**Elisa:** Good morning this is Elisa Mattson for the National Park Service. Today is Thursday the 27th of May 1993. I’m here on Ellis Island with Sarah Shiller, who came from Poland in 1921, April of 1921.

**Sarah:** May 1st.

**Elisa:** May 1st of 1921, when she was six years old.

**Sarah:** My name at that time was Sarah Trop, T-R-O-P.

**Elisa:** Why don’t you begin by giving me your full name and then your date of birth?

**Sarah:** It was Sarah Trop and then my married name became Shiller. I was born September 14th old calendar, which means its September 27th actual today 1914.

**Elisa:** Your maiden name then was Trop?

**Sarah:** Trop, T-R-O-P.

**Elisa:** Can you spell that for me one more time.

**Sarah:** T-R-O-P.

**Elisa:** Where were you born Mrs. Shiller?

**Sarah:** I was born in a town called Baranovichi.

**Elisa:** Can you spell that for me.

**Sarah:** B-A-R-O-N-O-V-I-C-I, now it’s with an I at the end. We used to call it Baranovichi, but I see on the map it’s with an I, Baranovichi I guess. At that time I was born it was part of Russia, part of the Russian Pale.

**Elisa:** What size was the town?

**Sarah:** The town was a rail road junction. I don’t know the exact size of it, the population but it was big enough to be on the map. It was a rail road junction so I guess it was an important town to that extent.

**Elisa:** Did you grow up in this town?

**Sarah:** Yes, I was there until I was six and three quarter years. I don’t know what else you want to know about the town?

**Elisa:** What did it look like?

**Sarah:** It was a small town, as towns go. I live in New York so it was very small. I remember only one story houses, just homes, we had our own home. The tallest building that I remember was a brick two story building. I think it was either the police station or some other official building.

Across the street from me was a wood cemetery, it was a cemetery but also a park. I know my aunt used to take me there and we used to horse around, play and picnic.

Across the street, there was a street facing our building that ended, it was a dead end street that came to our building. On one side was this park and on the left side were stores. I remember there was a candy store there that I used to go and buy candy. That’s why I know there were stores there.

**Elisa:** Do you remember what most people did for a living there? What was the major industry? Was there a major …?

**Sarah:** I was six and three quarters when I left, I wouldn’t know too much about the major industry. Let me tell you a little bit more about where we lived so you get an idea what the town was like, because maybe other places were like mine.

I lived with my family, my mother and father and my sisters lived in the house. There was a store adjoining it, another house where my grandmother lived with her family, my grandmother grandfather and the children, her children, who are my aunts and uncles.

In the back was a big huge garden, vegetable garden, where my grandmother would take care of that. There was a big yard and a barn and we had a cow. We also had a well. We didn’t have any running water in the house.

We used to have to bring water in from the well because I remember going to the well in the winter time and sliding down the ice from the well. I guess I came with somebody I didn’t go to get the water. I was too small for that.

That gives you an idea of something about the town. My mother was a dentist. We had an office in the house and a waiting room. My father was a dental mechanic and he had his little office right next to my mother’s office.

**Elisa:** What was your father’s name?

**Sarah:** His name was Chaim.

**Elisa:** How do you spell that?

**Sarah:** I guess C-H-A-I-M would be Chaim, but it was Anglicized to Hyman H-Y-M-A-N.

**Elisa:** What did he look like? Can you give me a description of him?

**Sarah:** I should have brought a picture. We all resemble him a little bit, he had beautiful curly hair, brown hair when he was younger, he got grey quite early. He never lost any of it. He always had a head full of hair. All his teeth were perfect except for one tooth. I understand he had perfect teeth.

From the pictures when he was young, he had a moustache. As I remember him when he got older, he was grey and he had developed Parkinson’s. He was not able to function at his work which was dental mechanic where you need precision handling. It was a little tough for him in his later years, but he was a good looking man.

**Elisa:** Personality?

**Sarah:** A very sweet man, he was too kind for this world. He couldn’t cope with the competition, with the stresses, it was …

**Elisa:** Too much. Is there a story you remember from your childhood with your father?

**Sarah:** I remember, in Europe?

**Elisa:** Sure.

**Sarah:** We had a cow, as I mentioned, and I remember I was very curious -I don’t how old I was, I was quite young. I was very curious and I was watching the cow eat.

