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PASSAGE BY AIRPLANE

NASH: This afternoon I have the pleasure of visiting with Miss Anne-Marie Huste who is a chef here in New York City and has her own cooking school called Anne-Marie's Cooking School. Miss Huste was born in Ulm, Germany, and came to the United States in 1963 at the age of nineteen. We are going to learn how it was she came here and what happened to her since.

HUSTE: I was born in 1943 in Ulm, Germany. I was an only girl in a family of three boys, the youngest one at that, and when you are the only girl and the youngest in a family in Germany, you learn very early to stand on your own two legs. Otherwise you will never make it above the age of ten. And all my life I loved to cook and I always wanted to be a cook. In Europe a nice girl, from a nice family, my whole family is in the fur business, just doesn't go out and cook. It is just not done. So I had a great deal of pressure there from my family that I shouldn't be doing this and all that sort of thing. But I was determined that I wanted to do it. But my mother insisted that I first learn a decent profession, which was when I was thirteen. I had eight years of basic schooling, disliked school tremendously because I always liked to learn things by hand and doing it. And so I said, "Well, definitely I don't want to go anymore to school." So she said, Okay,

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but you must learn a decent profession." And what they considered a decent profession was to learn to sell shoes. Now, in Europe, to be show saleslady it's not just where you go in a store and, "Okay, I want to be a shoe saleslady." You have to go for three years to school as well as practical training. You work for; you are in a store, in a shoe store, and twice a week you go to school and the rest of the week you work in the store. And that usually encumbers of washing windows and everything else with it. So I don't see much difference there as far as all the things you do. So after I had my exam taken when I was sixteen and was qualified to be a shoe saleslady, I called up my mother from this school and I said, "Okay, now I have a decent profession, I want to be a cook." And she says, "Well, if that's what you want to do I guess I can't stop you on it and go ahead." In my family, my brothers, I always was like, "She's ugly." And I was ugly. I have definitely improved with age. And, "She's dumb and she'll never get anywhere." With this you not only grew up with a lot of complexes but with unbelievable drive to show them I can do it. And so when I first started to be a cook, I started in my home town then went on to Munich, and to France and Italy and a little while to Greece, working always longer enough in a household to have enough money to go on to another country or another city. By the time I was nineteen, I still just hadn't gotten anywhere. I'm a very impatient person and also my brothers still sort of, well, you know, so what's the big deal; being a cook and everything. So I decided that, you see in Europe everybody knows, and it's still true today, that America is the land of opportunity and if you want to go and be a success you go to America. And so I decided when I was nineteen that I wanted to go to America. I have an uncle in Cleveland, which is my mother's brother. I wrote him and I said, "I want to come to America and be a success, be a big chef over here." And he wrote me back and he says, "Well, no, you can no longer make it, a success here. That was fine thirty years ago but today it's not possible anymore. You won't get a job and because of it we don't think you should come and we're not going to sponsor you." So I said, "Well, I'm going to go to America no matter what." Also, I couldn't speak any English either. But things like that I said, "Well, I can learn it when I get there." So I called up Frankfurt, I wrote them a letter. There's an employment agency in Frankfurt for housekeeper-type girls, which is the

only way you could come to this country. Also, you know, to tell somebody that with nineteen you want to come as a chef people say, "How could she know how to cook with nineteen?" So that was really the only possibility, and as a matter of fact, there is a very funny story. When I went into the consulate in Munich, when I finally got my visa papers and everything, in the questionnaire it says, "Do you speak English?" and I figured well, I could speak, "Yes and No and Goodbye and Good Night," and things like that, and I said to myself, "Well, if I say no, they are not going to let you go to America." So I wrote down "Yes," figuring, oh well, I can speak a little. Not realizing that before you get your papers you have to go to the consul and he will ask you why do you want to go to America and all this sort of stuff. and so, after realizing it, I said, "Oh my God, he is going to speak in English to me and I won't understand what he is saying." So the night before I went together with some friends and one of my friends said, "Oh, I know the consulate very well, the consul, very well, so please give him my regards." I said, "Oh, maybe this way you will be saved somehow." So I went there and told the consul as I walked in, "Oh, I should say hello to you." In German I said, to this friend, and then he talked and I can understand English to a degree, but I could never, sort of, I couldn't really speak it properly. So I just kept saying "Yes" a couple of times after listening to what he had to say and then I told him in German that I was so nervous I couldn't remember a word of English. Anyhow, I got my papers and I arrived here in '63.

