**Janet:** Today is August 23rd 1994 and I'm here in the Ellis Island Oral History Studio with Renee Neiss who came from Austria when she was 28 years of age in 1940.

She is visiting here from California and I'm delighted to meet you and I'm looking forward to hearing your story. Why don't we start at the beginning and say your birth date and where in Austria you were born?

**Renee:** My birth date is April the 18th 1911. I was born in Vienna, Austria.

**Janet:** Did you live in Vienna up until 1940 when you came to this country?

**Renee:** I lived till 1938. I left 1938 to Holland, illegal, and there I gave birth to my baby because I had no rights there for any hospital or any doctor. It was very dangerous to stay there because our lives were in danger.

**Janet:** Let's begin talking about your life before the rise of Hitler, when you were living in Vienna before it became dangerous for you there. First of all, what was your mother's name and her maiden name?

**Renee:** My mother's name was Mina Bertisch, her maiden name.

**Janet:** Could you spell it please?

**Renee:** Bertisch? B-E-R-T-I-S-C-H and her first name was Mina, M-I-N-A.

**Janet:** And your father, his name?

**Renee:** My father was Emile Machauf.

**Janet:** Mauchauf that was the maiden name?

**Renee:** M-A-C-H-A-U-F.

**Janet:** Did you have grandparents living in or around Vienna that you saw with any frequency when you lived there?

**Renee:** Yes. My grandma was living with us but she was put in an old age home because of Hitler but it didn't help because he took her out... I was left already, but my mother wrote to me, they took her out of the old age home and brought her with 92 years to Theresienstadt and there she died after a few years.

**Janet:** Do you remember... Could you discuss the circumstance...? Was that something that happened that people, elderly people were taken out of their homes?

**Renee:** Everybody was taken. Many people, the Jewish were taken out of their homes. I saw that Crystal Night that they- I had a store, a milliner store and the people, my super came in the back and told me, "Close your lights and close the doors. I will not say that you're in there." That's how I was saved. They taking all the people from the house, they're Jewish and I was there closed in.

After a while, it was quiet. I went out. Of course I didn't look Jewish. I was blond, blue eyes and nobody bothered me really, so I went home but when I came home I looked through the window. The people were taken out from across the street from that house in a big truck, pushed in, hit them with whips, and pushed them like sardines in a truck and put them away. They never came back. It was very bad.

**Janet:** Do you remember... can you describe what happened in your grandmother's situation? She was taken to an old age home?

**Renee:** From an old age home.

**Janet:** Oh, she was taken from an old age home.

**Renee:** From an old age home to Theresienstadt which is a concentration camp.

**Janet:** I see.

**Renee:** My mother, I don't know where she died. She must have died on a transport because she didn't make it. They took every single way. I had a store, they took that store away, they took our apartment we had, and they took everything they could take.

**Janet:** Now how was that done? When you say they took your apartment, what actually happened?

**Renee:** They just came... I had to close it when I went home. They put a seal on the front of the door, so I couldn't open it anymore and then they came, like SS people, came to my house and asked for the keys and I gave it to them because they came, they had guns.

I do meet a lot of trouble before I had to change the name, Renee Neiss [? Hutsalone 00:06:05] and to say that is not German. It's the [unknown 00:06:11] should write German. I should write it in Jewish letters, Hebrew letters. I didn't know but my uncle did it for me.

He wrote it for me and I had to make.... Everything was costly. They wanted the tax, we should pay the tax. On the front of the store, they made signs, "Don't go in, Jewish" and they made on the window marks [unknown 00:06:49], this swastikas and it was bad. Even before they closed, it was bad because if someone came in to buy but they were not Jewish, they put them in the window and hung a board and then, "She is a pig." "She is a swine", they wrote on it.

**Janet:** This was somebody who...

**Renee:** That's under Hitler's regime.

**Janet:** Who would they take to put in the window that way?

**Renee:** The woman who bought, when she was a Christian woman

**Janet:** And she bought in the store of the Jews.

**Renee:** And she bought in a Jewish store, they put her in, not in mine because I had a small store but across the street it was a big store, they put her in the window and put a sign on her that she is a swine, a pig. It was really bad.

