

EI-1043

JESSIE CZESIA HILLIARD

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: There is a video tape (VHS) of this interview in Jessie Hilliard's file in the Oral History Research Office. JL

LEVINE: We are—are recording now. I'm talking with Jessie Hilliard and she came from Poland in 1922, and with her two older brothers and her mother. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and we're going to discuss some of—of what was wrong and why you were detained at Ellis Island. Okay, if you would again please say the name you were born with and your birth date.

HILLIARD: Okay, my name is Czeslava [PH], Czesia for short, Gonshepska [PH]. I . I was born November 14th, 1912.

LEVINE: Okay, and where in Poland were you born?

HILLIARD: I was born in Gowtzen. [PH]

LEVINE: Gowtzen, and you lived in Gowtzen up until you left?

HILLIARD: Until we left.

LEVINE: Now, you were describing the home that you grew up in up until you left Poland.

HILLIARD: Yes.

LEVINE: Could you do that again, please?

HILLIARD: All right. We were living with our grandparents because when my mother went back to Poland, that's where she wanted to visit them. So we were living with them and it was just a small house, one of these that sometimes you see in a Western movie with the thatched roof, and we even had a—a stork next on top of our roof, which we get excited watching. And there was only four rooms and each room practically had as many beds in it as they possible could put to sleep all these people.

LEVINE: Did you sleep in the room with your two brothers and your mother?

HILLIARD: My mother and my brothers, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: Uh-hmm, and then of course there was two sisters, that's my aunts, that weren't married that were living there and two uncles that were single were living there, too. Plus my grandmother and my grandfather.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and we were talking about your grandmother and grand—this is your mother's—

HILLIARD: This is my mother's—

LEVINE: Mother.

HILLIARD: Parents.

LEVINE: And—and what experiences do you remember with them?

HILLIARD: Well, my grandfather was a farmer and of course everybody in that village was a farm—a farmer because you have to raise and do whatever you could because there was no such a thing as any kind of an occupation and so they had to raise all the vegetables. They had their own cows and pigs and—and that would be their survival. So say

if they raised some vegetables, they had to preserve them to last them 'til the next season.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HILLIARD: So it was kind of hard. My grandmother was—she was the housekeeper. She just stayed in the kitchen and cooked for the whole family. That's all she could do.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HILLIARD: While my grandfather and my two uncles and all of us, we used to go out and work in the fields. Even when we were as small as we were, we could crawl around and pull out the weeds between the potatoes patches and things, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: So everybody always had something to do.

LEVINE: Wow. Well, now, maybe we should give kind of a little bit of the history of—of your family. Your—your mother and father and brother—your mother and father had—had come to America prior to the time that you did.

HILLIARD: Yes. Yes.

LEVINE: Now, do you know by any chance when they came originally?

HILLIARD: I don't remember. No, I don't remember when. My father was here first. My father was here first.

LEVINE: And why did he come and what were the circumstances, do you know?

HILLIARD: I don't know. I don't even know if he was a citizen or not, see.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HILLIARD: All I know is it was when my mother went to America and she had a sister, sister there, and so then she was introduced to my father.

LEVINE: Oh.

HILLIARD: And they got married.

LEVINE: I see. Now, was your father's family from Poland?

HILLIARD: Oh, they must have been, but I don't remember too much because, like I say, I never even saw my father because he died and, you know, but they—all the people by then came from Poland. Mostly all of them were all immigrants, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Where were they—were did they settle, your mother and father in the United States?

HILLIARD: Well, they settled in Hyde Park, Massachusetts. Yeah, so that's where they were—they were settled there and that's where my brothers were born.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: See?

LEVINE: And what was your mother's name?

HILLIARD: Stanislava or Stella. Her maiden was Sheff, Gonsheffski. [PH]

LEVINE: Okay, when we finish—

HILLIARD: Gonsheffski.

LEVINE: We'll—we'll write these out, okay?

HILLIARD: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: And how about your father, his name?

HILLIARD: Tofil, T-O-F-I-L. Tofil Gonsheffski. Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay, and your brothers, their names?

HILLIARD: My brother's name, my older brother was Stanley and my other brother was Joseph.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So would you talk about the situation? In other words, your mother married your father. They met over here and married, had two sons and then what was—what was the circumstances under which your mother went back to Poland?

HILLIARD: Well, she was here for a couple—couple of years, I guess, and she had the two small babies and she got very homesick. She just wanted to visit her parents, you know, to make a visit and my father at that

time, he had a pretty good job, so he could afford to send her for a visit.

LEVINE: What kind of a job did your father have?

HILLIARD: Oh, he was a machinist in Sturvant's [PH], and that's in Reedville, Massachusetts. It's a big factory.

LEVINE: Sturvant's?

HILLIARD: Sturvant's.

LEVINE: Sturvant's.

HILLIARD: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HILLIARD: So—so she wanted to go back so much to see her parents, so he sent her, let her go for a visit. That's what it was supposed to be.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HILLIARD: Yeah.

LEVINE: So what happened once she got there?

HILLIARD: Well, when she got there, then she found out she was pregnant, so she figured, well, she might as well stay there and wait until the baby was born, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HILLIARD: And—and that's when I was born.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: So she waited and in the meantime, I can't remember the—exactly the years or whatever, the war broke out and there was no communications of any kind. We didn't know what was going on in America and they didn't know what was going on in Poland, you know. And because in the meantime the Russians owned part of Poland and the Germans owned the other part.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HILLIARD: So we were in between, you know, and so then my mother just had to stay there and—and she didn't know—in the meantime, my father died during they had that influenza epidemic.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: So she didn't even know that he was—he—he died until after the war, when the mail starts to come through.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HILLIARD: So she found out that he was dead. So now there she is with three children and what was she to do? She didn't have anybody to sponsor her now. You know, she couldn't go—just go back. So she got in touch with my uncle, and that's her brother in-law and between the two of them, they worked out that she wanted to go back to America. She wanted my brothers and myself to get an education. She didn't want us to be just farmers, to work on a farm the rest of our lives, you know. She said in America we could learn a trade or it wouldn't be as—because now we don't own anything in Poland because we're living with the grandparents. So we didn't have a home. We didn't have anything that would call our own.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: So she figured if we come to America, then we could get a new start.

LEVINE: UH-hmm.

HILLIARD: And—

LEVINE: Well, be—let's talk for a little bit about life before you left for America in Poland.

HILLIARD: Okay.

LEVINE: The things you remember. The village, was it a lot of families? A lot of farms or was it a small village? Was there a school?

HILLIARD: It was a small village and it was all farms. It was all farms. Like I say, what you raised, that's what you lived on.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. How about religion? Were you a religious family?

HILLIARD: Yes, we were very religious and we were Catholics. We had a church right in the village. Yeah.

- LEVINE: And do you remember any religious observances or ceremonies or—
- HILLIARD: Oh, well, yes. All of them like Christmas and Easter. We always observed that and like for Easter they used to bless the food. So like Easter Sunday, anything that you ate was blessed because the priest used to come around the house and you would have the table set and he would bless the food and this is—this would be your Easter—Easter dinner.
- LEVINE: Uh-hmm.
- HILLIARD: And Christmas, Christmas Eve they had—of course, they used to fast, you know, like Fridays and all. Christmas Eve they had what they called a Christmas Eve supper. It was meatless. Everything that you had was—how shall I say it? Well, we had, shall I say in Polish, pierogis. [Laughs]
- LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.
- HILLIARD: Pierogis and platskis [PH] and everything was all homemade bread and—and cheese and—and things like that. Fast. We'd fast. Had a fast.
- LEVINE: Everything but meat.
- HILLIARD: Everything but meat, yeah.
- LEVINE: Uh-huh.
- HILLIARD: And then for Christmas, then we would have a regular—regular dinner.
- LEVINE: Well, can you remember how some of these very Polish dishes were made?
- HILLIARD: They were what?
- LEVINE: Can you remember how they were made, pierogis or any of the others?
- HILLIARD: Well, I still make them.
- LEVINE: Well, describe the—the procedure. [Laughs]
- HILLIARD: There are so many different ways and if you read in the paper, each lady has a certain way.

