

NPS-49

ISAK BRENIG AND JOHN WATERS

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NASH: Today is February 15, 1974 and I have the pleasure of speaking with two gentlemen who are today American citizens, but came to this country originally as immigrants. They came at different times, but some elements in their story are similar and, of course, a lot are different. We are going to hear about what happened to the both of them. With me is Mr. John Waters who was born in Ireland and came to this country in 1929 at the age of 20. And also with me is Mr. Isak Brenig who came to this country in 1939 at the age of 39. And we are going to begin by hearing a little bit about where they came from, the town they were born. Mr. Brenig, where were you born?

BRENIG: I am born in Austria. At this time was Austria-Hungarian Empire. When the First World War break out, we had to leave our city because this city was near a well-known fortress, Przemyl. There was people went to Vienna or to Czechoslovakia. I stayed there and I didn't like to go more back. I try it because I learned more from the West civilization. I went to German schools and I really stayed in Vienna.

NASH: Okay, Mr. Waters, where were you born?

WATERS: I was born in a town land called Cairns Lough, three and a half miles from the town of Ballymote, in the County of Sligo, Ireland.

NASH: Mr. Brenig, what did your family do?

BRENIG: My family, they had merchants; they had a store, textiles store.

WATERS: My family were farmers.

NASH: Well, I would like to get to this situation. What were the kinds of things that lead up to your coming to the United States, Mr. Waters?

WATERS: Well, as you know they had a revolution there startin' in 1916. They executed the leaders with firing squads. After that, they went to the hills, what was left and they fought around till 1921 when they had the truce. So after that truce, there was a lot of disagreement and both sides. Was two parties -- one for an outright republic and one a set to the Free State. So the Free State was backed by the British and they won all of the ones that was for a republic; so that they went into battle against each other. After, about 1922, it was all over. So I was about twelve, 19-- yeah, twelve, when they had assassinated or ambushed a police sergeant on the town of a fair day, the town of Ballymote. The name was Sergeant Fallow. And he represented the British.

The Irish police then was paid by the British Crown. So -- when they -- two of the -- the guerrillas come in, well, let's say -- say the guerrilla fighters. You know, maybe more of a nicer name to call them. But the Irish Republican Army coming in and when they sent in their squads and they ---. This man, the police sergeant, used to go to lunch, but he always had an escort and on this particular day, they hadn't enough of men to cover the town with the fair, so he had to go it alone. He lived in his own home, you know. And he would go down to lunch, it might be four blocks away from where the police barracks was and then he would come back. But this particular day when he got to his own house, he was accosted by the -- well, what shall I call them? -- the execution squads. And they opened up and they assassinated him.

So, as you would say here, all hell broke loose when this happened. The British forces in Ireland, they had a nickname called the "Black and Tans." That described them as they had blue pants of a policeman and they had the -- the tunic of a soldier. And they wore a black beret or a tam o'shanter they called it, you know. That was the uniform of the Black and Tan. They were the worst element that England could send over. They took them out of the prisons and that was the real, the murderers, the rapists and everything. That's what they let loose. So there was stationed in the town of Sligo (which was then about twelve thousand people) and they had the most of the militia and the police and everything staying there and the armor cars.

Well, when they heard of the assassination in the smaller town, which had probably about ten or twelve men in the police barracks, they come up with the armored cars. It was about twelve miles from the town of Sligo to the town of Ballymote and everything up there though they shot on sight. Dogs that barked, anything -- cows, anything. So I remember at that time I wa--I went to the bog, they call it peat here, you know, where you get for a fire. And I had a donkey and cart with me. And I didn't know anything about this at the time I went, but on my way back an old man he come out on the road and he said, "You cannot pass over this bridge or you cannot go down that road because the Black and Tans are raving drunk and they are shooting everything in sight." And I did hear the rifle fire, you know, but a kid of that age, oh I say, well, it wouldn't happen to him and all that. And he couldn't talk me out of leaving everything there with him and coming back the next

day which made sense. And I insisted that I would go and I went the road that he didn't want me to go.

And I had just cleared around the curve in the road when they passed the road I was on. That's how close I came to getting assassinated because nothing lived that was on that road when they were passing by. So that was an experience I never forgot because it -- I didn't understand it then. My mother, she ran out and she was crying, you know, and there -- they - they could hear the rifle fire, you know, three miles away was rifle fire, you could hear it very clearly. And they were all disturbed and, of course, I didn't know what all the excitement was. I didn't, you know, understand till a year later, you know, how important what happens. So everybody left the cattle in this small town and anybody that wanted cattle for nothing could have them. They run, that was it because they went in and they broke into the liquor stores and the saloons or pubs or whatever you want to call them and they drank up free and then they were really intoxicated. And anything -- anybody that had any -- was under any suspicion, they went and went after them.

So they went down, I think about six houses at the lower end of town. And the creamery where they made the - the butter and the milk from the country and they separated and they made the butter and they called it a co-op. You know, the farmers sent in all the milk and it was separated there and they made butter. And they sent back the skim milk for -- to feed pigs or cattle or anything like that. So they burnt that - that down. That was 1920, November, 1920 that happened. So then it went on until '21, this terror. And then they had to do something about the truce and I guess there wasn't - meanin' from the United States and the Irish and the United States and they were putting pressure on. And the government of the United States was less or more in favor of the Irish, you know, getting the freedom. But it was after coming out of World War I and the Americans and the British were allies, and, you know, it wasn't nice - it was easy for them to take sides one way or the other. And they wanted to remain neutral I suppose, as much as they could.

But I think by their persuasion of their offices of the American government was a big help in bringing about the solution -- temporarily anyway, of a free state. So when the free state come, then they had a vote on it and the people decided that they want a republic. But the British government says that the treaty, well, "If you don't accept it we are going to burn everything to the ground. We scorch - have policy. Nobody is going to win." See. So it was like having a gun at your head. They weren't equipped anyway, they were almost out of guns. So they had nothing to do. The leaders, they went over, they were going to take this treaty. See. Then the ones - the other ones that wouldn't accept it took to the hills, so we'll fight their own people.

So this is what disturbed me very much. It was '22 -- it's going on what -- fourteen years then, form 1908? Yes, it'll be fourteen, going on to fourteen years of age. And it -- you know, at that age you are almost a man and you can understand things and I was myself for the republic, but I was only a kid, you know, but that was my sentiment. You know, I felt this -- because I had quite a bit of Irish

history then and I understand the situation. So 1922 to '23 the Civil War lasted and then they were practically all arrested. Also the one incident that they had fourteen guerrillas in the mountains near where -- Sligo. And they couldn't capture them because it was the Ox Mountains and it was hard to get them. Now this is the Free State army representing the Irish government at that time that went after them and went out to get them. And they had an advisor from the British Army with them, see.

The British Army supplied them everything; uniforms, equipment and everything for this civil war. So what is very sad about that thing and I felt very bad about it, they supposed to have surrendered and put their hands up coming down the mountains. You know, they were surrounded and the Free State Army had about two hundred men on this maneuver. So they surrendered, this is the story. And when they surrendered, the Irish officers was bringing them in and the British advisor says, "No, they don't come in, they don't go no place." But he is in charge, see. So they say, "We goin' to execute them here." So he says, "No, we are Irish and we wouldn't execute their own people." So he says, "You have no choice. I'm in command." And here they were all lined up and he went with this revolver each one in the ear and they was all executed right on the spot there. Then everybody left. And -- I'm sorry I am getting emotional. And when it was all over and they had dispersed, the farmers that was near there and heard all this; they took the doors off their homes and each one to a door was like a, what do you call it--a ?

