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JOSEPH M. FEDER

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RESIDENCES:

CLOUTIER: October 17th, 1984. This is Dennis Cloutier with the Oral History Program. What's your name, sir?

FEDER: The name is Joseph Feder.

CLOUTIER: And where were you born, sir?

FEDER: I was born in a town by the name of Chertkov [PH]. It was part of Galicia [PH] and Galicia was a province of the Austrian Empire. At that time, the Austrian Empire was quite an empire. We had Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Moravia, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Bokavina, [PH] all these parts were part of it, just like the United States. We had—we didn't have 49 or 50 states but we had, probably, what 12 or 14 states incor—including incorporated into the Austrian-Hungarian monarchy. It's part of the—in Austria, Kaiser Franz Josef [PH] was a kaiser, an emperor. In Hungary, he was a—he was a king. So it was a double—a double monarchy. And I was born on the—the Austrian government.

CLOUTIER: In what year?

FEDER: In—in 1903. I was born April the 8th, 1903.

CLOUTIER: And what was the political feeling of the country in those days?

FEDER: The political feeling in—you mean not when I—when I was born, I—I couldn't tell you.

CLOUTIER: Well, as you were growing up.

FEDER: As I was growing up, political feeling was this. It's quite a difference from the United States. Over there, you take out three languages, beginning in your public school. The language of the country was German, just like Germany. The Austrian language is German. That is called the mother tongue. But in part of Galicia being Poland today—Russia, also part of the Okraena [PH]. We were taught Polish, complete, the same as German, and Okranian [PH]. So as a youngster, you learned three languages. You were already a linguist by the time you reached the age of 10 and 11. At the age of 11, you entered your—the end of 10, the age of 11, you entered high school, the first year of gymnasium, which like spelled over here, gymnasium, which we used for workouts. Over there, high school was called gymnasium. In a gymnasium, you wore uniforms, not like over here, just plain clothes. You wore in the summer, white; in the winter, black. And the first year of your high school, you didn't have such a thing as a junior. Whether your—your four—comparing to the United States, your four first years were sort of junior. You wore a silver bar on a straight collar, like a uniformed Austrian officer. One silver bar was a first class; two, the second; three, the third; and four, the fourth. When you began the fifth, that was already like you—the next four years were, let's say, high school. One gold, two gold, three gold and four gold. After that, came university. So at the age of—when I was young, I already spoke three languages. Beside at home, my people being of the Jewish faith, I spoke Jewish.

CLOUTIER: Was the country exper—experiencing prosperity in those days?

FEDER: In those days, we didn't know such a thing as being absolutely poor. We had a—in town, a few beggars. We would like to say professional ones. We had professional mourners, like you see in the [unclear] films that run after bodies and cry and carry on. We had the same things in the Old Country over there. But my father, being a custodian of a big—one of the biggest rabbi palaces in the world, which no one would believe a thing like that existed—it was fabulous.

CLOUTIER: Hmm.

FEDER: It had its own stables. It had its own sulkies and no automobiles by that time. You had—when the war—war broke out, although the army had ‘em, their ally didn’t have any automobiles, only horse—horse and buggies. And we had a tremendous garden, which was, let’s say, like half of Central Park. That’s how large it was. Working for them (my father was a tin snip by profession), but he contracted to take care of the entire palace. The roof of the palace was cathedral type all the way through. So naturally, the snow in the winter had to be taken off. Otherwise, the thing would be—would cave in. So he had to contract for that, taking care was part of his job. And I remember many a times at the age of 11, I went up with the opening to the ceiling on the roof with the—what do you call—the flame blow tor—blowtorch—

CLOUTIER: Right.

FEDER: —to loosen up the ice. So we’d get the heavy weight off the roof.

CLOUTIER: Hmm.

FEDER: And he was also versatile in electricity, so poorness I didn’t know, because if you needed something, in his spare time, he made pots and pans in his house. And the pots and pans that he made, to neighbors we paid—they paid in Austrian coins and Austrian kronen [PH] at that time. So we didn’t know no such thing as being poor. We knew very wealthy people, but poor, to go out and beg or—we had a very nice life. We had good food. We had clothing and my brother was even sent away to stay with his uncle in a town that you had to take a railroad overnight, right, to go to gymnasium, because at that time, my town didn’t have it. When I—when I was at the age of 11, that’s when we had it. But my brother’s time before me, he had to go out of town to school. So my father had to support—my parents had to support him. So we didn’t know such thing as poverty.

CLOUTIER: Well, having such a good life there at home, what made you want to come to America?

FEDER: Well, let me explain this to you. Then came the war. In 1914—this is—I’m going—when I—1914, I was 11 years old. Russ—the Austrian Army, and the first ones to war was a—to come in on horseback was a Hungarian regiment. And they, plus artillery, started to roll. The town that I lived in, was born in, was about 30 kilometers from the Russian border. So they went into Russia unopposed. They were there two days when the German planes, which at that time, the language

called—every German plane was known as die Taube [PH], which means dove in English. You could see high up a very small dove speeding along, you know, the size of a dove. That's because they were very high in the air. And the artillery shells burst way in the bottom of them. They were never hit because they didn't—couldn't reach 'em that high. And the taubes, the German reconnaissance spotted a huge—spotted a huge—are you working?