Suddenly she took me up on the horns and my father was sitting in the house looking out the window. He jumped out and rescued me. That’s something you don’t forget.

**Elisa:** Did your cow have a name?

**Sarah:** No.

**Elisa:** It didn’t have a name?

**Sarah:** No, but I remember walking around barefoot in the backyard and stepping in the cow dung, in those pies. Have you ever stepped in them? Do you know what it is like?

**Elisa:** It’s terrible.

**Sarah:** It’s a big pie and the top looks solid, it’s a thin coat. You step on it, it’s gushy underneath and it goes right through your toes.

**Elisa:** What about your mother, what was her first name?

**Sarah:** My mother’s name is [inaudible 00:07:27] Zelicovitch.

**Elisa:** Can you spell that for me do you know?

**Sarah:** You could spell it anyway you want because [Inaudible 00:07:40], her name became Rachael here. She was called Ray, Grandma Ray or Aunt Ray. Her name by then was Trop because she had married my father in Europe.

**Elisa:** Her maiden name again was.

**Sarah:** Zelicovitch, Z-E-L-I-C-O-V-I-T-C-H.

**Elisa:** You said your mother her occupation was?

**Sarah:** She was a dentist. She had many problems coming here with that. It was very tough for her here because they gave her wrong information about how to get her license. They told her she had to go get four years of English, four years of History and Civics. She didn’t check further and she started going to school and taking all these courses.

By the time she got them all and handed in those records they had changed the law. That she needed to have two more years of dental school. By this time she had two more children. My brother was born the one she came pregnant with and then she had another child. Unfortunately both of them had died.

She tried to get two years, but they wouldn’t give her [inaudible 00:09:06] you apply to Columbia, NYU and they would not give her those two years. They said, “You have to go for the whole four.”

She felt she couldn’t do that. Then there was a university out somewhere south west that was willing to give her the two years but she couldn’t move with the five children. My father never was able to make a living.

**Elisa:** It was a very tough time?

**Sarah:** It was very tough.

**Elisa:** What did she look like though?

**Sarah:** She was a very good looking woman. She had brown eyes, my father had blue eyes and he was fair. My mother was dark, she had black hair. She was …

**Elisa:** Was she tall?

**Sarah:** No, she wasn’t tall. I don’t remember I know that she was very short by the time she died when she was at the age 83, but she wasn’t tall.

**Elisa:** Do you remember a story that you could associate with your mom in your childhood?

**Sarah:** Yes, I remember many things in relation. First I want to tell you an interesting little thing I remember walking over to the table where my mother and father were eating and being able for the first time to see above the table. I’ll never forget the thrill I had standing on my tiptoes and seeing above the table, what was on the table.

I remember another story that wasn’t directly to my mom. The whole time we lived there was wars and revolutions. I was born 1914 and the First World War started in 1914 and shortly after it was conquered by the Germans. My sister Gertrude who was born a year and a half after me, her birth certificate is in German, mine is in Russian.

Then my other sister who was born a year and a half after her was born after the war was over. Her birth certificate is in Polish because it became Poland after the First World War. Now that area is part of Belarus, because it had gone back to Russia for a while.

Because it was that kind of a situation, we had many situations with armies. One of them, we had a servant in the house. My mother and father had gone to another city in [inaudible 00:11:44] to the wedding of her sister, my aunt, who incidentally was finally killed by Hitler. We were left with [Charna 00:11:54], her name was [Charna 00:11:55] the servant we had.

The rumor came down the street that the soldiers were coming to take things. They always used to come and take whatever they wanted. We didn’t have much left because they had taken plenty by this time.

I guess there still were a few things left, little things because she put me into my crib. She put these few things under the covers and covered me up and put a wet cloth over my head and said I was sick. At that time there were a lot of epidemics, there was typhus, pneumonia, flu and everything.

I remember the soldier came in and he looked at me and he stood this nice distance from me and she explained to him that I was sick. He wouldn’t go near me, but he did look around the house and did find something after all. The few things that she put under my cover were saved. That was a scary thing.

**Elisa:** That’s a wonderful story.

**Sarah:** I’ll tell you another story. They used to look for men to put in the army. My uncle didn’t want to go in the army, he wasn't going to fight for whatever it is they were fighting, he had no faith in it.

I remember he’s running into the house and running upstairs into the loft where there was hay. Shortly after, a solider comes in and my mother answers the door. He says he’s looking for my uncle, my mother’s brother. My mother said, “He is not here.”

