

NPS-139

SADIE ROTHSTEIN SALTZMAN

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INTERVIEWER: KATHY CONNELLY

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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 3/1995

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 5/1995

AUSTRIA, 1912

AGE 8

SHIP: KAISER WILHELM III

PORT: BREMEN

RESIDENCES:

- **AUSTRIA-HUNGARY: BOLEKHOV**
- **US: NEWARK, NJ**

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: MUSIC CAN BE HEARD IN THE BACKGROUND THROUGHOUT MOST OF THE RECORDING OF THIS INTERVIEW. THERE ARE OTHER PEOPLE WITH MRS. SALTZMAN, AT LEAST TWO WOMEN AND PROBABLY ONE MALE, WHO OCCASIONALLY INTERJECT DURING THE INTERVIEW. THIS INTERVIEW MOST LIKELY WAS CONDUCTED ON ELLIS ISLAND WHEN THE ABANDONED MAIN BUILDING WAS USED FOR TOURS BY THE NATIONAL PARK SERVICE. PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., DIRECTOR OF ORAL HISTORY, 5/25/1995.

SALTZMAN: Okay. I -- my name when --- when I came here --- he came to the Ellis Island --- Castle Garden, actually it was --- in nine-- uh, August the 20th, 1912. My name was that time, Sadie Rothstein.

CONNELLY: Could you spell that?

SALTZMAN: R-O-T --- R-O-T-H-S-T-E-I-N, like Roth and Stein, you understand?

That's it. And I came here with a lady by the name of Betty Schwartz. She couldn't --- she couldn't speak a word of Polish or -- or Roma--- or German.

And that's a --- that's a language that they --- that the --- the agent ---- would I call him the agent? --- the ones that -- you know -- ask different questions -- you know. They want to know who do I go to in America. I was eight years old then -- you know --. And I told him --- I told him that I was going to my Mom. My Mom was in Mount Clemens, Michigan that time.

You see what it is? She sent the --- the cards, what do you call, the tickets -- the tickets to Austria and -- and she ---- she wrote a letter to that lady -- a young lady --- she was around twenty-four years old. She was a fiancée of a cousin of mine, and they were engaged in Romania -- you know. And when he came to the U.S.A., and that ti-- and she brought me over. And they -- so, anyhow -- wha--- wha I'm trying to say --- I'm tryin' to say --- and she couldn't speak a word -- she couldn't speak a wo-- Engl--- she couldn't speak a word of Polish or Roma-- like I told you. And so I was the interpreter -- you know. So meanwhile, while I was in -- you know -- I was so excited. I went to --- I was --- we had a beautiful farm in a little town by the name ---in Austria, I can even tell you the name. Bolekhov is the name.

CONNELLY: How do you spell that?

SALTZMAN: B-O-L-E-C Bol --- wait a minute. B-O-L-E, Bolechov --- C-H-O-V, yeah, yeah.

VOICE: It's on the Hungarian ---

SALTZMAN: It's in Austria.

VOICE: Austrian and Polish border.

SALTZMAN: Yeah. Anyhow, so I --- it was a big farm. And I --- in the most nature, the kids go barefooted --- and I got a splinter. And here -- you know -- all excited, I was going to America -- going to America. And on the boat I was suffering terrible. She kept threatening me. Her name was Betty Schwartz. She kept threatening me, "They'll throw you into the water." Because the doctor went around asks, "Anybody wants help? Anybody wants help?" And anyhow, I had two pair of socks. They were dark. I think they must have been navy blue. So she kept ---they smelled terrible, so she kept washing 'em. So during the day I took 'em off -- you know. And --- but we had to go in the-- had to go somewheres ---- to the bathroom or something. I had to ----- I had to take them off, and my foot was killing me. And that was a whole sce --- that was a whole --- it was at least --- it took at least two weeks to come -- you know. The ship was a ---I -- I can even remember Kaiser Wilhelm the ----- Kaiser Wilhelm III, I think, the second or the third.

CONNELLY: Did you leave from Hamburg?

SALTZMAN: August the -- I left from Bremen --- Bremen, Germany. And I think it was, I'm trying to think whether it was --- whether it was Kaiser Wilhelm the second or the third --- you know this--. I came August 20th, 1912. It said --- I wanted the citizenship papers, so I called up Foley Square and they gave me the information. [Clears throat] Anyhow, what else do you want to know? So --

CONNELLY: Well ---

SALTZMAN: I got here to Ellis Island, and – and -- they say, "Now, who is your next of kin?" I said, "My mother. She is in Detroit, Michigan." She --- she worked. You see, during this --- during the winter she worked in Westinghouse in Newark, New Jersey. But there was no work during the summertime, and she had a relative in Mt. Clemens, Michigan. Years ago they, they --- you had ---- it was a town where – where they had the sulfur baths. Nowadays, when you have arthritis and rheumatism, they give you injections. I think the place is closed. It's --- I asked them if there was a Mt. Clemens, Michigan. There was no such name.