CLOUTIER: Yeah.

FEDER: Spotted a huge Russian Army moving towards the Austrian border, so they got the order to withdraw. They withdrew. They started to withdraw and the town people started to run after them to the railroad station. And the last train that we couldn't make, that was all filled up. We couldn't get on—was shut off, the track anyway, by that time, by the Russian artillery. So we remained in town and we stayed on the Russian regime for two and a half to three years. And that's where I completed perfect Russian. I learned Russian because our school was stopped completely. I was in the service for the Russian Red Cross by permission of the Austrian Gyndamoree [PH], telling them that I am not carrying any weapon, but I'm working for the sake of the epidemics that we had. We had epidemics that people dropped dead in the street, something you never think that anyone—[unclear]. We had cholera, typhus—two kinds of typhus, head and stomach—smallpox, dysentery and what do you call that—oh, that's about as far as I can recall. And we went out—we went out—at that time, the only way to combat this was going into a house with masks, young men that we were, and some oldsters. Our mattresses were sackcloth and straw. The middle class and the—the—the poorer class had no mattresses that we have over here. Rich did have 'em with springs. But the poor had sackcloths and we filled them with straw. When we came to a house where there was such an illness, we took the mattresses. If the bed was wood, we took the wood out, sprinkled it with gasoline, and put it on fire. It was the only way to combat it because they were very dangerous diseases, and you had plenty of fleas, bedbugs and lice. Those were three things that, when I came to the United States, I never saw them in my life again. So now, leaving there, while I was there—and the Russians withdrew after the three years, the Austrians and the Germans came back to town. When they came back to town, my older brother, who was at that time with the general staff of the Austrian Army—he was at that time a one—they called it [unclear] instead of being drafted. He was a—he was with the general staff at their legal—with the legal staff. And he phoned me from Lemberg [PH], which was the big city, known as Lvov [PH] today, to come and see him from my town, which took an overnight ride. So my mother packed baked bread that I took to him, and I came up to

see my brother. When I saw my brother, he said to me—he spoke to me at that time, “I am going [unclear] and we’ll get in touch [unclear], and we’ll get in touch. And then maybe I’m going to bring you out to me to Vienna.” That’s where he lived, and he practiced law in Vienna.

CLOUTIER: Now, he was with the Austrian Army, right?

FEDER: That’s correct. I didn’t see him, you know, in years because I was in the Russian occupation.

CLOUTIER: Uh-hmm.

FEDER: When this happened down there, my brother was let out of the army. He sent for me to continue my studies in Vienna, and for my mother. But my mother remained a while because my father was ill, and my father died. And my mom—my father died. My mother came up to Vienna too. While living in Vienna from 1917 to 1920 and stun—studying electro-engineering, I got a letter from my sister. I mean, at that time, we got more than one. She said, “The next one, I’m sending you a ticket to come to New York. You come to America.”

CLOUTIER: Where was your sister? Where was your sister?

FEDER: In New York at that time. She was working here in New York buying garments in the garment industry. So I had a choice. My [clears throat] father’s brother, which is my—son—my first cousin, retired from the Austrian Ar—Army as a colonel. He commanded a regiment that built bridges, pontoons laying over water for the army and artillery to cross. And you wouldn’t believe that. You’d think I’m telling you a story. He was an orthodox Jew, a colonel, an orthodox Jew. You would call him book-like. Of course, he didn’t have the locks [PH] but he was a—a Hussid [PH]—a Hassid [PH] is the way they call them here, strict, religious, kosher all the way through. And he had a battalion of men that were Jews. Wherever they traveled, they—if they were staying a few days, they threw up a big tent or a wooden frame house, and that was their synagogue. They had with them two Torahs. They worshipped. They had with them the necessary [unclear] for services. They had—their kitchen never served meats because they couldn’t get kosher meats, so they served only dairy and fish. This man came in Vienna to my house and said to me, “Joe, I am leaving.” By that time, it was Palestine, not Israel. “I am leaving for Palestine. If you want to come with me, you got to promise me that you’ll revert back to Judaism, because right now you’re not a Jew. You’re smoking on the Sabbath. You’re not eating kosher food. You’re not doing the things that your religion wants you to do. Now, if you’ll promise me that you’ll drop all these things and you revert back