He said, “I know he is here I saw him go in and he is up in the loft. If he doesn’t come down, I’m going to go up there and [inaudible 00:13:39] him.” My mother said a few words to him, I didn’t hear what she said, but maybe I did, I don’t remember. She went out of the room came back, gave him some money and he left.

**Elisa:** What a traumatic way to live.

**Sarah:** You know it’s very interesting that I was happy, they were not unhappy years, because it seemed like that’s the way the world is.

**Elisa:** That the way it was.

**Sarah:** I’ll tell you another story that explains a great deal. I was visiting a friend, with my sister, around the corner. I told you we had a garden, say here was the house and here is the garden around here, my friend lived a block away.

By this time there were airplanes. It must have been towards the end, when maybe I was five or six already, probably five because the war didn’t end by that time but it was towards the end.

Then there was a counter-revolution, the revolution, I don’t know exactly what year this was. I had an airplane and airplane meant only one thing, bombs. There were no civilian planes, anyways at that time.

My thought was I want to die at home. I ran with my sister, we were running home. I get to the garden and I have to go around it to get to the house and I can’t, I’m very impatient, I try to go through the picket fence and I get my head stuck.

My sister is wiser than I, she runs around. I see my mother opening the door for her, she’s going in the house and I’m still pushing. Finally I got through apparently and I ran through the garden, which I wasn’t supposed to do. My grandmother used to blow me out all the time for running through the garden.

I get to the back of the house. I stopped cold on my feet because there my father, my uncles, maybe my grandfather were standing there trying to figure out what kind of a plane that was.

**Elisa:** They weren’t as scared as you were?

**Sarah:** The minute I saw how relaxed they were I stopped being afraid. I was embarrassed and I stopped and I just walked over there and joined them, stood there looking with them. The way your parents behave is so important. If they are not afraid, doesn’t matter you won’t be afraid.

**Elisa:** I think you are right. Can you name for me your brothers and sisters that you’ve talked about?

**Sarah:** Sure.

**Elisa:** How old they were.

**Sarah:** My sister Gertrude is a year and half younger than I. I’m 78, so she is going to be 77, I’m going to be 79 in September, she is going to be 77 in June. My sister Miriam is a year and half younger, she is going to be 75 or she is 75. I think she will be because her birthday is January I think she was 75. My brother Isaac he was born in 1921, he died two years ago.

**Elisa:** That was your brother that your mom was carrying?

**Sarah:** Yes.

**Elisa:** When you came over?

**Sarah:** Yes. He was born July 1921. Then my brother Joe was born in 1924, April 24th 1924. He died at the age of 51, he wasn’t quite 51, he was going to be 51. He died in January.

**Elisa:** He was the youngest?

**Sarah:** He was the youngest.

**Elisa:** You talked about the garden next to your house, could you describe your house for me when you were living in Russia?

**Sarah:** As I recall it there was the office which seemed to me like a big room and there was the waiting room. On the left of the office was a waiting room. On the right of the office was the laboratory where my father worked. Behind the office was the dining room, there was a dining room there.

**Elisa:** How was it decorated?

**Sarah:** I don’t remember the dining room, I know there was a dining room and I’ll tell you why. Behind the dining room was my parents’ bedroom. Then to the left of that and behind the office must have been our bedroom, because that’s where my bed was. I don’t remember the kitchen at all.

**Elisa:** Do you remember some cooking stories? Your mom cooking for you, what she’d make?

**Sarah:** My mother never did any cooking, I think my grandmother did the cooking or we had a servant. My mother was in the office. My grandmother’s house, I used to be there a lot. I remember her kitchen. I think we used the same kitchen because I don’t remember any kitchen in our house.

**Elisa:** Do you remember what your favorite food was when you were living there or what you?

**Sarah:** I remember the huge [inaudible 00:19:13], a huge room where my grandfather who was dying of cancer was kept in that room. One of my uncle’s had gone to the United States and he got sent a letter back. They were reading the letter and I remember listening to the letter. I’m interfering with the?

**Elisa:** I think its okay.

**Sarah:** The letter was in Yiddish of course. It said something about, my uncle was a cutter, he was he learned to be a cutter in the garment industry. Now a cutter was Yiddish for a [inaudible 00:19:57]. I remember listening to that story and thinking how could be a [inaudible 00:20:02]? I still remember until I found out what that really meant.