NASH: How did you come?

HUSTE: I came by plane and I arrived at Kennedy Airport, then it was still Idlewild. And I had never seen the man, the family, I would be working for. And so I arrived there. Oh, my mother, she brought me to the airport. At this stage I had spent all my money on visas and things like that and a new suitcase and so she says, "Well, I guess you really need some money." One would have to understand the background of the part of Germany where I come from, which is baden Wittenberg. The people there are great savers of money. And like every nickel goes; they have a special saying, you know, "You work,

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work, work, and you buy a little house and you die." That type of thing, and they really do. And so my mother, anyhow, she sends me off with three dollars in my pocket, and I said, "Oh, my God, I can't go with three dollars." She said, "Well, you get a job there. What do you need money for?" So sure enough, I arrived here with three dollars. And I worked in Glen Cove, Long Island, which is where the family lived, for about nine months as a housekeeper, the twenty-five dollars a week, you name it, you did it kind. And nine months after--

NASH:       What was that experience like? How did the American family seem to you?

HUSTE:       Oh, it was fascinating to me first of all. I mean, what was one of the most impressionable things when I remember is the most beautiful room I had when I worked for this family. I mean, really a gorgeous big room and my own bathroom and I mean that was a big thing. And just the whole idea of America, and oh, the big thing I remember was the ice cream here. In Germany ice cream was still something that was very special and only in summer. And never in a gallon, you know, containers like they are here. And so for the first couple of months I ate ice cream, like ice cream was out of; I must show you after a picture of just what I looked like then and, oh, God. So also they had three children. And they were nice, spoiled brats, but they were nice. And I had a good time but what I liked about and what I'm glad about that I came this way, it showed me how people lived in this country, a family, because everything was really completely different to what happened in Germany. Like, for instance, the way you make a bed is a whole different ball game here than it is in Germany. Here you have a blanket and you tuck it over and push it in while in Germany you have these feather beds and you got to straighten it down and push a broom over so it is straight. Little things like that, that were very important. And I enjoyed being there and I learned a great deal. Of course, all the first English I learned were really bad words because the boys were, I think in every country, in every different speaking country, they teach you all the words that you are not

supposed to be knowing, but that's the first words I learned of English. Anyhow, it was really fun, but what I wanted to do was be a cook, not just clean house, and I loved doing housework and everything, but I wanted to make it as a chef here. And so I went to New York City. Oh, and you know, when I couldn't speak English there was some very amusing times. Like one time they had company and one of the guests comes in the kitchen and asks me, "Well, what are we having for dinner?" And I had then made a New England boiled dinner, you know, corned beef and cabbage, and instead of saying "corned beef and cabbage," I said, " corned beef and garbage." Little things like that, I mean, I was not only the housekeeper and cook and everything, I was also the comedian in that house and I was; every time there was company I was brought out and had to speak English. But because they couldn't speak any German and I couldn't speak any English I, of course, had to learn much faster and I'm glad for it because I learned because of it, I think, a much better english than if I would have learned it in Germany with a very heavy German accent and everything like that.

NASH: How did you learn to cook American cuisine, if that is the proper expression?

