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MOLLY DEKTOR (DEAKTOR) EPSTEIN

BIRTH DATE: DECEMBER 5, 1905

INTERVIEW DATE: JULY 18, 1994

RUNNING TIME: 52:07

INTERVIEWER: KATE MOORE

RECORDING ENGINEER: DR. KRISTA VARANTOLA

INTERVIEW LOCATION: PITTSBURGH, PA

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: CECELIA MUSSELMAN, 12/1994

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR. 2/1995

RUSSIA VIA ROUMANIA, 1921

AGE 16

SHIP NAME NOT RECALLED

MOORE: Good morning, this is Kate Moore for the National Park Service and today is the 18th of July, 1994 and I'm Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania at the home of Molly Epstein who came to the United States from Russia in 1921 when she was...

EPSTEIN: April, 1921

MOORE: April, 1921...

EPSTEIN: May or April...

MOORE: May or April, when she was sixteen years old.

All, right, why don't we begin by you giving us your full name and date of birth, please. What is your full name?

EPSTEIN: Molly.

MOORE: Molly...

EPSTEIN: It was changed. That's the same as Molly but the

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Russian Molly's...

MOORE: Okay, and what was your last name?

EPSTEIN: Dektor.

MOORE: And how do you spell that?

EPSTEIN: D-E-K-T-O-R, Dektor. D-E-K-T-O-R.

MOORE: D-E... Here we have it written D-E-A-K-T-O-R...

EPSTEIN: Right. They're the same.

MOORE: Right, okay. They're the same, okay. And your... then your married name?

EPSTEIN: Epstein.

MOORE: Mm hm. Would you spell that, please?

EPSTEIN: E-P-S-T-E-I-N.

MOORE: All right. And, ah, where were you born?

EPSTEIN: I was born in, it was a small town, Pa-, Pavolich.

MOORE: Do you know how to spell that at all?

EPSTEIN: I don't think so. It was a quite small little town.

MOORE: And where was that town near, the nearest big town?

EPSTEIN: Near, near Kiev.

MOORE: Near Kiev. And what was your birthdate? What's your birthday?

EPSTEIN: Birthday? In December.

MOORE: December...

EPSTEIN: The fifth.

MOORE: The fifth?

EPSTEIN: I tell you how it is. Years ago they didn't remember things like your birthday, like my mother used to say you're born before, like, ah, before Christmas, New Year's, Hanukkah, so they pick a day.

MOORE: Right, so you knew according to the holi-, high holidays?

EPSTEIN: Yeah, that's a, be-, before the, that wasn't high holiday, you know, it was Hanukkah when you give Hanukkah presents. Before they pick a day, the day before, that's all.

MOORE: And so they estimated December 5th?

EPSTEIN: Yeah.

MOORE: And the year is 19...

EPSTEIN: '05.

MOORE: 1905. Okay. Now...

EPSTEIN: It may have been a week before, a week after. I couldn't tell you.

MOORE: Yeah,. and so the small town you mentioned near Kiev, where you were born, what size was that? How small?

EPSTEIN: It was very small. It was a few, a few Jewish and Gentile, but what it was transportation, train transportation used to go. It was a small little town.

MOORE: So, how many families would you would be there? Lived in that town?

EPSTEIN: It would be about a hundred at that time...

MOORE: A hundred?

EPSTEIN: Yeah.

MOORE: People or families?

EPSTEIN: Families.

MOORE: A hundred families.

EPSTEIN: A hundred.

MOORE: And what, how would describe to us who have never been there the town... what the town looked like?

EPSTEIN: Like a small town, everyone has a house they live in and a little garden and, ah, like a cow or two cow, a horse, you know.

MOORE: And what about the countryside? How did it look like?

EPSTEIN: Countryside? All right.

MOORE: And what was the major industry in that town? What did people do mostly?

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EPSTEIN: That's all, visit the trains pass by. So then, they buy it. They used to sell it.

MOORE: Buy and sell?

EPSTEIN: Yeah.

MOORE: There was a train industry?

EPSTEIN: The trains passed by and the stuff they shopped.

MOORE: Oh, I see. People stopped and shopped. And, um, what was your father's name?

EPSTEIN: Max, (?). Max.

MOORE: Max. M-A-X?

EPSTEIN: M-A-X. My husband's name was Max, too.

MOORE: Yeah? And what was, what was your father's occupation?

EPSTEIN: Ah, butcher.

MOORE: He was a butcher. And, ah, could you tell us what your father looked like? Could you describe him to us?

EPSTEIN: He was a nice looking, nice built man.

MOORE: Ah, eyes color? Hair color?

EPSTEIN: Brown, dark. I look like him, dark.

MOORE: Uh huh, dark eyes and hair?

EPSTEIN: Yeah.

MOORE: How tall was he about?

EPSTEIN: Oh, he was about 5'8" anyway, I'm the shortest

one in the family. I am.

MOORE: 5'8". And what about your father's personality and temperament?

EPSTEIN: He was a good natured man.

MOORE: Good natured?

EPSTEIN: Yes.

MOORE: And is there any story about your father you associate with your childhood? Anything you remember special?

EPSTEIN: Well, I remember my father's mother, the grandmother. Years ago they had a lot of children. I know there six living. He had a brother and a sister, a sister passed away and left her son, and they helped him. My mother raised him. My mother was a very good natured woman.

MOORE: Hmm. And what was your mother's name?

EPSTEIN: Eh, Sarah.

MOORE: How do you spell that?

EPSTEIN: Sarah.

MOORE: Oh, Sarah. S-A-R-A-H?

EPSTEIN: Yeah.

MOORE: And what was her maiden name, your mother?

EPSTEIN: Levenson.

MOORE: Levenson?

EPSTEIN: Yeah.

MOORE: All right, and is that, how would you spell that, Levenson, L-E-V-E-N-S-O-N?

EPSTEIN: I don't know, offhand. She was, she didn't know her father, you know.

MOORE: Oh, I see. Okay, what was her occupation, your mother, if any?

EPSTEIN: Nothing, ah, a wife, a housekeeper.

MOORE: House, housewife. Mm hm.

EPSTEIN: She cooked, she baked, you know. That was her occupation, was to cook and to bake.

MOORE: And what did she look like? How would you describe her?

EPSTEIN: She was a beautiful looking woman. You could still see the picture there. (she gestures to a photograph) She was beautiful looking.

