**Paul:** Good afternoon, this is Paul Seacrest for the National Park Service. We are here at St. John land speaking to Yolan Batta, who came from Hungary. She arrived on Christmas Eve at Ellis Island in 1921. Mrs. Batta, could you please tell me your name when you were in Hungary?

**Yolan:** Yolan Szenczy.

**Paul:** Could you spell your last name

**Yolan:** S-Z-E-N-C-Z-Y.

**Paul:** I see and what year were you born?

**Yolan:** I was born 1897.

**Paul:** In what town were you born in?

**Yolan:** [unclear 00:00:38].

**Paul:** And is that the town that you lived in?

**Yolan:** Yes.

**Paul:** I see, let’s talk a little bit about what life was like when you were in Hungary. Let’s start with your parents?

**Yolan:** My father left when I was only but 3 years old.

**Paul:** I see. Where did he go?

**Yolan:** He came to United States, he came at Cleveland Ohio, he used to live. I don't see my father since I came back here, so I met him again in 1921.

**Paul:** What was his name?

**Yolan:** John Szenczy.

**Paul:** I see, so you were with your mother then--?

**Yolan:** I was with my mother till 1905 and by 1905 my mother died.

**Paul:** And what was her name?

**Yolan:** Julia.

**Paul:** And what did she die of?

**Yolan:** I don't know, she died.

**Paul:** Were there other brothers and sisters?

**Yolan:** I had a brother and I had a sister, my youngest sister and older brother 2 years older. My brother was taken away and my grandparents took me up, my mother's parents took over.

**Paul:** And they lived in the same town?

**Yolan:** Yes, they lived in the town and they raised me.

**Paul:** And what were they like as people?

**Yolan:** They were nice. They had a little business- pork stuff, pork store. My grandmother used to sell pork animal.

**Paul:** Like a butcher shop?

**Yolan:** Butcher shop, yes something like a butcher shop. So we had alright, [unclear 00:02:21] and there was a war came out and father [unclear 00:02:26], we donate from him nothing. After the war, he wrote a letter, he wants to come. Alright, in the meantime I lost my sister in 1916, so true and she died in tetanus.

**Paul:** And what was her name?

**Yolan:** Maria, so I had my brother and my brother was a soldier, he was in the army.

**Paul:** He did not go to live with your grandparents, yes or he did?

**Yolan:** Who?

**Paul:** Your brother.

**Yolan:** My brother was lived, yes sure.

**Paul:** I see, you grandparents took all the children.

**Yolan:** Yes, took all the 3 of us, yes sure and raised us.

**Paul:** I see, let’s talk a little bit about your life with your grandparents, for instance--

**Yolan:** Life was alright but I lost my grandpa in 1913 and it was only my grandma.

**Paul:** Did grandma did the cooking?

**Yolan:** Yes, she did.

**Paul:** Was she a good cook.

**Yolan:** She was a good cook, my grandma was [unlike 00:03:27] coo...

**Paul:** I see. What did she make that you liked? What was your favorite?

**Yolan:** Everything.

**Paul:** Everything was great. Did you ever help her with the cooking?

**Yolan:** [unclear 00:03:35] yes.

**Paul:** She was running the shop with your grandfather right

**Paul:** Did you or your brother or your sister, did you ever help out in the shop?

**Yolan:**  Not much.

**Paul:** Not really.

**Yolan:** It was too small.

**Paul:** Did you go to school?

**Yolan:** Yes, I got to 6th grade, grandma school otherwise I don't have high school. Just the grandma the 6th grade.

**Paul:** Did your grandparents supply music lessons, piano lessons anything like that?

**Yolan:** No.

**Paul:**  No, they were not musical people.

**Yolan:** No, it wasn't.

**Paul:** When you were a little girl in Hungary, for instance what sorts of games did you play [chuckle]? Did you play with the other children?