BRENIG: No ambulance?

WATERS: An ambulance, say, that you carry people in. They used the door in other words, to carry them down from the mountains. Two to a door. And they put each corpse on the door and that's how they came down. So then they went down. Then -- I was about seventeen I think, this was all over now. They were all out of prison a year later. They had to sign a release that they wouldn't revolt again against that government. And they all came out and that drainage scheme came up on the Avonmore [ph] River. I was about seventeen, but I was big for my age, so everybody was going getting a job there. There were no other employments, you know. Ad I got a job in the Avonmore River as a laborer, you know. I was digging down into the river, deep in the river in other words. I worked there for about two or three summers. Then I am coming on to twenty years of age. So this, 1928, December about '28, I decided that I was going to emigrate.

NASH: Mr. Brenig, I wondered if you would tell your story and in what way you think your story compares, if there is anything that Mr. Waters said that you responded to in some way?

BRENIG: Yes, yes. As I said before I used to live in Vienna, Austria. I had a - a occupation what had top do more than ninety percent with gentiles. I used to be a buyer in lumber in the -- for a - for a firm for the Germ for the Germans. They had to pay to French instead of money, in lumber. As a matter of fact, I used to live in Vienna but I - the most of the time, five days a week. And before I

married, I used to live in Salzburg, in Tirol and all these countries who had lumber. I was al-- I wouldn't say a member because the Nazi party, even it was not called Nazi party in this time. At this time it was Deutsch Nazionale Partei. Had already not to take in-- only -- only Aryan. As I was Jewish, I had no right to be a member of this organization.

I used to be a mountain climber back in Austria in the Alps. I like very much the girls. So I was really, I took part every Sunday, especially before I was married. So this is the story before Hitler took over Austria. This was in 1938. In March of 1938, Hitler marched in to Austria and occupied Austria. You can imagine, as I mentioned before, that most of my friends were not Jewish. And I called them the next day. "Hello, Margaret," "Hello Lillian," even if I was married already because I used to be in this--. They -- I wouldn't say they didn't respond. They were already, if they wouldn't known me at all.

A few days before, I met a friend of mine on the street, he was a Social Democrat, a socialist and he told me, "I just came out from prison." Because in this time before Hitler it was Dollfuss-Schushnigg regime, also a fascist regime, but not -- I mean it was a very--. This man told me, "I just came out of -- from the prison because I am a Social Democrat. I have nothing to eat." I couldn't give him much, I mean, he didn't want it really much. I took him to my house and I was surprised. And he ate in my house he didn't have a shirt, something very, very little. And I was rather surprised, three days later, this was I -- this was on Thursday. On Sunday I see this some man in a S-- SS uniform. He's going on this side and I am going on this side -- as he would never know me.

I was only - lets up. This was the situation. Goering came to Vienna and said, "We have to leave the country in four years." He gave us a time, but where to go? But during the four years you can still try to find some place. But probably this time there was too -- they wanted to shorten it. They wanted just we should leave the country. First we didn't have occupations anymore. For instance, a doctor of medicine, the doctor could only have Jewish patients. And the most people, they really didn't have -- to live. I myself, I had always, even in America, I always was trying. I -- my policy is everybody should have so much money in the bank to live a year. Because you never know what will be tomorrow. But our children don't believe, even if they are college professors. (laughs) So --

NASH: Excuse me. I just wanted to say that if there is anything you want to say while either one of you are talking, you know, you should feel free, if there is anything.

BRENIG: Yes. So I - I had still to live. Sure I started to - to lower because I didn't know what for. And the people who were acting like the young people today in America, on next day they had t- they had to go on a bread line. So they wanted we should go out because this was their policy. Now, how can they force people to get out? They started to take them in concentration camps -- without a trial, without a reason. And it just happen that a Jewish boy, Greenspan, killed in Paris a German

ambassador. And so they had something to prove and to prove something and they arrested on this day, this day is known in all histories, if you read the history, as the Crystal Night. Maybe you heard about this. Why is this Crystal Night? Like you said, the young people, they let out the criminals, they just went where they could. Break the window, wreaks--wreak all synagogues..

WATERS: (coughs) It was an old trick.

BRENIG: Yeah. So as to just, so as to just -- this was the policy from all these countries like - like in Ireland.

WATERS: We see 'em fed up.

BRENIG: This is now, if you read in the - in different kind of history, in all histories, of the Crystal Night. And they arrested me and about, I couldn't give you exactly a number, about twenty thousand Jewish people just from house to house. And we went to the concentration camp, Dachau. Concentration camp Dachau is ein camp and about thirty thousand people were there. Fifteen thousand Catholics, most Catholic priests and most from German--is here, also here, like the scientist, like the Christian Scientists. They used to call them Bible organization. This was the Catholic and Protestant believers. Alle--they were --. When - when we came, most of them were there already. Everybody had a sign, a number and a sign. From the sign I could see why he is there. A communist had a red sign, a gypsy had a black sign, the bible, they had a violet. This was, alzo, and we had - we had a blue, a blue sign. So we were there. It was in November, December. It was very, very cold. S-- in the mountains, Dachau was near the - the Alps. I was used to the cold because my -- as I was a buyer in lumber, I always was in the forest. So I was--I use --. But these priests, these prelates -- they were not used to the cold. Because a priest is most of the time in his office. And the worst thing was about six o'clock in the morning, there was a signal - in ten minutes we are going -- fifteen minutes we have to be ready and we were standing for - for hours in attention. Surprisingly, this older man, well, I was still 38 years, and I was used--as these people fell because they couldn't take - they couldn't take the cold. But this ha--this is really had nothing to do with my emigration.

NASH: No, but it is interesting and we would like to know about it.

BRENIG: As a matter of fact, I found, alzo, priests because if you come in a village, you know, like in Ireland probably, who do you meet in thru restaurant? You meet the priest, the girl from the post office.

WATERS: Yes, true.

BRENIG: The teacher - the teacher. So we were, even if they know, I we-- my type is not the type, the Ost-Jewish type. See, I - I , of cou--I am more like say more, we were friends. We played chess, we played Austrian games and on me. And they told me, "Isaak, Isaac," they told me, "Du kommst 'raus." [you will get out]. I will be out, but I not. They will not come out and this was really in this time, this was the policy. Now what could they do with us in the concentration camp, the

Nazis. I mean, everyday, as you can imagine, ten died, twenty died, frozen. Because if you had high --let's say forty fever (this is about three hun-- hundred four) you have to report.

It was a little hospital, but they gave you an appointment for two days, for two -- three days later. No. Somebody ha- - is hundred four fever and he has to go out in the morning to stay. But nevertheless the dying was not much enough to, that's in my camp. It was many camps. Shooting I would say, it took place some indirect shooting, not direct. Because it was not a trial against us. For instance, when I was called, when I was called sometimes, to go somewhere, my - my guard told me, "Go fast," and I knew if I could go fast, he shoot. Because he could say I would like to run. I didn't listen to him. I go slowly. So it was still people around.

WATERS: [not understood]

BRENIG: It was still people around. So he beat me up; I didn't run. Now the policy this time...

WATERS: At least he stayed alive by doing that..