MOORE: And what...

EPSTEIN: Well built.

MOORE: And how tall was she about?

EPSTEIN: She was taller than I was.

MOORE: About 5...

EPSTEIN: 5'3".

MOORE: 5'3". And how about eyes and hair?

EPSTEIN: Eh, they were like your shade.

MOORE: Um, blondish?

EPSTEIN: Yeah, blondish.

MOORE: And eyes?

EPSTEIN: Same thing.

MOORE: Blue?

EPSTEIN: Yeah. Grayish.

MOORE: Grayish blue eyes, yeah. And what about her, you said she was good natured. Tell us about your mother.

EPSTEIN: She was very good natured. She used to help out people whenever she could. Very good natured. Whenever she had money she always used to, always used to dump the (?). She love a good (?) the money. Used to give us it.

MOORE: So she was generous?

EPSTEIN: Very generous. Very good natured.

MOORE: And what were her chores around the house? You said she cooked and she baked...

EPSTEIN: And that's all.

MOORE: Did she clean as well?

EPSTEIN: No. Cleaning not much. We grew up, our sister, we used to do the work in the house.

MOORE: Did you have servants at all?

EPSTEIN: No.

MOORE: And, um, you said that your mother took in a child of your father's sister. Is there...

EPSTEIN: When the father died she raised that boy.

MOORE: And how old was your mother when she did that?

EPSTEIN: When she died?

MOORE: No, the boy died before you were born or after you were born?

EPSTEIN: The boy?

MOORE: Yeah.

EPSTEIN: You mean our sister? The boy, well, she married him and then they came to this country.

MOORE: Oh, I see. I see. Okay, I got that wrong. okay, um, now what about brothers and sisters? How many brothers and sisters did you have?

EPSTEIN: Three brothers and one sister.

MOORE: And could you name all of you in order?

EPSTEIN: Yeah. Sam, Irving, and Joe and then Lise.

MOORE: All right, so Sam, Irving or Irvy?

EPSTEIN: Irving. Irving. And Joe.

MOORE: And Joe and then you came along? So they had three boys first?

EPSTEIN: Ah, yeah, I was the youngest and then my sister.

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MOORE: And then your sis-...

EPSTEIN: Was after Irving. And then Joe.

MOORE: And then your sister is named...

EPSTEIN: Lise.

MOORE: Lise. And then came Joe?

EPSTEIN: Then, ah, Joe came and I came the last one.

MOORE: Oh, you were the last one.

EPSTEIN: Mother had, she had, ah, twins after me but they didn't live.

MOORE: Oh, I see, okay. And what do you remember about your house back home in the old country? What do you remember?

EPSTEIN: Well, it was a small, a small house and there wasn't too many rooms and we slept three in one room, you know.

MOORE: How many rooms were there about would you say?

EPSTEIN: We had four rooms.

MOORE: Uh huh, and how was the house...

EPSTEIN: (?)

MOORE: How did you heat the house?

EPSTEIN: The heat? You know it had like the two walls and in between the two walls was like you used to lead up. They used to get the, get the heat from them.

MOORE: Uh huh. And...

EPSTEIN: And the oven.

MOORE: An oven, mm hm. And what about... what was your house made of?

EPSTEIN: Oh, from charcoal, you know, cheap. (she laughs)

MOORE: No, but I mean, when they built the house was it made of...

EPSTEIN: Frame, frame, frame.

MOORE: A frame house?

EPSTEIN: Yeah, a frame and it had plaster in it.

MOORE: Now what about lighting? How was your house lit?

EPSTEIN: With a lamp, with gas.

MOORE: Gas lamps?

EPSTEIN: Yeah.

MOORE: Mm hm. And did you have, you had a garden, did you?

EPSTEIN: Oh, yes.

MOORE: And what did you grow in the garden?

EPSTEIN: Oh, uh, vegetables then.

MOORE: What type of vegetables, like...

EPSTEIN: I don't know like potatoes, carrots, stuff like that. That was onions in this garden.

MOORE: And did you, did you actually eat from the garden? A majority of your vegetables came from

your garden?

EPSTEIN: The mo-, sure they used to, yeah, oh yeah. They get it and they cook it and eat it.

MOORE: Mm hm. Now what type of furniture did you have in that house? Was it store-bought or homemade?

EPSTEIN: Store-bought years ago, you know. It was like, it wasn't fancy furniture. We weren't, we were not rich people.

MOORE: Um, did you keep animals?

EPSTEIN: Yeah, we had a cow and had a horse.

MOORE: And anything else?

EPSTEIN: Oh, chickens, you know.

MOORE: Chickens, yeah. And, um, how about plumbing? How was the plumbing? Where did you get your water?

EPSTEIN: We got it, we had a well.

MOORE: You had a well.

EPSTEIN: Yes, and we would go with a bucket and bring, ah, pull water up.

MOORE: And what about toilet facilities? Were they...

EPSTEIN: Ah, outside.

MOORE: Outhouse. Now, you mentioned your mom did the cooking and baking.

EPSTEIN: Yes.

MOORE: What was your favorite food as a child?

EPSTEIN: I ate anything. I was not a picky. My sister was the one, the picky. I wasn't.

MOORE: And, um, did anyone else live with you? Grandparents? Did they live with you?

EPSTEIN: My, mm, uh, my father's mother, my grandmother.

MOORE: Your grandmother lived with you, too. Did she help cook?

EPSTEIN: No.

MOORE: No. Okay. Now, what about the kitchen? Could you describe your kitchen?

EPSTEIN: They have a built-in oven, you know.

MOORE: A built-in oven.

EPSTEIN: Yeah and that's all, you know. They cook it and you have a pot and there's water in it and you put it in there to cook.

MOORE: Uh huh, and, um, how did you take baths?

EPSTEIN: Bath? We had, uh, was a big, ah, what did they have, they had a bathhouse. You could go there once a month...

MOORE: A bathhouse?

EPSTEIN: Yes, they had...

MOORE: In town?

EPSTEIN: Yeah, in that city and you would go and take a

bath.

MOORE: All right, and so, how far was your house from town?

EPSTEIN: Close, close.

MOORE: Within walking distance?

EPSTEIN: Walking, yeah.

MOORE: How did your family get about from place to place? Did you...

EPSTEIN: With a horse and a wagon.