I remember another little story. I got up one morning it was a beautiful sunny summer day. I just wanted to feel the sun on my body. I ran out in front of the house, it was very early in the morning nobody was out, completely naked. I just stood there like this to get the feel of the sun on my body then I quickly ran in. I remember other things.

**Elisa:** What are some other stories you could tell me?

**Sarah:** I remember they were coming to take our chairs, because we had chairs in the waiting room. There was going to be some meeting and they were looking for chairs and they knew we had chairs. The rumor came down again, people tell each other what’s going to be if they’ve already found out.

I remember my father taking chairs, putting them in places, covering them up and putting things on them. We were busy hiding as many chairs as we could so we would have some chairs left.

**Elisa:** Who would take the chairs when you say they were coming?

**Sarah:** Soldiers.

**Elisa:** German soldiers?

**Sarah:** No, they were not German because by that time I was older and the Germans were there in the very beginning. I was older. I don’t know who they were. It was either the Bolsheviks or the Poles.

**Elisa:** The Russian soldiers?

**Sarah:** It was either the Bolsheviks or the Poles. I remember another interesting little incident. When we came to the United States, I used to hear on the radio station W-E-V-D, I know now was W-E-V-D.

I used to hear the radio station and they used to play a song in the beginning. The song was the international because it was a socialist station. I knew the song. It was about the only thing I knew that I heard on the radio.

I couldn’t figure out what it was, because every time I would hear that song a certain image would appear in my mind. I would be standing with my mother and father and my sister and I would be eating an apple.

Not until years later when I found out what that song was and found out a little history about the area that I came from. I realized that that area where I came from was at one time under the Soviets in the early years.

In the counter-revolution it came back to Poland, became part of Poland but during that period when it was part of the Soviets we must have gone to a public meeting. They used to play the international and we all stood up.

**Elisa:** You heard that song, incredible.

**Sarah:** That was very interesting to me.

**Elisa:** It’s almost eerie that you remembered that.

**Sarah:** I remembered because it impressed me so much, why do I think that every time I hear that song? What is that song? For years I just kept on wondering what that song was and why I had that image. Until I learned the history of the period and then I realized what it was all about.

**Elisa:** What can you tell me about your grandparents? You talked a little about your grandmother and your grandfather.

**Sarah:** My grandmother, I remember every Friday was busy in the kitchen, cooking and baking preparing for the Sabbath. She had in her kitchen a huge oven, this big Dutch ovens made of brick. Bakery ovens and you could sleep in the oven. It was a big oven, nice and warm.

Every Friday night we used to go to her house for dinner and it was a very festive occasion. My grandfather with his beard would sit at the head of the table.

**Elisa:** What was his name?

**Sarah:** His name was Isaac.

**Elisa:** Your grandmother’s name?

**Sarah:** Esther, they called her [inaudible 00:24:16] Esther, they called her. I just called her bobba, but her name was Esther Zelicovitch. Then she came to this country after we did. My grandfather died, before we left he died then after he left we came here.

My grandmother came a few years later. I’m not sure what year she came. She remarried here, a man by the name Fisher, she became Esther Fisher. She was a cute lady, she was very vain too and she used to doll up and wear a flower in her hair. She wouldn’t tell anybody her age.

There’s a story which may very well be an apocryphal, but it’s typical. After she had arrived here, she used to go back to Europe to visit the rest of the family because they were still living there. One time she tore out the page of the passport which gave her age because she didn’t want anybody to know her age. I don’t know whether it’s true or not, but it could happen to her.

**Elisa:** Every Friday you’d have dinner with your grandparents?

**Sarah:** Yes.

**Elisa:** Was your family a religious family would you say?

**Sarah:** Everybody was religious there, in the community. It was that kind of life. You were isolated from the rest of society. You had your own schools and the synagogue was the center of life.

My mother and father were modern, so to speak, they were not so fussy about these things. When we came to this country they were not religious. I don’t remember having separate dishes even, I don’t remember if we did or not. Maybe in the beginning we did, but we got careless.