LEVINE: Well, your way.

HILLIARD: All right.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HILLIARD: My way. Now, like stuffed cabbage, which is galumphing, right?

LEVINE: Okay.

HILLIARD: Well, you take a head of cabbage and you par boil it just to make it soft. So you could take the leaves off the cabbage, and then you take some rice. You par boil that a little bit, and then you have like Hamburg and sometimes you use half Hamburg and half pork. You mix that with the rice and maybe you sauté an onion and—are you listening? Because you like it. [Laughs] And you mix that. You know, you mix all that together, season it, of course, and then you take the cabbage leaves and you put the stuffing into the leave and roll it like a roll—roll—cabbage roll. And then you can either bake them or cook them on top of the stove, plus you have to put some kind of a sauce on top of them like a tomato sauce or even chicken broth or something and then you let them simmer for about an hour or so. That's—that's one of them.

LEVINE: And what are the seasonings?

HILLIARD: The seasoning for—for galumpkis is just salt and pepper, as far as I'm concerned. I don't like my food so I'm eating something—you know, I want to taste what I make. Yeah.

LEVINE: That's great. Okay, describe another dish that's yours that you make.

HILLIARD: All right, another dish is—oh, potato pancakes. What they call latkes, right.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: That you take a raw potatoes and you scrape them or peel them. Some people don't. Some people just wash them thoroughly. Then you grate them on the grater and then you take a little flour, not too much. Just to bind it together and with a couple of eggs. It all depends the amount that you make. Say, take a couple of eggs, and you mix that together and again, of course, you put a little salt and pepper, you know, and make that. And then you fry them in the frying pan, just like small pancakes. You take like a spoonful and you make

them small and you brown them on one side. Then when they're brown, you turn them over and brown them on the other side and when they are done, a lot of people like them with sugar, a little powdered sugar or with any kind of a fruit, but I love mine with sour cream. I just douse it with sour cream and that was our big—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HILLIARD: That was our big treat because that's—that is a job to make them, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah, right.

HILLIARD: Yeah.

LEVINE: Can you remember any experiences when you were in Poland that revolved around food? Any particular events that happened?

HILLIARD: You did what?

LEVINE: That have to do with food?

HILLIARD: Like for instance?

LEVINE: Well, any—any—any particular dinners or celebrations or did your mother teach you how to make these things?

HILLIARD: Well, I was too small at that time, when I was in Poland.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: You know, for her to teach me, but I used to watch my grandmother cook, you know, and then even when I was growing up, even when I was in America, my mother wouldn't let me cook because she was afraid I would ruin it because that was our survival. That would be our dinner, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: She would let me watch her, and whatever she was cooking because if I were—[knocking] Oh, well.

LEVINE: Okay, we're going to pause here. [tape off/on] Your grandmother.

HILLIARD: I used to watch my—I could peel potatoes or scrape things like that, but of course at six years old, you know, and besides, I don't think I could ever lift those pots because you're feeding, what, ten people.

LEVINE: Were they iron.

HILLIARD: Iron.

LEVINE: Those iron skillets kinds of pots—

HILLIARD: Iron, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HILLIARD: Yeah, so you're feeding ten. So I would start peeling potatoes in the morning, so I'd be done by supper time. [Laughs] Everybody else would be working out on the farm, and then they would all come home for dinner.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: And we'd sit at the table and we'd have a big bowl in the center of the table and everybody would have a spoon. You didn't have your own dish, you'd just dig in there and you better hurry up because, you know, it disappeared real fast.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

HILLIARD: So that was our main meal. Mostly—mostly the meals were like soups because meat was pretty scarce. You know, meat you usually used to have it for holidays or certain occasions, but if they would kill a pig, now, they would have to make that pig last for a long time. I don't even know how they do it without refrigeration.

LEVINE: Well, they smoked it, I guess. Do you remember smoking food?

HILLIARD: Yes. They used to smoke it. They used to put it like in salt, in brine and things like that to make it last. So if my grandmother was cooking something, she'd go and cut a piece of meat and just throw it in the pot to give it a little flavor, you know, and—and the meat pot mostly the men ate because they worked hard on the farm and we had to eat the soup, fill ourselves on kapuski. [PH][Laughs] Cabbage soup, mostly.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

HILLIARD: So that was—that was our meals.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HILLIARD: So when the war broke out and there was no more communication with your father, can you—were you—were you too young? Do you remember anything about World War I?

HILLIARD: I—I remember this. Now, there was talk of war, see, and the Russians were coming one way and the Germans the other way. They used to march through Poland and they would be burning houses and rape women, like you read in the story and you say, “Well, it can’t be true.” But anyway, my grandfather knew this was happening and so he built like a covered wagon and we went in that covered wagon and he took all his like—all the cattle and the pigs and the horses and everything with us and we went and hid in the woods because, you see, the soldiers were stealing everything. They were hungry. You know, they didn’t have any food either, and so they would take your pigs or your cows or whatever they could find, as they went along. So if you wanted to save anything, you took it with you.

LEVINE: I see. Did you know that the soldiers were at the march through your town? Is that why—

HILLIARD: Well, evidently my grandfather did.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HILLIARD: Because now, I don’t know how long we stayed in—I don’t know how long we stayed in the woods. [someone speaking in background]

LEVINE: Wait. Just hold—hold on.

HILLIARD: In the woods, you know, but when we finally came back, we were fortunate because our house was not burnt. So we had least had a home to come to and of course we had to start everything all over. Like with planting vegetables and—

LEVINE: You mean you were gone for a matter of months, do you think?

HILLIARD: I couldn’t tell you.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

HILLIARD: I couldn’t tell you really.

LEVINE: Had your house been vandalized?

HILLIARD: There's nothing there to vandalize. I says, all there was was just bedrooms and a stove. There was nothing there to vandalize. Had we had any live cattle like cows or pigs or whatever, then that would have been taken.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: But otherwise they didn't have nothing to—to take.

LEVINE: Did you—do you know about—[pause]. How about the other people in the village? I mean, were they affected?

HILLIARD: A lot of people were affected. They would—they would, when they got home, a lot of homes were all burnt and they didn't have any homes to go to. So the neighbors, whoever had a home or whoever had some other relative somewhere with a home, you know, they helped each other. That's one thing. They always helped each other.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HILLIARD: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah. So was there a market day? Do you recall a market day when people would bring what they grew to another place to sell it?

HILLIARD: No.

LEVINE: No.

HILLIARD: No, they did have—once a year they had like a fair, you know. Everybody from out of town or cities. I don't know where they came from, and it was at the church, churchyard, but that would be mostly like trinkets and things, things like that which I don't know how anybody could afford to buy anything, when I think of it now because nobody had money.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HILLIARD: Now, if you wanted something or say you'd give a chicken for it. We used to have these Jewish peddlers walk around with suitcases. You probably heard of those.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: And they would have a lot of things that the house lady would need, like needles and thread and material and whatever. So if they wanted to buy something, they'll probably give him a dozen of eggs or a chicken or whatever he wanted, you know. That was what they used for money.

LEVINE: Hmm.

HILLIARD: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. How about things like shoes?

HILLIARD: Shoes? Shoes was a commodity. We were bare footed all the time and if we did—were fortunate enough to have shoes [laughs], we would carry them to church. Before we got inside church, we put our shoes on. Then when we come out, we took our shoes off because, you see, there was no roads or anything. It was all mud and grass, so to save our shoes, we never—never could wear them unless different occasions where we didn't have to go trotting through grass and mud and things. Yeah.