VOICE: There is a Mt. Clemens.

SALTZMAN: There is a Mt. Clemens, Michigan?

CONNELLY: Could you spell that? Mount . . .

VOICE: Mount, M-T.- C-L-E-M-E-N-S. Mount Clemens.

SALTZMAN: So my Mom worked there, in a relative's. In the – they -- she had a hotel, so she did --- she waited on tables, she cooked. She did everything in order to make a dollar during the summertime. What happens --- what happens? She gets, she gets [Boat horn] Oh, boy. So she – she gets a --you know --very important letter, she thought it was a joke. Anyhow, she really looks --she says, "Sadie Rothstein, they want you in Ellis --- in the Castle Garden." Ahh, she got scared. She had to leave everything in the middle. I don't think they even paid her. In the middle of, August the 20th. See, she wrote a letter that they should -- she should come here. What do I know? I was eight years old. To come after Labor Day. [Voices]-- a – a – after Labor Day See, she figured -- she figured after Labor Day, she'll earn her money and-- you know -- and she'll be free and she'll pick me up. But she --- the minute she got the tickets, the --- the Betty

Schwartz --- she immediately rushed right into the --- went right away. We took the train. And I was glad, "I'm going to America, I'm going to America." Any ---

CONNELLY: Did you have any brothers and sisters left in Europe?

SALTZMAN: Yeah, no. I --- I -- I was the only one. There was a little brother, and he died when I --- when I was a youngster. I must have been around four years old.

VOICE: Diphtheria, wasn't it, Mom?

SALTZMAN: He died of diphtheria, yeah. But I came here --- my Mom later on got married and I have a sister ---yeah, yeah -- a half-sister, yeah.

CONNELLY: What did you hear about America or Ellis Island before you left Europe?

SALTZMAN: Yeah, I didn't --- the only thing --- the only thing I heard, "the golden America" ----- that the [Laughs] I was eight years old --that the gold is on the sidewalk. [Laughs] That's what I heard. After all, I was a youngster. You know what I mean. And I was always thinking, Mani [ph] ---- I was thinking, "What am I going to call myself?" My name was Sura. They called me Sadie here. My real name should be Sarah -- you know. Anyhow, there was --- my aunt's name was Sarah. She didn't want to be --- she -- really she --- I don't know why they didn't --- didn't name me Sarah. So they made me Sadie -- you know. So I says to myself in --- when I was in Europe I says, "I'm going to call myself Solka." Solka is Polish. [Laughs] -- you know -- a child's memory, yeah.

CONNELLY: Can you spell that?

SALTZMAN: Solka is supposed to be S-O-L-K-A. And, of course, when I came to U.S. --- to the United States --- Lillian ---she's gone, she's passed -- my cousin says to me, "Your name is going to be Sadie." Okay, so my name is Sadie Rothstein. Of course, my name is Mrs. Sadie Saltzman now -- you know. And here it is. That's it. [Laughs]

CONNELLY: Do you remember what it was like on Ellis Island? Did you stay the night?

SALTZMAN: Yeah, oh, yeah. So what happened -- was sitting there with that awful foot, see. It was all pussy, really. When I got -- the --- and so she said ---so she says, "Walk straight!" And believe me, I made up my mind ---

CONNELLY: Who is "she?"

SALTZMAN: The Betty Schwartz, the lady I was with. She kept threatening me all the time. I have to say it again -- threatening me all the time, "They'll throw you -- they'll throw you into the water," or, "They'll send you back." So I walked with that --- that foot was absolutely raw, pussy, and the skin was hanging down. When I was with my Mom --- anyhow, so my Mom picked me up -- you know -- when we got here. So she had to get married immediately. They had to go to a judge years ago

Voice: That other woman had to get married

SALTZMAN: The other woman. She was twenty-four, twenty-three -- twenty-four years old. So she came to my cousin. They were engaged in Romania, see. So the immed—so I sat outside in Foley Square. I'll always remember it. Sat outside while my Mom was a witness and they got married by the judge right there, because he . . .

VOICE: Mom, did a doctor look at your foot when you were here?

SALTZMAN: He didn't, she didn't want it. She kept threatening me. She kept threatening me, believe me. They came on the boat. They says, "Anybody wants help?" They said it in Polish, in German, and I says, "My God." She says, "Shut up." She says, "They'll throw you into the water." And the same thing in Ellis Island. So, so anyhow, we're sittin' seven days over here.

CONNELLY: Did you have enough food here?

SALTZMAN: Huh?

CONNELLY: Did you have enough food here?