MOORE: A horse and wagon. Um, now, when you ate your meals, back to mealtime, now, when you ate your meals how did your family organize meals? Did you eat them separately, together, how?

EPSTEIN: We ate together, you know, when it was cooked, a pot roasr you'd bring to the table and everybody was eating.

MOORE: Everybody sat down at one table. And where was that table?

EPSTEIN: Yeah, yeah. It was like in the dining room. The dining room, the living room was one room, you know.

MOORE: Mm hm, okay, and, um, how would you describe you grandmother? You said your grandmother lived with you. Were you especially close to her?

EPSTEIN: Yes, she was an old woman, yeah. A nice, quiet woman. She could, she was short and fat and didn't do anything. (Ms. Moore laughs) Died. She didn't feel good and she died.

MOORE: Oh. Um, who were you closest to in the family?

EPSTEIN: Here?

MOORE: No, in, in, back when you were a child. Who was closest to you in feelings? Who were you...

EPSTEIN: You're always close to your mother, you know that.

MOORE: Um, all right, what about religious life? What denominat-, what were you religiously?

EPSTEIN: Jewish.

MOORE: Yeah, and, and...

EPSTEIN: I was religious. Jewish religious. That's Orthodox.

MOORE: And were your parents?

EPSTEIN: Yeah.

MOORE: And do they keep kosher?

EPSTEIN: Strictly kosher.

MOORE: Strictly kosher. Your father was a butcher.

EPSTEIN: Yeah.

MOORE: Therefore, he was a, he was a kosher butcher?

EPSTEIN: Yeah.

MOORE: Yeah. And um, did you say prayers daily?

EPSTEIN: Yeah.

MOORE: And tell me how you, how did you observe your religion? What did you do?

EPSTEIN: When there's a holiday you observe the holidays religious way, you know.

MOORE: How about, how about in sundown and sunup, did you, did you observe the Sabbath that way?

EPSTEIN: Sabbath is the seventh day.

MOORE: Mm hm.

EPSTEIN: Sabbath and Shabbas, you know, you close everything up and then you don't do nothing. You rest. That day is the, you know, you the six days you work and the seventh day you rest.

MOORE: And did, um, how, how, was there a synagogue nearby?

EPSTEIN: There was a small place, like a little chapel.

MOORE: A little chapel.

EPSTEIN: Wasn't many people so a small chapel.

MOORE: And, um, did you ever experience any religious persecution when you were a child?

EPSTEIN: Plenty. Jewish people were, ah, had plenty persecution, you know, then down there.

MOORE: How did, how did, and what form did it take when

you were a child?

EPSTEIN: We had to hide ourselves, you know, because when they passed by, the soldiers, they were looking for women. To rape them.

MOORE: And where did you hide?

EPSTEIN: We'd hide in the, in the stable where the cows lie, and we hide in the roof we'd hide. They pass by, you stay there half hour, saying they were hunting.

MOORE: And how about, how about in terms of the community? Was the community anti-Semitic, too?

EPSTEIN: Well, good and bad.

MOORE: It was a mix.

EPSTEIN: Yeah, a mix. Some of them were very nice and some of them, oh, they couldn't honestly help themselves. They rob.

MOORE: Yeah. So, when you said you had to hide, how often did this happen?

EPSTEIN: Well, when they kept, when they went by, you know, soldiers, so you had to hide.

MOORE: How often did the soldiers come by?

EPSTEIN: I couldn't tell you exactly how often it was. Mostly a couple weeks and sometimes in a couple

days passed by they...

MOORE: Do you know anyone that was hurt? Do you know?

EPSTEIN: Oh, yeah. A couple of them got killed.

MOORE: So they, they were women that got killed?

EPSTEIN: Men.

MOORE: Men.

EPSTEIN: Women were raped.

MOORE: Did you know women that were raped?

EPSTEIN: If they were raped they wouldn't tell, you see.

MOORE: Yeah.

EPSTEIN: And another thing, they, ah, find us playing  
with, died.

MOORE: Mm. Um, now what about holi-, what was your  
favorite holiday as a child?

EPSTEIN: Every holiday was a favorite when I would prepare  
extra and you bake extra, you know.

MOORE: And, and what type of, what type of baking and  
food was good at holidays?

EPSTEIN: Bread, coffeecake, different spices to make,  
roasting it.

MOORE: What about school life? Did you go to school?

EPSTEIN: Not much. You couldn't, you know, it's, ah, when  
there was, thank God there wasn't any schools so  
they didn't bother with it.

MOORE: And, um, did you go at all to school, though?

EPSTEIN: A little bit, not too much.

MOORE: A little bit. What age did you go?

EPSTEIN: I wouldn't tell you exactly what age, you know, and then you studied in the house as much as you could. During the war, you know, there was a war at that time, the 1913 war. Yeah.

MOORE: And how did the war affect your life?

EPSTEIN: Oh, well, sure it affect everybody's life down there.

MOORE: How? How? What happened?

EPSTEIN: You were a, you know, you were afraid for getting killed.

MOORE: Did, did, was there anyone in your family fight in the war?

EPSTEIN: They were too young at that point.

MOORE: And what about, did you ever suffer from hunger?

EPSTEIN: No.

MOORE: No. Because you lived...

EPSTEIN: We had the, we, we were saving (?) of food. We were a labor where the master was a gentlepeople, they were very nice. My mother used to help them out. They tried to save us, find a place where to hide.

MOORE: And what were their names? Do you remember?

EPSTEIN: I don't remember. No.

MOORE: And they tried to save you when?

EPSTEIN: When they, those soldiers came around, (?), you know, and they were looking for trouble so they tried to find a place where to hide.

MOORE: Now, whose soldiers were they?

EPSTEIN: The one that lived there in that time, one or the other were fighting and in the country, you know. The one for the, for the czar, you know.

MOORE: For the czar, yeah...

EPSTEIN: And, you know, and, ah, one was Bolsheviks, you know. They were fighting one country with the other were fighting.

MOORE: So, Cossacks.

EPSTEIN: The Cossacks, too, was with them.

MOORE: So it was either Cossacks...

EPSTEIN: The Cossacks was for the, for the, for the, for the czar, you know. They want the king to be in.

MOORE: But also the Bolshevik soldiers came through?

EPSTEIN: Bolsheviks were fighting with the Cossacks.

MOORE: And did they come and try to hurt?