BRENIG: No, I - I -- because I knew, because I heard, I knew and people out to go fast, he had already witnesses. He won't around me - he had the right to shoot. He had the right anyway. But this was really right. So we wanted to go out and this was still before the war. This was like I mentioned, 1938 and 1939. The real war started in September.

WATERS: That's right, I remember.

BRENIG: In September, 1939

WATERS: Right.

WATERS: Tax.

BRENIG: So we were there. Roosevelt , he knew everything. He didn't do nothing, he didn't do nothing. So they said to my wife, "If you can prove us that your husband," I mean, this was the - me - to owe, "that you husband can leave the country in four weeks, we get him out." This wasn't this time.

NASH: Why were they doing that?

BRENIG: Because they wanted to have my apartment, they wanted just to get rid of - of the people, of the Jewish people in Vienna. We were there about hundred and eighty thousand.

NASH: Did you still have an apartment when you were in Dachau?

BRENIG: Yes, my wife had still an apartment. Sure.

WATERS: Did they confiscate all your other thing in the house?

BRENIG: As a matter of fact, I was not direct in business. I couldn't - I didn't have a job. What could they do? - Yes, they came in and broke. I mean, they came in and broke the chairs, but the -- what can they confiscate?

WATERS: Let's say you had a bank account. Did they confiscate that?

BRENIG: I didn't have--I was never poor, but I was never rich.

WATERS: I see.

BRENIG: I mean, it was not so an account, they confiscated the bigger accounts. I was never in the high. I just made a living.

WATERS: That was their policy. Their policy was to confiscate.

BRENIG: Sure, to get rid. Not only to confiscate. They had to pay, when they left the country twenty percent of it.

BRENIG: When somebody had a house, let's say the house was, I give you an example, hundred thousand dollars, they had to pay twenty thousand dollars. That was the question, where should they take the twenty thousand dollars when they have confiscated the money. But I was just an employee, now to me, a little -- even later a little businessman. So it was nothing against me. Now is the question, where should I go? Where should I go? Now it was two possibilities. One possibility was, the same Gestapo, the same Nazis, who wanted to get rid of us, they -- let's say, they want hire this maybe -- not exactly English, they hired ships from other countries and they sold tickets. They sold the tickets to my wife, this was most to Shanghai.

It was already under Japan, China, Japan. They told my wife, if you have, let's say, a ticket about five hundred dollars was a ticket. This was wasn't too much, if you have a thousand dollars, you bring us a thousand dollars we give you the tickets and next day your husband is home. What could you do? What you had, you had to sell. And nothing to sell and I said, as I had already a little money and the America-- I think it was, (not I think, I'm sure) different organization, also the Quakers -- tried to help us. So the question -- of the sound of this thousand dollars or eight or maybe even less, it was not so, I mean, so my wife bought these tickets. And the next day I was home. She got them Friday, Saturday I was home. I had to go to the Gestapo, straight, I couldn't say they, the matter of fact, the police - the police from Vienna who were, it's not like the police in America. The police in America are very friendly, even if they call him, how the - how some p-some young people call him pigs. This is not true.

WATERS: (laughs) You c-you call them that there!

BRENIG: (laughs) I mean. I -- I - I very - I have much to do with them because --

NASH: Do you agree with that, Mr. Waters?

WATERS: Yes, I do.

BRENIG: They are very friendly. And I have much to do with them because I am also a chairman by elections.

WATERS: I happen to be a Port Authority policeman myself for eleven months.

BRENIG: They are very friendly. There's no question. For instance, if you had a demonstration in Vienna, let's say a socialist demonstration, they were from another party, they try to, not to beat, to -- how they say humiliate, here the policeman even if he belongs to the Ku Klux Klan (I give you an example) he wouldn't do, understood. He is very friendly, this is my experience with hundred of police. The police in Vienna, they were - they were policemen. A policeman is something more that a president here. He goes like this. But during the Hitler time, they were to us very, very feared. The boss. Besides the poor - the few who were also socialists, who were also Nazi members. The most were very friendly. They gave out advice how to go -- how to behave. Now I came out on Saturday, on Monday I went up to the Gestapo my wife. I ver-- I have to go out - Yeah, I have to go out in four weeks. When my ship is leaving. Oh, you sh-- they didn't have a ship at all. They didn't have a ship.

WATERS: They didn't have a ship?

BRENIG: No.

WATERS: They led you to believe that you had a ship?

BRENIG: What can I do? And it wasn't my personality, it was many like this. Really, I couldn't t-- I couldn't tell you the name exactly in America. We believe it was the Quakers with some Jewish organizations or maybe some, like yesterday, I -- I met here a Gentile organization who are for - for Israel. They tried to send us papers to come to America and this is in your time, too. You must have an affidavit, you must have somebody who - who guarantee that it's up - during the five years what you are here. You have not to take not from the city and not from the-- but besides this, you must have a number. For instances, it was for - for Irish was a quota.

WATERS: Quota, correct.

BRENIG: Correct, this was in 1924. I think it was Coolidge. He -- the people in America, it was already unemployed, they said, "We can't leave more, so many immigrants; not refugees, immigrants because we haven't got opportunity to give them. They made a quota. For instance, they said, "If the Irish people came," they made a year, 1890 or this I couldn't...

WATERS: There was no limit then for the Irish.

BRENIG: There was not a limit.

WATERS: No, there was no limit, no, not for the Irish.

BRENIG: Well, let's say for us, it was...

WATERS: The whole country could have left if they wanted to.

BRENIG: I think it was, excuse me, when I don't, because - it -- not it wasn't a limit.

WATERS: It was different there.

BRENIG: You had a limit, but your - your quota was so big because the Irish used to come, let's say, in the 1900, let's say, if a million Irish came, they gave seven percent. So you had the right so many. Your quota was open. A quo-- everybody has a quota. This is a law. Our quota was very low. My quota was seven thousand a year.

NASH: For the Viennese? For Austrians?

WATERS: Austria.

BRENIG: For Austria, yes. Born -- not in Austria, born in--before it was Austria. But I was really, I wouldn't say smart till Hitler came, when Hitler came on Friday, I went on Monday. I took a walk and I see people are staying before the American consul, what are you staying, we would like to have numbers. I was thinking, what - what can happen. I was staying and I got a number.

WATERS: In other words, you wanted to go on a quota.

BRENIG: Only on quota, I couldn't, I couldn't.

WATERS: So this is what the number meant. You had a number on this quota, a list.

BRENIG: That's right. Seven thousand -- seven thousand one hundred. The quota was seven thousand six. If I wouldn't, if I would go a hour later, I wouldn't be alive anymore.

WATERS: Your list worked like seniority list here in a job.

BRENIG: Quota, quota, right.

BRENIG: If you were in first, you got out first, right?

BRENIG: As a matter of fact, now I will, I wouldn't say I accuse America, as a matter of fact, what most people don't know, maybe you know. America didn't let in not one refugee, not one -- without a quota. Einstein, Freud, well-known scientist, who - who had to leave the country, they couldn't come to America. Only it was somethings werde [will]. America is the only one country in the world who didn't let in one Jewish refugee without a quota.

WATERS: You had the depression here then, that was one reason.

BRENIG: But when we were - we were to death. I mean we're - So. Now, I had a quota number, but I didn't have a sponsor. There was somebody from Detroit, a Doctor Terke [ph] - Terke I mean only mention, I don't know if he is Jewish or no Jewish. I never saw him, he never saw me. Suddenly, an American comes around in Vienna, told me you got papers, you can leave tomorrow. Because my number was - my number was on the list for this year. I had seven thousand ,one hundred and it was seven thousand, seven hundred.