They force people to live... If it's a mixed marriage... I had friend, he had a store, he cut hair, a barber, and he was married to a Jewish woman. He had to leave her. They forced her not to be together otherwise they would put him also in the concentration camp. It was really bad, very bad.

**Janet:** Can you think of any changes as this Hitler regime was building up, can you think of the changes that happened from what your life had been, ordinary life had been and other things that began to happen as this built?

**Renee:** Yes. Before I could go anywhere I wanted to go in a restaurant or in a movie, anywhere but I couldn't do this because it says, “Jews and dogs are not allowed in here.” So you couldn’t go, my husband said, “He doesn't want to stay there. We have to go out illegal.” I have to leave my mother because she didn't think it would be that bad. Nobody thought it would be bad, that they would kill people like this.

**Janet:** Do you remember what you thought? Once you realized that people were being taken away in Trucks, what were you thinking of that?

**Renee:** I was very afraid. If I heard them marching through the streets, I was very afraid. I couldn't sleep, I couldn't work. I always thought they would come. Yes, it was very bad.

**Janet:** Before the rise of Nazism, what was your life like?

**Renee:** It was very nice, very nice. Vienna is a beautiful city and has nice routes all around and the people are very friendly. The food is very good in the restaurants and you have all the culture there, so nobody could think it would happen like this. You had the opera, theaters and I enjoyed this. It was very nice, but the people they're not nice.

**Janet:** How about as being a Jewish family, part of a Jewish family, how were you treated before Hitler came on the scene?

**Renee:** I had no troubles, no but my brother had a friend. They were from the first grade to end of college, they went together. When Hitler came, the last year of college he couldn't finish because Hitler came and that friend sent him back all the books. They were studying together for so many years, sent him all the books and said, "I'm sorry. I can't see you anymore because I was illegal, Nazi. I worked illegal for the German party, for Hitler." We were just like this, couldn't believe it, some people.

**Janet:** Were you a religious family?

**Renee:** Yes, we hold our holidays, just the holidays. I didn't go every day to the synagogue but we kept our holidays and my grandmother was very religious.

**Janet:** Was this your mother's mother?

**Renee:** Yes.

**Janet:** Can you think of any experiences with your grandmother prior to Hitler, when you were younger and things were more harmonious?

**Renee:** Yes. She went with us to the park. She taught me some baking, cooking. Yes, she was very nice, very nice. We had someone one who comes to our house to clean, make the laundry, but on that day, nobody came anymore and they just came and wanted the money, even they didn't work. We told them... My brother said to them, "Listen. That's not honest. You ask something that you shouldn't get." Some went away.

**Janet:** How would you describe the change in ordinary people that you had dealings with?

**Renee:** Yes. They didn't talk to us anymore. They were afraid because they arrested Christian people too if they helped Jewish people. So they were very afraid, but some were better, some were worse.

**Janet:** How about your father? What was he doing for a living in Vienna?

**Renee:** My father was dead already for many years. He was not there.

**Janet:** How old were you when your father died?

**Renee:** I was 21.

**Janet:** Did he have a business before he died or what was his work?

**Renee:** He was a painter.

**Janet:** An artist or a house painter?

**Renee:** A house painter.

**Janet:** And your mother, did she work at all?

**Renee:** Yeah, she was a businesswoman. She bought some merchandise outside of Vienna for people who couldn't come in to buy stuff. So she went out, get some orders for sweaters, shirts, anything.

**Janet:** So, she didn't have a shop but she just went out and-?

**Renee:** She just went and she got the orders and then she ordered it in the wholesale place and she delivered it to them.

**Janet:** Were you an only child or did you have brothers and sisters?

**Renee:** No, I had two more sisters and one brother. My brother died in Israel. My sister died before Hitler in Vienna and one sister still in California, living.

**Janet:** Do you remember when it became apparent to you that you had to leave in order to save your life?

**Renee:** Yes, after the Crystal Night, after that day, it was very bad and you couldn't go no place. Everything was- you were not allowed to go. I was very hurt. Even I sneaked out and again because nobody bothered me, but my husband, he had dark hair and if you had dark hair, you're not good.