**Yolan:** All kinds of games. Oh I love person like a tom boy.

**Paul:** I see so you were kind of an active overall.

**Yolan:** Oh yeah.

**Paul:** What about your sister and your brother? Were they active children also?

**Yolan:** Same too, same too.

**Paul:** What about religious life? What religion was it?

**Yolan:** I was a catholic, roman catholic.

**Paul:** And were you very devout?

**Yolan:** I would say yes. I went to catechism school every week, once a week the catechism.

**Paul:** And then did you go to mass on Sunday?

**Yolan:** [unclear 00:04:59]. I still know the stories.

**Paul:** They drilled into you.

**Yolan:** Oh, yeah.

**Paul:** Let’s talk about the holiday for instance, was Christmas a big deal or Easter was a big deal? They were

**Yolan:** Oh yes, it’s a big deal. Christmas or the New Year’s and all the holidays we had all the holidays.

**Paul:** Did you have parties at your house.

**Yolan:** Yes.

**Paul:** Who came?

**Yolan:** No strangers, kids.

**Paul:** I see, you said your sister died later on. What happened after that?

**Yolan:** I was with my grandma.

**Paul:** And your brother was gone at that time.

**Yolan:** My brother was a soldier, he was almost in the war all the time because 1918 there was all over then he came home, he got married and I stayed with my grandmother till I came out to United States.

**Paul:** I see, let’s talk about why did you come to the United States? Who made that decision? Did you decide you wanted to come?

**Yolan:** I did and my grandmother too. They wanted to send me to my father but my father find out that he wanted to see me, he wanted to have me.

**Paul:** What was your father doing? What business was he in? What jobs did he do?

**Yolan:** My father had a very good boots, he made boots.

**Paul:** Shoes. In Ohio.

**Yolan:** Made in Ohio and in Europe and he was working in railroad. A rail road Ohio some place, I don't know where [unclear 00:06:56] in Cleveland Ohio and [unclear 00:07:01] and they burnt him out [chuckle].

He had some property there and they want to take him over the Italian people [unclear 00:07:09] and they want to take that property for him and they don't want to hear it, so they burnt the whole [unclear 00:07:14]. One day he came home there was only the trunk left over, nothing at all. So in 1930 he died in the hospital, I was up there. I was there when he died.

**Paul:** Alright, let’s get you to America now. So you decided you wanted to go to America and your grandmother decided she also wanted to go. So you both came together?

**Yolan:** No, I only came alone.

**Paul:** You came alone, grandmother didn't come with you.

**Yolan:** I came. I lost my grandma 1918, she died 1918.

**Paul:** And so did you save up your money to come?

**Yolan:** My mother's sister had an aunt here, my mother's sister in the meantime she was only visiting, she was visiting, she was home.

**Paul:** Where did your aunt live here? Where in America?

**Yolan:** In New York, in Central Park West. I know my aunt and when father came, get me in Ellis Island I refused to go with him, I told him I want to go with my aunt. My aunt came to see me every day and had me something to eat because I didn't like the stuff, what they gave me there.

**Paul:** Do you remember the boat ride over?

**Yolan:** It was the Layon.

**Paul:** It was on the Layon.

**Yolan:** The French line.

**Paul:** I see, from what port did you leave?

**Yolan:** Louvre through Layon.

**Paul:** So how did you go? Did you go by train from hungry to France? How did you get to--?

**Yolan:** To train.

**Paul:** To train, and you travelled alone?

**Yolan:** 32 of us, a bunch, immigrants they came out.

**Paul:** That’s a long ride with 32 others. What class did you travel on--?

**Yolan:** 3rd class.

**Paul:** Do you remember that at all? Do you remember what it was like? Did you have a cabin?

**Yolan:** I don't remember. All I know is all young people, all young people 31 of us was the first get there, so it was kinds of people there and we had a good time believe me I had a good time there [laughter].

