

EI-1096

HERTHA JOOST YAGEL

BIRTHDATE: DECEMBER 4, 1906

INTERVIEW DATE: JULY 27, 1999

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 92

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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GERMANY, 1912

AGE: 6

SHIP:

PORT: HAMBURG

RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: Today is July 27th, 1999. I'm here at Ellis Island. I'm here today with Hertha Yagel, who came from Germany when she was six years of age in 1912. At the time of this interview, Mrs. Hagel is 92 years of age. And with is today is Mrs. Hagel's daughter-in-law, Helen Yagel. And I am delighted that we happened to run into each other. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. If you would say for the tape, please, your birth date and where in Germany you were born.

YAGEL: I was born December the 4th, 1906 in Grosziegenord, Germany.

LEVINE: Okay. And you spelled that for me earlier. It's G-R-O-S—

YAGEL: Z-I-E—Ziegen—Z-I-E—

HELEN YAGEL: First part is [unclear]—

YAGEL: —G-E-N—

HELEN YAGEL: —O-R-D.

LEVINE: O-R-D. And it's Grosziegenord.

YAGEL: Right.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, did you live in Grosziegenord until you left for America?

YAGEL: Yes.

LEVINE: Yes.

YAGEL: I was born there and I—just prior to going on the ship, we lived there.

LEVINE: Oh.

YAGEL: But when we left Grosziegenord to go to the ship, we went first to visit my aunt in Kehl, Germany. And then Mama went back to— I'm sure it was Hamburg where we got the ship—

LEVINE: Okay.

YAGEL: —to come to America.

LEVINE: Okay. Let's get a little background. What was your mother's name?

YAGEL: Her name was Anna Stieper—S-T-I-E-P-E-R.

LEVINE: And your father, his name?

YAGEL: Albert Joost.

LEVINE: Albert, uh-huh. And Joost was your maiden name. J-O-O-S-T.

YAGEL: Right.

LEVINE: Right. Okay, now, do you remember grandparents in Germany?

YAGEL: My grandmother died just shortly before I was born. Mama used to say that she used to wait at the window and so on, but she didn't see me. But she knew I was coming. And my grandmother—my grandmother's house went on fire and that

made her sick. She had—she developed this—like a [unclear]. Yeah, there called consumption, but something like that. And she was in—invalid from then on.

LEVINE: Now, this was your mother's mother?

YAGEL: My mother's mother.

LEVINE: And your father's mother, did you know her?

YAGEL: My mother brought me over to see my father's mother but she lived far away in Germany. She lived in Roseheidikruk, [PH] which is not too far away from Konigsberg [PH] in Germany.

LEVINE: Do you remember that grandmother? Do you remember the visit or visits?

YAGEL: No.

LEVINE: No.

YAGEL: Because I was a infant in my mother's arms.

LEVINE: How about grandfathers? Any recollection of them?

YAGEL: All my grandmother—all my mother used to tell me that my grandfather used to go to the bakery on Sundays and would buy sweet buns covered with icing. And he would dump the whole thing into the carriage and would let me lick the—all the icing off. And then he'd gather them all up together, put them in a bag and go back home.

LEVINE: [laughs]

YAGEL: Because he didn't live with us.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, do—were the—were—the parents of your parents, were they from Germany?

YAGEL: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Or had they come from someplace else?

YAGEL: Oh, no, no, no. No, they were German.

LEVINE: [unclear]. Okay, and of that—of those first six years, when you think of Gros—

YAGEL: —ziegenord?

LEVINE: —ziegenord, what is it you remember about the place?

YAGEL: I remember my mother always taking me into the woods, and she'd tell me to sit under the tree and wait for her. And she would pick blueberries, or whatever the berries they called it that time. It was something similar to a blueberry.

LEVINE: Elderberry, maybe.

YAGEL: No.

LEVINE: No?

YAGEL: No, no.

LEVINE: Boysenberry?

YAGEL: And then she would go over to Statin [PH] to sell the berries in the city. So there was a man in the town and he came—he came to America later on, his son—had a little boat that would go across this little waterways and bring Mama to Statin. And that was a city where they would always sell things. They'd come back again to the hometown. And my mother said I was always a good child. She could always trust me that she would be gone for hours, but I would always sit there. She knew I would always be there.