HUSTE: I think I started off with box top labels, reading it. The women showed me some of it. And then I have all my life, my favorite books have always been cookbooks, and so, of course, I right away got a hand on like Betty Crocker's and the Joy of Cooking and read them, and whenever I couldn't understand what something meant I had this little dictionary, thus Lengershire Dictionary, and I remember I was living with that like day and night, and like what's a broom, what's this, what's that. And this is how I sort of got started on it and just; I have always had a natural knack for cooking so it doesn't really matter what cooking or what country you are in. It goes very quickly when you understand what they are like and then

once you understand about food, you know, the chemical reactions, or the reaction that happens when you put what together and all of it. So I had no difficulties. I remember my first great accomplishment was an American cream cheese cake with a graham cracker crust and with strawberries on--gorgeous. I had a boy friend whose mother I terribly impressed with that. So after nine months I decided that I wanted to go to New York and find a position as a chef. So I found out which one is the best agency for private chefs in private households and I went there, and at this stage I didn't have any references as a cook in this country. So they said, "Well"--I was then twenty years old. They decided to take a chance on me and they sent me to a Greek shipping family. There were two interviews. One was with Mrs. Peter Lawford, who was the late president's sister, and this Greek shipping family. But the Greek shipping family paid me more and also for some reason the job appealed to me more. This was like from twenty-five dollars a week to ninety dollars a jump. I mean that was a biggy. I worked for them for about a year and I learned a great deal about Greek cuisine at that time. I think the most memorable thing I can remember about this job is that I used to have to peel grapes for dessert because the family did not like grapes that weren't peeled. They had to be peeled and seeded. Usually you can buy seedless grapes. Peeled grapes you cannot buy. So that was the most memorable thing in that household. But I'm a great person for challenge. You give me a good challenge and I love it. So after a year it got boring to me. It was the same thing over and over again so I decided that I wanted to have a new job, so I went back to the agency who, of course, had followed up and checked out and everything. and I said, "Well, I wanted to have another job."

NASH: What was the reaction of your employer when you told him? Did you tell them that you wanted to leave only after you had found a new job or did you tell them before that?

HUSTE: I think I told them after. No, no, I left them before I had a new job. I told them that I wanted; I have always believed in giving people plenty of notice. I have never left anybody except for one household where she counted the potatoes, where I said to her--she had this big household with all this help and everything and I just worked for a little while, and she would count every potato. And I mean one of the wealthiest families in this country. This was right after the housekeeper job. I worked for them for a little while shortly after I came here. And so one day I was so infuriated about it I said, "You know, if you can't afford to feed your help, you can;t afford me." And I walked out. I felt very big about it. But usually I always give people plenty of notice so they could find somebody else and they wouldn't be standing there. So I went back to the agency and I said, "I really want to have another job and everything." They said, "Well, the only job we really have, or position we have open now is that as chef to Billy Rose. But we really think you are much too young for this position." And I said, "Well," I was then twenty-one, I said, "Well, why don't you let me try it. You know, I mean, what can I lose?" They said, "Okay, we'll let you try it." So I went home and I told my girlfriend, I said, "I'm having an interview tomorrow with Billy Rose." And she says, "You're kidding." I said, "Who is this man? I never even heard of him and everybody seems to be making such a lot of fuss about him." And so she told me about him and I decided that is the job I want, and I have always believed in luck, but I have always believed also that you can help along little situations like that. And I decided that I wanted to know about this man before I went for the interview so I would know hot to best handle it in getting this job. So I figured well, if he's that famous I'm sure somebody had either written about him or there was a book or something. And I went to the public library and I found a book that he had written in '45, which was an autobiography which was called, Wine, Women and Words. You couldn't take out the book because it was a limited edition and I sat there

and I read the book and I was very impressed. I said, "That's the man I want to work for."