You look too Jewish, anybody. They didn't care. They didn't like people with dark hair. Seems very crazy but it was like this. He said he does not want to stay, he has to go, and I was in the third month of pregnancy when I left.

**Janet:** What was your journey like leaving Vienna?

**Renee:** Well, it was hard but in a way, because I didn't know what will happen because we had no visa, nowhere to go, so we went illegal. When we came to the border, we went in the trolley car, and one SS man came to us and I was very afraid.

He said, "What are you doing?" Does he know we're not from that town, from their little town in Cleveland? This was in Germany, and he said, "What are you doing here?" And from the duty where you pay to go over when you bring stuff for [inaudible 00:16:32]. My husband said, "Oh yes, that's very good, but we need you. We want to see you anyhow." So he took us off the thing. It was a lie, but he tried to save his life.

He took us there and I had to undress and he look all my clothes too if I take something illegal out but we have our papers in order. I had my tax paid, and I had exactly the money that I could take out. I had ten shillings too much so I had to send that back. Then the woman said, "Alright, I find nothing, put your stuff on." She was nice because I had some jewelry on me because I had to go out because I didn't know what will happen. My husband said it was okay.

I had bread and salami, and we cut this all in pieces to see if nothing is built in. Then they said, "Alright, we'll show you the way how to go." My husband said, "The Gestapo in Vienna told us to come to you, you will help us." They believed him, I don't know, I was surprised.

Then they send us someone with a bicycle to show the way. It was a way to the routes. It was drizzling rain and we had to run to the route, and he said, "Don't come back because if you come back, I can't help you," something like this. He threatened us and we were running, running through the routes.

On the way there was a fog. I said, "I don't know how to go, straight, across, right, left." I have no idea but that was already Holland, the border of Holland. I know they take the people that back from there and send them back if they find them there where they patrolled.

When I looked up, it was two women staying a few meters away from me and I went to them. I knew a little bit Holland, not much, but I said, [unknown 00:19:09]. That was the town where we want to go to get the train to Amsterdam because in Amsterdam, we had an uncle, my husband had an uncle and we could stay there.

**Janet:** Do you know how to spell the name of that town?

**Renee:** Mymagen, I'm not sure. It's M-Y-M-A-G-E-N. I'm not sure exactly, something like this.

**Janet:**  So you asked the two women?

**Renee:** The two women that, "Oh you are refugees. Come on. Five minutes, there's a bus coming. I'll take you." I think they were two angels, those women. They took us to that bus, they paid for us the tickets and then she wondered if we should go to eat. I said, "No, please, here is the money.” The five gulden per person “Get us the tickets to Amsterdam and show us because we don't want to speak German, we don't want to speak because they'll send us back." They were very nice. They bought the tickets for us and they put us on the train.

**Janet:** So they went with you on the bus?

**Renee:** Yeah, they went anyhow on the bus. I think they went to the bus. I didn't see no houses, nothing, but just in front, a few meters were two women and they were very nice.

**Janet:** Then you got to the train?

**Renee:** Then we got to the train. We went in, direct to Amsterdam. Even there my husband was afraid. He said, "Just don't go from the front. Go from the sideways." But not long we were in Amsterdam. We had to go to the police to tell them we were here. It was about Christmas. At the [unknown 00:21:18] all the people who came to the time and that week could stay. They were not sent back.

**Janet:** That was the week you arrived?

**Renee:** Yes, that was the week we arrived. We came on December 8 and so I was lucky but it was not so good in Holland either. My husband after two, three weeks about they took him to a work camp in Holland. It was hook from Holland so that he shouldn't be able to work. They didn't want the refugee to work and take away from the job from other people, not like the United States.

Yes, they took him to a camp and I was alone. I was by his aunt and uncle, I stayed there and when I gave birth in April the 13th, 1939 to my son Edgar, my husband came to visit me with two policemen. They did not let him go out. The Jewish organization had to pay for his stay in that camp, in that work camp.