NASH: What year was this?

BRENIG: What please?

NASH: What year was this? The year.

WATERS: The year you come.

BRENIG: 1939, this was in Nine-this was in April. I went right away to the consul, they examined and I had permission to come to America. Now -- now is very interesting. If you will let - let me --?

NASH: Please. (laughs)

BRENIG: I didn't know to whom I am going. I was on the boat. I went to England.

WATERS: Excuse me a minute. Could I ask you a question?

BRENIG: Yes, sir.

WATERS: Suppose that you fail the physical, that you --

BRENIG: Yeah. Yeah I - I couldn't come.

WATERS: you would be rejected, wouldn't you not?

BRENIG: Yesah. I would be rejected. That's right.

WATERS: You would be --. They had an examination, but it is strict. In fact you had to be almost perfect, I know that's what I come from.

BRENIG: That's right.

WATERS: Now that's why I am asking this gentleman to see if he had the same setup.

BRENIG: I still was the whole family--.

WATERS: You went before the doctor, you went -- it's like going into the Army here..

BRENIG: Everything -- examined everything: the eyes. And this was right.

WATERS: Everything [not understood] .

BRENIG: It was right.

WATERS: If you had varicose veins, you would be rejected.

BRENIG: Now I got tickets and I came with a British boat , Britannic.

WATERS: Britanic.

BRENIG: Britanic. It's not today. On the ship we were treated like everybody. I was only ashamed', a little ashamed' that we were - we had only the right to take out four dollars, four dollars.

WATERS: Four dollars.

BRENIG: This was -

WATERS: They searched your pockets, I suppose, to make sure you didn't...

BRENIG: Now I saw - I saw the waiters and I knew we have to give them tips. So I had something, I mean stamps and so on. Now, I am going to America, Tuesday in the morning, eight o'clock

NASH: I am going to stop you at Tuesday at eight o'clock and we are going to see how was Mr. Waters's trip and then we will rejoin you. (laughs)

BRENIG: Yes, because I -- this much I would like to say about the Quakers -- very good. This is most important thing what they did for us. This I -- please you can stop me if you want to hear, but this I think is most - is most important for the museum. If you would like to...

WATERS: Alright, go ahead. You tell that part of it then. All right with you?

NASH: Sure. (LAUGHS)

BRENIG: Because this -this is even from the museum.

WATERS: It's all very interesting.

BRENIG: I came eight o'clock, I told my children. "Children--".

WATERS: How many children, by the way, did you have then?

BRENIG: Two.

WATERS: You had two children.

BRENIG: Two children.

WATERS: How old were they?

BRENIG: What is --?

WATERS: How old were they?

BRENIG: One was four years and one was twelve.

WATERS: A boy and a girl?

BRENIG: Two girls.

WATERS: Two girls.

BRENIG: I told them, "Children, eat how much you can." I did not know when we would eat later because I didn't have nobody.

WATERS: Right.

BRENIG: So I - organization -

WATERS: Some situation.

BRENIG: -- the HIAS that you probably know. They took me. They had already, they knew already that I am coming. They took me out from the boat. And the next day the manager of the HIAS is coming --(this is the important thing that I would like to say, also from my organization. He told me, "My dear Brenig, you can eat here as long as you don't have a job, but the room we need for other refugees -- welcome tomorrow," and this was true. "After tomorrow, we have to try...

WATERS: To find a place to stay.

BRENIG: So I told them, it is a - it is a song I don't know, it is in - in all languages,. Where should I go?

WATERS: Yes.

BRENIG: So he gave me a letter, this that they would like. This - this -- if you would like to help me at this point, I would so--. He gave me a letter to the Council of Jewish Woman. They only took care of people who came here who didn't have relatives -- at all. I came there, they had also my name. From where they had my name, I don't know, probably from this Quaker --

WATERS: It was well organized.

BRENIG: From this organize. They - they asked me my occupation, oh, you are from lumber, I send you to Oregon, but this takes a few months. They gave me a check of fifty dollars. So you can imagine. And told me you go downtown The Fourth street -- Fifth Street. There you can have apartments for twenty dollars a month. Take an apartment. And you call us and tomorrow you have furniture. And this was it. I took apartment

for twelve dollars, I call them nex-- the next day came a big truck, second hand, second hand furniture.

WATERS: Wonderful.

BRENIG: And I was really settled. This is not far from the HIAS. The HIAS is -- used to be, today we have the - the theaters - the Lafayette Street. Probably you know -- on the 8th Street. Is different kind of theatre what they know

WATERS: Yes, that's down near Cooper Union.

BRENIG: Correct.

WATERS: That's where my son is a -- an associate professor there -- in Cooper Union.

BRENIG: Oh, in Cooper Union. To eat we didn't, I mean, what they gave. I mean, we couldn't starve. I had for twelve dollars on an apartment. I had furniture and this what I would like. If you -- . This th-- the Council of Jewish Woman, they helped us to survive. They sent me to schools and I am -- a say, I was say about one year under their, how do you say? control.

WATERS: Jurisdiction.

BRENIG: Jurisdiction. They gave - they gave us so much us to relieve. And this time us to relieve, gave to the people here for - for four - for four people. If the Council of Jewish Woman wouldn't help us, I wouldn't survive. This is the story of the immigration. We are here, we worked, my children are also professors. My daughter is in Smith College. And now we are old.

NASH: (LAUGHS) You are still a young man.

WATERS: Did you have any other children after that?

BRENIG: No, no.

WATERS: That was it.

BRENIG: That was it.

BRENIG: Now we are old and the same organization ,they understand, they understand us. And they have now the Katherine Ingalls Center. If you live not far, I wi-I will give you everything. The Katherine Ingalls Center is the one of the biggest center in the whole world.

WATERS: And where is it located?

BRENIG: In the - in --73rd Street. And we -- no racial -- no religion. We take care of people,-- doesn't cost you nothing.

WATERS: Non-sectarian.

BRENIG: Non-sectarian, everyday open from nine 'til five o'clock.

WATERS: Very nice.

BRENIG: So we can again survive. It just happen I am the president of that organization.

NASH: Mr. Waters, let's find out about -

WATERS: We got up to the time in my part of it where I started to prepare to come here. Made up my mind to come here. Well, like this gentleman is talking about having to go before the consul and having to go before a doctor and the physical examination and you could pass anything, you could pass them. This is what I had come up against. And I was worried because you feel yourself, I felt great, I felt healthy, I felt everything, but how do I know if there may not be something wrong with me that I don't know about. And before I would go to all the expense of going to the consul and failing there, I would go to my family doctor and get a through physical from him. So I went in to the family doctor in Ballymote, doctor by the name of Doctor Hart and he was out on a sick call and he come in.

Well, I rode in on a bicycle the three miles from the town and my cheeks was all, in the wintertime of the year -- was all red from the exercise and he came in and he was a great curser, "What the hell," he says, "could be wrong with you, you're healthier looking than me." You know, he was kidding. Well I says, "Doctor, I don't believe there is anything wrong with me, but I want to be sure that there isn't, so this is why I came here for you to give me a physical." "All right, get all your clothes off, everything." So he gave me a physical from the nails on my toes to the hair on my head. Measured me every way, my weight, my -- measured my eyes, took my eye test, everything. Now he says, "I give you a lot of attention. Would you have any reason to know why I gave you so much attention? I says, "No, I hope there is nothing wrong with me." "No," he says. "You have passed the police examination. The reason, and I know," he said, "what you were going to do. You were going to emigrate." He said, "My wife was in the United States for four years. It's a wonderful country, she liked it, but don't get the idea that it is the land of milk and honey and you put your hand down in the street and you pick up the gold on it. If you are lucky and if you get your health and you work and you are ambitious, you may make it. If you are unlucky and you don't get your health, you are going to be in trouble."

