

JPA ELLIS ISAND Monologues

Evelyn:

I was dreaming to come to America. We had two uncles who came here when they were young men. And right after World War One they wrote and asked us if we wanted to come to America. But they couldn't send for the whole family; they just sent for three of us: my father and I and my younger brother. I was dreaming about it. I was writing to my uncles; I said, "I wish one day I'll be in America." When we finally got on Ellis Island, my father sent a telegram to his brothers to come and get us. They never got the telegram. And nobody came, and we were worried sick. Then they told us, if nobody's going to come and get us off, they're sending us back to Europe. Can you imagine how we felt? My father was crying. He said, "What's happening? Why don't they come? They don't want us, or what?" So he had a cousin in New York, so he called that cousin and he came and he took us off. Yes, I was always dreaming of America. And I was dreaming, and my dream came true. When I came here, I was in a different world. It was so peaceful. It was so wonderful here. It was quiet. You were not afraid. The doors were open. I'm free. I'm just like a bird. You can fly and land on any tree, and you're free.

Sophia:

When I got on the boat, I was only five and this little, this gentleman who had been back and forth several times, well he took me on a walk one day and he said, "You know what? When you get over to Ellis Island they're going to be examining your eyes with a hook," and he says, "Don't let them do it because you know what? They did it to me and one eye fell in my pocket! So we get over there and everybody has to pass and I'm on the floor screaming! I passed without a physical.

Chiara:

I did not have a normal childhood because there was a war, a neverending war. That's all I knew of, the scarcity of food, the scarcity of materials. We had to fight for a piece of bread; hide it because it was taken away from you.

The Romanians came in to Hungary as an army of occupation. The Jews had nobody who would stick up for them. The Romanians made Jews turn in their precious stones, silver coins, of which my father had a big amount.

And not only did they take it away from him, but they beat him up mercilessly. The officer hollered, "Hit him hard!" And before they took him away, he came over to us children: "Let me bless you." We never knew if he was going to come back because over there, they took you away and you disappeared. We decided to leave. Of course, you couldn't come through Germany; it was closed off. As we came closer to port, masses and masses of people from East Europe, from the Baltics. It was waves and waves of people; unbelievable what you saw.

The trip was eleven days on the ocean, and we were packed in tight, like in the army when they ship soldiers across. Nobody ate the first few days; everybody was seasick. I stayed in bed a whole week. The last two days, I finally got to taste food, and when I saw the lights I felt fine; I know we're nearing land. At dawn, when we saw the Statue of Liberty, like welcoming you, that was such a beautiful feeling. People started to sing and everybody was happy.

Clara:
TBD

Jackson:

It's hard for people to understand today what it was like to be on a boat then in a storm like that. The great waves would smash, the noise tremendous, and I thought we would flounder at any moment...all the other people were so sick. But I get over very quickly any sickness. I would go up on the captain's deck and watch the prow of the ship...that's a terrifying scene but, as a young boy, I enjoyed it.

Carmen:

I feel like I had two lives. You plant something in the ground, it has its roots, and then you transplant it where it stays permanently. That's what happened to me. You put an end, and forget about your childhood. I grew up here, quickly, all of a sudden. I started life new, amongst people whose language I didn't understand. It was a different life; everything was different, but I never despaired, I was optimistic. And this is the only country where you're not a stranger, because we are all strangers.