SALTZMAN: I had some food, and whatever they gave, an egg, a [Not understood].

CONNELLY: Were you in a regular dormitory?

SALTZMAN: I was in a regular dormitory on the second floor. I dun-----

CONNELLY: No hospital?

SALTZMAN: No hospital, because she threatened me. I went to sleep. She said, "Don't say anything." She -- you know -- they examined me, but they didn't examine my feet. See, they examined me all around --- that I'm okay, I had injections. Remember, I'm eight years old. They gave me vaccinations when I was maybe a year, that's still good. -- you know -- they didn't vaccinate me. They vaccinated her. But she kept threatening me, "Don't say anything." And I walked straight with that terrible foot. I made up my mind; I'm going to the USA. So then --- then my Mama picked me up. And, remember, I had a --- my Mom was in Mt. Clemens,

Michigan. First a lady came over. It was my aunt. So I says to her, eh, I says, "Hello, Mama." She says, "I'm not your Mama, I'm your aunt." So they says, "No way will you take that child."

CONNELLY: How long were you, when did you see your mother last?

SALTZMAN: My, my Mama lived till a hundred, a hundred-four. She died 1970. She died, when was it, August the 15th, 1979. She lived till a hundred and four.

VOICES: [Interposed] & [Superposed] Did she know when you came? When did your, when did your Mother leave? How long, how long had you been?

SALTZMAN: It was around eight days, because they let her know. She left the --

VOICE: No, no . How long since she left, and came here and left you alone over in Europe?

SALTZMAN: Oh, yeah, that's right.

VOICE: Your mother.

SALTZMAN: My Mom came 1907, and I came 1912. Five years I didn't see. My Grandma took care of me.

CONNELLY: Was your Grandmother in Austria?

SALTZMAN: My Grandma was so nice to me, such a nice lady.

CONNELLY: Did your mother ever talk about why she decided to leave Austria?

SALTZMAN: It'd be --- She couldn't get along with her husband. That's my father --- couldn't get along with. So she had two --- two children. She had me, and she had a li—she had a little boy. And the boy died of diphtheria years ago. I'll always remember that. Looking in the crib, and looking in the crib, and I was around four years old. They were looking in the crib and he died. So I was left. And when she heard that the little boy died, she immediately sent a ticket. She loaned money, because years ago it was very hard to – to earn money -- you know.

CONNELLY: Do you know how much money it was?

SALTZMAN: I think – I think it must have been – what would it be? I really don't know -- the ticket, it must have been fifty dollars – 'cause I was eight years old. See, I think she paid a hundred dollars to Betty Schwartz. 'Cause I was a youngster. But I did all the talking and all the walking. [Laughs] She would sit like a dope and I did all the interpreting. Really, interpreter. I did.

CONNELLY: Did Betty, did Betty leave right away?

SALTZMAN: [Superposed] Betty immediately ---- Betty immediately got married. And ---

CONNELLY: She passed through Ellis Island immediately?

SALTZMAN: Yes.

CONNELLY: And you were left alone in the dormitory?

SALTZMAN: Uh, no. We were both together all the time.

CONNELLY: You both stayed in the dormitory.

SALTZMAN: Both in the dormitory there, for seven or eight days. I know it! And 'cause I had to wait for my mama.

CONNELLY: Was it crowded?

SALTZMAN: Yes, yes. I had to wait for my Mom to go all the way from Mt. Clemens, Michigan. It takes at least ----it took at least two days. And she had to give notice -- you know -- and she took her time. She was just -- and she just felt terrible. She figured L-- after Labor Day she'll be home, and she'll pick me up on the boat. And this, and Betty Schwartz didn't want to know. The minute she got the ticket, she says, "Come." Because she came from Romania, and I live in Austria. I don't know how much---

CONNELLY: And she was engaged to your --

SALTZMAN: She was engaged to a cousin of mine. His name, I even remember his name. His name was Diengott. And the first name, I think --- I'm trying to think the first name. Yeah, I don't know what it was.

VOICE: Morris?

SALTZMAN: Not Morris. It wasn't Morris. It was another name. She --- I forgot. I don't know. I think it was Abie -- Abe Diengott, or something like that. It was so many years ago.

CONNELLY: Can you spell that?

SALTZMAN: Diengott. D-I-E-N-G-O-T-T. I think two T's at the end.

CONNELLY: Did you know you were going to sail past the Statue of Liberty in New York

Harbor?

SALTZMAN: I didn't know, I didn't know that. I didn't know it. I was a youngster. I only ---.

CONNELLY: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

SALTZMAN: Huh?

CONNELLY: Do you remember going out on deck to see the Statue of Liberty, or?