Now, he says, "You have passed all the qualifications; the job is yours. All I have to do is take you over to the parish priest. He is in charge of the applications, from there we go to the police barracks. The sergeant is in charge of giving OK in the test that the doctor just gave and you are on to for the police training depot in Dublin. You will be there in three days. So what do you say?" Well, I was so flabbergasted because this was something that if this was three months earlier, oh, I would have been the happiest person in the world. Once I had my mind made up to come, I don't know what it was, I would not

change my mind. So I says, "I am not going to take, or accept your beautiful invitation to join the police. I like the job. I think the job is wonderful and I says, "I know you have to be good to get there, they took the cream."

"Well," he says, "I still think you are making a mistake, but," he says, "I wish you luck. I am not going to try anymore to talk you out of it," you know. He says, "It is your life, it is what you want." So I said, "Well, I'll take my chances, I think I can. I have that - that feeling. I want to leave." "My biggest reason for leaving," I says, "we come out of a civil war. It's brother against brother," I said, "and you has 'em doublin' in the four courts, where the father and the son was inside and two sons outside fighting one another. That's what a civil war is, that's right. So there was terrible enmity amongst the peoples and accusing each other of being spies of the other side and all that stuff. So how could I be a policeman and try to apprehend or if they committed a crime or if they'd done something trivial, to bring them into court. Now which would be a job. And would be in the country and all in a small town that you would be stationed.

So then I had fully decided. I said, "No, as long as I pass the examine and double for the American Consul, I am going to the United States." And that's how I came to the United States. So that was on February the 18th that I passed the American Consul and no problem and was signed up to sail on the 19th of April from Queenstown, Ireland or Cobh as it is called now -- the Gaelic word for it. And we landed in New York--. Well first, it was a boat that stopped at Lancaster was the name of the boat, and it stopped at three ports. It stopped in Canada, it stopped in Boston and the last one was New York. A boat of 16,000 tons, the name of the boat was the Lancaster, did I say that before?

BRENIG: Yes.

WATERS: So the food was excellent. It was very crowded and all immigrants.

NASH: What part of the ship were you traveling, were you a second...

WATERS: I traveled the cheapest fare, (laughs) the cheapest fare. I certainly didn't travel no first class.

BRENIG: (laughs)

WATERS: The cheapest ticket I could get and that was third class, that's right. But we had a beautiful dining room and I must say that for - for the place. It was very nice. And I met a lot of British and Scotch, but most of them were going to Canada that I met, you know. of other countries. And there was some other European countries, but we were not mingled with them people. So - and they were put in a different part of the dining room and all this stuff, see. So that we never had an oppo-- of course, we didn't speak the same language anyway. So there wouldn't be, you know. But sometimes you would meet on deck, you know, we used to walk the deck, as soon as we had breakfast, we were

right up on that deck. That was the only exercise we had. And we played shuffleboard on the deck, you know. And then they gave a couple of concerts organized from the people that were there. We had some terrific entertainers, some great violin players. Were the immigrants and some very good singers. And you know, it was -- was terrific. And the trip took altogether from the time we left until they landed in New York -- twelve days. Landed here on April 30th, in New York. So --

NASH: How long did your trip take, Mr. Brenig?

BRENIG: About the same. We had on--we were on--only in Ireland on the coast. What was the name?

WATERS: Queenstown I guess or Cobh like me.

BRENIG: So --

WATERS: Yes, you come into Queenstown first. It was a British ship?

BRENIG: Britannic.

WATERS: So you come on that ship, first come from Liverpool then you come into Queens, now Cobh and then you come from Ireland to here.

BRENIG: It's about the same, I think.

WATERS: Only that I went to the other ports where you didn't. You come to New York direct.

BRENIG: It was in Boston for one couple hours and New York. I came in the Fortieth Street

WATERS: Oh, Halifax was the name of the port in Canada.

BRENIG: Yeah Halifax, I know, Our ship was bigger ship, Britannic -- was about, I think thirty-thousand tons.

WATERS: Britannic was a big ship. It was much bigger than the one I was on. It was about nearly twice as big.

BRENIG: Yes. Because I know Lancaster, too. But I took the first ship what --

WATERS: That was a nice boat, the Britannic.

BRENIG: I couldn't say. They were very nice, even the waiters, they knew -- they knew that we, I mean, that we are poor that we can't, they were very nice.

WATERS: There was one incident that I have to mention here about that voyage. The boys began to sing--they began to sing rebel songs. And they began to sing songs I never heard, but they were really something. And they aroused the passions of everybody that was emigrating and especially coming out of two wars, one with the British and then the Civil

War. And we had all British employees. And the song was so bad against the British, was about the British, that there was almost a riot. But the chief steward and the police on the ship, they had to come down and get the stewards that was mix-- mixing it up, you know, they was into that see.

Well, they didn't understand, they wasn't there, see. And these people, that's leaving the country now and they know it probably will be forever and they figure they haven't much to lose. And here the mainland now - was the British that's feeding them. And it's the British boat. The Irish had no boats then and there wasn't much choice in becoming a British boat. So there was almost a riot, but outside that everything was, you know, fairly good. The food was nice and the employees was nice people, you know, they're working people like everyone else. But the situation came up like these guys really sang some brutal songs, you know, about the British.

NASH: Do you remember any of the songs? Oh, you had better not say "I don't know." (laughs)

WATERS: Well, you know, no, no, it wasn't that -- 'The Soldiers Song' was one.

NASH: Would you like to sing a song? (laughs)

WATERS: No.

BRENIG: Ireland Forever.

NASH: I don't think it would be so bad, but...

WATERS: Well, the Soldiers Song wound up later, it was the national anthem of Ireland.

NASH: Oh.

WATERS: Yes. And then there was O'Donnell - the Blue which was a very patriotic song.

NASH: Why don't, would you like to sign a song?

WATERS: No, I'm sorry, I couldn't sing.

NASH: Okay, alright. I'm sorry too. So what happened when you got off the boat?

WATERS: Well, now that's a story too. When the boat docked, a telegram was awaiting me. And there was a Mrs. Gettings, her maiden name was Ward; no, her maiden name was Dunn. And she couldn't get there on time, but she sent the telegram the way I wouldn't have to worry. Now, I had a first cousin working in New Jersey, had those two or three first cousins of mine on my mother's side. And they happened to come up a little bit of trouble about a legacy from the U.S., from my aunts in California and you know, how friction can arise about money, who got this

and who got that and who should have gotten more, with the result that I was left holding the bag when I come to the-- expected that my first cousin would have claimed me. But this woman was nothing but a neighbor from home that I went to the same school with. So I had asked her to meet me as well as I had also asked him, in case. And another woman in Baltimore, about a second cousin of my father's, I could have gone to Baltimore. So I wound up in New York. Well, I wanted to come to New York. So I waited on the dock. And there you have to go before inspectors they call them, before leaving the ship. And you line up if you are aliens.

NASH: Were they on the ship, the inspectors?