Because there was a man who started off with nothing and had so many different talents and made it perfection, each one of them, and because of it, I mean, anybody who can make for nothing sixty million bucks got my respect. I mean, no matter what you do you got to be good at it. And so the next morning I went up for the interview and when I went in front of the address, which was like a forty-eight room townhouse, I did get a little worried for a minute. And I went up there and the butler brought me up to the (?) office and everything and there comes this little man dressed sort of pretty crummy. I mean nothing special, and I figured it must be the house man or something. And he walks over and says, "I'm Billy Rose. Who are you?" I said, "I'm Anne-Marie Huste." And he says, "You're a gourmet chef?" And I had never before heard that expression, and I said to myself, "That sounds fantastic. That's what I'm going to be from now on." And I said, "Yes, I am." And he says, "Well, you certainly don't look like one." And I felt like saying, "Listen, you don't look like a millionaire to me neither." So he says, "Well, sit down." And he told me about all his beautiful houses, and he did have beautiful houses, and it ended up with him saying, "Well, you know, I really think you are much too young for this position because I've had some of the top chefs in the country and I really don't think you can cope with this." I said, "Well, Mr. Rose, in Europe we have a saying, 'Never judge a book by it's cover.'" So I don't think it's fair of you to tell me I couldn't do it unless you give me a try. If you don't like my cooking, fine, I'll go out the next day." I had a lot more guts than anything else then. And he says, "Well, what sort of cooking do you do?" And I had this really gorgeous cookbook with me that was way over my head then, and I said, "Well, that's about the type of cooking I do." And he says, "Well, the man who wrote this book used to be one of my chefs. (?) like that again, and he says, "Do you know how to make Chocolate Normandy?" I said, "Oh, sure." Never even heard of Chocolate Normandy, but I figured if I'm going to tell him no, he's going to say, "What does this kid know, she doesn't even--" So, if he would have asked me how do you make it, I would have just told him, well, that was my secret. So he says, "Okay, fine." Oh, then he said about the salary, he says, "Well, what about salary?" I said, "Well, I thought I should start about

a hundred and ten." He says, "Well, how much did you make in your last job?" I figured well, if I said ninety to a hundred and ten, it's to big a jump. If I tell him a hundred, he's not going to check it out, right? So I said, "Okay, a hundred." He says, "Well, now you think you got it made and you can ask me for a hundred and ten." And I said, "Well, Mr, Rose, when you buy a stock today, are you going to sell it for the same price tomorrow? The same goes for experience. I mean, it gains over the years and I have worked for a year for that money. I now think I should get more." He says, "Okay, you got it." Anyhow, to make a long story short, I started as a chef. The first night he had dinner there I made him all his favorite dishes and from there on there was nobody like Anne-Marie and I not only ended up as his chef, but I also ran his household, which, as I said, was forty-eight rooms and eight people in help. And I figured, Anne-Marie, for twenty-one you're doing all right. And I also ended up with a lot higher salary than a hundred and ten dollars I started out with. And I was with him until his death. And two weeks after his death, the secretary, Nancy Tuckerman, the secretary of Mrs. Kennedy, then Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy, called me up and asked if I would like to work for her, and I mean wouldn't I like to, boy. I said, "Okay, fine, I'm coming for the interview and everything." And after she got through asking me all the questions she says, "Well, you know, I think it's only fair to enough to tell you it's only a temporary position." And I said to myself, "Well, it's either now or never." And I said, "Well, I'm terribly sorry but I do not work for anybody temporarily." And I didn't because when I work for somebody I really work for them. And so I said, "I don't work temporarily and so unless the position is permanent I'm not interested in it." I would have worked for a week, I mean, if it would have come down. But I figured well, you're just going to have to pull all your guts together and do it. And so she says, "Well, let me call Mrs. Kennedy." And she comes back and she says, "Okay, Mrs. Kennedy said to hire you permanently. But she first wants to see you before its final and talk to you."

NASH: What year was this?

HUSTE: That was in '66 and it was up in 1040 Fifth Avenue. So the next day I went up to meet Mrs. Kennedy for the interview and like that type of thing. I mean, I remember when I came to this country in '63 and I remember when the late president was assassinated. When I think back, I looked at this all, I would have never in my life--I mean, if anybody would have told me, "One of these days you are going to work for his widow," I would have said, "Are you crazy, no way." So here it was. So I went up there and I remember she had a meeting with the late Robert Kennedy in the other room and I was sitting there horrified. And all the help, you could see them in the back looking through the door, looking what was the new cook like and everything. And so she came in. I was terribly nervous when I sat there, and as she comes in she has a way with people that puts you right away at ease. And she says, "Oh, Anne-Marie, you are so young and everything. It is going to be really nice for the children." And she sat next to me and we were talking for a while and she was just the nicest person you could want to be. She says, "Oh, I'm really looking forward to this. When can you start?" And I said, "Next Wednesday." And the first night, I never will forget. I started at two o'clock in the afternoon on a Wednesday, and at seven o'clock there was for dinner the whole Kennedy family. I mean the old man then was still alive, Joseph Kennedy, and Edward Kennedy and Robert. And my first day was like; and on top of it, she wanted to have certain things that I didn't know how to make. But I said, "Anne-Marie, you are going to hang in there, and being nervous is not going to help." And it worked out beautiful. And I was with her for two years, one month, and sixteen days. People have asked me that before, as you will notice, why I remember so. And that was the most unbelievably, fantastic time of my life. I mean, now I have super times too, but it was a great