EPSTEIN: Ah, this is, the, the soldiers, you know, were the ones going by and they to help the, sure they

tried to hurt.

MOORE: Yeah. Um, now, what did you do for entertainment when you were a child? Did you have games that you played?

EPSTEIN: We didn't have much time because of the war all the time.

MOORE: Yeah. How was your area affected? Was there destruction in your part of the country?

EPSTEIN: Where we lived was no, not so bad, some of them was completely destroyed, you know. From this city we went to another city. It wasn't good. You struggle for the (?) when years are bad.

MOORE: Now, how did you get to the United States? When did the idea come into your family's minds'?

EPSTEIN: It was when they, 1919. When we were just able to go. We didn't, couldn't get in touch with, my brother, the oldest one, was here.

MOORE: Now, how did he get here?

EPSTEIN: He got, he left just before the war broke out. Exactly. And he was there in America.

MOORE: How did he get to the United, who paid for him to come here?

EPSTEIN: I think my, we paid, my father.

MOORE: And so, did he have any contact person here?

EPSTEIN: We couldn't get our contact at that time. During the war you couldn't get a contact when it was, when there wasn't, it wasn't one country like, Russia fight the, ah, with Germany. No, then there was no war, see, there was...

MOORE: No, but I mean...

EPSTEIN: ...no peace. There was no peace.

MOORE: Right. But before the war, when your brother came and you say you think you father paid the money for him to come...

EPSTEIN: To get out of the...

MOORE: Did he know anybody here?

EPSTEIN: He, yeah, my father had a brother here.

MOORE: Your father had a brother. And where was your father's brother?

EPSTEIN: He was here in, ah, in Pittsburgh.

MOORE: In Pittsburgh.

EPSTEIN: Yeah.

MOORE: So your oldest brother...

EPSTEIN: He got married, not my, my father's. He had one brother. When they called him for the army, so he left and he came here, lived in America. His wife's parent lived in America, so they brought them over.

MOORE: And what did you father's brother do? Your uncle, what did he do for a living?

EPSTEIN: In America?

MOORE: Mm hm.

EPSTEIN: He bought a butcher shop. He know how to cut meats in Europe, so he become a butcher.

MOORE: A butcher here.

EPSTEIN: And my brother when he came here he became a butcher, too.

MOORE: Ah, hah. So you father and you uncle and your brother were butchers.

EPSTEIN: See, they had experience with that. They were, they knew, they went to.

MOORE: Right. And, so, your brother came first and then came the war. Now, how did it happen that you all came over?

EPSTEIN: We, we tried to leave here and go so we had a little bit money saved up. We dig the money in the backyard in the, the ground dig the money. And the neighbor were very nice people and they knew. We told them we, where we hide the money and the gold up, you know. And then we wait until 1920 to leave. And to go on the train was war, terrible thing, oh, you're afraid. But we

did, see, the woman went with us and we came to Bessarabia, Roumania.

MOORE: No, wait a minute, though, okay, now, what woman came with you?

EPSTEIN: The neighbor.

MOORE: The neighbor woman came with you.

EPSTEIN: Yeah, the Gentile neighbor, yeah.

MOORE: I see. So you said...

EPSTEIN: She was a Gentile woman, you know, she could talk with the soldiers. And she's one of their kind.  
And they...

MOORE: And she...

EPSTEIN: Didn't touch us with her.

MOORE: I see. Okay, let's...

EPSTEIN: At the border to Bessarabia. The border. The border with, ah, Russia with Bessarabia. And there, you know, you have somebody to go to the border. They paid him that night to take you over. And at night they took us over there.

MOORE: Took you over the border of...

EPSTEIN: To, to Bess-, to Roumania.

MOORE: To Roumania.

EPSTEIN: Yeah.

MOORE: Now, before all this happened, let's back up a

bit, you said you hid your money in the ground.

EPSTEIN: Yeah. We couldn't keep any like silver, gold or paper money, whatever we had in the backyard garden. But they, they knew. We told them.

MOORE: The neighbors, yeah.

EPSTEIN: Yeah, the neighbors we, we were very close with them. They were, you know, about a, we used to help them out. You know, poor people. And she carried the money and gave it to us. And there we had a little bit of money in Bessarabia, to manage there and then the Jewish people, they have help them out. We had one room for five people but we, we managed.

MOORE: Ah, and so what, do you remember getting ready to come to the Untied States? What did your mother know and father know about this country?

EPSTEIN: Nothing. They said, "In America it is peaceful. You'll be able to live no matter what you have." And there was no peace, during those years there was nothing but war. Fighting and fighting. In and out was fighting. Fights, you know? Only a couple generals have, because a couple of people they got to fight and you want in the, you have a couple states, you know how it is. Bolsheviks,

eh, got a hold of it.

MOORE: Did your parents speak English at all before coming here?

EPSTEIN: No I coul-, I couldn't read English nothing.

MOORE: So, what did your uncle tell your father of life here? Do you remember?

EPSTEIN: Nothing. You came and you worked hard and you had, you got married you had one child after another. Ah, had six children one after the other...

MOORE: Who did, your father?

EPSTEIN: My father's brother.

MOORE: Your father's brother, okay.

EPSTEIN: Yeah. Four worked and he had, one thing he had was (?) people were not ready to work and then and that's all and you make a living.

MOORE: Mm hm. Now, what did you do to prepare to leave? Do you remember preparing?

EPSTEIN: When we left nothing. We had one outfit on yourself and one you took along. You don't take nothing with you. You couldn't carry no baggage because...

MOORE: Did you tell anyone you were leaving?

EPSTEIN: No, the fr-, down there nobody would... You get

up at night, you leave at night and that's all.

MOORE: So you left secretly.

EPSTEIN: You couldn't carry...

MOORE: You had to leave secretly.

EPSTEIN: Yeah. You couldn't take anything because they'll take it away from you they'll see you carrying anything.

MOORE: Did you bring any ba-, any type of religious things at all?

EPSTEIN: We couldn't take anything. We couldn't even take some clothes to change.

MOORE: Oh, okay. Yeah, okay.

EPSTEIN: Whatever we had holding and another set to change underwear. But we came to Roumanian Bessarabia.

MOORE: Mm hm.