WATERS: The inspectors is on the ship, they had a desk there. You went in, say, like the dining room, they used the dining room, of our third class dining room. And you get a line and you have you have your passports in order and everything and your papers stamped and the consul stamp. And the consul visa, you know. Let me see, I don't think I have the passport.

BRENIG: Yes, I forgot.

WATERS: Now I have only the American passport, so I don't have the Irish. I looked for it and I couldn't find it handy, you know, and then go getting excited about it and I said that I had to come without it. So when it come to my turn he says, "How old are you?" You know, he had it all there, but he's just checking out again to see if you're goin' to get the same answer that is down on the paper. And why you were coming here and long you intend to stay and who was I comin' to. Well, I says, "It just happened that I just got a telegram and this woman is coming to meet me and I should give them the telegram." Well, he said, "You don't need any telegram, you don't need any people to meet you." I said, "How come?" "Because," he says, "You speak the English language and you look like a fellow to me that can take care of yourself. And you can get a cab and you can go to this place you are supposed to go to if you wish to do it that way. But you are free to go and leave the dock." So he said, "What you can do is, if it's going to make you feel better, go out on the dock and when she comes you will see her. But if she doesn't come and something happens, you take a cab to that address."

BRENIG: May I? I have the same experience, but - but a very bad experience.

NASH: A bad one.

BRENIG: I mean bad, I couldn't expect better. It was the same when we came, the dining room, they - they wanted to see the papers and affidavits, the number. Then they ask you, who waits for you? A name. I mean, where are you going?

WATERS: Yes.

BRENIG: I couldn't -- I - I don't know. Who - who would take you from the boat? I don't know. Was really terrible.

WATERS: [superposed] That was tough for you. That was really tough. I could I can appreciate your problem because I know I went through it.

BRENIG: So, [not understood] they were very nice, they were on our side, but probably they find the code I don't know how -- probably they find out or it's possible, that they called this organization. He came, Isak Brenig and his wife and two children and he doesn't --. So then I went--now an inspector came and said, "Don't worry, somebody will take you out."

NASH: But they didn't tell you to get in a taxi and go, you had to wait.

BRENIG: I didn't have the money for the taxi.

NASH: The taxi.

BRENIG: The took me there, they took us with a taxi to this HIAS in the Lafayette Street in Cooper, you know, where this - this big house...

WATERS: Yeah, but they did not allow you to leave the boat until somebody come in to get you.

BRENIG: No, no. I was in the sideshow. I couldn't...

WATERS: Well, the difference with me was I - I left the boat, I did go out on the dock.

BRENIG: Where should I go, I mean.

WATERS: Yes, that's right. Well, I did go out on the dock. And they had the alphabetical order letters on the dock, you see. And if your name was "W", like mine was Waters, so I went to "W". Your name whatever.

BRENIG: "B".

WATERS: "B", you would go under the "B".

BRENIG: But I was on the side.

WATERS: So they, you know, there's -- it's just like a plane today, you know, if you ever go by plane, how they put you, how your luggage comes out. Well, they put all the baggage opposite the initials of the last name "W". And there was no problem. When I went out the bag was out there, you know.

BRENIG: Oh, that's nice, yes.

WATERS: Of course, I didn't have a lot, anyway.

BRENIG: With me they had a problem, but I was probably not the first one and they knew what to do with this kind of people.

WATERS: Yes, yes.

BRENIG: After that I was not afraid anymore. (laughs)

WATERS: Well, you want me to take it from when I met the woman?

NASH: Yes, yes.

WATERS: Alright. Now the woman showed up, sure enough two hours after she said she would. And we landed at West 14th Street, you know, in the Hudson, the West Side. I think it was Pier 58, I am not sure now the pier number, but I know it was West 14th Street. And at that time they had a trolley car on 14th Street that run from the docks through to Third Avenue on over to probably Second or First Avenue now. But she took me on the street car from that Pier 14 to the Third Avenue el, you know they had a Third Avenue el then and it ran from South Ferry to , I don't know—the Bronx at that time,. The Third Avenue el. It was elevated. So we got off at 14th Street on Third Avenue, went up and got the Third Avenue el, it was her money. And she -- it was a nickel fare - - it was something new to go through the turnstiles and all that. And, I - I don't know, I wasn't surprised and nothing seemed to surprise me, you know. I can't understand that about it when I think about it today, you know, nothing surprised me.

NASH: Did anything surprise you, Mr. Brenig?

BRENIG: Here in America?

NASH: In New York City when you first came?

WATERS: When you landed first, the very first and when you got in the traffic.

BRENIG: Yes, yes, yes. The - the fire escapes.

WATERS: That impressed you.

BRENIG: We didn't - we did -

WATERS: That impressed you.

BRENIG: We didn't have this in Europe. As a matter of fact, after the Vienna regulations, ninety per cent of this buildings has to be with not such a thing fire escapes.

WATERS: So when I got to Third Avenue, rode up on the Third Avenue El and, you know, they have the side seats and they had at that time, like the Long Island Railroad cars, you know, it was -- it was nice. And we got off at 143rd Street in the South Bronx. Now it's a Puerto Rican community. You know that area?

BRENIG: Sure, I used to live there. I lived farther, 117th Street, Tenth Avenue.

WATERS: Well, we went to 143rd Street right near the el structure. That place is not there anymore, there is a project up there now, a big high rise, you know. And after -- we went there and I stayed a --her sister was married and they had one baby and her name was Mrs. Wards. And I stayed with that woman and her husband at that address. And they moved about three or four months later and we went to 139th Street, 428, I will always remember that number, East 139th Street. And then I had a brother wants to come. In fact, he didn't waste much time about-- when he made up his mind to come and he got the money, he landed on top of me before I knew it. And he was here eleven months after I got here.

So, Michael James was his name. So we stayed with that lady I suppose, well, that was 1929, I guess about 1931. And then I started to go to Irish affairs, Irish dances, Irish communities and I met a group of young fellows that had a bachelor apartment down here on 87th Street right near the post office. Right in Yorkville, should be coming up here now. And they talked me into, "Oh, you got to come and live with us, " you know, you have to worry about what time you come in - what time you go out and, you know, this woman has a baby and everything. You'll have more privacy and, of course, I am young and I'm not married and I thought that was terrific, you know. And they do their own cooking and take care of themselves, make their own bed, take care of their own room. And it was a seven room apartment. So. I went for the bit and I wound up with them. So we stayed there with them about, and so my brother. He is with me now, see, from the Bronx. He land in the Bronx also and then we come on down to this place and we had twos, had a room to ourselves, it was a seven room apartment. It was nice, telephone, radio then, there was no TV. And we stay there until about '32, 1932.

NASH: I would like to ask you both what kind of jobs did you have or really what let's say, your most important, what you consider to be your most important work in life? If that's a fair question. Mr. Brenig?

BRENIG: As I didn't have a trade, my trade was in lumber business and they wanted to send me to Oregon and in between my little child became sick and I couldn't go. And as I had many relatives who were - who came to Shanghai who were in different kinds of concentration camps, and I tried to get affidavits for them. I didn't decide it, we don't know, so I didn't want to leave New York anymore, but I am sorry now. So I had different kinds of jobs. The Council of Jewish Women, they sent me to a trade school to learn sewing. And here you learn, I am sure in Ireland it is the same. In Ireland, if you are a tailor you must have four years.

WATERS: You serve your time, yes. .

