to go to a movie than to go to synagogue. But regardless we observed all the fast days, all the holidays. You asked me before what my favorite holiday was. I remember once I got to this country my favorite holiday was Passover because Passover we would get things that we wouldn't get during the year, and I'm not just talking about matzo, which I never liked. But we would have more meat. We would have, my mother would buy a salami. These were the

kind of things that we normally, I shouldn't say normally, but we usually didn't have. And we would play games, and when we were young we would go, of course, to the synagogue. But then most of the religious Jews were there, and the kids were there, so we could play around, have a good time.

MOORE: So was there any change in your mother's religious behavior when she came here? She continued it, or did . . .

EISENBERG: My mother continued, yes. For as long as she lived she was very orthodox. And that remained the same. That's probably one of the reasons that we're still, we still follow the old kosher style, although I must admit that I'm not kosher outside of the house.

MOORE: What about, you said your father adopted, your father adopted you.

EISENBERG: Yes.

MOORE: He was a Hebrew school teacher.

EISENBERG: A Hebrew school teacher.

MOORE: Did you go to Hebrew school?

EISENBERG: Oh, yes, definitely.

MOORE: And did you, were you a good student?

EISENBERG: No.

MOORE: Because I was thinking, you know, shoemaker's children have no shoes. (she laughs)

EISENBERG: No, no. I was not a good student. As a matter of fact, my children were better students in Hebrew school than I was. It was primarily because I was rebelling, I think, of the strict type of orthodoxy that my father ran. But I would go. I was always more or less obedient except for the fact that I didn't study much, and I never learned to read Hebrew very well. I can do it, but not well. And probably among other things, I probably was prejudiced, because I felt that being a Hebrew school teacher was probably about the lowest profession in the world. And you would say me, "Why is that? Teaching is a great profession." But being a Hebrew school teacher in those days was very difficult because your livelihood depended upon the

goodwill of the congregants. And not only the goodwill, but how much money they were willing to put up to pay for the teacher. My father never made more than twenty dollars a week in his best days, so you can see why I felt that that was not a great profession to be in.

MOORE: Well, you seem to do well in school.

EISENBERG: Yes, I was a good student.

MOORE: And do you remember any particular teachers that you liked very much in school, who helped you?

EISENBERG: Is someone talking to you? Yes. I was in love with an English teacher by the name of Miss Richmond.

MOORE: I didn't quite mean that, but you can elaborate if you like to. (she laughs)

EISENBERG: No. I just remember she was a lovely young woman there, and English happened to be one of my favorite subjects. So it wasn't really a very dramatic love affair.

MOORE: How old were you?

EISENBERG: I don't know. Fourteen, fifteen, something like

that.

MOORE: And . . .

EISENBERG: Asexual, I might add.

MOORE: Thank you for that detail.

EISENBERG: Well, that's why you asked me how old I was.
(they laugh)

MOORE: I just wanted to see how precocious you were.
(she laughs)

EISENBERG: No, not that precocious.

MOORE: All right. Now, did you stay, you said, you mentioned the house that your mother had for students to live in?

EISENBERG: She, yes. We bought this house.

MOORE: Did you stay at that address, or did you ever move within Madison?

EISENBERG: In that house, no. As a matter of fact, we lived in that house until I left after, I left Madison after school.

MOORE: What was the address of that house?

EISENBERG: 313 North Francis Street.

MOORE: 313 North Francis Street. And that house was the one where the students originally lived?

EISENBERG: Yes. No, no, not originally. It was originally lived in by somebody else, but when my mother bought it there were four bedrooms upstairs that she rented to students.

MOORE: And you lived downstairs?

EISENBERG: I lived downstairs. My brother and I slept on a pull-out couch.

MOORE: Now . . .

EISENBERG: Would you like to know how much those rooms rented for in those days?

MOORE: (she laughs) Yes, you can tell me that.

EISENBERG: Two dollars a week, and if they ate it was three dollars. Imagine those days?

MOORE: So how would you describe your family members' adjustment to life in the states, your mother and

father and sister?