**Janet:** What was it like? What happened in those work camps? What did your husband tell you about it?

**Renee:** Well, he said they had to clean the rooms and the toilets. They had just work and stay and sometimes they had to turn the earth. He worked there. Light work. It was not a prison, but like a prison. He couldn't go out by himself. It was like a prison.

**Janet:** Was all Jewish people, were there or were there other people also confined in that work camp?

**Renee:** I don't know. Yes, I think there was other people too. I don't know, but most Jewish people, people who came illegal.

**Janet:** I see. What was it like for you to give birth to your first one under such circumstances?

**Renee:** It was very hard because I was alone. My mother was not with me. She was still in Vienna.

**Janet:** Did you have communication with your mother at that time or not?

**Renee:** Yes, yes. It was very bad there. I send her some packages, some letters. I want to send some money and she said, "Don't send me any money," because she didn't get it. That means I didn't get it. When the war broke out, I was here in the United States and I had no communication. I even paid in some money to get a visa to get her out, but I got the money back. It was too late. Everybody closed the doors.

**Janet:** This was what year? 1939?

**Renee:** 1940.

**Janet:** Well, what was your plan? You were staying with your uncle, when you were in Amsterdam?

**Renee:** Yes, I was staying with my uncle, the uncle for my husband really.

**Janet:** From the time you got to Amsterdam, were you trying to get to-?

**Renee:** I had the visa already. That's why went on the way from Vienna because we had no chance to wait there. They would kill us.

**Janet:** I see. Was your uncle in any kind of danger in Amsterdam?

**Renee:** Yes. My uncle later when Hitler went to Amsterdam, to Holland, they took him in a concentration camp.

**Janet:** That was after you had gone.

**Renee:** I had gone. I was always going out in time.

**Janet:** How was it that you were able to leave finally?

**Renee:** I had my affidavit. That affidavit was given to me but I had to wait. My quota was not ready. They didn’t give me, every day you have to and so we figured out we don't want to wait in Vienna anymore because it's too bad. So we went illegal, even it was already, “Don't go away. If you go away and we catch you, we put you away or something like this. When we went away, it was 3 o'clock in the afternoon so we didn't wait till its night and we go and out. We were lucky.

**Janet:** And your husband, when he was in that work camp, did he feel that he was better off there than he would have been had he stayed in Vienna?

**Renee:** Yes, I think so because in Vienna, we were threatened. Our life was in danger.

**Janet:** And your mother? Was she being threatened when you had some communication with her from Amsterdam?

**Renee:** Well, it was no good, but she doesn't believe. She didn't want that I should go. She said, "I can't believe that they'd [inaudible 00:27:25]," She said, "in Germany. It's already two years, so I don't know how many years before and nothing happened, so it will go over." She thought like this and that was bad. She didn't want to go because of her mother. It was hard because... But then later she put her in that home for old people, old age home, but it didn't help anyhow.

**Janet:** When you're quota finally did come up, I take it, and once the quota came up, did you travel from Amsterdam to-?

**Renee:**  Yes, and to Rotterdam.

**Janet:**  To Rotterdam and that's where you left for the United States?

**Renee:**  Yeah.

**Janet:**  Okay, I think we'll pause here were going to turn the tape over and then we'll continue with the voyage.

**Renee:**  Okay

**Janet:**  This is side B and I'm speaking with Renee Neiss. Okay, so you went from Amsterdam to Rotterdam and there what ship did you take to the United States...

**Renee:**  From Rotterdam we took a closed train to Antwerp.

**Janet:**  Oh, you went to Antwerp

**Renee:**  Belgium and there was a ship rolling down.

**Janet:**  Did you have any kind of examination or any kind of interrogation before you left Antwerp?

**Renee:**  Before I left, I think a month before I left, I went to the consulate, to the American consulate and had examination and everything was okay and then I got the visa.