LEVINE: Can you actually remember sitting under the tree?

YAGEL: Oh, yes. I can remember that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

YAGEL: I would just be contented. She couldn't do that with Anna, see.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

HELEN YAGEL: Yeah.

YAGEL: My sister—

HELEN YAGEL: Sister.

YAGEL: —came 10 years later. But Mama would say, “Stay here,” and five minutes later my sister would be gone somewhere. [laughs]

LEVINE: [laughs] And what would you be thinking or doing or what—when you were sitting for that long period of time?

YAGEL: I just loved—I just loved sitting there with the flowers and the grass and so on. I was contented. It was really a happy time. Mama said before—before I was born, she used to pitch hay, used to help the—which was there—work [unclear] was—I think Grosziegenord was mostly a—a farm area. They raised a lot of wheat and things of that sort. And my grandmother used to look out the window and shake her head and tell my mother she shouldn’t be working so hard. But she enjoyed it. She was full of life.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

YAGEL: Kept being young. But—

LEVINE: Tell me more about your mother. What kind of a person was she?

YAGEL: Happy go lucky. Always singing.

LEVINE: Did she sing to you? Do you—can you remember—

YAGEL: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: —as a child?

YAGEL: She always sang, always sang.

LEVINE: Can you remember any of the songs that you—

YAGEL: Oh, yes. I still sing them.

LEVINE: —from a little girl? Oh, could you sing a little?

YAGEL: [laughs]

LEVINE: Just a little for the tape. It would be so nice to have that.

YAGEL: Well, she sang little songs like, “Acht, du Lieber, Augustine,” which people still sing today, and some religious songs.

LEVINE: What was your religion?

YAGEL: Lutheran.

LEVINE: Lutheran? Uh-hmm.

YAGEL: Well, she was always singing, always happy, always on the go. And I—and Helen knows my mother was very outgoing. That was [unclear]. Whereas my—my father was very quiet and reserved.

LEVINE: Oh.

YAGEL: And I had planned to go back to my hometown but that's all Polish today, Polish culture.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

YAGEL: And then I wanted to go do—visit with my father, where he came from, and that is all Russian today. It's near Konigsberg. And that was all—all the building—all the universities that they had there was—everything was destroyed.

LEVINE: Hmm. Uh-hmm.

YAGEL: So this last year I went on the Rhine Danube and gave me a little bit of Germany again.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Did—did you ever go to the marketplace with your mother?

YAGEL: No, I don't recall that. I don't recall going to a mar—marketplace.

LEVINE: Did you go to school at all while—while you were still in Germany?

YAGEL: No.

LEVINE: And you were—were you an only child—

YAGEL: No.

LEVINE: —when you were in Germany?

YAGEL: My mother—I had a brother and he was a couple years younger than I was. And he was the pride of the family because he took right after my father, dark hair and dark eyes, whereas I took after my mother. I had blue eyes and light hair and so on. Then when

my mother came to America later on, she had another child and that child died, as well as the boy died too—

LEVINE: Oh.

YAGEL: —in New York City.

LEVINE: Okay.

YAGEL: Children were playing one time and a child was wielding a stick or something and hit my brother on the head. And he complained later on that he had headaches all the time. My mother called a doctor and he said, “Oh, the”—it was Dr. Fisher, New York. He said, “Oh, everybody has headaches in the summertime. Don’t worry about it.” And finally got—he was so ill that he couldn’t leave the bed. And then my mother spoke to my father’s employer, the boss. And he sent his pr—professor there. And he said, “Well, with God’s help, everything is possible. But what I can see is no more help for the child.”

LEVINE: Hmm.

YAGEL: So I remember my uncle lifting me up to the casket. My brother laid there and I saw this great big gash across his head, you know, and I just screamed. My uncle put me down. But so he was only with us a short time.

LEVINE: Hmm, yeah. Well, getting back to Germany, is there any—are there any other memories? When you think back to your early years there, what are the things that stick in your mind, or the things that you recall about it?