LEVINE: Hmm. And clothing, who made your clothing or how did you get your—

HILLIARD: Ah. No, our clothing was handed down from one to the other, and it was always big families. At that time people had big families. So if anybody had something that didn't fit somebody, they would hand it to somebody else because I don't remember sewing anything, and yet I know I had clothes to wear.

LEVINE: Do you remember your aunt's sewing things?

HILLIARD: Hmm?

LEVINE: Do you remember your aunts or your grandmother or—

HILLIARD: No. No, I don't remember them sewing anything and this is what I mean. I don't understand how they—how they had their outfits.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: They must be sewing in the wintertime because in the summertime now they have to work on the farms. So in the wintertime, but they used to have sew by hand. You know, nobody had a sewing machine or nothing. You'd have a needle and then—of course, they were always doing something. It didn't interest me at that time, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: What they were sewing or what they were doing.

LEVINE: Do you remember what the adults did for enjoyment? What they did when they socialized—when they—

HILLIARD: Ah, yes, they did. They were happy people. They used to sing and dance a lot, like even when they used to get in a wagon to go to the farm, to work on the farm, and everybody would be singing songs. You know, things like that. Then once in a while they had like a hall and they would have a musician playing music, polkas of course, and they'd go. Everybody'd go and dance. They'd even used to have dancing out in the yard. Everybody was bare footed, but they were doing the polka, you know. [Laughs]

LEVINE: How do you recall those years, those early years in Poland? How—when you think about them, how do you think about them? How do you feel about them?

HILLIARD: Ah, well, I—well, we were—we were happy because we didn't know any better. You know what I mean? We didn't know that you had to have money or you could live better or you could have better things because everybody was in the same—same boat. You know, speaking of boats, like my uncles had a boat. They used to go fishing, which meant a lot for the food, you know, and—because we were close by the—by the lake there and so—but they used to find entertainments. They used to get together like—like say Thanksgiving here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HILLIARD: Like Thanksgiving here. At the end of the season in the fall, when everything was gathered from the farm and everything, they would all get together and have like a big cookout outside. They'd build a big fire and, you know, baked potatoes and vegetables and things like that. In the meantime, they would have music and my uncle was an accordion player. He had an accordion and he used to play it all the time, you know. So any—any reason, he'd get that accordion. The minute the music starts, everybody would be jumping up and down.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HILLIARD: So they made their own fun, and mostly life wasn't for fun. Life was for Christianity, for church. If you have time—time, you kneel down and say a prayer instead of—

LEVINE: You mean at home?

HILLIARD: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. We had to say a prayer before we went to bed. We said a prayer when we got up. Had to bless ourselves before every meal and after meals. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. How about the—the songs that—that people either sang or played during these festive occasions? Do you remember any of those songs?

HILLIARD: Oh, I remember a lot of them, yes.

LEVINE: Well, could you sing some?

HILLIARD: I'm not a—did you put her up to this?

LEVINE: No. I usually ask that. Actually, I do.

HILLIARD: No, while—

LEVINE: Your mind is working the same way mine does.

HILLIARD: A lot of Polish songs that we knew and, of course, we learned it from the older people and like Christmas time we knew Christmas carols and for Easter and different occasions and—

LEVINE: Do you know—can you remember any songs in Polish that you particularly liked?

HILLIARD: [sighs] Gee. [Laughs] It's kind of—kind of hard to think of just—there were so many. Yes, there was one—there was one that still stands in my mind because it reminded me of us because we didn't have a father.

LEVINE: Oh.

HILLIARD: It's about a little boy and his mother living in a hut near the water, near the ocean and the mother is a widow and the little boy is asking her, "Mother, where is my dad?" and she tells him, she says, "Son, I don't know where your dad went. He went fishing and he never came back." See, so this is why they're waiting for him to come back.

[END OF SIDE A, TAPE 1]
[BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE 1]

LEVINE: Could you sing a little bit?

HILLIARD: Let me try.

LEVINE: Okay.

HILLIARD: [singing in Polish] See, I'm going to start crying, see. [continues singing in Polish] See, it means where is my dad and she said, "Your dad is gone and he's lost," you know, in the water. And he says to her if he'd only come back, that she would happier and richer, you know, instead of being poor like she is. So then she tells him that he's not coming back and the only thing saving them is the Lord above, you know, watching them.

LEVINE: Hmm.

HILLIARD: That's always a sad song.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm! Do you know a merry, jolly song?

HILLIARD: Yes. [sings in Polish and claps] That's not a—that's an American one. Ah, when I come to think of it and I knew them all, and you—you had them all. [sings in Polish]

LEVINE: Great.

HILLIARD: [Laughs]

LEVINE: That's great. Now, when you came to this country, did you—did you hold onto some of those ways, cooking, singing, music? Other things?

HILLIARD: [sighs] Yes, because at that time, say if you were Polish or Irish or whatever, you lived in a group where they all were the same. You know, we had a church. We had a Polish church and Polish neighborhood. So you more or less lived up to your custom.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: You celebrated the holidays the same way and you talked, you know, the same way and so—so—but going to school was another story.

LEVINE: Now, did you go to school at all in Poland?

HILLIARD: We went to school in Poland. We could read and write in Polish. I can still read and write in Polish. So, of course, when we came to America, it was pretty hard for us. We went to school and we didn't know anything. Even about our spelling our name we got punished because this is where the difference we were going to talk about—the last name. Masculine and feminine. See, my brothers were ahead of me in class, so they spelled their last name with an I, and I being—

LEVINE: Feminine.

HILLIARD: Feminine, spelled it with an A. So we went to a parochial school, so when the nun told me to write my name on the board, I ran and I wrote my name the way, you know, I always did, but she took the eraser from me and she erased the A off and she put the I there. She dotted the I and I looked at her and I took the eraser off. I scratched the I off and I put back the A. Well, I can still feel that eraser. [Laughs] It was hard to understand, you know, our language and of course children learn fast, but the trouble was, children learn other children, what they shouldn't learn them. Like my poor brother Joe was forever getting punished because he would learn a new word and he'd be so proud, he'd run and tell the nun, "Sister," and he'd say something and she would take him and wash his mouth out or punish him or something because whatever he said wasn't a nice word, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

HILLIARD: So then we were afraid to say anything, but now when we lived with my cousin, our cousins used to help us a lot and then we had books like first grade books, Learn to Read, you know. "See—see Rover run," or "see," you know. Word by word, we would study a word at a time and children seem to learn pretty fast.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, is there anything else about life in Poland that maybe we haven't talked about. I mean, did you have—when—as a child, you had certain chores even as a young child. Did you—did you get to play at all?

HILLIARD: Oh, we got to—we had to play. We learned. We had different games, but we made our own games. Like they did hopscotch here before or something. You know, we—we played when we had a chance to, but then if you are not accustomed to all these goodies, you don't miss it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: Because you are brought up to every minute you should be doing something. You got to be feeding the chickens. You got to be milking the cow. You've got to—you know, in the meantime once in awhile we'd have a game of some kind, like we made our own little what they called jacks.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: Remember jacks?

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: We used to play jacks. We had a game of that, or we could play hopscotch or something, you know, like that.

LEVINE: Can you think of any—any things that your mother told you about how you should be or what you should do or what kind of person you should be? Things she tried to instill in you?

HILLIARD: Oh, yes, she did. My mother, she was—she was a very smart woman, I would say because now she wanted us to come to America to get an education, which I thought that was kind of daring for her, having no money and all that. She accomplished—she accomplished that and she used to tell us, now when you're there, this is what you have to. You've got to behave yourself, now remember. We were orphans, you see, and we were supposed to act like orphans. We weren't supposed to be too happy, in other words, because we were orphans. But kids are kids, you know, mother wasn't around, we weren't orphans. So—
[laughs]

LEVINE: Well, you always had your mother, though.