BRENIG: In my four years -

WATERS: As apprentice

BRENIG: But here you can in one week you can be, how they say, a tailor, a tailor.

WATERS: Yes.

BRENIG: Sure. They gave me a job as a sleeve maker. I never saw in my life how a sleeve looks without a jacket. And I came to a factory, I didn't know what to do. I sew the sleeve on all four sides. I didn't know what it is. I ha-I had America in no time. A very terrible time. A very terrible time. But as I am - I save money, I was fired. The latest ten years, the latest eight years I had a grocery in the Bronx, in 170 Street.

WATERS: You know Jerome Avenue?

BRENIG: Between -- not between the Grand Co--across the Taft High School. And with a partner, I was thinking this is still the best. I didn't look for making money, just to make a living in 19, this was in 1950. I couldn't -- many people from Italy came and they were really tailors.

WATERS: Good tailors.

BRENIG: And I was really just, I was the first, I was the last to be hired always and the first to be fired because I really didn't have a real --

WATERS: You are supposed to take some talent in your hands.

BRENIG: You must learn, in Europe you must learn.

WATERS: Like a carpenter.

BRENIG: If you want to be a ca-a shoemaker, you must learn four years. And - and then my people, friends came from Vienna who had a trade. They - they were the -- I wouldn't say the richest, but the -- . I really didn't have, I was only--I was working for Gimbels. A real trade I could never--so I decided -- I saved a few thousand dollars and a friend, we had a little store and we made a living. Till - till it came the - I had twelve holdup times and I had to give it up. I was just sixty-two years old. I was the first who retired for sixty-two years.

WATERS: And you are very good.

BRENIG: And I had an income only from two hundred dollars a month, no more. Everything. Included, included. And I had a very nice wife and she told me, you -- when I had the two hol--the second holdup, she told me, "You never go on the store anymore." And we had about two hundred dollars, we paid rent eighty dollars, we paid rent and I was still - and I knew I could get a part-time job and I really get a part-time job for twenty dollars and I manage till --. I mean. So. I never get rich, I never was poor. I - I always spent less than I took in.

NASH: I know we are going to have to wind up here soon. I just want to get to Mr. Waters.

BRENIG: Yes, I understand.

NASH: Tell me something about your career.

WATERS: Well, the first job, I was here ten days, May the 10th. I come on April the 3rd. May the 10th, I went down to me first job. Some friend of the people I stayed with come up and said that he quit his job that day and that it would be a vacancy there. That was in Hearns Department store on 14th Street there. And they had a warehouse on 13th Street. There was the whole block. That was one of the big stores at that time. That was considered a very big store. It is about a hundred years old now.

WATERS: Hearns.

BRENIG: Hearns, yes. I----

WATERS: That one in the Bronx, yes, same Hearns.

BRENIG: Yes, sure.

WATERS: So I went down to the employment office and there was a Mr. Childs. I will always remember him. He was the employment manager. And I was still twenty years of age. So he says, "Yes, that job is available, but," he says, "I have another job that would be better for you." And I says, "What would that job be?" He says, "I would put you in sales because," he says, "you are very young. And I'll train you to be a salesman. You - you belong in the sales department here because to me you appear like somebody we could use in sales." "Well." I says, "What does the sales department gonna start?" He says, "Twenty-two dollars a week." "And what does the other job pay?" "Twenty-four." I says, "I want the twenty-four dollar job." (laughs) See for two dollars, the money is what I want. It wasn't until less than -- . Of course, it was foolish of me then because he was right.

BRENIG: He was --

WATERS: He could have trained me to be something, you know, I'm a salesman. Big money, you know. And he was trying to - to be nice and I didn't understand. The only thing I want, more money. Which paid the most. In the warehouse, it was real physical labor.

NASH: Yes.

WATERS: We were in the stockrooms and when an order came in for a hundred pieces, chairs, hundred pieces of a dining room set, or a hundred pieces of a bedroom set, that was heavy stuff. They had them stu-- they had this stuff in crates and they had them stacked three high. There was another man. So that you had to be good to get that third one up there with another man. So one day, we had a man by the name of Spencer, he was a Bostonian, and he was very short, but he was inclined to be, you know, nasty, so he said to myself and Tom Barnes, he was my partner, he said, "You put the third up there, the two of you." And I said, "Two of us can put that up on the top of the other two?" He says, "Sure." I said, "Alright, you and I then will do it. Just we will have to try it out, let's you and I do it. Well, he went pale, see I had him because he

couldn't do it and he knew it, but it was alright to--you know, you get a hernia, you ruin yourself.

NASH: The hernia of .

WATERS: That's right, you ruin yourself.

BRENIG:

WATERS: So I says, "Could you do it? If you can do it," he says, "I'll do it with you."

BRENIG: I had about the same.

WATERS: So he says alright. So he got, he - he himself then helped us to put the third one up, but he said-- after [not understood] - "Smart son of a b--- " You know. (laughs) And since what helped me help me -- I hear I was right, you know. And he knew what I meant see. I says, "Two men, you rupture two men, but you don't care I suppose, but I care. I'm only startin' out "

BRENIG: I had the same, this was really my first job - as, as a watchman in a matra - mattress job -- mattress shop, but I had to do the work. And this was --.Really I was strong, but this was really not possible with the big mattress.

WATERS: But you could do so much.

BRENIG: To load this in a time, I mean. As a matter of fact, they always take, the Americans always take care of the refugees, of the new immigrants. Last year was the Puerto Ricans, this year, this is the Philippines and the Taiwans. This is the -- when new people are coming they take advantage.

WATERS: Oh, sure. It's exploitation, it's exploitation no doubt about it, but that was just the bosses. If he wouldn't like it see, I mean, he wasn't the company.

BRENIG: Maybe you don't like my statement.

NASH: Oh, I think it is just a fact.

BRENIG: It is a fact, it is a fact they take a little advantage and do something for cheap money what he even can do it.

WATERS: Yes, in fact you do worse probably, in the countries you left for the same kind of -- .If - if it is turned around. There might be worse about the same kind of things. So all in all I could find that liked it -- I always liked it here. Liked the Americans and liked the way of life.

BRENIG: Sure [not understood] .

WATERS: I worked terrible hours.

BRENIG: It improve, it's sti -there's a lot to improve, it will improve.

WATERS: So anyway, if I can continue with my story. Now, after I stayed eleven months in Hearn's and I went into the New York City now, Transit system, then it was the IRT Rapid Transit Company. And the city bought it over in 1940. So. You had to be just one hundred per cent to get that job too. You had to be a certain height, you had to be at least five foot eight and physical fit and all that stuff. So I passed that without any problems. And I went into the station department of the Transit System. I was hired as a platform man. And from the platform man, if you wished, you could go into the booths. They are now called railroad trucks.

So in the meantime, what you were - like -- it was like a shape up job for the first year there. You had nothing steady, you know. And it took about a year where there would be a vacancy that you could be made to another job. So I worked in that, as a platform man on days and we had split hours. We would start at seven in the morning to ten and then you would swing from ten to two and then go back again at two o'clock, from two to seven. That gave you the eight hours. At forty-two cents an hour. That was the money.

So we done that for six days and on the seventh day, Sunday, They made you come in and shape up, even though they didn't need you. they brought in two hundred men and they might use six out of the two hundred. And you had to get up at five-thirty in the morning to get down from the Bronx to get there in time for seven o'clock report. Because a vacancy would come in by phone. Somebody would go sick on the job, you know, things like that, and they had to be replaced and you were the one to replace them. So I worked there as a relievin' clerk. If somebody got sick in the booths I would be sent out to relieve them, you know. I got good at that and they would pick on me.