SALTZMAN: I was always, I was always on the deck. But the minute we got here, I was in such a misery with that foot! I didn't give a darn for anything. And I thought surely somebody would pick me up, and it would help me with that foot. Being that she kept threatening all the time, I was just in terrible pain. Can you imagine me walking up the steps, and all the ----- and all the way to the --- to the clerks. How can they ---- clerks, all ---- they had to question me. And she sat there like a dope.

VOICE: You're not talking into the thing. [Microphone] [Noise]

SALTZMAN: Yeah. Yeah. She sat -- she sat there like a dope.

CONNELLY: Do you remember what the clerk was like? Did he seem sympathetic or did he seem really overworked.

SALTZMAN: The clerk was a man, and -- you know -- there was quite a number of men, quite a number of men. And there wasn't --- I don't think there was any ladies, 'cause there was quite a number of men. They were nice. They asked questions. "Who are you going to?" In Polish. I answered them. And to my Mom, and she's going to her, to her fiance-- you know -- to the

boyfriend and it's true. They got married right away.

CONNELLY: Did the fiance come to Ellis Island?

SALTZMAN: Oh, they sh—the let's see, I'm trying to think. No, no, he didn't come to Ellis Island. My Mom came, see. My mother is the one that had to pick me and the ---- me and the Betty Schwartz, you see? But he didn't come. But -- you know -- the --- I think when they met in Foley Square, then they had to --- they went up to the a no—to the ---where to get -- to get married. So I was --'cause I was sitting downstairs -- you know. So they went over to the judge to get married. [Music]

CONNELLY: Do you remember what the food was like?

SALTZMAN: The food wasn't, --- the food wasn't so hot. I couldn't eat eggs. They came, they gave --- and they gave us eggs. I couldn't eat eggs for a year at least. The egg just smelled terrible. Of course, they gave you bread. I don't know, they gave you butter, and they gave you coffee, yeah. [Airplane sounds] And I think they gave --- they gave ---- I didn't care for the food. But I was eight years old, so whatever they gave me I tried my best -- you know. They -- I couldn't complain. I couldn't complain on anything except my foot, really.

CONNELLY: How, how did you spend your time while you waited for your mother during the day?

SALTZMAN: Sittin' on the benches --- sittin' on the benches, and I kept looking and looking and looking. [Music] And the first time I saw a colored lady with a colored child, I was just -- you know -- the first time -- you know. I was so surprised, because I never saw colored people before. Yeah, that was a surprise. Otherwise we were all, we were [Laughs] we were all immigrants

-- you know --.

CONNELLY: All in the same boat.

SALTZMAN: All in ---- and I remembered something ---

CONNELLY: What's happened to you since you left Ellis Island?

SALTZMAN: Well, the first thing ---

CONNELLY: Your whole family -----?

SALTZMAN: You know what happened? The first thing -- my Mom --- I was walking, didn't want to tell her, and I walked straight. I walked -- really, I was real brave. And I got --- listen, when I got there to my aunt's house, we went to my aunt's and uncle's house. The --- the ---- I took off my stocking, and my mother saw that foot.

VOICE: Look at the time. They're coming back. I guess, that's the crowd, right? We're ready. So it hasn't come back yet?

CONNELLY: No.

SALTZMAN: [Clears her throat] My, my Mom, --- when I got to the, ---my uncle's house ---I remember Beacon Street in Newark, I remember. I don't know the number, Beacon Street in Newark. And I took off my sock, and my mother took a look at that foot. Ahhhh! Oh, my God! All pussy and all. The skin was all off. This foot. And the first thing -- of course --she bathed it -- you know -- and she took out the splinter. Oh, what a relief! Oh, boy! What a relief.

VOICE: Let's get moving right now.

SALTZMAN: That's it, that's it. Thank God. Then later on a, I went to school. Mom took an apartment. I went to school. I went to 18th Avenue School in Newark, and so forth and so on. That's it. I lived happily ever ----

VOICE: Found Prince Charming.

VOICE: And you raised a family.

SALTZMAN: [Noise] I raised a family. [Voices]

CONNELLY: How large a family?

SALTZMAN: My family. I have two children. I have a son -- a very nice -- he --- a lovely son. He's an artist, and he works in the post office, and here's my daughter. She is --- she is a teacher, and married to a wonderful accountant. [Laughs] And I have two wonderful grandchildren. The girl is gone to third year at Rutgers University. She is going to be, what, she's eighteen nineteen years old.

VOICE: Twenty.

SALTZMAN: Twenty, she'll be twenty. And my Grandson is sixteen years old, going to high school. And I have a lovely family. I'm very happy in the U.S.A. Thank goodness, thank goodness for the U.S.A. I never miss Europe; I was only eight years old. I was so glad to get out of that farm.

VOICE: She visited Israel and she came, she's -- [Tape ends]