EPSTEIN: And there we settled and we waited to get a hold of, my brother to let him know, in America so he can send us some money. We didn't know it. There, my brother, there came date (?) he knew there's people coming to look for us. So my father went a little, sent a one week a little smaller, a little bigger city get back the (?) and he was talking to him. He says I have a son in America but I don't know how to get a hold of

him and he asked him what name and he told him and he said well, "I know him." And he was there, too. And we, ah, we met him and we met him here...

MOORE: Who was he now? Who are you talking about knew him?

EPSTEIN: One fellow down there, you know. Who he...

MOORE: Just a fellow in the town?

EPSTEIN: The fellow from the, from America, too. He happened to talk to him. I don't remember his name. And he said, "I know your son," and that's how he got in touch with him.

MOORE: Oh, so it was by chance?

EPSTEIN: By chance, the a, and my brother was here, there in Roumania to look for us. So they got a hold of him. When we met him, he was very sick, had a very bad cold, but, you know, he didn't take care of himself. So you took him back to, to, to our place, the one room and he was very sick. He lay there, very high fever, typhus, and we thought he'll never pull through and my, the other brother was the nurse. Nursed him day and night. Supposed to be typhus very contagious so we have to get in and he get in and he lay next to him.

He didn't to get it. He was laying next to him, watching him. And the clothes what used to change what, what he brought with him they a little bit money got so it's a good thing we had a little monay to need to help him survive. Don't forget, he couldn't, ask his wife and we did ask his wife but she had no money to send us. He had a butcher shop and he left it and, find out when, and, and, you know, down, down, the, ah, market and he shared with a relative to manage. He managed in his pocket. He, for four generations, nothing left. She was pouring money, pouring money, didn't succeed.

MOORE: Mm hm. Now, wait a minute, so... So, you were in Roumania, now how did you get then from Roumania to the States?

EPSTEIN: Roumania we waited for him, then he gets better, then he gets papers for us. He got them. Because he was American, so he got papers to us. We went to Belgium. Then we were waiting to get a boat to go over.

MOORE: Now, how at night did you leave secretly? By what means?

EPSTEIN: Where? In Russia?

MOORE: When you came from your house and they came to get you at night...

EPSTEIN: We, well, at night with that woman. We went with her. We had to go by train to go to the border.

MOORE: And where was the train? It stopped right at your town?

EPSTEIN: Yeah.

MOORE: So, you went by train to the border.

EPSTEIN: Yes.

MOORE: You stayed in Roumania.

EPSTEIN: At the border you hire someone, you know there's always, ah, you pay him and then there's a security guard, you pay them and you knew exactly what day to come, what night to come. You take the small boat and they take you over. So someone they did, someone they did drown them because they was afraid.

MOORE: Oh, I see, yeah.

EPSTEIN: Yeah. And then when we got in, into the city, there was a very nice people who, they find a place where to stay.

MOORE: Mm hm. Okay, so, you stayed, how long in Roumania did you stay at...

EPSTEIN: Oh, ah, we were there from (?) from September to the middle of the winter.

MOORE: All right, the middle of the winter. And then your brother arranged the papers.

EPSTEIN: And he go, after he was very sick with typhus and he laid a couple weeks. When he got better he didn't even know where he is, his mind was mixed and then, eh, like I told, my younger brother was with him. He was helping him out with everything.

MOORE: So, did he ever recover fully from typhus?

EPSTEIN: Yes, he got better. Took a while, you know.

MOORE: And, so, did he come back with you to the United States?

EPSTEIN: Yes.

MOORE: And how many people went to the United States together in your group? Who was traveling with you then?

EPSTEIN: My two brothers, with the older brother, one was sick, they went first and my sister came later with her husband. She went separate.

MOORE: Which sister?

EPSTEIN: I had one sister.

MOORE: Lise?

EPSTEIN: Lise, yeah. She's married.

MOORE: And she married then?

EPSTEIN: She was married in Russia. She came with her husband.

MOORE: I see, okay. Now your mother and father came, too?

EPSTEIN: Yeah.

MOORE: And that woman came with you? The neighbor?

EPSTEIN: No, she was a Russian. She went back home.

MOORE: She went back home.

EPSTEIN: Yeah.

MOORE: She didn't stay in Roumania?

EPSTEIN: No, she didn't stay anywheres. She only took us to the border.

MOORE: Only to the border...

EPSTEIN: She got paid, you know. And after we, eh, were in America they were, you know, they struggled for a living. So we used to help them out with money, mail, mail them. They were very deserve it.

MOORE: And did they...

EPSTEIN: They could get food, money...

MOORE: And did they receive them?

EPSTEIN: Yes, they did.

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MOORE: Very good. Um, so you came from Belgium. From what port did you come?

EPSTEIN: I don't remember, tell what port...

MOORE: Let's me see if they have it here in your papers here...

EPSTEIN: Let's see...

MOORE: Okay, it says you came, port of departure it just says Belgium. Do you remember which port it was at all?

EPSTEIN: It's, I, I know, I couldn't think of it, tell you...

MOORE: That's okay. And the year that you departed was 1921 it has here.

EPSTEIN: Actually 1921 here.

MOORE: Yeah.

EPSTEIN: There we were in 1920.

MOORE: 1920. How long did you stay in Belgium?

EPSTEIN: In Belgium we were not long, about two, three weeks, that's all. In Roumania we were most of the time, about seven, eight months.

MOORE: Seven, eight months in Roumania then a couple, couple weeks in Belgium.

EPSTEIN: Yeah. 'Til they, they had the ship, yeah.

MOORE: Do you remember the name of the ship?

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EPSTEIN: I can't think of it. I, I don't remember a lot of things.

MOORE: Okay. Um, so what about the, um, tell me about, you had only the clothes on your back.

EPSTEIN: We didn't have nothing. Clothes and another one to change and we had nothing.

MOORE: Mm hm. And um...

EPSTEIN: We came to America, we had nothing. There was none to give us, there was no one to give us anything and we had a lot of relatives here but they didn't bother to offer any help.

MOORE: All right, we're going to take a break here for a second.

EPSTEIN: What?

MOORE: We're going to change the tape. Very good. You're doing a good job. You remember! What do you mean you don't remember?

EPSTEIN: I've got to...

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

MOORE: All right, um, tell me about the ship voyage. What kind of accomodations did you have?

EPSTEIN: The, they were nice there because we are kosher, we didn't eat nothing so we had with us a couple cans sardines and, ah, piece of salami and that we managed with the bread.