to the Jewish laws, I'll take you with me to Palestine." So I told him at that time—his name was Joseph too. I looked him up in Israel when I traveled from here. I said, "Joseph, thank you very much, but my sister sent me a ticket and I'm going to New York." And that's how the trip was arranged. The trip was arranged from Vienna by Orient Express through [unclear], Zurich into Paris. In Paris, they put us up for two days at a hotel, small hotel. From the hotel, after the two days, we were always supervised by the Federation of Jewish Philanthropists, because I wasn't the only one. There was a whole group of us together. Then they took us to Le Havre by train and they put us on the La Lorraine [PH], at that time, one of the boats belonging to the French Transatlantic Line. The trip took eight days. We had a very stormy trip. I did not go steerage, although there was a steerage class, which I saw. It was very—you couldn't even enter it. The stench would kill you and the stench was mostly from vomiting. People were not used to travel, rock—you know, the—and especially the storms we had that tossed the boat around. Most of the people were ill. I had a ticket for third class and in my cabin there were two upper and two lower bunks. I was lucky enough to travel with three American farmers. [laughter] And they taught me a couple of English words. The first thing in the morning, on the eighth day when we came into harbor, we saw was the Statue of Liberty. In calm waters, everybody was raising their hands, "Here is where—at last, we are in a country where the streets are paved with gold." And the—everyone was, naturally, happy but we did not land right away in Ellis Island. We were in a Brooklyn pier instead of Manhattan pier. And they discovered there was one person sick with typhus so we were in quarantine. We were in quarantine a few days, two or three days, and I remember the day distinctly. It was, I think, the last day of quarantine when the bomb exploded in Wall Street and a horse—that a horse and buggy carried in one of the buggies driven by a single horse. It was a—a bomb in that buggy and they were saying they were, at that time, communists or reds or even 19—in the year of 1920, there was starting over here a little bit of unrest. You had maybe—at that time, you had a labor ticket and you had the worker and your newspaper for—which was an extremely radical, comparing to the "Times" and the "World" newspaper. So [clears throat] while I was on that boat, my sister couldn't come up to see me. She took a rowboat with a—somebody rented, pay the man and he rowed away the bottom of the boat. And I was—she was yelling up to me and the first cigarette I smoked were Chesterfield. She sent me up a carton of Chesterfields. Then it came to disembarking. I did not stay overnight in Ellis Island.

CLOUTIER: So, wait a minute. You were—you were [unclear] for three days on the boat?

FEDER: Yes.

CLOUTIER: Uh-hmm.

FEDER: And then they took us off by tender and they brought us to the island. In the island, we were grouped together and then marched single file in line. There were rails, like you walk into a movie that has got the two rails put up, the velvet rope. Well, these were rails of iron that you can hold on, like in a boat railing. And you walked, one in back of the other, until you reached a desk in front of you, small table. And then it was a American—American government—I don't know if you call him—we called him inspectors or whatever. They're like you have over here in—when you import things. They are the people that come to inspect your baggage. What do you call them?

CLOUTIER: Inspectors.

FEDER: Huh? Inspectors. They were sitting at a table. They were uniformed. I remember it was a dark uniform. And we—I came before the man, after the man was—had somebody else that stood back a few paces. "You're next." He asked me what language do I speak? I said, "German." Because at that time, I didn't remember much Jewish. My German was [unclear]—or Polish. He said to me, "I'll talk to you—speak with you in German." And he said, "Where are you going?" I said, "I'm going right here to New York." Are you running low? "I'm going right here to New York and, in New York, my sister is here to receive me. She is the one that sent for me." He says, "Have you any money?" I says, "Besides some Austrian money, kronen, I have a \$10 bill, American money." "Boy, you're a wealthy man. You've got \$10. You're a wealthy man. Go ahead." I went out of the line and came outside in front of it, grass, you know, outdoors, was in August. And out there stood the people from HIAS. Do you know of that organization? The HIAS sent—stood there, received—received us, took us all and transported us to their building, which is now—still is on Lafayette but no more HIAS. Now, you've got playhouses in there. I went to several performances so I know the difference. And there were tables set with all the dairy goodies you can mention, cream cheese, lox, sour cream, bagels, rolls, rye bread, corn bread, anything. Herring, pickled herring, schmaltz [PH] herring, any—eggs. Anything you wanted. And the women stood around you, "Come on, eat, eat. Don't worry. Go ahead, eat. Don't worry. Just keep eating." [unclear], "No more. Got enough."

CLOUTIER: What did you think—

FEDER: “Where you going?” I says, “I’m going to East New York. East New York, part of Brooklyn city line, [unclear] Avenue.” My sister had an apartment for us on Sudder [PH] corners King. Now, the—I went back to see that neighborhood. It’s all bummed out. If you look at that neighborhood there, you would think the war was over there and not over in Europe. Everything leveled. There wasn’t a house up for miles. And that was the most congested Jewish ghetto, so—it wasn’t a ghetto. It was [unclear]. But the Jews wanted to be amongst themselves, was actually very few but there are some—one or two blocks further up, which are I—Italian. And they remained. The colored people never got in there. They don’t sell their property unless they’re—they get permission to whom they sell the house to. So they’re surroundings still remained Italian. But mostly, the houses where Jews lived in the East New York area on there are all ripped and bombed out, nothing there anymore. And I lived there from the year that I came, 1920 until after Prohibition, and then I moved to New York, got married and moved to New York.

