

NPS-145
MOLLIE SCHUBACK
BIRTHDATE: 1908
INTERVIEW DATE: NOVEMBER 29, 1983
AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 75
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INTERVIEWER: DENNIS CLOUTIER
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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: IRV SILBERG

RUSSIA, 1912
AGE: 4

SHIP: ROTTERDAM
PORT:
RESIDENCES:
 RUSSIA: DUBNA
 US: NEW YORK, NY

CLOUTIER: -November 29th, 1983. This is the Ellis Island Oral History Program, Dennis Cloutier at the mike. What's your name?

SCHUBACK: Mollie Schuback.

CLOUTIER: When and where were you born?

SCHUBACK: In Russia.

CLOUTIER: What part of Russia?

SCHUBACK: I think it was Poland, near Poland.

CLOUTIER: In what year?

SCHUBACK: 1908.

CLOUTIER: So how old were you when you came to this country?

SCHUBACK: I was about 4 and a half, five years old.

CLOUTIER: Any idea where you left from?

SCHUBACK: We left from Dubna . That's a part of Poland, I think.

CLOUTIER: Uh-huh. It was.

SCHUBACK: [unclear]

CLOUTIER: Much about the voyage? How long it was?

SCHUBACK: The voyage was about two weeks. We had a ball at—on the boat.

CLOUTIER: A what?

SCHUBACK: We had a ball on —

CLOUTIER: Oh.

SCHUBACK: — the boat because we were kids. We didn't know anything. My sister and I (she's about two years older than me), and when we came on the boat -- first place, I didn't know it was the boat. I kept asking my mother, "So where's the boat?" And, "Where's the boat?" We came in. It was on a Friday night and you—the Jewish people put up candles. So—so she said, "This is the boat," and we couldn't believe it because it was a great big thing, and the candles were burning. I thought I was in a house. And the trip was very nice, although my—one of my sisters and my mother couldn't take it too well. But I and my sister, the one that's next to me, we had a ball. And all the—the help on the boat was so fond of us that they gave us anything we wanted. It was really very pleasant for us.

CLOUTIER: So you didn't get sick or anything?

SCHUBACK: No, my mother and my other sister, the older sister, were sick for about two days. They slept. But we took it lovely.

CLOUTIER: Hmm.

SCHUBACK: And we had a good time.

CLOUTIER: Were you traveling in steerage or were you in cabins?

SCHUBACK: I think we were in cabins. Yeah, we had a nice trip.

CLOUTIER: So how many people did you travel with?

SCHUBACK: Let's see. We were three girls and one boy—four children and my mother.

CLOUTIER: Where was your father?

SCHUBACK: My father was here already.

CLOUTIER: Oh.

SCHUBACK: He was here for two years and then he sent for the family.

CLOUTIER: Uh-huh. What did he do here?

SCHUBACK: He worked with ladies' shoes. He made ladies' shoes.

CLOUTIER: Did he do the same trade in Russia?

SCHUBACK: Yes. In Russia, he was on his own. Here, he worked for someone.

CLOUTIER: Uh-hmm. So where'd you move to when you got here?

SCHUBACK: We moved in with a cousin of mine until my mother got an apartment. And then we lived—the-downtow—in Brooklyn on Atlantic Avenue.

CLOUTIER: Any idea what the name of the ship was?

SCHUBACK: R-Rotterdam. You know, I have all that information. We needed it for something. And I meant to look it up and show it all to you, and I didn't get the chance to.

CLOUTIER: Oh, well. But the Rotterdam, it was called.

SCHUBACK: I think it was the Rotterdam.

CLOUTIER: Uh-hmm. So the reason you came to the United States was for better jobs?

SCHUBACK: I suppose so. My father came here and then he got himself settled in a job, and then he sent for his family.

CLOUTIER: Did you ever talk to your mother, in later years, about what Russia was like in those days?

SCHUBACK: Oh, we often spoke about it. We kept reminiscing. My oldest sister remembered more than I did. She was about nine when she came here. So naturally, she remembered more than I did. But I remember quite a bit. I remember the trip. I remember when we got off the boat. I remember a lot of things.

CLOUTIER: So when you got off the boat and you went—you went to Ellis Island, how was it there?

SCHUBACK: Well, all I remember there is seeing luggage [chuckles] and a lot of people. I think over there is where they gave you the medical examination. And somehow, they were a lit—a little hesitant on me with my eyes, although I never had trouble since. So we were held over a little while, but then we were let go. We also didn't have the ferry, like the boat that you have here, taking you to the Ellis Island. But we had, like, little boats, small boats, I remember going onto.

CLOUTIER: Uh-hmm. So they—how long did you stay over? Overnight?

SCHUBACK: No, no. It-it-

CLOUTIER: It was just for a little while?

SCHUBACK: Just a little while. They sent from one to another.

CLOUTIER: Ah.

SCHUBACK: And everything was okay and we came through.

CLOUTIER: They probably thought you had trachoma or something.

SCHUBACK: I don't know what it was but what—we went right through the same day. (ringing) Oh, excuse--.