MOORE: How long was the voyage?

EPSTEIN: Not, ah, not long. About seven, eight days.

MOORE: Seven, eight days. And where, what class did you travel?

EPSTEIN: On the third class. We were poor and my brother was broke so we couldn't afford any better and nobody helped us. Plain talk.

MOORE: Did you go hungry on the boat then? You said there was...

EPSTEIN: No, I didn't, the bread and, and, and a piece of salami was satisfied.

MOORE: All right, what about, um, how did you sleep?

EPSTEIN: Bunk beds.

MOORE: Bunk beds, right. Um, and, were any of you sick?

EPSTEIN: Not me. But one friend of ours who came with us, she was sick. Me, I come from the front of the boat I was going (?) and they need it to run the motors works everything. I didn't mind. I felt good on the boat.

MOORE: You said a friend came with you. Who came with

you?

EPSTEIN: Another family from the same town.

MOORE: The same town, another family. Were they Jewish?

EPSTEIN: Yeah, yeah.

MOORE: And they were...

EPSTEIN: A mother with two sons and a daughter. She was very (?) were two sons and their (?) were in Cleveland.

MOORE: In Cleveland, uh huh.

EPSTEIN: They were traveling the same way...

MOORE: Right. And, um, what, was there anything unusual or something for the first time that you saw on the boat? Do you remember any, what do you remember about the boat trip?

EPSTEIN: Nothing.

MOORE: Okay. And, um, what about the trip, what about, was it, what kind of sea conditions were they? What was the sea like? Was it...

EPSTEIN: I didn't mind any rough.

MOORE: Was it rough?

EPSTEIN: It was (?) For me, I didn't mind it. It didn't bother me.

MOORE: Were other people affected?

EPSTEIN: Yes. There was the girl, she was sick during the

most of the, the (?). Oh, she was sick. I didn't mind it, didn't bother me. I was strong.

MOORE: And did you have any activities on the boat that fun at all? No? Um, do you remember seeing land for the first time?

EPSTEIN: Land, no. We came here, we didn't see. We heard that land was (unclear) where that Stat-, you know, (?) Island 'til somebody picked us up, ah...

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

EPSTEIN: Yeah.

MOORE: And did it mean anything to you?

EPSTEIN: We were happy to see it because we'd really reached the border, you know.

MOORE: And what was the atmosphere on the boat then?

EPSTEIN: It really didn't bother some who were sick, you know, they felt good, you know. They know they're coming to something to get to their eyes with something and sure they, you know they felt good about it. And here, when they came here they had to go on their own.

MOORE: Right. So after Ellis Island, after, um, Statue of Liberty what happened? The boat, what

happened with the boat? Tell me how you, you mentioned Ellis Island, going through Ellis Island. How did you get from the boat to Ellis Island?

EPSTEIN: They took us off, you know, with gangway and we had to wait for someone to come and, uh, guide us, to pick us up.

MOORE: Uh, huh, and you said they took us off. Did you go on another boat?

EPSTEIN: No, no. We arrived in New York, you know (?)

MOORE: Right, okay, so back to Ellis Island. Do you, what do you remember? Do you remember anything about the Ellis Island? Do you remember being processed?

EPSTEIN: No, no. The only thing they examined if you're well, if anybody got, uh, some kind of sickness they wouldn't let you through. And if you had trouble with you eyes, you know.

MOORE: So, they gave you an examination.

EPSTEIN: That's all.

MOORE: And what did they examine? How thoroughly?

EPSTEIN: Listen, they, they want to check your eyes, your ears, you know, to see if you're well enough to come in.

MOORE: Did you have any fear that you would be rejected at any time?

EPSTEIN: I was all right. I was healthy. I was all right.

MOORE: Did anybody in your family have any fear?

EPSTEIN: No, no.

MOORE: Your older brother?

EPSTEIN: No, they were fine.

MOORE: They were fine. And do you remember, how did you manage not knowing English?

EPSTEIN: Well, the, the, there were Jewish people here. Ah, you come in to the city and they would, they're mostly Jewish people, so you learn.

MOORE: Mm hm. Now, you had mentioned do you spoke...

EPSTEIN: There were others...

MOORE: You spoke, you spoke, what language did you speak at home?

EPSTEIN: Russian.

MOORE: Russian at home?

EPSTEIN: Yes.

MOORE: Or did you speak Jewish at home?

EPSTEIN: Jewish, too.

MOORE: Did you mix the two or how did you...

EPSTEIN: We didn't mix them. We had a, when we talked

Russian, we talked Russian and mostly we talked Jewish like at night or with the, with the people, with the friends because they were Jewish.

MOORE: Now, so you understood Russian, too.

EPSTEIN: Oh, sure.

MOORE: You spoke Russian. So you're fluent in both languages. When you were at Ellis Island did they ever speak to you in Jewish or Russian, the officials?

EPSTEIN: The officials spoke to you, uh, in Jewish.

MOORE: They did.

EPSTEIN: Not in Russian, their native language was English.

MOORE: But did they talk in any other language at Ellis Island? Do you remember? All right, and, um, did you stay overnight at Ellis Island? No. You were only there a short while?

EPSTEIN: Yes. Because we, because my brother left before us. Several days before us. So he arranged to pick us up.

MOORE: He didn't have to go through Ellis Island?

EPSTEIN: He was already American. He was here already.

MOORE: Right. I see.

EPSTEIN: See he was married here and he a wife and a child and he picked us up and when we came here in New York we took the train and we came to Pittsburgh and we went straight to his house. He lived on Penn Avenue.

MOORE: On Penn Avenue?

EPSTEIN: Yes, yes.

MOORE: How big a house did he have?

EPSTEIN: It was a second floor, you know, that second and third floor. It was an old house but, ah, the rooms to stay in.

MOORE: And so your whole family came there.

EPSTEIN: Yeah. We all came to that house, yes.

MOORE: Do you remember saying goodbye to the other family? The family that came with you?

EPSTEIN: Oh, we were for a long time good friends.

MOORE: Did you, did you go on the train together?

EPSTEIN: They went to Cleveland.

MOORE: So, did they go on a different train?

EPSTEIN: They must have taken the train to Cleveland and we went to Pittsburgh.

MOORE: And you kept in contact afterwards with them?

EPSTEIN: Yes. Mm hm, we went to, you know, they used to come to, to see us, you know, after they had a

car they used to drive in.