CLOUTIER: So back on Ellis Island, you had no medical exper—experience at all?

FEDER: Back on Ellis Island, I did not stay overnight. I did not have no medical experience. I had no—they didn’t feed me there. They just brought me by tender there to check in and check out, because they didn’t check me in. Maybe if I would have been second or first class, they might have checked me—they might have checked me out through the boat. But being third class, they took me by tender into the is—into Ellis Island, my baggage. And then I stayed in line in—until I was interrogated.

CLOUTIER: You didn’t see any doctors looking at your eyes or your skin?

FEDER: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. That—yeah, that, they examined me while—while I was—before I reached the man, they examined my—especially for trachoma. They—that was one thing they were very—and then examined your chest to see whether you have TB or anything like that. I was pronounced okay and then that’s how I went to the desk. Otherwise—

CLOUTIER: They used—they used a steth—stethoscope.

FEDER: Stethoscopes, yeah.

CLOUTIER: And how’d they check your eyes?

FEDER: By turning over the eyelids. And I still remember. I think they used a pencil in those days, had a pencil. I thought was just—the eyelid

rolled right up on the pencil [unclear], and they looked in. And trachoma, you saw right away on the eye, whether you had it. So—

CLOUTIER: Did this make you nervous?

FEDER: Well, naturally, make you nervous. I felt how—anything wrong with me, where they going to send me? They send me back, you know, to—who wanted to go back? I didn't want to go back because, as things worked out, the fates preserved my family, myself, my brother, my mother and my sister was here. Otherwise, none of us would be here because my—my brother would have been the first to go, being an attorney in Vienna when Hitler marched in after they killed Dolphis [PH] and arrested Shushning [PH] after him. They would have shot him, period, would have had no—and myself too. I—I would have been long gone. I would never be here at 81. That's fate.

CLOUTIER: Were these thoughts going through your head as you were waiting in line?

FEDER: Well, when I was waiting in line, the—the only thing I, at that time, that I was thinking of is, 'I hope that I'm not—anything is not medically wrong.' So when I came to the examination and I was pronounced okay and shipped further, as they looked me over and they shipped me into the line further up there, front, I knew when I passed the line of the doctors, yeah, I'm there. I felt relieved. Naturally, you feel like you're newborn because you're going into the world, something in there, you're never—and then you're so near it, the la—the land of promise, the land of—well, it's like the Lord promised the Jews the Land of Canaan and that was it. They were going towards the land of milk and honey. I'm going here to the land where gold is paved—the—the streets is paved with gold, and here they're going to keep me out of it. It was a feeling—it was bad. However, what—

CLOUTIER: Did—did you really hear those stories that streets were really paved?

FEDER: Oh, of course. That was there, money and gold in America. Actually, plunket [PH]. That's the—plunken [PH]. When we came here—but I want to tell you something. You bought a suit of clothes for 7 or \$8, and for 14 or \$15, you were a model. A hat was \$2. You—money, comparing—the worth of the money comparing to now. I went out looking, my—I left my sister's house. I went out looking for a job with a quarter in my pocket. It took me two nickels, a nickel up and a nickel back to go to East New York and to Manhattan with the elevated. It's ten cents. And for 15 cents, and I took a sandwich along from the house, and for 15 cents, I used to get into the Jefferson

Theater on 14th Street after, if I didn't find anything. I'd see vaudeville and a motion picture for 15 cents. Try that—try that today.

CLOUTIER: How did this compare with your prices back home?

FEDER: The prices back home were very—when I left, the prices back home were far and far out of this world. The prices back home were already—when I—and I still went to school—my brother put me out. All of a sudden, they had a—Austria wa—was the only country there left that had electric bulbs on the market yet. And in Sofia, Bulgaria or in any one of the neighboring countries, they didn't have them. It didn't come in. They didn't manufacture and they didn't bring it in. They didn't bring it in. So when the market opened up, my brother send me out to every electrical supply store or house wares store that sold bulbs. And I was dying them—buying them, at first, at about 25 kronen a piece, then at 50 and 40. And he was selling them for 150 and 200. I mean, the—the price was no object. Amer—[gap in tape] and for 500 Austrian kronen, in Austria, you could buy a lot of things. So it's quite a difference. Over there, we used to [unclear] come over here. The money is so valuable. The American penny is so—so valuable.

CLOUTIER: So even though the streets weren't paved with gold, you weren't disappointed.