**Janet:**  They examined your papers and did they also examine you physically?

**Renee:**  Yes, they examine my papers and physical.

**Janet:**  Now you were travelling with Edgar your baby at that time?

**Renee:**  Yes, baby Edgar. He came with me on the boat.

**Janet:**  It was just the two of you travelling together?

**Renee:**  That's right. My husband had to stay back because he was in the camp and his visa was not ready.

**Janet:**  Once his visa was ready he would be able to leave the camp, was that?

**Renee:**  Yes.

**Janet:**  I see. How was it saying goodbye to him. Did you see him before you actually left Amsterdam?

**Renee:**  Yes, I saw him for a short while but he said I have to go. I have to go because my baby was 11 months and if I would have waited other month I would have to pay for him a whole fare. As a baby I just have to pay a little bit, I think $10 something like this.

**Janet:**  So the plan was that your husband was waiting for his visa and when it came through he would join you in the United States.

**Renee:**  Yes. That was bad situation, I didn't like to go but they said, they forced me. The committee in the Holland forced me to go. They said, “You have to go,” because you have to pay other ticket four ticket and that's too much.

**Janet:**  What was the crossing like? What was it like on the Volendam?

**Renee:** The Volendam was very nice, the waiter was a little rough but the crew was very nice and they helped me and they could take care of my baby. It was a very nice voyage.

**Janet:**  Were you traveling in first, second third or steerage class? Do you know?

**Renee:**  I think it was one the same.

**Janet:**  It was all the same?

**Renee:**  They gave me very nice cabin because they couldn't put the bed in for the baby crib, there was no place. So when I speak pleasant cabin with two beds on the side, so I could put the baby in a bed.

**Janet:**  So it was just you and the baby in the cabin?

**Renee:**  Yes it was nice, it was very nice voyage.

**Janet:**  Do you remember any of your conversations with people on route or anything that happened?

**Renee:**  No, everybody was happy, happy to go out. To come out and leave because in Holland was not so good anymore.

**Janet:**  Were there mostly Dutch people aboard

**Renee:**  No.

**Janet:**  It was all

**Renee:**  People were all different, most German people, Austrian people, it was mixed.

**Janet:**  Do you remember the Volendam coming into the New York harbor?

**Renee:**  Yes.

**Janet:**  What was that like?

**Renee:**  When I saw the statue of liberty, a warm and exciting feeling came to my whole body and I felt finally free and there was anxious to start the new beginning. I was very happy.

**Janet:**  Did you remember seeing Ellis Island from the ship?

**Renee:**  No. they told me, I can't go down even my brother in law, my sister no one to pick me up but they were not citizen and the men who gave me the papers the affidavit could not come, he had a store that was very busy. So they brought me to Ellis Island because I travel just with a child without husband. That was it only. Everything was okay.

**Janet:**  Do you remember when you came to Ellis Island?

**Renee:**  I don't know the exact date when I came to Ellis Island. I know only when I left, it was March the 20th, and I was about 6 days in Ellis Island.

**Janet:**  Was your voyage about a week long?

**Renee:**  Something like this yes.

**Janet:**  So it was March or April when you arrived here in 1940?

**Renee:**  I arrived March the 20th in New York.

**Janet:**  During those 6 days did you know what your situation was? Did you know why you were being detained at Ellis Island?

**Renee:**  At the beginning they didn't tell me but then they told me because I came, at the hearing they told me, because I came alone without my husband and with the baby. They wanted only that man who gave me the visa should pick me up, nobody else. So after three days they said I could go but that man couldn't pick me up, I had to wait other 3 days because it was on the weekend he picked me up.

**Janet:**  Did you know this man who had sponsored you?

**Renee:**  No, he was a relative to my husband and he didn't know us just he sponsored us.

**Janet:**  I see he knew your husband's relatives and he was a citizen.

**Renee:**  He was a citizen, yeah.

**Janet:**  So what was your six days like here at Ellis Island? How do you remember it today?

**Renee:**  It was not the pleasant, remember one week. When we came to Ellis Island, the woman and the children was up on the second floor. There was one big room next to my bed they put a little crib for the baby. There was a big room, restroom with no doors on it. You had no privacy and it was very dark.

The windows were up and very small and the ventilation was not so good. There was a lot of noise, many children were there crying and in the morning they brought us down to the breakfast but before we went and went down they counted us.

Then we could seat down, we get breakfast and after that we went in the bigger room where everybody was waiting for hearing. It was not pleasant. It felt like a prison.