EISENBERG: It was great. I mean, we were made for Americans. We adjusted very rapidly. My brother, who I think took no time at all, but he developed a pretty good business being a newspaper distributor. And my sister went to school, and she would have odd jobs in stores like that. But we were, other than being, still being kosher and living at home and being Jews, we were complete Americans.

MOORE: Well, do you think that, did you feel foreign at all then?

EISENBERG: I never did, no.

MOORE: Did any family tragedy occur during the years following your coming here to this country?

EISENBERG: In my immediate family? No. We were generally not particularly well-off, but we were otherwise well enough and happy enough compared to other people. We had no problems from the standpoint of health until my mother died.

MOORE: Well, we got up through your schooling up to the point of fourteen or fifteen when you were enamored

of Miss Richmond, or whatever her name was. Now, tell us a little bit about your life after that, okay? (she laughs) In terms of your career and your family.

EISENBERG: You must remember that part of our background was the importance of study. It got to the point where I think I probably would never bring home papers to show my father unless it was either a perfect paper or an A paper or something like that, because that was what was expected. There were no ifs, ands or buts. There were no excuses. He would never punish me for anything except that in order to receive his approbation, you know, to make him happy, I brought home good papers. So we worked, we worked hard. But other, I played out with the neighborhood kids the same as all of them did. And other than for the fact that it got to the point that I knew that I wouldn't be too friendly in those days with too many of our, the Gentiles, we had no particular problems. By the time I got to high school I even dated, surreptitiously, a couple of non-Jewish girls, which my mother I'm sure never knew about. But I became very liberal in a short period of time.

MOORE: What about your schooling after high school?

EISENBERG: Well, after high school I went to the university in Madison, and then I followed it up when I went to the medical school in Madison.

MOORE: And what did you specialize in, or what was your . . .

EISENBERG: I was an internist.

MOORE: An internist. And how about marriage? I just met your wife.

EISENBERG: Yes. When I came to Chicago as an intern in 1944, and I ran into this nurse on the fourth floor of Mt. Sinai Hospital, and that was it. I came here in March of '43 and we were married in August.

MOORE: So say you ran into her, you mean you met her.

EISENBERG: I probably ran into her purposefully.
(they laugh)

MOORE: Slowly.

EISENBERG: Yes.

MOORE: And did you have children?

EISENBERG: Yes. Yes, we've got, we have three children, and eight grandchildren.

MOORE: The three children, could you name them and give their ages?

EISENBERG: Oh, yes. We have, my oldest child is Howard, who is forty-six and is the dean of the law school at Little Rock. And my second son is Gerald, who is forty-two and who is a rheumatologist. And my daughter is, I'm going to get killed, forty or forty-one, perhaps, and she is a nutritionist and a family counselor.

MOORE: And when you look back on your life and your family's life, how do you feel your mother felt about coming to this country?

EISENBERG: Grateful.

MOORE: And do you think that any of you would ever consider about going back ever?

EISENBERG: Not in the wildest. No one ever considered that. As a matter of fact, people have asked me if I'd like to go back and visit and I don't even know that

I would be particularly interested in that. Some of my friends have gone back. I've had relatives have gone back, although nobody has been able to find our little village. But no, I have no interest. I spent two-and-a-half years over there during the war, and that was enough.

MOORE: Over there where?

EISENBERG: Oh, in Europe, I'm sorry.

MOORE: And what part of Europe?

EISENBERG: Well, I started in England, and then I went over to France. We, my outfit went through Germany. We were in on a couple of the concentration camps. And other than that, of course, I'd gone back to visit in France, England, Israel, Italy, the usual.

MOORE: So basically you can . . .

EISENBERG: Not the Far . . .

MOORE: You can sum up that you were happy that your family came here.

EISENBERG: I'm not only happy, I probably wouldn't be alive if we didn't get here.

MOORE: I'd like to thank you on behalf of the Ellis Island Oral History Project. This is Kate Moore in Chicago, Illinois on April 25, 1994 with Herman Eisenberg.