CLOUTIER: Uh-huh.

SCHUBACK: Which [tape off/on]—

CLOUTIER: All right. Do you have any exit papers or any documents that you brought with you from Russia?

SCHUBACK: No, not that I know of.

CLOUTIER: Yeah. Of course, when you're four and a half, you don't remember such—

SCHUBACK: No, I don't remember.

CLOUTIER: —trivia like that.

SCHUBACK: No.

CLOUTIER: [clears throat] So on Ellis Island, you remember luggage.

SCHUBACK: I remember loads of luggage and so many people walking back and forth.

CLOUTIER: Uh-hmm.

SCHUBACK: I even remember the door that we walked out on. And I showed it to my children and they were stunned.

CLOUTIER: Hmm.

SCHUBACK: I remember—I remember the trip. I remember everything. I mean, most of the things that interested me.

CLOUTIER: Uh-hmm. As a child.

SCHUBACK: As a child, yeah.

CLOUTIER: Lots of people.

SCHUBACK: Lots of people with their baggages. And they were—one kid was running here; so many children. [laughs]

CLOUTIER: Sounds like a great—

SCHUBACK: It was fun to me.

CLOUTIER: Sounds like a good time.

SCHUBACK: It was fun to me.

CLOUTIER: [laughs]

SCHUBACK: Though I don't think it was fun for others.

CLOUTIER: No.

SCHUBACK: But as a child, to me, it was fun.

CLOUTIER: A new adventure.

SCHUBACK: Yeah.

CLOUTIER: Well, as a newcomer to America, what do you remember as a new, strange country?

SCHUBACK: Well, I remember my cousin taking—the first thing she did was enter us into school. And we felt funny. Naturally, we didn't know the language but we got it fast enough. And that's all.

CLOUTIER: You pick up things really quickly when you're that young.

SCHUBACK: Yeah. You were interested in everything. Everything seemed to—you wanted to know everything, so you pick it up fast.

CLOUTIER: Do you s—still speak Russian?

SCHUBACK: I don't speak Russian. I speak Jewish.

CLOUTIER: Jewish.

SCHUBACK: Yeah.

CLOUTIER: Do you still speak it?

SCHUBACK: Oh, yes.

CLOUTIER: Uh-huh.

SCHUBACK: I speak a very good Jewish.

CLOUTIER: Yiddish.

SCHUBACK: Of course, my mother and father didn't speak it too well. My mother spoke a little better than my father did, but my father didn't speak English at all. He understood what we spoke to him but he—he couldn't speak it.

CLOUTIER: What was your first job here in America?

SCHUBACK: My first job was—I was a typist and I married my husband from there.

CLOUTIER: Was he an immigrant also?

SCHUBACK: No. He was American born.

CLOUTIER: Hmm. Well, had you heard anything about America or Ellis Island before you came here, that you can remember?

SCHUBACK: No, no.

CLOUTIER: Did you know anyone that was sent back from America because of reasons?

SCHUBACK: Yes. My father's brother was traveling with us and they sent him back. I don't remember the reason.

CLOUTIER: Uh-huh.

SCHUBACK: And we had problems there because he carried the money with him. And my mother had some—I remember that she had problems in getting it to him, getting to him to get the money because we—the—on our way. You know, the—that we were traveling, because he carried everything.

CLOUTIER: Hmm.

SCHUBACK: But that's about all I remember. Why they sent him back, I don't know.

CLOUTIER: Did he ever make it to America?

SCHUBACK: No.

CLOUTIER: No?

SCHUBACK: No.

CLOUTIER: Traumatic.

SCHUBACK: Yeah. My father's brother.

CLOUTIER: Did any other relatives join you here in America?

SCHUBACK: Well, after a number of years. In fact, not—in 1950, we had a cousin that came over. And they were here for a while and then moved to Israel. And then both of them passed away.

CLOUTIER: Did you ever go back to Europe?

SCHUBACK: No.

CLOUTIER: Never.

SCHUBACK: I'd love to.

CLOUTIER: I bet.

SCHUBACK: See what everything is like, although I remember the house we lived in, and it had, like, a little pond on the outside. And in the summertime—it was like a little country place where we lived. And I remember in the summertime, we'd sit on the doorstep and we'd watch the— the cows going to pasture. It was beautiful scene, beautiful place. It was more or less the country.

CLOUTIER: Uh-hmm.

SCHUBACK: And I remember that. I remember that some—so well. I can just see everything in front of me. And in the wintertime, we used to go skating on the pond.

CLOUTIER: [chuckles]

SCHUBACK: It was nice.

CLOUTIER: Did you remember—oh—did you—that wasn't what I was going to say. Ah, I forgot what—so you got married. And did you have any children?

SCHUBACK: I have one daughter.

CLOUTIER: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. Did you ever live anywhere else in this country, other than New York?

SCHUBACK: No.

CLOUTIER: No? Broo—Brooklyn all the way?

SCHUBACK: Brooklyn all the way.

CLOUTIER: Yeah, yeah. Do you enjoy America now as much as then when you first arrived?