HILLIARD: Oh, yes. Oh, yeah, we always had my mother and then, of course, my mother, she had to go to work so she got a job in a restaurant washing dishes and she had to walk for miles because at that—there was no busses or nobody had any cars or anything. You walked everywhere. She had to walk for miles, rain or shine or whatever for God knows how much she got paid, you know.

LEVINE: Right. So what—so she tried to instill into you the—the value of education?

HILLIARD: Education. Yes, she did. She wanted—this is why she wanted us and so when we went to school, they put us in the first grade with the children. It wasn't too bad for me, but for my brothers, you know, they were bigger boys and—and—and they were ashamed of themselves to be in with little kids, you know. So it was afterwards—now, this goes to another story after when my mother got married again.

LEVINE: Well, let's first talk about when you were—it was your uncle who sent—

HILLIARD: Yeah.

LEVINE: Who sent your mother the money for—for you to go?

HILLIARD: That's right.

LEVINE: And that was your father's brother?

HILLIARD: No, that was my father's sister's husband.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

HILLIARD: That was sister's husband.

LEVINE: Okay, and then your—do you remember leaving? Do you remember leaving the rest of the family, your grandparents and your aunt—

HILLIARD: You mean Poland?

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HILLIARD: Oh, yes, I remember leaving. I remember, again, my grandfather put us in a wagon and—and then he had to take us to—to Warsaw, you know, and then we had to go through to get all these papers straightened out and things like that.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: Yeah, I remember leaving Poland, but I didn't feel bad leaving because to us [sighs], well, it was a new—new life, new excitement. We're going somewhere. We're going to see something.

LEVINE: Do you remember what your mother had told you about America?

HILLIARD: Well, she told us in America people lived different and, you know, she didn't say too much but there wasn't too much difference then either

because, don't forget, this was during Depression and hard times and all that. So—[sighs]—so when we come to America and we lived with my, you know, my uncles, there was—as a matter of fact, I thought I was disappointed because back home in Poland we had food. We had more food than we had here and I was surprised that when my mother went to the store and she had to buy three potatoes. She come home with three potatoes in a bag, you know. She had to pay for them. I says, “Oh, my God, in Poland our whole barn was full of potatoes,” you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: And it was things like that that we had to get—get used to until little by little then when we started to go to the city and see the lights, see the stores, see the people how they were dressed. Then we started to see America.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: But when we arrived, you know, the first thing when we just arrived, it was almost disappointing, you know, because of the little—the little houses. Those were factory houses, too. They were small houses, cold flats and so I says, “Gee, this is America?” and in our minds we thought America would be something like you would talk about Disney, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: We were all—everything is for free. You just help yourself. You've got everything, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HILLIARD: But we found out it—it wasn't so.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HILLIARD: Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember going to the port to get the ship?

HILLIARD: Yes. Yes, I remember going to the port. We were assigned to our cabin and, oh, we were so happy because, you know, they had a lot of food, you know, on the ship. They had a lot of food. Oh, my God, next day we all got seasick, my brothers and I. We were seasick and just the smell of food made you worst, you know, so we had to stay in our

cabin. But the nurse would come along every morning and she would take us out on the deck, just to take a walk to get some fresh air, you know. I can imagine what—what the little cabin smelled like, you know, all of us throwing up all the time. Excuse the expression. But then when you went outside, even if you felt a little better, you still got sicker because one would be hanging over the rail, the other one would be—everybody was—was seasick, you know, and that was for—for quite awhile before finally we could eat anything. You know, all I remember I had was the first time that I really enjoyed was a cup of tea and a piece of toast and that tasted to me like—like million dollars because the rest of the food, just the smell of it, you know, would make me sick until we got better. [Laughs]

LEVINE: Do you remember when the ship came into the New York Harbor?

HILLIARD: Yes, I remember. I remember and it took two weeks for us to sail, and oh, it was rough. I remember one night the ship just stopped and all we could hear was “Whoo,” this sound. It was foggy and the water was so rough the ship was just going like that, up and down. I says, “Oh, my God,” we were—we were so scared, you know. So anyway, that went by. So then all of a sudden we hear everybody’s hollering, “Land! Land! Land!” you know. So everybody rushed on deck and all we saw, first thing we saw was Statue of Liberty. There she was, you know. Yeah, so then when we landed, like I say, we didn’t go—I’ve never been to that building. I don’t know what it looks like. [clears throat] But the—the other building where we stayed, you know, we went up there. So we were assigned to our cabin and then again they had a mess hall where we used to have to go like breakfast, lunch and dinner. Go and have our meals there.

LEVINE: Talk about why it was that you were detained at Ellis Island.

HILLIARD: Well, we were detained because they were very strict. Now, just on names alone, you know, would throw them in—in a dither. So then my uncle would have to come from Hyde Park to Ellis Island. He would have to come and he was a working man, so he had to come during weekend or something and he would try to straighten out, you know, the names. And then like my two—two brothers, they were going to let them in America and they were going to ship my mother and I back to Poland because we weren’t citizens and they were, you know. And she says, “Oh, no.” She says, “No way. If we go back, we all go back, and if not,” I says, “we want—you know, we want to come to America.” So then again she sent for my uncle. So he had to straighten that out and you know how slow those things take.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: So—so we were there for quite awhile. It seemed to be like a home for us.

LEVINE: In other words, there were several weekends during which your uncle made the trip from Massachusetts?

HILLIARD: That's right. That's right, until finally he got straightened out. When they told us that, oh, we were going to go to America, oh, boy, we were so happy, you know. We were just happy to get there, and I got to tell you about the colored man.

LEVINE: Okay.

HILLIARD: See, in Poland they don't have colored people, right? But they used to scare us kids like they do with "Well, the ghost is going get you," or "The boogey man's going to get you," and up there they used to say, "If you're bad, the devil's going to get you," and the devil is black and "Black devil's going to get you if you don't behave yourself." Okay? First time we went to the mess hall, my brother Joe and I, of course, we ran ahead of everybody and we went up there and oh, we looked. I says, "Oh, my God." We stopped dead in our tracks. We look again. We look again. So we quickly turned around and ran back to our cabin and "Ma, we're not going in no hall. We ain't going up there." She says, "What's there?" "Ma, there's a devil there. We just saw a black devil." So—[Laughs]—the poor lady, she says, "Now, you just better sit down." She says, "Let me talk to you." So, okay, so we sat down, you know and we're like this, we're so scared. We saw the devil. "Now," she says, "you listen to me." She says, "In America there is no black devil. You're going to see a lot of Black people. Those are people but they're only Black," you know.

LEVINE: Now, who was explaining that to you?

HILLIARD: My mother.

LEVINE: Oh, your mother.

HILLIARD: My mother. She says, "They're Black people. They're people like you and I, only they're Black." "Okay." So she says, "Now," she says, "anyway. In America they got a red devil." Now, what she have to tell us that for? [Laughs] She says "In America they have a red devil instead of a black one," you know. So, well, okay. So that's it. That was the end of that, but every time we went down that hall, we looked. You know, my brother Joe and I, we looked and we used to follow that poor man around like you wouldn't believe, and every time he'd turn

around, you know, we'd duck behind somewhere. We wanted to take a good look at him, you know, to see why he's Black or what is he Black or you know. We wanted to take a—yet, we were afraid. We were afraid to get near him.