**Elisa:** Can you describe to me your coming to America, who decided to come to America?

**Sarah:** My father I think, from what I can gather, wanted to come. He felt that there would be no future for Jews in Europe. My mother didn’t want to come, she was very satisfied because she was very highly respected in the community, she was the only dentist. She had a good life, she was Dr. Trop there. She went along with my father which was a lucky thing, because my aunt [inaudible 00:27:20] …

**Elisa:** Did you know anyone already in America?

**Sarah:** Yes, my mother’s two sisters had already come to the United States. My father also had family in the United States. His whole family actually had already come here.

**Elisa:** He was the only one?

**Sarah:** He was the only one that was left behind.

**Elisa:** Do you remember the papers that you had to get together or anything that your family did …?

**Sarah:** That wouldn’t have been part of my experience.

**Elisa:** Did you want to come to America?

**Sarah:** I don’t remember wanting or not wanting, I just was excited with life.

**Elisa:** What did you know about America when they talked about it? Do you remember what they said?

**Sarah:** We started to learn English I remember, my mother got an English teacher. We were sitting at the table, I guess we had a kitchen, we were sitting at this table and we were all practicing how to say water. I remember saying water, and we were all …

**Elisa:** Was the whole family involved, everyone was learning English from this teacher?

**Sarah:** Yeah we were sitting at the table. I was six and my sisters were younger than I and we were also learning Hebrew, I remember we had a Hebrew teacher. I remember coming to this country on the way I had a book of Hebrew. I still remember the pictures on the page and the words under it.

I learned how to read, yeled yaldah which means girl and boy and shulchan and kisse which is table and chair. That’s what I remember. It was elementary, but we were already learning English, we were learning Hebrew. She was busy teaching us, getting teachers for us.

**Elisa:** Did you go to school while you were in Russia?

**Sarah:** No, we had teachers coming to the house. I don’t think they started school until they were seven there. We hadn’t reached school age yet.

**Elisa:** Did anyone give you a goodbye party when you left?

**Sarah:** I think so, I don’t know. I guess there were people saying goodbye to us, especially my grandmother.

**Elisa:** No formal?

**Sarah:** No, they wouldn’t have formal parties.

**Elisa:** Do you remember your luggage, do you remember packing or getting ready to leave?

**Sarah:** Nothing like that, no.

**Elisa:** Anything that you took specifically with you when you left?

**Sarah:** No, I don’t remember any of that. The only thing that I remember about our baggage is those bundles around me when I was sitting.

**Elisa:** Who came with you on your trip to America?

**Sarah:** Just my family, my mother and father and my two sisters.

**Elisa:** Your mother who was pregnant at the time?

**Sarah:** Yes.

**Elisa:** I have to ask you this question, what port did you leave from?

**Sarah:** That I don’t know. I’m going to see if I could find that out. I may have known it at one time but it escapes me.

**Elisa:** Do you remember the journey getting to the port? Do you remember if you took a train?

**Sarah:** It’s funny that I don’t remember. I think my sister remembers, but I don’t remember that. I just remember the boat, being on the boat.

**Elisa:** You remember being home and you remember the boat?

**Sarah:** Yes.

**Elisa:** Not the journey?

**Sarah:** No, I don’t know why I don’t remember it, but I don’t remember that.

**Elisa:** Do you remember what time of day you left?

**Sarah:** I don’t remember leaving. I remember being on the boat and I just had the greatest time.

**Elisa:** What was the name of the ship you traveled on?

**Sarah:** The Lapland.

**Elisa:** Did you have to wait for the ship once you got to the area? You don’t remember?

**Elisa:** Did any family members did your grandmother come with you to say goodbye at the port or did she say…?

**Sarah:** No they wouldn’t. We had to travel a distance to get to a port and my grandmother wouldn’t.

**Elisa:** What kind of accommodations on the ship?

**Sarah:** We had a bath with two upper and two lower. When we first got there, one of my sisters slept with me in one of them. She developed measles very early on. I don’t know how long the boat trip was.

She developed measles and my other sister developed measles. Why I didn’t develop it, I’ll never know because she slept with me in the same bed. Maybe I had had a very mild case of measles which wasn’t diagnosed because I was immune.

**Elisa:** What class did you travel?

**Sarah:** Second class.

**Elisa:** Your sisters had measles, now your mom who was pregnant.

**Sarah:** My mom was pregnant then and was seasick.

**Elisa:** She never …

**Sarah:** She was she must have had at the time.

**Elisa:** Do you remember the dining room?

**Sarah:** No.

**Elisa:** On the boat? Or eating anything else?

**Sarah:** I don’t remember the dining room. I do remember the writing room. I don’t know what you’d call that room. It was a room where there were tables, desks with fountain pens. It was the first time in my life I had ever seen a fountain pen.