**Janet:**  Do you remember what you were thinking about life in America based on your first 6 days at Ellis Island?

**Renee:**  Well, I was not afraid because I am milliner and I know to work and I know it was everybody what I had at that time. I know I will get a job and that was right, I got a job right away.

**Janet:**  So the man who had sponsored you who had a citizen came for you after 6 days. Do you remember leaving Ellis Island and how you left?

**Renee:**  Yes, we went with the subway to Washington Heights, New York and there I was staying with my husband's sister and her husband in Bonn Nome with the baby.

**Janet:**  What was that like?

**Renee:** Well, it was better than anything else, better than being over there.

**Janet:**  Did you them at all? Had you met them before?

**Renee:**  Yes I knew them. They came also from Vienna one month before me. My husband came after I went with them. My husband came after a month. He came out of there. Yes, he joined us.

**Janet:**  Do you remember the reunion with your husband? What was that like?

**Renee:**  Yeah. It was very nice, it was just to my birthday and I was so happy, the best gift is this.

**Janet:**  Okay now that your husband and your baby and you were all here then, how did your life unfold?

**Renee:**  Well, we took an apartment and my husband had a hard time to get a job because he was a salesperson but he couldn't speak English, it was very hard. But he started to work in Clans department store and then he worked as in the other place where he was manager in big place and there was long time. I had a job on fifth Avenue I designed turbans and hats.

**Janet:**  And did you like that?

**Renee:**  Yeah, it's my job. I learned this and I knew how to do it very well.

**Janet:**  How did you like living and working in New York City?

**Renee:**  Oh, I liked very much, I lived over 30 years in New York and later I went and worked in a bridal department with Bridal veils. I had the opportunity because they had run out 10 years with me throughout on Fifth Avenue and after this I went to Best & Co. on Fifth Avenue, the bridal department. Designing bridal wear and I had no trouble.

**Janet:**  What was your husband's name?

**Renee:**  Nathan

**Janet:**  And then you had two other children?

**Renee:**  Yes.

**Janet:**  And their names?

**Renee:**  Stephen and Maureen, is my daughter.

**Janet:**  When you look back on your life and starting out in Vienna and going through what you did, how do you say that affected the rest of your life in this country?

**Renee:**  It was worth all the trouble I had because it's very nice to live in the United States. It the best place because there you could have your religion and feel free to do whatever you want to do. My both sons went to college and they have good jobs.

**Janet:**  Did you become a citizen?

**Renee:**  Yes, after 5 years I became a citizen, as soon as I could.

**Janet:**  Was that a big day for you?

**Renee:**  Yes sure. I was very happy, I’m still very happy to be in the United States.

**Janet:**  What do you feel most proud of or most grateful for in your lifetime?

**Renee:**  I think here you could if you want to learn something. Its many things are free. You’re free to go evening school, you can become whatever you want if you like to be whatever you want to be its very easy, and you don't have to pay much high fees. Some hardship, after you work the day, you could go evening school and learn the language everybody should do this. It’s very important.

**Janet:**  Would you have any advice to give to the immigrants who are coming into this country today?

**Renee:**  Yes. They should learn the language. It’s very important and if they can they should any trade if you don't have any because the many schools they give you advice and they help you and you should take their advice.

**Janet:**  And how is this phase of your life? This phase that you're in now and aren't working?

**Renee:**  I’m very happy, yes. I go visiting my daughter, I’m very often there and I go out with the trip here and to Atlanta, I see my children, my grandchildren. It’s easy, it's nice.

**Janet:**  Do you think you carry forward any customs from Austria that you learned as a young adult? Do you carry over any attitudes customs?

**Renee:**  I like to make hikes, to good rocks and go swimming. I like this at, I keep my religion, we hold our holidays and that's it. I'm really happy.

**Janet:**  How about cooking? Do you cook in the way you remember from girlhood?

**Renee:**  That's right. I make many dishes, Austrian dishes.

**Janet:**  Could you describe one or two of them?

**Renee:**  Yes, I make an opid cake. This is a very light dough with opids and apricot jam. That’s very good. I love the compliments when I make this. Also my children like dumpling, in German [German 00:16:56] that is apricot dumplings and I make a potato dough mixed with floor and the dumplings make the dough and then fill each piece with one apricot.