**Paul:** Was the boat ride rough at all? Did you get sick on the boat?

**Yolan:** Most terrible, it was terrible, I thought every minute [unclear 00:09:38], it was shaking and [unclear 00:09:42] and screeching and everything and the tides, tell you something the water that came above like mountains. They were big mountains that [unclear 00:09:54] the whole thing and the water too was terrible.

**Paul:** Do you remember how long--?

**Yolan:** 11 days. I remember French.

**Paul:** Do you remember seeing the statue of liberty when you arrived? Were you happy to see the statue of liberty?

**Yolan:** I remember, too I remember.

**Paul:** Too you remember it.

**Yolan:** Too I remember, early in the morning and then it was all on the deck, all on the deck.

**Paul:** Everyone came up, waving at [unclear 00:10:29].

**Yolan:** They did.

**Paul:** So were probably very happy to see land after--

**Yolan:** Of course I was happy.

**Paul:** And after that kind of a boat ride.

**Yolan:** Oh boy, it was terrible.

**Paul:** Alright, let’s talk about Ellis Island now.

**Yolan:** I like it.

**Paul:** What do you remember about Ellis? You were there for 2 weeks.

**Yolan:** 2 weeks.

**Paul:** And why were you there? Why were you detained?

**Yolan:** I'm telling you my father came to get me and then I don't want to go with him, I don't know him. When I saw my father's first, I looked at him and he looked at me and he was a nice looking guy, he was a nice [inaudible 00:11:06] and that’s strange but my see my aunt and he's got [unclear 00:11:15] and so he left then he went back to Cleveland Ohio and my aunt came to see me.

They don't want to let me go with my aunt, so one day I don't know what to do, so they used to live a lady there in that Central Park West, a lady is some senator. They had a friend senator, the lady called up the senator, they called off the president.

The president sent a telegram to Ellis Island, "Let the girl go immediately," I saw the telegram, my aunt saw the telegram too so they let me go. That’s how I came out to the central park first.

**Paul:** When you were at Ellis Island you said the food wasn't very good, why? Was it just strange to you?

**Yolan:** Strange and everything what happened. Where I came from is plenty Jewish people and I know friends were Jewish so I used Jewish kitchen and since I go to the Jewish kitchen and the [unclear 00:12:33] food. I go there to the Jewish kitchen they give me a [unclear 00:12:38] and gave me a boiled potato on a plate [laughter]. I want to get the [unclear 00:12:47], so I got up heading plate and a boiled potato. I know if I get it.

**Paul:** Did you eat in a big room?

**Yolan:** Big room.

**Paul:** Were there a lot people who were detained with you? Lots of people on the island.

**Yolan:** Oh yeah about 2000 people, they were coming and going, they're coming and going. They're picking them and sending back some of them, they were sending back, some of them they were sending up. It was everyday commotion, always something going around there, always.

**Paul:** When you were at Ellis, were there other people from Hungary that you could talk to because you didn't speak English?

**Yolan:** 32 of us.

**Paul:** There were 32 who'd come over.

**Yolan:** Yes.

**Paul:**  So at least you had somebody there that you could talk to. Where did you sleep? Do you remember [laughter]?

**Yolan:** That’s another one [laughter]. I had a cage like and we're sleeping in there so if you have a girlfriend, it’s a monkey cage we called it [laughter]. She called monkey cage, it was alright.

**Paul:** And that’s where you stayed the 2 weeks that you were there. Did they ever show you movies or [crosstalk 00:14:14]?

**Yolan:** I don't remember that, no.

**Paul:** Nothing like that. Well then you must have been very relieved when they finally let you off of Ellis Island. Okay so you go to Central Park West, talk a little bit about- because you went to stay with your aunt and what did she do or what did her husband do? They must have been rather affluent.