My father I remember showing me the fountain pen and I was absolutely enthralled that he didn’t have to use inkwell for that pen. That you could write with the pen without having to dip it. I remember that room very well.

**Elisa:** How big was the room, this writing room?

**Sarah:** It was a big room, to me it seemed huge.

**Elisa:** It was filled with desks?

**Sarah:** Yes.

**Elisa:** Were there lots of people in there?

**Sarah:** No, there were very few people there, just desks with writing paper. Hardly anybody was in that room.

**Elisa:** Do you remember going up on deck?

**Sarah:** Yes, I used to go from one deck to the other. I used to roam the boat and get lost sometimes.

**Elisa:** What did you see?

**Sarah:** I saw people, they had little stores if I remember, little places where you could buy candy.

**Elisa:** Gift shops I guess.

**Sarah:** Something like that, I don’t remember exactly. Of course I was interested in the candy. I used to love to roam around and just do nothing special but it was fun for me.

**Elisa:** Was it loud, do you remember loud noises or?

**Sarah:** No, I don’t remember any loud noises. I remember looking down at the steerage with my father. He knew people down there, I don’t remember if I went down with him or if I’m imagining it. I seem to remember going down with him to visit some people whom he knew down the steerage. We could go down the steerage, but they couldn’t come up to us. That I remember.

**Elisa:** What was it like, what do you remember?

**Sarah:** It was just crowded, I just remember crowds.

**Elisa:** What were the seas like when you were traveling on the boat?

**Sarah:** It must have been calm because I don’t remember anything special.

**Elisa:** Do you remember meeting anyone, a friend, other children on the boat?

**Sarah:** No, the only people we met were my father’s friends or compatriots.

**Elisa:** You didn't play with other children on the boat?

**Sarah:** No, I didn’t see any other children there. At least where I was, they were down below but I didn’t play with them.

**Elisa:** Both of your sisters were staying in an infirmary? Describe that story for me.

**Sarah:** The whole time. All I knew was suddenly they were taken to the hospital with the measles.

**Elisa:** You don’t remember them feeling ill or?

**Sarah:** No. They were there the entire time. Fortunately, the boat trip must have been long enough for them to get over it, because they were allowed to leave. We were all allowed to leave.

**Elisa:** Your mother who was also very sick she was …

**Sarah:** She was seasick.

**Elisa:** Where did she stay?

**Sarah:** At the hospital with them.

**Elisa:** You and your father were the only two that stayed …

**Sarah:** It was great. My father was very easygoing and very kind and sweet person. He wasn’t hovering over me, he let me roam around.

If my mother were there I would have been confined. She would have been nervous, “You can’t do this, you can’t do that.” She would be worried I’ll fall, I’ll jump over the boat, something will happen to me. He wasn’t like that I had a wonderful time. I was glad they were all in the hospital.

**Elisa:** Were you able to visit them?

**Sarah:** No.

**Elisa:** Do you remember?

**Sarah:** I didn’t go visit, I don’t know, maybe I was able but I never did visit them. Maybe they didn’t let children in and I was only six and three quarters.

**Elisa:** Were there activities in the boat, things you could do at night?

**Sarah:** No, not that I knew of.

**Elisa:** How long was the voyage? How many days?

**Sarah:** I don’t know how long it was. I wish I had asked my mother all those questions when she was still alive. She died in ‘69, I never thought about it at that time.

**Elisa:** Describe for me your landing, the first time that you saw land.

**Sarah:** I didn’t see land. I saw a black board through my window. It just happened I was sleeping and I got up maybe eight o’clock it was, eight, nine o’clock and the boat had landed. I heard a lot of noise, people were very excited and I ran out. That’s all I remember. I just remember this tremendous excitement that we had arrived, but I never saw the Statue of Liberty.

**Elisa:** Did you see New York City?

**Sarah:** I didn’t see anything then but I was sitting there waiting with the bundles and then finally my parents came. My aunts and uncle, two of them and the children their children my cousins, were there waiting for us.

You know that little picket fence that they have here in the museum park. They were behind that picket fence. There was a little gate there and that led to the outside. I don’t know what they’ve done with it now.