FEDER: No, I wasn't disappointed because I didn't realize, when my cousin gave me a job and the job was being a busboy, even though I didn't speak English, on Broadway and Times Square on 43rd Street, one of the top-notch restaurants, St. Regis Restaurant, doing fabulous business night and day. And my cousin, by marriage, was the president of the company that owned about 14 restaurants. And they wanted to bring me in. They gave me a break and they paid me as a busboy, working 12 hours a day, \$2 a day. And the waitresses, whom I served—there were two busboys on a floor. We had 16 waitresses. I worked for eight and he worked the other side for eight. After each lunch, the waitresses counted their tips and they gave us 10 percent of their tips. And that amounted, in the end of the week, sometime, including my pay, I came home with 38 to \$45. That was big money. And I became very loose with that. I became a spendthrift. I started to—17 years of age, I started to, you know, shoot—shoot my money as if I'm a millionaire. [several words unclear] thinks—the money had value. You went out and you spent it. You had a good time. I was single. And until one day, I rebelled against it. I said, "I should—came to America to mop floors and to mop a toilet in a restaurant?" It was beneath me. I mean, here I had come to be [unclear] and that's the kind of a work to do, carry dirty plates and glasses? I rebelled. So I

got myself an electrician's helper job for \$14 a week, no other money. Fourteen dollars a week and had to go and drill holes in the beams, you know, rip floors. And we pulled the wires through and set in the boxes for switches and the boxes to make—to—to put in the outlets, you know, because I studied e—electro-engineering at home. I figured I'd become an electrician, because right away, I was told I'll not make it in the United States—as a Jew, I will not make it to become an electro-engineer because the Edison Company did not hire and the telephone company didn't hire a small percentage, a ratio of Jews at that time, which is the truth. A Jew had to stick to a certain part of work, either in restaurants or work by cloaks. I mean tailoring and garments, restaurants or sell, become a salesman of some sort. But to get into an engineering [unclear], until World War II, when they discovered brains like Einstein and a few other people, and then discovered that some of the Jewish people have brains which are—would be a shame to waste. They exploited them so they learned that some of the Jews could produce and work under any conditions and become good attorneys, doctors, engineers, et cetera.

CLOUTIER: Did this make you disillusioned with American way of life?

FEDER: It—it did not make me disillusioned. It made me, in later years, as I learned it, to see, especially now, that we fought for ages to get some recognition. And the colored people got it so fast, and they still rebelled that it is not enough. And wherever I work today—not that I'm against them; I'm for them because I—I'm anti-slavery. I believe a black is a human. I'm a white and he's a black. They're human pe—they're human and they should be given the courtesy and they should be given the opportunity that every human is entitled to, never mind what their color is. However, the disappointment lied in this, that they pushed so hard, and whenever I enter today a bank or any other place where at one time a Jew couldn't even apply for a teller's job, and today is nothing but black. You talk about discrimination. I think it's being discriminated against the white race. Whenever I walk into [unclear] institution, I see nothing but black, especially the post office. You walking in the general building, in the post office building, you see nothing but black people. So naturally, become a little bit disillusioned that things are not running—at one time, they were running pretty much against them. Now all of a sudden, you get—they're getting [unclear] the pressure a lot and they still think they're not getting enough. And somehow, just to keep things going, they're getting more and more. Not that I want it—want it to be taken away, deprived of them. But what I can't stand, whether a man like Jackson goes out and talks against Jew, where Jewish people died on the way to Selma, Alabama on the march with Luther King, for them to put down—four Jew—Jewish boys put down their life for freedom for them. And he

goes to work and sells himself to the Arabs, to our Semitic cousins that are doing us wrong. That's the thing you get disillusioned in, in the world. They disillusion your people that if you are my friend and I do you a favor, and then you turn around; you knock me in the back. That's disillusionment.

CLOUTIER: Did you ever keep in contact with anyone from the—the Old Country?

FEDER: Hmm?

CLOUTIER: Your distant family or—

FEDER: From—yes, some friends. Some we met through organizations, which are called—the country—the town you come from has an—especially in New York, they have clubs, associations where they create for themselves an organization that, primarily, first thing, offers you is burial grounds. And that's what you're interested in. When you come in here, you don't belong to anything, you have to have a place, not to wind up in Potter's Field. So you join this society of your hometown, and the society of your hometown is right here in the city of New York, created by some of your countrymen that came here before you and after you. And to be joined together, dues help keep it up and they bought a plot in which they erected a cemetery. And they also raised their money at social gatherings and outings, et cetera, where they could—where you contribute or buy tickets and that goes to doing good, to give the money for philanthropic purposes.

CLOUTIER: Was this HIAS, in your case?

FEDER: Pardon?

CLOUTIER: Was this HIAS, in your case?

FEDER: The HIAS? The HIAS, didn't go for them, although they do n—need anymore, didn't go for them although they do—they take care of you further on, if you come here and you needed more. I didn't need 'em and then I just said, "Thank you very much." They didn't ask me for anything anymore. They may write you a letter for a contribution during [unclear] tell you anything, come or they want to do anything for you. Once they bring you up, they don't—they sever their relationship with you unless you want to donate money to them, continue, if you have it. If you don't have it, they don't press you. Some organizations keep pressing you.

CLOUTIER: What was your feeling when you—you—you just went to Ellis Island this year, didn't you?

FEDER: Yeah.

CLOUTIER: To visit. What was your feeling on—

FEDER: The feeling was there that my daughter and my son—very nice. Especially, it was there with my daughter and [unclear] son-in-law.

CLOUTIER: Yeah. Brought back a lot of memories, huh?