Then another story, too. When we—when we arrived in America, it was almost Christmas time and the children were all talking about Santa Claus and, you know, "If you're good, Santa Claus is going to bring you something," you know, bring you a present. "He always comes, but you've got to be good or you don't get nothing." So, okay, as good as we could be, you wouldn't believe, you know. [Laughs] But before Christmas my mother was invited to my cousin. She found out she had a cousin in Springfield and they were invited for a visit. So that left us kids by ourselves at home for Christmas. Okay? But we were told by other children, now, the night before Christmas, you take a stocking or a sock and hang it by your door, by your bed and Santa Claus will leave a gift for you. So, boy, we could hardly wait, you know, for Christmas, see what we were going to get, and sure enough, we went to bed early just to make sure we get up early to see what we got, you know. So, okay, we gets up in the morning and we dashes over for our sock and three sad sacks like you never saw. We look in the sock and there was nothing there. I look in mine and nothing. So tears coming down my face, you know, and my brothers, you know, they says, "Well, maybe we're bad. Maybe Santa Claus don't like us," or something like that, you know. So we waited until my mother got home. So when she got home, we just surrounded her and says, "Ma. Ma, are we bad children? Are we really bad children?" She says, "No, why? You're not bad." She says, "Sometime you're bad, but you're not that bad. Why?" "Well, because the other kids got presents from Santa Claus because they were good and we didn't get nothing from Santa Claus and we thought we were good," you know. So here's my poor mother, a quick thinker that she was, you know. She says, "Now, wait a minute." She says, "You see—you know why you didn't get anything? Santa Claus don't know you're in America." See? "Santa Claus don't know you're in America and this is why you didn't get anything. But," she says, "wait until next year," you know, and it's things like that. That Christmas comes and then when you see the children, the kind of toys that they have, and at that time even the children that got presents, one would have an orange. Another one would have an apple, maybe a couple of nuts or candy or stuff like that. You know, that would be their present. It wasn't anything that was store bought or anything. But anyway, we weren't bad children. It was Santa Claus didn't know we were here. [Laughs]

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. How about the community of—of Polish people that you moved into in Massachusetts? What did they do? Did they have a social club or—

HILLIARD: Yes, they had their own church. They had their own church. They had their own clubs and they used to—we'd stick together. They would have like a banquet or something at the Polish Hall, and they'd have music and dancing. But there more or less would stick together, you know. Yeah.

LEVINE: And in school were there other immigrant children? Were there other immigrant children in school with you?

HILLIARD: Not—not while we were there. There was very few immigrants at that time. This was why we were such a novelty because the other people wanted to hear us speak Polish. See, because even their children were Polish, they didn't speak very good Polish, you know. So they used to, just to invite us over and to have us speak in Polish to them. Yeah. And another thing is, too, at one banquet like I told you, we were—when we were kids we learned how to do the polka before we could even walk, right? So we were invited to go to this banquet. It was a Polish banquet, okay? So my brother Joe and I and Stanley and Stanley was a little older so he was more subdued, but my brother Joe and I, we got into everything because we were curious. We wanted to know everything. So anyway, we went to the banquet and the music started to play. So my brother Joe comes over to me and he says, "Come on, Sis, let's dance." So we didn't think anything of it. We used to always do it in Poland. So we're doing the polka, see, on the floor. We're doing the polka and we're doing the really peasant kind, you know, and we're hopping around, we're dancing around and then we look around and there's no people except the two of us on the floor. Everybody got off the floor just to watch us dance. So when we saw that, the two of us went—we ran out the hall, you know, ran out the hall and we were ashamed, you know. We were at the hall, so we were out there. So the next dance the priest came over. He told the orchestra to play another polka and he came after us. He says, "Would you two dance for me?" So there we had the floor to ourselves, you know, and [sighs]—because it was different for them to see children like that, that small, you know, dance like that, I guess.

LEVINE: Hmm.

HILLIARD: And there was a lot of, lot of adjusting to do. Lot of adjusting to do. Yeah, we couldn't understand how say I'm Polish and I'm Catholic and you're Irish and you believe something else. Well, why aren't they all the same, you know? And we had to learn all that. And my brothers did make out good because when they got older, they went to a vocational school and they both learned to be machinists and they had good jobs.

LEVINE: And how about you? What did you—

HILLIARD: Me? I hated school because I was behind so much, see. Behind other children. Children that were younger than me were ahead, you know, so I felt like an oddball or something.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HILLIARD: So I quit school at fifteen and I went to work. I went to work in a factory.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: Yeah.

LEVINE: And then when did you meet your husband?

HILLIARD: [sighs] Ah, this is my second husband.

LEVINE: Oh. Well, your—your first husband.

HILLIARD: My first husband. Well, I was already grown up and living in Springfield at the time with my folks and it was during Depression. Oh, in the meantime, I had different jobs, you know. I had different jobs and I learned how to be a weaver. How to run looms, you know, and gee, and I loved that job and I was making good money and I was very happy about it. Then all of a sudden, everything was just quiet down. Everything was quiet down and I got laid off. So I didn't—didn't have a job, you know, and God, you couldn't buy a job for—for everybody was getting laid off at the time. So it was Labor Day weekend and my brother from Boston came down with his girlfriend. They were engaged and they were going to be married. My brother Stanley. My older brother. So they said to me, "Well, why don't you come to Boston to us? With us and we'll—you know, maybe we'll get you a job," and Frances, that's my sister-in-law, says "Maybe I can get you a job, you know, where I'm working." So okay. So I went with them and sure enough, she got me a job where she was working and lived with her folks. And so then I met some Polish girls there. So one day this Polish girl says to me, "I'm going to come over tonight and get you and we're going to go to this house," [sighs] because this house was almost like a club for the teenagers. You know, there wasn't much to do for the teenagers. They didn't have money to go anywhere, you know, so they used to gather around in groups. So says, "They gather up there and they have a victrola, so they play and they dance, and, you know, spend the evening." So she says, "I'll come and get you."

So I says, "Okay." So she came and I went with her, but I was an odd couple, you know. So everybody was dancing, but I was standing and all the fellows that were there were dancing with me because I was somebody new, you know, and I even felt guilty because the other girls were sitting down. You know, they all want to dance with me, and somebody says, "Well, too bad Johnny isn't here. That would make it even." And, of course, I didn't know. So this other fellow, his boyfriend, says, "I'll go get him." He says, "I'll go get him." He says, "He's only across the street." So he comes back with this fellow, introduces me to him. You know, we're talking, you know, and stuff like that. So then when it came to come home, he says, "Can I take you home?" and I says, "Oh, no." I says, "I came with Julia," I says, and I—I mean, I didn't know him and I wasn't going to go out with him. I says, "Oh, no." I says, "I came with Julia, so I'm going home with her."

[END OF SIDE B, TAPE 1]
[BEGIN SIDE A, TAPE 2]

HILLIARD: So after a couple of evenings like that, you know, I says, "Okay, you want to take me home? Okay." So I agreed. So he brought me home. Standing by the door he says, "Well," he says, "when can I—can I see you again?" and I says—and I didn't really want to bother with anybody. You know, I was just new there getting acquainted. I says, "Well, maybe some rainy Tuesday," you know, and then I said goodnight and off I went. The following week, mind you, somebody's knocking on the door and I go to open it and he's standing there and he says, "You said next rainy Tuesday. It's Tuesday and it's raining." [Laughs] And then that's how we—that's how we got acquainted.

LEVINE: [Laughs] You were detained for how long on Ellis Island?

HILLIARD: For about two weeks, I would say.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and other than what we've already discussed, can you remember the sleeping arrangements, the food, what you did there during the day while you were there? Any of those kinds of things?

HILLIARD: Yes, I remember. I remember when we, my brother Joe and I, we were—first time we went down to the mess hall for dinner. Okay? And the table was all set and you just sat with your family. Everybody sat together, you know, so when we sat down—and I don't remember what we—what we had, but there was two sugar cubes in front each setting, you know, and we never had much of any kind of sweets or candy before. So we thought that was candy, you know. So, oh, boy, we were so happy, we ate the candy. So next meal brother Joe and I quickly run downstairs before my mother and brother Stanley would

follow us, but as we went along, we picked up the cubes that we could and we filled our pockets with them. [Laughs] And we kept doing that, you know, and then we would put them in the—in our suitcase. [Laughs] So then my mother one day looking for something and she sees all these cubes. She says, “My God,” she says, “what’s happening here? What is this?” So we had to tell her what we did, you know. Well, we got punished for it and we didn’t do it anymore, but we had enough candy to get us to America. [Laughs]

LEVINE: And how about the sleeping? Did you sleep with your family in a—in a separate little room or—

HILLIARD: We had—we had one room. One room and there was four beds, bunk—bunk beds. My two brothers slept on top and mother and I slept on the bottom.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, and you were the only ones in that room?