We came along and they were behind that and then we were admitted, we were allowed to go through. We were here, we had arrived. They took us to my aunt’s house I believe it was.

This was my first impression. I don’t remember whether I was getting into a car or getting out of a car, but I looked up and I was just overwhelmed because the building seemed to be converging. I had never seen such tall buildings. Maybe they were four or five story’s, but to me they were huge. It looked to me that they were going to meet somewhere up there.

**Elisa:** Because they were so tall?

**Sarah:** It was just an experience that I’ll never forget, the majesty of it, the awesomeness of it. Coming from a place where they have the tallest building, and only one, was two story’s.

**Elisa:** It’s pretty amazing to see buildings like that. What do you remember about Ellis Island, the building when you first saw it?

**Sarah:** All I remember is what I told you. I don’t remember very much else. I remember sitting there with all the commotion all around me and I’m sitting up against this pole.

**Elisa:** Were you frightened or excited?

**Sarah:** I never was frightened. I was excited but never frightened, curious and happy but not very happy for long.

**Elisa:** Was it crowded, Ellis Island?

**Sarah:** I think so, it wasn’t my concern.

**Elisa:** How long were you on Ellis Island?

**Sarah:** I don’t know.

**Elisa:** You don’t remember the time?

**Sarah:** I don’t know.

**Elisa:** When you came off Ellis Island and you met your aunts. What can you tell me about that experience, leaving the island with your family?

**Sarah:** I don’t remember very much about that.

**Elisa:** Do you remember that voyage? Do you remember going from Ellis Island to?

**Sarah:** No, I don’t remember. What I remember is what I told you, seeing the buildings and it must have been when I got to Manhattan. I remember seeing the buildings and how struck I was by their height and the way they seemed to be converging.

**Elisa:** Where did your aunt live?

**Sarah:** They lived in the Bronx. They lived around 145th Street or 150th Street maybe in East Bronx, Westchester Avenue.

**Elisa:** This was an overwhelming experience to come to such a big city area?

**Sarah:** Yeah it was. I remember going there and going into their house. We stayed with them until we found an apartment, until they found an apartment for us. I remember their apartment very well.

**Elisa:** What did it look like?

**Sarah:** There was a kitchen and there was a living room and from the living room were two bedrooms. It wasn't very big. Even I felt it wasn’t big. My house in Europe must have been much bigger. It seemed crowded to me, of course we were crowding them because she had three children of her own.

I remember they had a phonograph and I had never seen a phonograph. They were playing music on it I remember looking behind it to see if there was anybody behind there, because where could that sound be coming from?

I also remember when we got there they wanted to give me castor oil. Because that seemed to be the conventional wisdom, you had to give castor oil for the children for some reason. I refused to take it. I was running all over that house, I don’t know if I ever got it or not.

**Elisa:** You told me that your house in Russia didn’t have any indoor plumbing?

**Sarah:** Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**Elisa:** Their house?

**Sarah:** We had an outhouse.

**Elisa:** When you came here to your aunt’s house?

**Sarah:** They had indoor plumbing.

**Elisa:** I assume they had indoor plumbing, do you remember that or that was just [inaudible 00:42:16]?

**Sarah:** No, I don’t remember. I hated that outhouse in Europe, I hated it. I can never go to an outhouse because it reminds me of the stink. I used to go on the outside. I used to get punished all the time because I would go on the outside.

**Elisa:** Once you were here in America, what did your father do? What was his first job here? Or your mother, what did she do?

**Sarah:** My mother practiced illegally, now I could say it because she’s dead. She brought her equipment with her because she expected to get her license right away. She brought her chair with her and all her tools, everything.

[Inaudible 00:42:58] knew her from Europe and she was considered a very good dentist. They used to come to her and she used to take care of them.

Many years later I met somebody and we were talking about, we were getting acquainted, finding out each other’s parents. It turned out that her mother had gotten teeth made by my mother. How she praised my mothers work that time, she said she had it all these years and just now she changed the work.

It was my mother and father. My father was trying to find work because my mother couldn’t give him enough work, it was very little work that she had. He was trying to find work as a dental mechanic, but he couldn’t speak the language.

He started to get some jobs teaching Hebrew in the Hebrew schools. He was a terrible teacher. He didn’t know how to control the kids so he couldn’t do that. He was having a very tough time. Eventually he did get some work doing dental mechanic. Then he tried having his own lab, but he developed Parkinson’s.