SCHUBACK: Well, it's different now. You know, after all, I'm an old lady now. When I came, I was a kid. I was married, I was 18 years old. I started to work; I was 15.

CLOUTIER: As a typist.

SCHUBACK: As a typist. And then I married the boss's brother.

CLOUTIER: [chuckles]

SCHUBACK: And that was it.

CLOUTIER: America has changed.

SCHUBACK: Oh, and how.

CLOUTIER: [chuckles]

SCHUBACK: And how. I'll tell you, it was much better then, although people didn't have much. But the demand wasn't as much as it is today. And, look, we never had too much. We were a big family. We—my mother had six children. And years ago, people didn't earn so much, but they were satisfied with what they earned and you had a—a happy life. It was very close family and we enjoyed it. It isn't that way today. Even when we got married, we all stayed around the same area where my parents were.

CLOUTIER: Uh-hmm.

SCHUBACK: Today, one child is here. This one is there. And it isn't as close as we were years ago. And that's what it is.

CLOUTIER: That's how it is.

SCHUBACK: When you get married, they—each one goes with their own families, you know. So—

CLOUTIER: When you first arrived here, was there anything unusual that you'd never seen before? For instance, the last interviewee mentioned about how she couldn't figure out how the clothes would be hanging five stories up. How would they get to them? Things like that.

SCHUBACK: I remember one thing. We were given bananas and we didn't have that. So I looked at it and I didn't even know what you had to do with it. [laughter] That was a funny thing. We often talk about it. And when my older sister was alive, she—she remembered more than I did. And we used to sit and reminisce and it was so interesting. Even today, you know what? My daughter and my son-in-law took me to Ellis Island, and my granddaughter was with us. And when she heard me talking about the different things, they were so interested and they were so enthused about it. And they got such a kick out of it; you just have no idea. They enjoyed it more than I did.

CLOUTIER: [chuckles]

SCHUBACK: Knowing that, where I come in, and when I walked into that building, it was so dilapidated now and so—it was terrible.

CLOUTIER: [chuckles]

SCHUBACK: And I remember it was all lit up and so many people there and luggage is standing. Wherever you went, you fell over it.

CLOUTIER: [chuckles]

SCHUBACK: But it's a different life today, anyway.

CLOUTIER: Did you eat a meal on Ellis Island? Did you eat anything?

SCHUBACK: No.

CLOUTIER: No?

SCHUBACK: No.

CLOUTIER: In and out real quick?

SCHUBACK: No, we—my father picked us up and he took us to this cousin where we stayed a little while—she had a big place—until they got an apartment and we moved.

CLOUTIER: Did your father meet you on Ellis Island?

SCHUBACK: Yeah.

CLOUTIER: Hmm. And then you took a small boat back, you say.

SCHUBACK: It was a small thing that—

CLOUTIER: Yeah.

SCHUBACK: If I—I remember it correctly, because we had to step over it. That's what I remember.

CLOUTIER: Hmm.

SCHUBACK: Today it's big—great big boats—

CLOUTIER: Uh-hmm.

SCHUBACK: —we go on.

CLOUTIER: Well, there used to be a ferry also that came back and forth between Manhattan and Ellis Island.

SCHUBACK: I don't remember that.

CLOUTIER: Yeah.

SCHUBACK: Then we took a—I think a trolley car to the place where we stayed.

CLOUTIER: That must have been a shock.

SCHUBACK: Yeah. We got on. I didn't know what it was. [laughter]

CLOUTIER: Is there anything else you'd like to relate to?

SCHUBACK: What else can I tell you?

CLOUTIER: Glad you made it?

SCHUBACK: Yeah.

CLOUTIER: To America?

SCHUBACK: Yeah.

CLOUTIER: You think your life would have been a lot different in Russia?

SCHUBACK: I don't know. Well, things are—are different all the time in Russia.

CLOUTIER: Uh-hmm.

SCHUBACK: But naturally, over here, it's—it's entirely different. Life here is different, although people were very happy there. Maybe they didn't know any better.

CLOUTIER: Uh-hmm.

SCHUBACK: So they were contented with what they had.

CLOUTIER: Yeah.

SCHUBACK: But naturally, it's different. I would like—I'd love to make a trip back.

CLOUTIER: Hmm.

SCHUBACK: To see what it's like and where I came from. But it must be so different there now than—just as well as here.

CLOUTIER: You can never go home.

SCHUBACK: No.

CLOUTIER: [chuckles] So what'd you—what'd you finally do with that banana?

SCHUBACK: Oh, you know, I started to eat it with the skin and all. [laughter] We often talk about it and we laugh. That's about all.

CLOUTIER: Bite it like an apple.

SCHUBACK: Yeah.

CLOUTIER: Well, I think that's all I have to say, Molly. Thanks a lot.

SCHUBACK: I hope I'll hear myself some day.

CLOUTIER: [chuckles]

SCHUBACK: Can you put it on—turn it back?

CLOUTIER: You'll hear it right now.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

NPS-145/SCHUBACK

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