HILLIARD: Yeah, just the four of us. Yeah, in a single room. And then they had the facilities. They had, oh, another place like a hall, you know, where they had you could take a shower or bath and then everything else. But the room was just for sleeping.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, and how about during the days when you were there for that long? What did you do all day long?

HILLIARD: Well, we—we used to—I don’t really know what we did. We used to try to amuse ourselves. We used to play cards and we used to play different games.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: And the time just went by. We weren’t used to all these different games and toys like the children have now. We liked books, you know. We liked books. They had a library there so we could go and we couldn’t read, but we could look at the pictures. You know, we’d take a book with a lot of pictures in it.

LEVINE: Did they have books for children in different languages, do you—do you remember?

HILLIARD: I don't remember. I don't remember seeing different languages. Probably if we had asked, they would have had it, see.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: But we would like to get a big book with a lot of colored pictures in them.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: Yeah.

LEVINE: And how about other people? Were there—were there other people that you were aware of their situation, why they were there? When they got to leave?

HILLIARD: Oh, well, they weren't—they didn't really communicate. There was so many different languages there, too, you know.

LEVINE: Were there a lot of people being—being detained, do you remember?

HILLIARD: Oh, yes, there was—oh, the boat—the ship was just booked solid, you know. There was a lot of people and—but everybody just kept to themselves, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, but at Ellis Island most of the people probably passed right through that came on your ship.

HILLIARD: A lot of them passed right through. That's right.

LEVINE: But you were—but you were—and do—can you say anything else about what the mix up was with the papers?

HILLIARD: I really don't know, unless like I say, these foolish little things that don't mean anything to me, but it probably does for the record, you know.

LEVINE: You mean that what—what was on the record didn't jive with what—

HILLIARD: That's right.

LEVINE: You reported or your mother reported?

HILLIARD: My uncle reported one thing; my mother reported another. Even our birthdays. I had three birthdays until I finally decided on November 14th.

LEVINE: How so?

HILLIARD: Because my mother would say one thing. My uncle would say—I mean, they just couldn't talk to each other. They usually have to write to each other, you know. So—so they never knew what—what they were going to ask them to put down on paper. So they just put down whatever thought was—was right.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: And that's what made it difficult. Now, if they were just together and talked it over and so when I look at these—these things here now, I can see a lot of flaws there, you know, but—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: Yeah.

LEVINE: So do you remember when your uncle finally took you off Ellis Island?

HILLIARD: I remember, yes. I remember because they used to—at the mess hall, every afternoon the porter would come out and he would have like mail for the people or messages or something like that. So everybody would gather at the hall. So when he read your name, you went up and he'll either give you a letter or—but if you were ready to leave, if everything was fine, ready to leave, he would say your name and say baggage, and when he said "baggage," that means you're going. You know. So, gee, we were waiting. We didn't get no letters. We didn't get no baggage. Once in a while we'd get a letter from my uncle. He probably was asking my mother. Now, she'd have to write to him and you know how that takes. So—so finally—finally, when they did call our name and they said "baggage," my God, we didn't believe it, you know. So we ran quickly and we got our suitcases, you know, and off we went and—and it was too bad that we traveled at night because then we were sleepy and tired. I think I slept all the way until we got to Reedville. That's that little town where we were going.

LEVINE: Did you travel with your uncle?

HILLIARD: Oh, yes. Oh, definitely. He came after us. We had to go with him, yeah. So when we got there, it was in the morning and I looked and it was so dismal. You know, September, October, you know. I says, "Gee, in Poland we had flowers and we had, you know, a lot of trees, a lot of them here." And it was right by the railroad tracks and there was nothing pretty about it. Then they said—they talk about America. I says, "You know, nothing pretty about it." I was disappointed, you

know. So—so anyway, so that's when we went to live with my uncle and my aunt.

LEVINE: Do you remember any first impressions? Those first weeks, those first weeks or days or months that—things that were new to you and different? Do you remember anything that struck you initially?

HILLIARD: [sighs] Well, it seemed—it seemed everything was different. It was hard for us to express ourselves if we wanted anything or if we wanted to do something. You know, unless there was somebody that could understand Polish or something, then they would translate it. But it was hard for us to—

LEVINE: Right.

HILLIARD: To get along, yeah. So my brothers and I, mostly we used to stick together like, you know. Whenever we were alone, we were always be together. Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember when you first felt like you were really learning English? When you kind of reached the point—

HILLIARD: You don't notice it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HILLIARD: You don't really notice it because I know we made mistakes. We were laughed at, but we got so that we would laugh at the kids, you know. It didn't hurt us any because we didn't know what they were laughing at in the first place. [Laughs]

LEVINE: Were you called 'greenhorns' or were you—

HILLIARD: Oh, yes, we were called—oh, we were called greenhorns. Yeah, yeah. One time a little girl came over to me and she—I had a hat on. She took my hat off and she's going like this, and you know, and I slapped her. You know, I didn't know what she was doing. She says, "Where's the green horn? Where's the horns? Where's the horns?" She was looking for my horns, you know. Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember when you started to feel like you were glad you were here in America?

HILLIARD: [sighs] Yes, after we settled down and we could see if you wanted to do something, you could do it. Now, I remember in Poland that we were so restricted. We weren't allowed to go to church. We weren't

allowed to speak Polish. We had to learn to speak Russian because our part of Poland was under Russia. So we had to learn to speak Russian and nothing was yours. If the soldiers went by, if they wanted to take something, they would just—there's nothing you could do about it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: You know, and here we saw there was—was just different. You could buy things. If you had the money, you could buy it or you could do what you wanted to. You could go where you wanted to. You could go to church. You could pray when you wanted to and to us that meant a lot, you know, because that was our life, way of living. Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you think having come as a—as a—as a six year old, as an immigrant and—and in a family of people who had come, do you think that made a difference in your life? Do you think it made a difference in who you became and what your personality was like?

HILLIARD: Ah, I think—I think it did. I think it did because later on, I knew what I wanted to be and it was too late, see.

LEVINE: What do you mean?

HILLIARD: Well, I had a knack for sewing, see. Making clothes and sewing and I just picked it up myself later on, but I says had I been going to school like a designing school or something like that, that would be my vocation, see.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: But I worked in factories like—well, I worked at a bacon factory where we packed bacon. I worked where like I say, I learned to be a weaver and just a lot of other things that didn't amount—you wouldn't call it a profession or, you know, anything—

LEVINE: That was leading you in a direction that you wanted.

HILLIARD: Yeah, but—but I liked sewing, see, and I used to start—started to sew and I started from scratch. I would take somebody's old shirt and make a blouse for myself and, you know, I didn't know I had the knack of doing that. Now, had I pursued that, I probably would have—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: Had a good—good job, too, but I liked my job. I did end up to be a supervisor for William Carter Company. I don't know if you ever heard—

LEVINE: What is William Carter?

HILLIARD: That's—there was in Springfield, Massachusetts, there was a big factory and they manufactured children's clothes.

LEVINE: Hmm.