challenge as a chef because I was working for a woman who had absolutely exquisite taste, not only in food but everything else. I cooked for kings and I cooked for queens and for presidents and I remember like, the then Defense Secretary McNamara would come out in the kitchen and say, "Oh, Anne-Marie, it's so good," and everything. And I learned one very big basic lesson in life which I was grateful for, and that was the bigger the people the nicer they are. It's usually always the nobodies that give you the hard time, but really, big people are very, very nice people. And she is a super lady. I really enjoyed working for her. And I loved the kids. John-John was then like in the ages of five, six and seven and he loved to cook and he was always hanging around the kitchen and Caroline too. And it was a really happy life. I would go with them in the summer to Hyannis Port and everything and I enjoyed it very much. And it was, as I said, professionally a great challenge and just for fun it was great, great fun. I just loved it. And then one day I had made lunch for Mrs. Kennedy and some guests. I walked home from lunch because my mother had come two days before to visit me and I had an apartment, which I got when I started working for her, on Lexington Avenue between 86th and 85th Street, which is right around the corner from her. And I walked home after lunch to go over to my mother. I would in the afternoon go home. And I'm walking by the newspaper stand and, you know, how you look at the front page of the newspaper to see what is happening. And I'm looking at the front page and I said, "Wait a minute, either you're nuts or you are on the front page of the New York Post." I walked back and sure enough here I was right smack on the cover and it said underneath; there was a picture of me which had appeared in Weight Watchers Magazine a couple of months earlier. They had some recipes of mine printed, which Mrs. Kennedy knew and

everything. And it said, "Anne -Marie Huste doesn't look like gourmet chef but she's in fact the gourmet chef to Jacqueline Kennedy and turn to page two." And there was this big like headline, "Jackie's cook plans a Tv dinner which sounds great." And it was written by Maxine Scheshire, which I had never heard of at that stage. In the meantime, I know who she is. And it said that I was doing a cookbook and I would be having a television show and all sorts of things that were just petty and dumb, like John-John was a better cook, no Caroline was a better cook than her mother. I'm a great believer in people's privacy. I think whatever people do in their own four walls is their business, nobody else. I've been brought up that way always and I always believed in that, so I was very; "oh, my God," I said, the only thing that is going to save you is jump down the twentieth floor because they are going to deport you or something. I mean, it is going to be just terrible. And so I went home and I called the secretary and I said, "Well, I just saw this at the news stand and what am I going to do? So she said, "Well, her lawyer just called," because apparently he had seen it in a news stand too. And she said, "Well, I'll call Mrs. Kennedy and I'll call you back." She called back a half hour later. She said, "Well, Mrs. Kennedy was very upset and she felt it would be best you don't come back." And so I was fired in other words. And in a way I was more relieved than anything else because even though I had nothing to do with the story, I would have died having to face her after this whole thing, of embarrassment.

But it turned out to be the greatest thing that ever happened to me because after the story went out; I mean that again is something nowhere else in the world could it happen. There was so much news, there was a television news station. I wasn't up in my apartment because after that UPS called me up and asked if they could have an

interview and I said to myself, "Well, Anne-Marie, you lost everything you had, which was a job. You might as well make the best out of it and you didn't do anything wrong so why not tell your side of the story. Right." So my house was just unbelievable, news, television news, for three days I was front page in New York. I have a butcher who lives in Rio de Janeiro now. It was in the front page news there.