FEDER: Pardon me? Yeah. My wife couldn't go. She was operated on. We were in the hospital and then she was recuperating already in the hospital, feeling better. And the kids said, "Come on, Pops. We'll take you to Ellis Island." They came in there but I was disappointed in one thing, but Jean [PH] explained it to me. In New York City, everybody gives courtesy to a senior citizen by cutting a fare or a movie in half.

CLOUTIER: Yeah, yeah.

FEDER: And you come to the ride to the park, you pay the same on there as—as a—and I said, "The government to do that to you?" And Jean explained it to me. "It's not the government." "Yes, but the government ought to be able to step in. What's the matter with—not [unclear]?"

CLOUTIER: Especially for a former immigr—for immigrants, huh?

FEDER: I mean, n—not for immigrants. For—for senior citizens.

CLOUTIER: Sure.

FEDER: Not that I—the dollar made me any poorer. I mean, the—the same—the idea is, why should this boat be exempt?

CLOUTIER: Right.

FEDER: Why should this movie take me in for half price? Why should I go in and see a [unclear] three dollars—Los Angeles for three dollars and you go in and pay five?

CLOUTIER: Uh-hmm.

FEDER: Why? Because I'm a senior citizen. They extend the courtesy to me and give me three. Now, you come over here and [several words unclear] but Uncle Sam is discriminating against me? So now I know

it's a private line. If it's a private line, then I—I have no redress to nobody. I may have a beef but no redress.

CLOUTIER: [chuckles] How many years have you been married, Joseph?

FEDER: Pardon?

CLOUTIER: How many year—

FEDER: [unclear]. This is my 54th year to one woman.

CLOUTIER: Same one. How many children do you have?

FEDER: One. First one was born still. That was when my wife's father had a heart attack, pregnancy, was a boy at seven months pregnancy. I thought, 'I'll never have any children,' and I took a maître d's job in 1940 in Palm Beach. And she conceived and, thank God, I got my daughter, a wonderful gal. As a matter of fact, we're only back two weeks. We were there for 17 days. We had a wonderful time with them. I have two grandchildren. That's why I have two grandsons and no granddaughters.

CLOUTIER: So you've lived in New York City most of your life then.

FEDER: That's correct. I traveled through the United States and Canada but I lived in New York City.

CLOUTIER: Did you—

FEDER: They want me to go to California but at this stage of the game, tough to make friends in another c—city where you're unknown, especially [clears throat] at our age.

CLOUTIER: Did you make any lasting friendships on the boat?

FEDER: No. Coming over, no. We—I remember it lasted maybe a couple of years, because on Second Avenue and Doziers [PH] we had the— primarily, being a Jew, we had Zionist clubs. And we had liberal pau—pau—paula [PH] Zionists, which was a laboring—you know, swinging a little bit left of Zionism, becoming sort of a social—socialistic idea. And on Second Avenue, or off Second Avenue [unclear] be so small hotels that had big holes. At that time, they had a lot of them on Second Avenue. And especially, people hired them for marriage, from—for weddings and bar mitzvahs and [unclear] parties. So they had smaller rooms and they used to meet. They still have, today, some of those buildings where those organizations meet.

And we used to meet there every second Saturday and night, or every third Saturday in a small room. And then you slowly drift away, meet a father-in-law who makes—like, makes you join his lodge, be either an Odd Fellow or a Mason or—and you forget all about these small other things. So, sort of, you keep on going in life to make other acquaintances and other conquests.

CLOUTIER: Do you think the immigrant experience made you a better American than for people who were born here with the freedom?

FEDER: Well, I wouldn't—[clears throat] I wouldn't say, make me a better American.

CLOUTIER: Make you—

FEDER: I would say, ma—made me appreciate life and work and the thing that I do instead of—today is, like a youth—today is, American youths wants to [unclear]. They think they've had enough. They—they quit school when they're 14 or 15. They think they've had enough education. They can't even read English, their own language. And we come from over there and we're forced to study, actually forced. And then we come to today and European and comes there—for here. The first time I came here, I didn't have no knowledge of English. That's perhaps why I lost my European accent. But then I learned it here, because most of the Europeans that come today, migrate today, speak English. And even the refugees from Germany, when they came, they spe—they spoke English. They took it up there. They expected one day to run away and they took English up to help them along in their career over here. So never mind the accent but they spoke English. But our youth doesn't want to know that. Our youth doesn't want to know from working. I worked for a long time. I worked—well, even when I was an executive. I came into the Biltmore Hotel in my office. My secretary came in at nine o'clock in the morning, and by 4:30, she was going home. I was in at 7:30 with—at that time, I was assistant banquet manager and Bart Moore [PH] was the manager.

CLOUTIER: Banquet manager?