Pick the prick out put the piece of sugar in it and close it like a dumpling and cook it and it's very delicious. On top I make some bread crumbs, fried bread crumbs with sugar and yes, that's very good.

**Janet:** Can you think about on the one side any attitudes or values or ideas that you learned from your mother or father or grandmother as you were growing up? Ideas they wanted to instill in you?

**Renee:** Yes. They said you have to be honest and say always the truth and learn. They forced me to learn the trade. My mother said, "You have to know a trade," because in Vienna, if you don't go to college, everybody gets to choose a trade to learn something, so they know it and learn it very much, from the ground up and did this. I had to go as apprentice in a place to learn milliner, to know how.

Then they sent you... from the state you have to go to a school, like an art school. They teach you about how art, how the ancient people wear hats and what that kind and all the history and the material. Besides what you learn in the place, they show you how to make a hat, how to make all kinds of stitches.

I have to be three years to learn just as apprentice where you get not much, but little bit like pocket money. But after this, you have to make a test and if you make the test, you have to take a hat and trimming and they ask you some question about material.

After this, you're able to work with someone else in a shop as a milliner and then you get paid. After two years, when you do this, you work there and you have the experience, three years, you could make the another test and get the master's degree where you can open up your own store.

Not before anybody could open up a store if you don't have the master's degree so when you buy something, that's always perfect. I did this. I went to, I made this, I had a store. Small store but I was very happy because every day I get other customer referred from someone and I was very busy but that ended by taking that away.

**Janet:** Can you think of any attitudes or ideas, values that you passed on to your children?

**Renee:** I wanted they should make the college. It's always good to have an education, so I told them to go and do it. They were very good children. They're still good children. Yes, I think the United States should do something like this too. They should send the children when they are finished with school, high school or if you make high school, should tell them to go have a job. Learn something so they know to really work the right away, not just piecework, little by little. Everybody makes a little. That's not so good.

**Janet:** You mean like a trade where they could really-

**Renee:** They should really learn a trade and that would help I think the people here in the United States like they do it in Vienna and Austria. I don't know how they do it in Germany. I know you have to learn three years a trade, whatever this, if it is dressmaking or shoemaking, whatever it is. You have to learn and then they have to make a test and then go on and learn three more years before they could open a store or something really do right. But many people say they know it, but they're really not schooled.

**Janet:** How about heroes? Did you have any heroes in your lifetime, people you looked up to at any point in time?

**Renee:** In a way, my husband was a real hero. I have to say it. When it was very bad and they went for all the men to put in concentration camp, he had the opportunity to go to Belgium to Antwerp because he went illegal there and with his sister and brother-in-law. I couldn't go because, I didn't know that I was pregnant but I had the store and I was in that store. He left and said he would pick me up. He will see that I should come there too.

When I found out I'm pregnant and my mother said she would not let me go alone no places. That was a very bad situation, so I cried. My mother-in-law came and she said, "Okay, I will write to him. I will let him know." I got ready the visa to go just to... Not who have got the visa, but you have to wait for the quota. So when she told him in the letter that I'm crying and I have the visa and we have to wait only, he put his life on the line and he came back to Vienna.

I was very upset because he came back because we cannot go together when we go. He came back and he went through the Crystal Night that day, and he has really hard time because he had dark hair and dark eyes. He decided not to wait so we went but he came back.

**Janet:** Yeah, that is quite a man. Is there anything else you can think of about your immigration experience or changes in your lifetime that you've made, anything before we close?

**Renee:** Not really. I'm very happy to be in the United States. I think it's the best country to be. You're free. You could have your religion and you could do what you want as long as you don't hurt someone else.

**Janet:** Okay, I want to thank you very much for a most interesting interview. I've been speaking with Renee Neiss who came from Austria at the age of 28 in 1940. Today is August 23rd 1994, we're in the Oral History Studio at The Ellis Island Immigration Museum, and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm signing off.