MOORE: And so when you got here, um, what type of house, you say the house was an old house your brother had.

EPSTEIN: Yeah.

MOORE: Did it have indoor plumbing?

EPSTEIN: Yes, yeah. It had indoor, indoor plumbing.

MOORE: What about lighting? What type of lighting?

EPSTEIN: Electric.

MOORE: You had electric.

EPSTEIN: Yeah, yeah. We had electric, yeah.

MOORE: Now you came to, you came all the way from your small town to the United States. Was there anything here that you were suprised at at first or that was new?

EPSTEIN: Well, when we came in we came in to the poor neighborhood, that I went into that houses the poor. This was suprising. I didn't see anything special, good. So we managed to (?) and whenever we came to (?) my brothers was asking where they went to work where they used to get and the neighbors, they used to come and chop the wood for them. Because it was, we needed that wood. Made a couple dollars, a couple ruble and for

that you bought bread, you bought meat, something to eat. We saved a few dollars and my brother...

MOORE: Back in Roumania, you mean?

EPSTEIN: Yeah, in when my brother got sick you had to pay the doctor so it's a good thing we had a few dollars to pay the doctors because he didn't know nothing. He couldn't sign a check or nothing. They say that he was very, very sick. We never thought he's gonna pull through. And in the same house when the son got sick with the same thing and he was a young boy, at ten years old, and he died from typhus. And he pulled through. He was, ah, he was a religious man, my brother, believed in God. We started, ah, the, were praying for him.

MOORE: And, all right, so when you got here to this country, um, who, where did you family find work? Did you, did you find work immediately or did you have problems finding work?

EPSTEIN: It took a couple weeks and then some people, she says well did we want to work. We had to work because we had nothing to buy some living. She started work in a factory, machine, to sew pants. So I went there and I knew how to stitch on the

machine and I got a job like that.

MOORE: So you worked sewing in a factory. How long did you work there?

EPSTEIN: A couple years. And I was fast, I made good money.

MOORE: And where did you, how about your father? Where did he find work?

EPSTEIN: Well, he was a butcher, an experienced butcher, so he found work. If you had some kind of experience, you know, you could get work.

MOORE: Mm hm. And what about your brothers?

EPSTEIN: My brother. One brother went in, and my brother, my older brother left a store for his wife to take care of. I told you his cousin cleaned them out. And, uh, the house was his. So he, uh, he went in the store to work with him. To build up the store. There was no car and when you made a order they carried the order on the, on the shoulders. If you needed some food, from butcher some extra meat you go up and you take it, you carry it. He worked hard. My other brother got a job some relation. That the one that my mother raised, that nephew. Paid him ten dollars a week. (?) you know, years ago. They're a

refugee, you know, and they take advantage. So you work for ten dollars a week. So for a while they worked, my two brothers, worked in that store what he left and (?) and they built it up.

When you work yourself you build it up, you care (?) and the help. And so then, then later they bought us a, they rented a place in North Side and my, ah, in a, they had experience where they could cut the meat. So, they went to work, they manage and he made a success in that store. A very big success. Everything you have to have a little bit luck. Some people they don't make it but they make very good. It worked out with my brothers. They built up one store, they built up another store and they were (?) market and they were pretty rich people, my brothers.

MOORE: Now then how did your mother and father adjust to life here?

EPSTEIN: Fine. They were happy.

MOORE: They were happy. Do you think that they, they thought that their original decision was a good one to come here?

EPSTEIN: Yes. It was a good one. I know we could, we couldn't stay there. Was possible to be there.

MOORE: Now tell me how did you, you, you have picture of all your grandchildren and husband. How did you meet your husband? And what age were you?

EPSTEIN: Oh, I think twenty, twenty-one, I don't remember any.

MOORE: Mm hm. And where were you working at that time?

EPSTEIN: I worked and I sewed. Then I, Mother was not well, we, she was dying, she was, she had typhus fever in Europe. She was not well. She had blood pressure very high. So I had to stay home and take care of everything. You know, cooking, baking, stuff like that.

MOORE: When you said the pressure, what pressure?

EPSTEIN: Blood pressure.

MOORE: Blood pressure.

EPSTEIN: She had to be on a diet and she didn't believe in diet, you know, old timer. (?) and my son, god bless him. I lost my son. That's the worst part of it. I had two children, my daughter and my son. My daughter was in high school. She got a job. She was very good in school. We wanted to go for kind of a (?) but she got a job years ago. (Her microphone falls)

MOORE: Hold on. Hold on

EPSTEIN: Years ago she worked. (static) That was Melissa and she was good and kind. And she met her husband and this and then they...

MOORE: I'm sorry. Hold on for a second here. We're going to fix this up.

EPSTEIN: And then they got married.

MOORE: Hold on for just a second here. We're going to fix this. Okay, now, let's move back a little bit. How did you meet your husband?

EPSTEIN: You go up to the Jewish organization, you know, and that's the way you meet them.

MOORE: And, um, what was your husband's name?

EPSTEIN: Max.

MOORE: Max like your father.

EPSTEIN: Yeah, yeah.

MOORE: And what did he do for a living?

EPSTEIN: He was a salesman.

MOORE: He was a salesman.

EPSTEIN: Yeah.

MOORE: And, um, you had two children, a daughter and a son.

EPSTEIN: Yeah.

MOORE: And you mentioned the tragedy of your son.

EPSTEIN: Yeah. I had a son who was a very good boy. He

was born bad with club feet and I done everything in the world to correct that. He was a plastic surgeon, a big surgeon, and the, you know, after years ago they graduate medical school they have to go to the service. He was drafted and he was, ah, so he went in the Air Force and then, ah, in, in, in Texas, Wichita, Texas there he stayed two years and one year made for three years there.

MOORE: Where?

EPSTEIN: Wichita, Texas.

MOORE: Ah hah, in Texas. Yeah.

EPSTEIN: He was there and from there he came back and he remained under the wage, ah, you know. You know, you had to pay so much for medical school so when they were, ah, remained in the service you didn't have to pay. So the rate went up, so you went and they sent him to Japan. He was in Japan three years and he done wonderful there. A lot of surgey, plastic surgery. With the Japanese doctors in their hospitals, you know, after that. Made money, bought a lot of things, he got married when he was in there. Ah, in Texas. She was a registered nurse. She worked, ah, I talk about him. Very similar. Same, similar. And

then while he was in the service, ah, the pilots were, they used to call him to different... to different states, you know, to help out. But you take a murder, see, they used to call him, they used to fly him, they used to fly him, he used to do the flying, the pilot. So what. They went after a (?) and they got in small planes and he went on the plane and then he got killed.