FEDER: Yeah. I was the assistant banquet manager. I started there as the assistant. And then when he went to the Plaza, I became the banquet manager of the Biltmore. So my secretary came in at nine—nine o'clock, a few minutes later. I was in at 7:30 with Bart Moore. And we came—one day, he went to the coffee that made the fabulous coffee, got the [unclear] better than a million dollars, a million dollars can buy. What's the name of it? And I stopped in and took t—two containers

for the donuts. And the next morning, he did, and we came into our office at 7:30, looked over our sheets, looked over our bookings for the week. And we had time, looked it over for two weeks to see what's coming up, what we have to work on. And if we had a party at night, we didn't leave—leave the headwaiter just take care of it. We stayed till the party was through, and that may be at midnight or later. On a Saturday night, we stayed t—till two or three in the morning when we had a party, because you came to me. And you are spending \$10,000 on your party. You knew Mr. Feder, not the headwaiter. You wanted to see me there to be assure that everything is going to run the way I promised you it will, never mind the paper. If I'd go home, you wouldn't be happy. You'd be worried. So I was there constantly, so I put in 20 hours. But mostly, American-born children don't care for that. See, that's where the foreigner has the edge. He's used to hard work. The American child, well, if he doesn't learn it from early childhood on, then he's not [unclear]. I know my two grandchildren are doing nice. [unclear] come out but until they got there today, you had a lot of trouble. They didn't want to study. Now—one, now—now, I have one who has just been made front office—I mean front manager for the playhouse in California where the—where he started in the back. He's a genius with a—with a camera. He's a genius with electricity. He can install your—wire your house for a television or for telephone, any—you know, he knows it and that's what he wants as his future, special cinematography. And he worked for the theater in Santa Monica, a small theater that's kept—being kept open by grants. You know, they're in the red. They have no money. The donations from wealthy people, wealthy actors, keep them going. So he donated his time and he was their stage manager. And he improved the wire. Then he worked and he did carpentry, all that as 18 years old, very nice, very ambitious. Last week when we were there, he comes home. He's been promoted. He's now the front—manager in front and he's getting \$65 a week. Well, that's—he only—he goes to college only three days a week. He—the mathematic scores, they're not giving them till next year. So at least he is learning the hard way. But the younger one has—still hasn't reached that way. He's 15. So you—they still have home ideas. Parents will support and do things, where the [unclear] children are not brought up that way. They go out and earn. They have learned and seen where they go. The children of farmers go out and work in the field, you know, to earn—to help their parents. They're brought up different. Over here, we spoil our kids. I'm not saying that you are spoiled. You are a hard-working man but you're a young man. But we do spoi—tend to spoil our children.

CLOUTIER: Did you ever think you'd make it to 81?

FEDER: Tell you the truth, no. I might not have if I wouldn't have given up, and I'm not giving this as an [unclear] to people that say, "Stop smoking," but I believe in it. But 15 years ago, my wife had a duodenal ulcer and she had to be operated. And the doctor told her, "If you don't give up smoking, Mrs. Feder, stop coming to me. I—I don't want to—don't want to see you." So I thought it over, sitting across from her at a table and I'm puffing away on Camels all day long, and she has got to give it up. It's not fair. I gave it up with her and I attribute it to two things. Somebody up there loves me and that I gave up cigarettes, because I used to cough very, very bad. People looked at me as if I had—16 years ago—as if I had TB because the coughing from cigarette was bad.

CLOUTIER: Did you ever want to—did you ever want to live anywhere other than New York?

FEDER: No. [clears throat] Might—lately, I might feel that I'd like to be nearest one thing—one child and one—the two grandchildren I have in California. But then, like my wife, I says, "What will—I can't be pestering them every day. I can't see them, come to them every day. They have a life of their own. So—

CLOUTIER: But when you first got here, was it the excitement and the bustle of this, the—

FEDER: I loved it. I enjoyed it very much. You wouldn't believe it. When I first got here and I worked in the St. Regis on Times Square on 43rd Street in the 1920s, we walked from Time Square and 43rd when we were through working at night, which is sometime early, 8:30, 9 o'clock, we walked to Harlem to 116th Street. Walking, not riding. [unclear] people, that was a walk. We weren't going a marathon. We were just—brisk walk. We were going to Steinberg's [PH] Dairy Restaurant for Danish and coffee.

CLOUTIER: [chuckles]

FEDER: From one restaurant, we were wor—we were going to the other one. [chuckles] So you can imagine how [unclear]. And then, it's a different life altogether.

CLOUTIER: What was the subw—subway like in those days?

FEDER: Subway ride?

CLOUTIER: Mmm.

FEDER: Better than today.

CLOUTIER: [chuckles]

FEDER: Much better.

CLOUTIER: How much?

FEDER: Today, I don't ride subway, only bus.

CLOUTIER: How much was the subway?