**Elisa:** That made it very difficult for him?

**Sarah:** It was tough.

**Elisa:** What was your apartment like, the first apartment or house that you moved into when you moved from your aunt’s house?

**Sarah:** We moved to an apartment in a three family house it was on Forest Avenue, 1049 Forest Avenue, right near Corner Home Street. It was a very nice neighborhood in those days. We couldn’t afford it.

After all my mother was a dentist there, they had to find her a nice place. They didn’t think how she was going to earn her living. We didn’t stay there too long, but it was very crowded. My brother was born and I hated it.

I was used to the outdoors. I was used to plenty of space. I was used to having my aunts around take me to places to do things. Here my mother was busy all the time, my father was busy. There were all these other children all around. It was murder, I hated it.

**Elisa:** You moved from there where did you move?

**Sarah:** We moved every year because my mother would get concession, she would move. It was a terrible life.

**Elisa:** Do you remember going to school in this country?

**Sarah:** Yes, my mother put me in school right away. We came in May and she put me in school in June soon as we got settled in our apartment. I didn’t understand a word of English so I sat there for one month smiling and painting pictures. They knew that I couldn’t do very much.

Then I went to 1A again in September the following -At that time they had 1A, 1B in September and then again in January so I guess in January I went into 1A. By then I was beginning to understand, but it was very difficult.

I remember seeing an arithmetic problem on the board and nobody knew the answer and I did. I knew the answer, but I was afraid to say anything because I didn’t know if I could say it right. I remember the frustration sitting there, knowing the answer but I have to say in English I couldn’t get up and say it.

**Elisa:** You didn’t know the English well?

**Sarah:** I didn’t know the English well enough to say it. I also must have had some very tough times that I blocked out because I remember third grade was a very painful grade for me. All I remember is that I used to be very unhappy there.

Years later when I went to nurses training, because I’m a registered nurse, one of the girls in the class said to me. She says, “Do you remember? I remember you, I know you. We were in the same third grade class together.”

She said, “I used to feel sorry for you all the time because the kids used to make fun of you with your accent.” Then I realized why I was so unhappy there. I didn’t remember the reasons for it but I knew I was unhappy, I recall.

**Elisa:** How about your brothers and sisters, was it easier for them to learn the English? They were younger.

**Sarah:** I learned English pretty early but I was speaking with an accent in third grade, because I that was just two years after I arrived. Probably they didn’t have that because they didn’t start school until later.

I lost my accent, I don’t think I have an accent, I don’t know. People don’t think I have an accent anyway, they think I was born here. When they went to school they already had lost their accents, they didn’t have the same experiences I did.

**Elisa:** Do you think your parents, if you could look at them now, were happy that they came here eventually?

**Sarah:** They were never happy here because it was a very difficult life for them. I think when they found out what was happening in Europe they were very happy. Because my aunt who remained, the one aunt who remained …

**Elisa:** What was her name?

**Sarah:** Her name was [Rifka 00:48:29].

**Elisa:** She was your mother’s sister?

**Sarah:** My mother’s sister.

**Elisa:** Your aunt who’s here was that your mother’s sister as well?

**Sarah:** Yes, the two aunts who were here. Then there was another aunt who’s in Australia who went to Australia. My uncles, my two uncles, one uncle came here and one uncle used to come here and go back and forth then he settled in Israel.

This one aunt remained. The one whose wedding they went to when the soldiers came into my house. In 1938 she wanted to come but was it too late. She remained there and was killed, her whole family was killed.

**Elisa:** Eventually when they saw what was happening there they were happier?

**Sarah:** When Hitler came in we were happy we were here.

**Elisa:** How about for you, do you think you are glad? I guess you look glad.

**Sarah:** I’m delighted. No matter how miserable I had a time here, I certainly wouldn’t want that other misery.

**Elisa:** I think we’ll have to end this interview here. I want to thank you very much for coming here and for taking time to tell us your stories. This is a terrific interview and your stories are very rich and filled with lots of information. Thank you, Mrs. Shiller for allowing me to interview you.

**Sarah:** I’m very happy to do this. I hope that you’ll have a very good oral history full of posterity.

**Elisa:** Thank you. This Elisa Matteson signing off with Sarah Shiller on Thursday the 27th of May 1993 for the Oral History Project.