MOORE: Where?

EPSTEIN: In California.

MOORE: In California.

EPSTEIN: Oh, it's been ten years, twelve years ago already.

MOORE: Oh I see, twelve years ago.

EPSTEIN: Yeah.

MOORE: And, um, did he have children?

EPSTEIN: Yeah, a son and a daughter. And a darling little girl in California. And there he had a beautiful office fixed up. He had a very big practice, he had. Oh, my (she is moved) the little boy is play boy. But the girl, she was very good in school when I came. She said to him she was going to be a doctor. And he told her I'm going to fix up all the (?) you're going to work with

me. So you know what? She's in medical school.

And she's a A-student.

MOORE: In medical school right now?

EPSTEIN: Yeah.

MOORE: And what does your daughter do?

EPSTEIN: My daughter was a social worker. Now she's a loafer. She's retired. Her husband retired so she retired, too.

MOORE: A loafer.

EPSTEIN: She's a beach bum. She's at the beach three or four times a week.

MOORE: And um...

EPSTEIN: She does social work and she was very good there. She actually worked for twenty years. When you retire, he said, he was all by himself so she retired. So she's better off.

MOORE: Now when you look back on you life, you've come a long distance to live in this country and, and you had a hard life at the beginning. How do you feel now about coming here?

EPSTEIN: They're the best state. Here people wants to, people wants to work. They want they could make the best of it.

MOORE: Did you ever experience in this country

persecution? Religious persecution?

EPSTEIN: No.

MOORE: So you feel that you're able to, to live more freely here?

EPSTEIN: Sure.

MOORE: Did anyone in your family ever think of going back?

EPSTEIN: God forbid, we'd never go back.

MOORE: I would like to thank you on behalf of Ellis Island for helping us and giving us the opportunity...

EPSTEIN: What they go back for? For what? Nothing. They know they could work, work and they have nothing.

MOORE: But here you felt it was different?

EPSTEIN: Here if you work hard, if you want you could build yourself up. If you want to work and you're not lazy you made a success. If anybody's lazy, it doesn't make any difference. They don't make a success nowheres. My daughter, now thank goodness, she works, she was working and then, then her two kids, she has two children and both of them went to school. She worked for them to college for the boy, for the girl and the

daughter was, God, I told her when, when yesterday, she had like her daughter was a good girl, she listened to her mother. She was a nice, social little, girl not like those girls in those days. Whatever she bought on sale was all right.

She was pleased and then, and that boy, who she married, he lives just one block away. He went to kindergarten with her. And she, she's already eighteen years and three with the (?) and the kindergarten and that's his brother and there was no (?) back then. The kindergarten, that's right. And he went after them (?) and she graduate to, ah, high school and she went into college and he went to school. Then he asked her to go out. So my daughter says what are you doing, you're doing nothing. Jeff was such a nice boy, a nice family. Go with him to a show and that was it, they went together for five years and after he, he's a pharmacist. After he graduate she got engaged. A year later they got married. So Diane, now she's a schoolteacher. And in between she used to go work . She'd, she's a (?) part-time. And the manager down there always thought she's a very, a very quiet

girl. Says anytime you don't, eh, going to, eh, you know, they don't call you to be a schoolteacher, come in. You don't have to call in, just come in. Part-time, yeah. But she got out. She worked in a, you know, she went to ah, she was teaching one place, you know. 'Til she, ah, after she got pregnant and you know she had to stop. But you know, they were nice, they worked together and they worked themself up. He's a pharmacist. His father has a drugstore downstairs and he didn't like pharmacy. He went because he's a tennis player. He got part scholarship on it. But you, you know what he does? Everything. Went, in the, in the real estate business he went in. Always, you know, people, you know, they lost their homes from the mortgage he took it over and went in, he was in real estate businesses. In, what it is, he does anything. Once when they stole the car and the cops they, they pulled down the car. They asked him what do you have in the car? He says I have a bucket, I have, ah, a paint bottle, I have paint. He said what do you do and the register when he showed his license, he's a pharmacist.

He's a handyman.

MOORE: Well, you know with your life here you just...  
you just made me wonder is your life as religious  
here as, did you maintain...

EPSTEIN: I am.

MOORE: You are.

EPSTEIN: But not my children.

MOORE: But not your children. So you keep kosher?

EPSTEIN: I keep strictly kosher because I had my mother  
and father with me. I was the youngest. My  
mother, she passed away. My father remained  
lived with me for seventeen years and he was  
religious and I kept strictly kosher.

MOORE: I noticed on your door...

EPSTEIN: The mezuzah, yeah. But I kept the house strictly  
kosher, I didn't mix.

MOORE: And your children do not keep kosher?

EPSTEIN: No. They go to the temple but the, the meat is  
not cheap. The kosher is very high or the  
chicken meat and they don't go there either. I  
don't mix when I do go there I buy something  
kosher.

MOORE: Oh, I see. So the, so they respect your wishes.

EPSTEIN: Yeah. And I used to go to California to my son.

She use to go the butcher and buy some extra kosher meat and the butcher used to pack, mark on the package "kosher". And my son said mother we'll go out. What's the difference. They're the same thing. I say, "Honey, I'm too old to change." And now I wouldn't change, you know, I wouldn't change already. I'm kosher registered.

Downstairs where's the meat. People look like don't have time to eat. My neighbor usually goes and gets chicken and mashed potatoes and apple sauce and she pays \$2.50, 2.65 and then that's it and, and I don't.

MOORE: Yeah.

EPSTEIN: I buy chicken. And I make it the way I like it.

MOORE: Mm. Well, I'd like to thank you for giving us this chance to talk to you for Ellis Island's Oral History Pro...

EPSTEIN: A copy of that?

MOORE: And, uh, we'll sent you a copy of this as well.

EPSTEIN: Thanks.

MOORE: And, um, this is Kate Moore on the 18th of July, 1994 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania with Molly Epstein who, um, came from Russia in 1921 and I'm

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signing off for the Ellis Island Oral History  
Project.