FEDER: Five cents. But nobody—first of all, nobody approached you for money. “Mister, can you spare”—that only started in the Second World War. “Mister, can you—on the—can you spare a dime?” You know. But even that wasn't bad. But now, walking—have you been to California? When I walk down to Venice, which is part of Los Angeles, lower part, where they have all—like here, Greenwich Village, but they are on the sea. They're skating on roller skate—young ladies skating on roller [unclear] on the sidewalks. They'd only wear G-strings over here and very short bandanas over here. I mean, you—it's a crazy, crazy world. And when you walk the main street, a guy'll come over to you with a kerchief around his hat, holding his long hair. And he'll say, “I'm a little short. I need a—a dollar, eighty-five towards a meal. You want to give me a dollar, eighty-five, please?” I mean, people asking you for a quarter, a half a dollar, a dollar, eighty-five, [unclear], he needs a dollar, eighty-five. It's—it's a different world altogether. The world keeps changing. I hope maybe—I hope it will be for the better.

CLOUTIER: That's what makes it interesting, huh?

FEDER: Pardon?

CLOUTIER: That's what makes it interesting.

FEDER: Right.

CLOUTIER: Keeps changing. Well, it seems about—

FEDER: I think we covered a lot of things here.

CLOUTIER: Sure did. So your experiences on Ellis Island were basically happy?

FEDER: They—on Ellis Island, I have no regrets because I didn't stay there. I didn't sleep there. I only came there for one day. We came there in the morning and we were let out by afternoon. We were let out and I

remember being for lunch in the HIAS, brought in there and then I went—go to East New York to my—my sister was at work. When she came home, she found me there.

CLOUTIER: You must have thought you were in heaven when you came to [unclear].

FEDER: Well, I was—I was a little embarrassed on the—when—not with her. My cousins lived on the floor above so, naturally, I stopped in their house first. And when I introduced myself and the young ladies in the family, I said in German, “[speaking German],” which means, “I kiss your hand, young lady,” and I actually did. They drew their hand back. They didn’t—they didn’t know. They were so shocked with that man—mannerism. They didn’t understand it until [chuckles] when my sister came later. I explained to them the customs in Vienna is altogether different, in Austria than over here. And then, naturally, people liked my politeness, mannerisms, which at that time—that’s one thing over there, people had manners. And over here, per—usually, most of the children are—they drop their manners constantly. When I see somebody walk out now and I see a young man or a—open the door, I’m shocked because in the subway—not in the subway, in a bus, because I don’t ride the subway, who do you think gets up to give me their seat? A young lady or a middle-aged woman, not a man. Young lady.

CLOUTIER: Hmm.

FEDER: Not a young man.

CLOUTIER: Did you see any other differences in customs when you first got here or things you’d never seen before that—

FEDER: In—

CLOUTIER: —you wondered what was going on?

FEDER: Well, n—not—no. I came here young. I didn’t—the customs didn’t—[unclear] all, what’s the same in every—in every part of the world, it was the same thing. As a matter of fact, when I came here, and over here they talked to you when you have a song or somebody speaks with a double meaning, especially a sexy song with a double meaning in there, not because they don’t want to shock you. But they just gi—I left that in Vienna in 1920. We had American bars over there that we went to for in a—for a show at night, and then you went—of course, I didn’t—with a grownup because the grownups were [unclear] company. But we heard those songs that were—actually had a

double meaning every word. And yet, nobody made a big how do you do about it. I mean a big to-do about it. Nothing at all. I guess the world is the same. Things come—things come slower somewhere else and they go on faster someplace else. But in general, people are—people are people and they are nice. You'll find most of them—I found most of them very nice, because I had, in my younger days—years back, I used to be a maître d' in the country. I used to go away for the summer, to summer resorts. And the college men wouldn't let me live. They keep calling me up at home. And when I worked nights during the winter, I couldn't sleep. I had—my telephone was listed in my wife's name. Everybody was looking—every student was looking for a job to go with me out there. I had nothing but students as waiters and waitresses. I had young ladies from Jersey State Teacher's College. They went to work for me as waitresses. They made—in the '40s, they made 1,100, \$1,200 for their July and August—June, July—part of June, July and Au—10 weeks work. In those years, they made that money for college tuitions there. They were from poor families. They needed it. And to me, the most pleasant surprise of my life was when I was in a place in New York—do you know New York? How long are you in New York?

CLOUTIER: A few years.

FEDER: Huh?

CLOUTIER: A couple years.

FEDER: Oh. Before your time, we had on Eight Avenue and 50th Street, there was a place called Roger's Corner that was opposite the old Madison Square Garden. You weren't here when they had the Madison Square Garden on Eight Avenue then. That was a res—big restaurant, had the biggest bar in the world. And World War II, it was jam-packed with—with soldiers. They were going overseas or coming back. And I was in charge of a small room called the Pan American Room. We had in it a novelty orchestra called the Corn Cobblers. And they gave a show on. It was beautiful. People came from all over to watch it, small room, and was—the [unclear] were at a premium. They had to take care of the headwaiter to get in. And one day, [clears throat] from the first big room, in comes the bouncer. He says, "Joe." He says, "I got the entire Air Force outside there. They want to come in. They want to come in to see it." But he says, "You got no"—I says, "Let 'em in. They want to come in to see me. If they asked for me by name, all right, let 'em come in over here. Maybe they don't want to stay." Sure enough, they were—

[END OF INTERVIEW]