HILLIARD: Mostly at first it was lady's underwear, nightgowns and penoirs and all that, and then they changed it to children's—children's clothes.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: So when I got to work there, for them, that was right up to my alley. I loved it because now if I got the machine, you know, and everything, and anything we did was piecework. So my supervisor, the head supervisor would put me on one machine and you don't realize how many different machines that there are to make a garment. There's smocking machines. There's button machines. There's buttonhole machines. There's all kinds of machines. She would put me on a machine, give me a job, you know, and after I got it going and I was doing pretty good, she'd take me off and put me on another machine. Then I have to start all over, you know, so that I'm going, you know, doing this and, okay. So about the three or four time, I got kind of teed off because now every time I'm ready to run a machine good where I could make piecework, she would change me. So one day I went over to her and I says, "Mrs. Scott," I says, "I don't understand this." I says, "Am I doing something wrong or what?" I said, "It seems every time I can run a machine, you change me. You give me a different one." So she looked at me and she said, "Oh, gosh," she says. "Forgive me, Jessie, I didn't realize, you know, I was doing that. But," she says, "I was doing this for a purpose." She said, "You take to a machine like a duck takes to water." She says, "I can put you on any machine and then in a day you're running it, you know." And she says, "I did it for a purpose." She says, "How would you like to be a supervisor?" I said, "Oh, a God, a supervisor." I said, "I don't know nothing about supervision or nothing." She says, "Well," she says, "I know you need a—I know you need a job, you know, and," she says, "you've got nothing to lose." So I thought to myself, "I don't. I've got nothing to lose, going to be a supervisor." So she made me a supervisor, which I liked because then I had to teach the girls. Like new girls that would come in, I would have to put them on a machine and teach them

different jobs and different like that, which I liked to do very much, you know.

LEVINE: Could you describe what it was like working in a factory, in the different—you worked in several different kinds of factories. What—what was it like for—

HILLIARD: Well—well, there was—at that time there was a lot of sweat shops.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Did you work in a sweat shop.

HILLIARD: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Tell about that.

HILLIARD: There was a lot of sweat shops. Well, say, it was hard to get a job, okay? So if you had a job, and I had a job, so we're trying to compete who's faster. Say if you made more, a couple of bundles more than I did, the boss would come over and say, "What's the matter with you?" you know. So he'd let me go and get somebody else that could be faster than me, you know. A lot of those factories were like that.

LEVINE: Were the sweat shops working on piecework?

HILLIARD: They were—if they weren't working on piece work, you had to put out so much, you know. So—and this is where the sweat shop come in. Everybody—this was worse than piecework because piecework, if you wanted to go to the ladies room, you lost time, but you could go. But here you couldn't because you're going to go—going to be getting behind, you know. So you try to compete with the—with the—with the others and that—and that was sweat shop and she practically—when I got a job in Boston now, I got—I started with seven dollars a week, okay, and this was in a hosiery mill and that's when my sister-in-law—I started to talk about my sister-in-law getting me a job and it was a hosiery mill. Seven dollars a week. I paid five dollars for board and room that I stayed with my sister-in-law's folks.

LEVINE: Right.

HILLIARD: Okay? Dollar twenty cents for carfare because we worked six days. Okay, dollar twenty cents carfare. Okay, five cents for the basket in church, ten cents to go into church. So I think I had—I had about thirty-five cents left for me for the rest of the week.

LEVINE: What about lunches?

HILLIARD: Oh, you bring your own lunches.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: Yeah, you bring your own lunches, yeah.

LEVINE: Wow.

HILLIARD: That—that was—that was a sweat shop and you had to work because if you didn't, there's twenty people waiting for your job and jobs were hard to get, unless somebody got—got you in or if they're hiring for somebody. But it was pretty tough and you—you really—you really had to put in a day's work.

LEVINE: Did you ever have any encounters with unions early on?

HILLIARD: Well, this—especially this one I'm talking about now, the hosiery mill? And we were—at least we were working steady. You know, my sister-in-law was working there and I met a lot of friends up there. So now rumor is going they want to unionize the place, okay? Of course, you don't dare to talk to anybody because if you do, out you go, right? You're afraid.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: But there were men, union men outside. They used to wait for us to come out from work. So if we saw them, we would cross the street. We didn't want to talk to them because if anybody saw us and reported it, then you just didn't have a job. They didn't even ask you questions.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: But the union was getting closer and closer, see. Some people started to talk and when one started, another one followed and before you knew, you were getting a group to gather, okay?

LEVINE: Now, they would be talking outside of the factory?

HILLIARD: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, and they would be getting to gather, you know, each time be a bigger group, you know. Okay, fine. So one morning we come to work, the place is closed. They closed down the factory. Over the weekend they moved out and nobody had a job. Yeah.

LEVINE: Wow. Did you ever have any other experiences with unions?

HILLIARD: Ah, well—well, most of the unions were like that.

LEVINE: Oh.

HILLIARD: Until they started to organize more and people were outspoken more, you know, and so before we knew, there was more—more union jobs. So then we used to get more money and time off and—and things like that. Yeah.

LEVINE: So—so there were some factories you worked in where there were already unions organized—

HILLIARD: Yes. Yes.

LEVINE: And you went—

HILLIARD: Yes.

LEVINE: And did that make a big difference—

HILLIARD: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: The comparison between the two?

HILLIARD: Made a big difference. Excuse me. After that I wouldn't go to a—to a factory that wasn't a union, you know. Yeah.

LEVINE: Hmm.

HILLIARD: Because now they had to pay us so much and if we worked overtime, you know, they would have to pay us. It was—union made a big difference.

LEVINE: And as a supervisor were you in a union?

HILLIARD: The whole factory was a union then.

LEVINE: It was.

HILLIARD: I was not a union. I was company because, see, now, I'm working for the company.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: So I was, but I was a union before.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: Before I joined to be a supervisor, yeah.

LEVINE: So is that where you ended your work career, as a supervisor?

HILLIARD: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HILLIARD: Yes. Yes, I did. And I—we made children's clothes. We made such cute things, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, how about any heroes in your life? Did you ever have a hero or a heroine? Somebody you looked up to, whether it was somebody you knew or somebody you knew about that you—that you felt you wanted to be like?

HILLIARD: Oh, I wanted to be an actress. [Laughs]

LEVINE: Really?

HILLIARD: I wanted to be a dancer.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did—were you at—did you see, what, shows or—

HILLIARD: Shows.

LEVINE: Theater plays or—

HILLIARD: Show—movies.

LEVINE: Movies.

HILLIARD: Movies.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HILLIARD: And at that time, too, they used to have what they called the Vaudeville.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HILLIARD: Do you remember that and—

LEVINE: Well, I know about it, yeah.

HILLIARD: Yeah.

LEVINE: And so what was it like for you, Vaudeville?

HILLIARD: Oh, we used to love it, you know, and gee, we thought those people were just in another world. Yeah. They come up dressed up in just—they were just so beautiful.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HILLIARD: Yeah.

LEVINE: So that would be—that would be the kind of person you would—

HILLIARD: Yes.

LEVINE: Look up to.

HILLIARD: That's that kind of life I wanted—I'd like to be, a star. [Laughs] A star is born.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So, do you remember movies early on?

HILLIARD: Oh, yes, I remember them.

LEVINE: Do you remember silent—silent movies?

HILLIARD: Silent movies, yes. Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and somebody playing the piano?

HILLIARD: Playing the organ or blip, blip, blip, the horses are coming, you know. [Laughs] Oh, yes. I remember those and then when the talkies came out, oh, boy, that was something. Couldn't believe it. You couldn't believe it. You're looking at the pictures and they're talking, you know? Gee. Like I say, people take these things for granted because that's—it's there for them, but to see the progress and see—see the things change and say like—like horses to cars.

LEVINE: When you were in Massachusetts early on, were people using horses?

HILLIARD: Ah, no. The only ones that used to use horses were the peddlers. The peddlers used to have horse and wagon and they go, but very few cars. Nobody had cars and if you were living some place, you would move some place where—near a church, near a school, near a store where you could walk. We walked everywhere, yeah. Nobody had cars at that time.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, and do you remember the—the Depression in the '30s, how it affected you and your family?

HILLIARD: Oh, yes. Yes. It didn't affect our family as bad because, see, my father—my stepfather worked for the railroad and he had a steady job. He had a job.