I have a cousin in Tokyo, it was run. In Germany, of course, there wasn't a paper that didn't cover it. It was unbelievable. I mean, you just could not; my mother was there, right? She couldn't comprehend the whole thing. She was just sitting for two weeks in a state of semi-consciousness saying, "I couldn't possibly." She says today, if I wouldn't have been there, I would have nowhere believed that anything like that could have happened. Well, in this article, as I said, she said that I would be writing a cookbook. Well, writing a cookbook then was like, I know one of these days I'm going to have a house in the country and grow my own vegetables and herbs and stuff like that, but I don't know, this could be in two years, in five years, what do I know. So all of the publishers in New York called me and wanted to have the cookbook. And I said, "Well, Anne-Marie, if there ever was a time to write a cookbook, this is it." So I sat down and I wrote for two months, twenty hours a day, the book that is now Anne-Marie's Personal Cookbook, which got an award for best cookbook in '68, and was a best seller and it did splendidly, and it's just a very easy to follow book and everybody who has ever had it loved it. And then I did, I was (?) in Germany. I did some things there and I decided to open a cooking school because everybody always said, "Why don't you teach how to cook." It took me two years to find the location. It was very difficult to get the financing together. But I wanted to have just as; I wanted to have it in a townhouse, I wanted

it to have twelve foot ceiling, and I wanted fireplaces, and all of these things. And I have always believed that unless you can do it the right way, don't bother doing it. And I started it three years ago. Now, the first two years were very, very rough. I mean, if anybody ever tells me, "You were just lucky," I'm going to bust their mouth because there was a lot of hard work. I work eighteen hours a day, but I love it. I really enjoy what I do. And it's like the old story, you only get out what you put in. It's as simple as that. And that works anywhere, really. But really, when I think back of all the things that I have accomplished and today I just finished my second cookbook. I've written a book on how to equip a kitchen, just about to have my own cooking show--a television show--doing syndicated newspaper stories and all sorts of things. When I look back, no way could I have ever possibly done all of these things anywhere else in the world but here. And you know, people who say you can't make it anymore today. You can make it right now, today, if you've got what it needs to make it and that is really you have to have talent first, you have to be good at something. You have to be willing to work as hard as whatever it requires at times. You have to have a great deal; you have to be tough, and I don't mean tough, tough, I mean, I think when people should look every so often words in the dictionary. Toughness means to be to sustain pressures and to hang in there and if you get down and it doesn't work out, to get up again and try again and try again. And it has really worked for me and I mean, I haven't even started yet.

NASH: That's what I want ask you. It seems like you have accomplished all this by what, you are thirty, and all this has happened now and you are only thirty. I mean, what comes in the next thirty years?

HUSTE: I keep saying to my students, I just hit thirty, and I said, "Life is getting better everyday. I can't wait for tomorrow." I think what I really want to end up as, is America's Sweetheart in Cooking. That would about best describe it, you know, because I really love people. I love what I do. I love doing lecture tours. I love going out teaching women how to do something a little easier, a little better than she thought she could. And I've been very successful at it and I'm just hanging in there and trying and trying and even if I don't make it, I've loved every minute. I mean all the things I think I can do. I know I can do them and know they'll happen. Whether it's this year or next year, I know they will happen. But I just really love life. Every day is getting better for me, really. Eighteen hours, I mean, you give me eighteen hours of work, I love it. But you really have to, you have to work on it, and you have to constantly work and work on being better because there is everywhere, in every field, there is always twenty other people that are willing to take it away from you just now so you got to be on your toes and really work hard. The only way you will make it is being the best.

NASH: I've heard that the cooking field is very competitive and even--

HUSTE: Treacherous.

NASH: Treacherous, right, all sorts of nasty little jibes that people take at each other, is that true?

HUSTE: Well, yes and no. It is so silly though because there are too few of us and there is room for all of us. We all do our special thing and there shouldn't be such a thing. I know all of; I know James Beard and I know all of the cooking people and I am in great standing with them. You know, we sit together and we chat and everything and it really doesn't have to be that way. So I'm just going to go and hang in there and do

it. And I think I can; I know I can make it.

NASH: Well, thank you very much Miss Huste. It's bee a real  
pleasure speaking with you.

HUSTE: Thank you very much.

THE END