Most of them fellows didn't want it because it was too much responsibility. If you run into a thief and you had to check the place out, you know, and after you signed them out, you are responsible for everything there. So a lot of times they say, alright, go ahead, being the big fellow. You would wind up with two dollars short when he would leave and you had to pay it. So I remained in Transit until the war come as a ticket agent, I was promoted to ticket agent then they called it. And they went up to a big fifty cents an hour and there was a twelve hour night. Then you went on nights, you worked a tve--a twelve hour night because I had no seniority so you took the last thing was left to you. And you had to work in Harlem starting off. There was nothing else open. So I worked there. It moved fast, though. And the first chance I got -- and we had to pick every six months, you know, where you picked where you could work. And I picked out in Queens. I picked what they called an azonta [where you worked a different place each day relieving each man on his day off.

BRENIG: Yes.

WATERS: Yes. And I would try to work in Queens as much as possible, the Astoria and the Flushing line in Queens because it was in the open air, that was my reason behind it. But it was a long night, twelve hours. You started at seven p.m. until seven in the morning and you didn't get home until eight in the morning. It took an hour to get home. So I don't care how good you were, it was, you know, it was very monotonous and if you wasn't married or had no obligations, it was tough. You'd see fellows of your own age go out on a Saturday night to a party somewhere else, you couldn't go. We had Thursday off, that was the day, I couldn't pick any other day off. I was off on Thursday -- so you had only the Thursday to go out.

NASH: Well, I want to sort of bring this to a close. I would like to know just a little bit more about, you know, your last position and then maybe if you just talk about what your children have grown up to be.

WATERS: Well, then in 1940, coming on to that, I -- '44, the Port Authority had a big ad in about they needed traffic officers. So, I decided I want to be a traffic officer. Get out of transit, so I was tired of the booths anyway. So it was a change. So I became a traffic officer for eleven months, but there's an old saying that distant hills look green far away. But I was very unhappy in that job after about six months. I knew it wasn't for me. The supervision was very strict, but the bosses was fair and nice but the top orders from the big wheels, they harassed you a lot. They expect an awful lot out of you for what they had done and what they were giving at that time.

And you go--and I worked in the Holland Tunnel and we went in the wintertime. And when it was five degrees outside, it was about fifteen in that tunnel when you stayed in that catwalk in a midnight tour. Now you stayed two hours in, there was a law, the Bureau of Mines said they could only keep you two hours in the tunnel because of the carbon monoxide. Then they had to bring you out in a wagon. And then you spent two hours outside. Then after two hours outside you went in again for another two. That's how they worked that system. So I stayed there for eleven months and then I resigned from transit and I got re-instated in transit again. And come back to transit, I was very happy to come back to it. Then the job had improved and we had, well, we had Michael Quill before I left and the union was there. I helped to build the union before I left. I used to be a part-time organizer with Quill.

BRENIG: I used to. be--.

WATERS: And I shaped up with Quill when he was on the extra list. And we'd shape up on a Monday morning, I used to meet him there, down at Grand Central where they have the office there. And then when I come back from the tunnel, I had, you know, a lot of experience of a lot of things and they used to use me three to four days a week in the union as an organizer. Go out on the road, you know, go from station to station. Men did not have to pay dues, you were working for the city. La Guardia says, "Nobody has to pay dues or belong to a union if he doesn't want to." So it was like a cajolin'. [not understood] was a good fellow. So I done that as about for about four years and then I went and got myself a part-time job with Brinks, the armor car people.

Because of the experience of the Port Authority, I knew how to handle a gun and I was a part-time paymaster for Brinks for eight years. I used to be a paymaster Friday, every Friday was the paymaster. I pay off Kolzman's in Long Island City here, that big factory. I would pay off the office. They had eight hundred people. That was the morning job and then you would do something else in the afternoon to fill a day's work. Then the U.S. Trucking bought it over, Brinks left New York. So I stay there until about a year ago, you know, as a part-time worker. Well, I was trying to educate my children, give them a college education and the one job couldn't do it, so this is the way I do it.

So. My son went to, he has an all Catholic education, the three of them. My son went Resurrection Ascension Grammar School, he went to Bishop Laughlin High School, he went to Saint Joseph's, Indiana with a B.S. cum laude, he went to the University of Connecticut for his M.A. and his Ph.D. in Connecticut. Then my daughter, she was older by two years, she went to Resurrection Ascension Grammar School and she went to Our lady of Wisdom High School and she went to Saint John's University for her bachelor of science in teaching and Hunter for her master of science in teaching. Then the youngest one, the third, is a boy and he went to Resurrection Ascension Grammar School, he went to Bishop Malloy High School and he is now in Manhattan finishing up in May and he is taking his bachelor of science in teaching. So that's the education of the three kids. And we are up to the present time.

BRENIG: Very nice.

NASH: And you have one daughter?

BRENIG: I have two daughters.

NASH: Two daughters. Ah. so, one daughter, she went to Taft - Taft High School and she went to Hunter, to Hunter College and she is Phi Beta Kappa. And she got right away a job to the State of Ohio College, she was teaching there, in history. And she made there also the B and the M.A. Now she ma-she married, her husband is a professor in English in Amherst, Massachusetts and she has only the M.A. She could have a steady job, and the thing -- she got a boy. She is a part-time teacher in Smith College in history. And the other daughter, she is a - she is a editor of Modern Romance.

NASH: Modern Romance? (laughs)

BRENIG: Yes. She is just good in writing and to my co-it's a very - it's a very good paid job. But if you would see the girl, she is just hundred per cent against this other job.

WATERS: Well, do you want me to come back now to my retirement, when I retired? I don't have to wait.

NASH: Sure.

WATERS: So 1972, I was sixty four and we get a very good pension through the union. And if I didn't go out that year of '72, the picture would have changed, I would have been reduced to about twenty per cent. So I retired in '72 with sixty-four years and forty-two years service in Transit. And I came out with a nice salary. I suppose you don't want to hear the salary.

NASH: Well, if you want to say it, we are willing to hear it.

WATERS: Well, my income is about twelve thousand a year, between social security and my pension. I am very happy and I don't have to worry. I stopped working period. That's it, I take it easy. With the gas shortage now, of course, you can't do much with a car, you cant go anywhere.

BRENIG: It's really a gas shortage, it's really one. I don't think so.

WATERS: Well, we try and get it. I've been out line-- I've been out in the lines a few times and it isn't funny. So I don't use the car, only when I have to.

BRENIG: I know, it's eighty vessels with gas and they can't unload, it's only they want to raise the prices I don't believe it is a gas shortage in America.

NASH: Well, I have to stop. It has been wonderful. I thank you for sharing the time between the two of you. It was really a pleasure.

WATERS: Well, it was nice talking with you and nice explaining.

BRENIG: I would ask you if it is possible, as we have the 80th anniversary. In our is only for immigration. The Council of Jewish Woman, if you will find out has only to do since eighty years with immigration. If could - if you could somewhere mention.

NASH: We will do, I will do an interview with them. And I have a special interview on the Council of Jewish Women.

BRENIG: On Council. Yes, yes.

NASH: Alright, thank you very much.

BRENIG: You are welcome.

WATERS: Thank You.

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