**Yolan:** Yes, she was living there. She had an apartment there in Central Park West.

**Paul:** And you were 21 rights?

**Yolan:** 24.

**Paul:** And so did you get a job in New York or?

**Yolan:** 2 weeks later.

**Paul:** What did you do?

**Yolan:** Domestic work, I went working for people [unclear 00:14:56].

**Paul:** For one family?

**Yolan:** We have family.

**Paul:** Do you remember their names? No.

**Yolan:** Russians.

**Paul:** They were Russians.

**Yolan:** I start to make- I'll never forget it. I start to make [unclear 00:15:06], you make Hungarian pastry, they call it [unclear 00:15:13]. So the lady, they let me do them and she [unclear 00:15:16] and I opened the whole thing, the door and everything.

She called the whole house. She called out the whole house, “Look at what she’s doing,” because she hadn't seen something like that. I pulled the door and I talked to her on the table [unclear 00:15:40].

**Paul:** She's never seen anything like [laughter]. Were they nice people to work for?

**Yolan:**  Yes, they was alright.

**Paul:** Did you work there a long time?

**Yolan:** It was about 6 months.

**Paul:** And then what happened?

**Yolan:** Again change to different place. I learn English. I learnt the language as much as I could.

**Paul:** How did you do that? Did you go to night classes or anything like that?

**Yolan:** No, people were [unclear 00:16:23], so I learnt it and when I came out there I spoke Bohemian good, Bohemian and Germany and Hungarian, so the English it just came to me. So in 6 months I was speaking English.

**Paul:** How long did you live with your aunt?

**Yolan:** Oh, I don't live at all. I was working.

**Paul:** I see, so you had your own place?

**Yolan:** No, I was working then I got married.

**Paul:** I see.

**Yolan:** I got married and [unclear 00:16:57].

**Paul:** I see, what year did you get married?

**Yolan:** About 1920 I guess.

**Paul:** And to whom were you married?

**Yolan:** Hungarian guy. I don't have it here. I just had it this morning I took it out. I got a picture here but I put it back, Hungarian guy.

**Paul:** So after you married.

**Yolan:** I went work for the shop. I learnt [unclear 00:17:32] and I was 39 years [unclear 00:17:41] lady.

**Paul:** You're saying [unclear 00:17:48]?

**Yolan:** Making [unclear 00:17:49- unclear 00:17:54] or everything.

**Paul:** Did you ever hook up with your father again.

**Yolan:** He died in 1930, I lost him in 1930.

**Paul:** That’s right, and did you see him before he died or you never did?

**Yolan:** No, not after that but I was there before about a week before.

**Paul:** Before he died.

**Yolan:** He was in the hospital and he let me know if I wanted to see him, my father I should go see him so I went to see him. That week later he died and I couldn't go back again. I was very [unclear 00:18:34] and I just wasn't so close with my father either.

**Paul:** You worked in the fur business.

**Yolan:** I worked in the fur business for 39 years.

**Paul:** That’s 39 years and your husband was in the fur business.

**Yolan:** He do the same thing.

**Paul:** And you were living in New York City then?

**Yolan:** Yes.

**Paul:** So you lived in New York all that time.

**Yolan:** Yes in the Bronx.

**Paul:** Did you have any children?

**Yolan:** I had lost two.

**Paul:** I see and after you retired from the business, did your husband retire first or did you sell the business?

**Yolan:** I don't know, I don't remember. All I know my husband lay down and then don't forget to get up.

**Paul:** I see what year was that?

**Yolan:** He died.

**Paul:** What year?

**Yolan:** I think 47" 57.

**Paul:** So when did you move to this area of Long Island?

**Yolan:** 25 years ago. I live on this side about 22-25 years.

**Paul:** I see, long time. Well I think that that probably wraps up this interview. I want to thank you very much for taking out of your time.

**Yolan:** Thank you for coming here.

**Paul:** For telling us about your experience.

**Yolan:** I hope they use it.

**Paul:** Oh, it’s great and we really appreciate you and then you letting us do this with you. So anyway this is Paul Seacrest signing off for the national park service.