JL; Was he—was he like a conductor or was he in the—

HILLIARD: No, he was just a laborer.

LEVINE: Oh, he was making the railroads or he was maintaining the railroads?

HILLIARD: No, say—say when the freights used to come in and they would deliver—everything used to be delivered by mail. I mean by railroad.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: So they would unload the goods—the goods. Whatever came in, they would unload them.

LEVINE: I see.

HILLIARD: And then put them on trucks and, you know, to be delivered. He was just—he was just a laborer but he was—he was working steady.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HILLIARD: And so we didn't have what you would call over abundance of anything, but we weren't hungry either.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: And my mother was always proud that she never had to go on the WPA, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: And, so but I remember—I remember Depression good. See, people were really starving. They couldn't get a job. They couldn't—they'd work for anything. They'd work for a meal, you know. Just didn't have any.

LEVINE: How was it—how was it having a father for the first time?

HILLIARD: Oh, having a father, I was the happiest kid on two feet. See, when I was growing up, I often wondered how it would feel to have a father. When I saw my cousin sit on her father's lap and, you know, he'd put his arms around her and I'd look, you know, I'd just look and I says, "Gee, I wonder how that would feel?" you know. So okay, so anyway, when my mother was getting married, I went to school and I was telling all my friends I was going to have a father. [Laughs] "I'm gunna have a father." I was—I was so—so pleased, yeah. I really was, and he was very good to us. Yeah, he was very good to us.

LEVINE: Now, was he Polish?

HILLIARD: He was Polish and he was a bachelor. I says, "Gee, he had a lot of nerve marrying a widow with three kids," and you know, three—three tough kids because we were—we were street kids.

LEVINE: What do you mean by that?

HILLIARD: I might as well say that. I mean, we had to stand up for our own for a lot of things. That's what I mean, you know. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: And I mean we just wouldn't take no sass from nobody or from any kid and especially me. I was pretty brave. I had two brothers, so no—no—no kid would pick on me, you know. [Laughs]

[END OF SIDE A, TAPE 2]
[BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE 2]

HILLIARD: Yeah.

LEVINE: When do you remember World War II? Do you remember when World War II was going on? What were you doing then?

HILLIARD: [Sighs] I don't know which one was War I or War II.

LEVINE: In—in the '40s, you must have been—

HILLIARD: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Yes, in the '40s. I remember. Well, I was working then. I was working then and I remember my brother—my brother Ed was—I think it was in the '40s. He was in the navy, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: But to actually not see the war—

LEVINE: Were you—were you—were you aware of the efforts people were, you know, going into—

HILLIARD: Yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: Factors to do war—

HILLIARD: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.,

HILLIARD: Yeah, it didn't effect us like when in Europe, you know.

LEVINE: Right.

HILLIARD: It was all together. They were fighting somewhere else and—and so—so we cares. Everybody was happy because they had a good job. The navy yard was going full swing. The armory was working overtime. People were making money. They were in [unclear]. The hated to see the war end, tell you the truth.

LEVINE: Hmm.

HILLIARD: Because once the war ended, then the factories, one by one, would be closed down.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: Yeah.

LEVINE: When you were—you weren't working in a factory that had anything to do with—with the war itself?

HILLIARD: No. Oh, towards—towards the end, yes. Like I said, I used to sew and I worked—I got a job in this factory because I said, "Gee, they're paying pretty good, you know," and I hated to lose my job because it was steady, but they were making more money in the other factory.

So I went in and I got a job and we were making—we were making like trench coats or rain coats for the soldiers. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HILLIARD: And we were—the company had a government contract, you know. They were working for them. Yeah.

LEVINE: Hmm. Wow. Well, you certainly have seen a lot of—of this century's history.

HILLIARD: Yes. Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: When I think of things, if you could just put them together. Of course, it's every day life. Every day was something different. You never know from day to day what you're going to do or what's going to happen.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, did you stay in Massachusetts? When did you leave Massachusetts?

HILLIARD: [Sighs] I stayed in Massachusetts—hmm—until I met my—my husband. Until I met my second husband.

LEVINE: And—and when was that?

HILLIARD: And that was in 1964. We got married in 1965.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HILLIARD: Yeah, and then we traveled. We lived in Vermont. We stayed in Vermont and we lived—ah. Where did we live? [Laughs] All over. We just—we just traveled all over. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HILLIARD: Yeah.

LEVINE: So how is this part of your life, this time, now that you're—

HILLIARD: Right now?

LEVINE: Yeah.

HILLIARD: Well, right now I am just thankful for the life I've had, in spite of all the ifs, ands buts and we're pretty happy. We've got our own home. Whatever we have is ours. The only thing is now is I'm thankful for at my age that I am still able to do the things. A lot of my friends are already gone, you know.

LEVINE: How old are you at this point?

HILLIARD: Eighty-six.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: And I'm still able to be—able to get along, but I have a lot of nice friends and neighbors and we help each other. Yeah, and my husband and I, we both liked to travel before and now he doesn't feel good. You know, he doesn't feel himself so we more or less just stay home and do things around the house.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: And happy to do that.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, is there anything you can think of that we might not have covered that you want to say before we close?

HILLIARD: Well, I've had two daughters.

LEVINE: Oh, and what are their names?

HILLIARD: Barbara and Joan. Yeah, I got two daughters. One of my daughter died of cancer about seven years ago. About seven years ago. She was young, and Barbara still lives in Massachusetts. She's got a—a son and a daughter. She's got a nice home, nice husband and I got grandchildren and great grandchildren and they all just love me and write to me, and I wish they wouldn't. [Laughs]

LEVINE: Oh, I don't believe that.

HILLIARD: No, no, no, no. No, but I get mad now because now even the little ones, they do fax, you know. I have to write.

LEVINE: Oh, it's too easy for them.

HILLIARD: Yeah, they write one letter and they can send it to twenty people, where I have to—[Laughs]

LEVINE: What would you say were the high points and the low points over your life?

HILLIARD: What do you mean like?

LEVINE: The happiest times or the times that gave you most satisfaction.

HILLIARD: Well, the happy times. When I got married and when I was a mother. And of course, the worst sad part was when I lost my daughter. You know, she died of cancer. That was bad and—and right now I'm losing a lot of friends, but that's—I says we're in that point now. And the happy times, we make our—we made our own happy times. As long as we were healthy and we could do what we wanted to do.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: We traveled a lot. Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay, well, I hope you get a chance to visit Ellis Island and see where your tape is.

HILLIARD: Probably.

LEVINE: And the archive there.

HILLIARD: That would—that would—that would be—that would be something, you know, and I said—I say now, I get very, very disturbed when I see people come over here and they swam over by boat like the Haitians and all there, and they're here no more than a day or two, then they're demanding they want this, they want that and the government gives them a home and—and a job and everything else. I said when we came over, nobody helped us. Nobody helped us. You know, we had to be on our home and I says, and I'm—you know, I kind of—I kind of—I said I know those poor people want to be here, just like we all do, but we had to stand up on our own feet. We had to support ourselves, but these people nowadays, they demand things. You go see a lady shopping, she's got three or four kids hanging on, and her basket is

loaded with food like that, Welfare. We couldn't get a loaf of bread for nothing.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

HILLIARD: But that's progress, I guess.

LEVINE: That's a great place to end. I want to thank you very much.

HILLIARD: Yes.

LEVINE: For the lovely interview.

HILLIARD: That's progress, and in this country, nobody should be without shelter or food because I believe there's plenty for everybody, but not everybody's lucky to get it. Now, when we look at the other countries and whatever they have to go through, just thank the good Lord that we have what we have.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Okay.

HILLIARD: Yeah. [strange humming noise in background]

LEVINE: Wow. Okay. Well, I think we're going to end here and I thank you so much.

HILLIARD: Can I offer you a sandwich or something? Are you hungry or are you—

LEVINE: No.

[END OF INTERVIEW]