YAGEL: [chuckles] Well, one thing my mother told me, which I did, was very bad. Mama would say she would give my brother a bottle. And a short time later he would cry. Mama would look at the bottle and the bottle would be empty. [chuckles] And she couldn’t understand. She—“Oh, I just gave you a bottle. What are you crying for?” And that went on a couple of days. And then Mama, of course, gave him food right away again. Then Mama thought, ‘There’s something going wrong.’ And she said she stayed in the room and watched for a while after Herb got his bottle. And there I dragged a little footstool, put it next to the crib there, took his bottle, drank all the milk, put the empty bottle down with him. I walked out. [chuckles] So at that time I was a naughty girl.

LEVINE: [laughs]

- YAGEL: And I enjoyed that milk.
- LEVINE: How would you describe the six-year-old little girl who you were when you—when you left Germany? What kind of a little girl were you?
- YAGEL: Well, when I came to America, let's see—my father came a year before we did. And he al—he lived with his brother and sister-in-law, and they were Irish. And they took us in to live with them in New York up in the Bronx. And I remember leaving the ship and Uncle Emil [PH] and my father stood there in the corner here, from this place here, and we was just so happy to see them. And the first thing I know, we were on a subway. And I think the subway in New York had just about opened a few years prior to that.
- LEVINE: Oh.
- YAGEL: And I was so amazed at the seats and the—the ride was just so wonderful, all this webbed seat that we had, like a—
- LEVINE: Like a straw kind of a—
- YAGEL: Straw, yes.
- LEVINE: Uh-huh.
- YAGEL: And then right above me, could see they had advertisements at that time, was Meyer's [PH]—Meyer's gloves. And there was a pair of gloves here and there was an ashtray here with a cigarette, a lighted cigarette. And I just would stare on that until we got to Bronx, thinking that cigarette would fall over and burn those gloves. I couldn't get my eyes off of that.
- LEVINE: [chuckles] Wow. Well, let's just talk, like, when you—did—well, when your—do you remember your father leaving Germany the year before you did?
- YAGEL: No, because he always worked on the ships.
- LEVINE: Oh, that's what he did?
- YAGEL: Uh-hmm.
- LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. I see.

HELEN YAGEL: As a merchant marine—

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And—

YAGEL: I have no idea. I—that's—I'd like to find out more about my father. But I—as Helen said, I imagine it was merchant marine. He had his uniform. We had his picture. Helen still has a picture of where he stood there with the staff with a ribbon on it, where he graduated from somewhere. And Helen bought me a beautiful book. It's an expensive book, all about the German Navy. And now I see too why my father wanted to leave Germany in the worst way.

LEVINE: Why?

YAGEL: He knew war was coming. And he said to my mother, "They—they built the [unclear] Canal. That means we're going to have war here and I don't want war." He was a peaceful man. And sure enough, the book that Helen gave me, all about the German Navy, there was my name in it, Hertha. They were building a ship by the name of Hertha that time. And my mother always told me I was named after a ship.

LEVINE: Ship. [chuckles]

YAGEL: And there it was.

LEVINE: Ah, wow. [chuckles]

YAGEL: It was on page 25.

LEVINE: [laughs]

YAGEL: I can't forget that.

LEVINE: Okay, well—when—when you—you say your father had a brother? When—when he came to America, he came to a brother—

YAGEL: Yes.

LEVINE: His brother's house?

YAGEL: His name was Emil.

LEVINE: And he was married to an Irish woman.

YAGEL: An Irish woman, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

YAGEL: And she was so good. She insisted that my—my mother was very restless with my aunt. For one thing, she couldn't speak the language. She felt so alone, you know. And there, she had the two children in the bedroom. My father evidently had a room somewhere where he was living away. So she begged him, "Please, take me away from here. I don't care where I live. I have to get away. I have to be with my children." So it was agreed. My Irish aunt wanted me to stay with them, being I was six years old I would have to go to school in September. So she kept me there. I think we came over in April, kept me all that time so I could learn some English, so I wouldn't feel lost when I went to school. And I know I was so thrilled when I went to school to hear all those beautiful nursery stories. You know, I never had heard anything like that before. I was just thrilled with it.

LEVINE: Huh.

YAGEL: I was so happy. So my father finally—after a very short time, he got an apartment, a flat, I—was called, cold water flat, New York, 19th Street. It was four rooms. The back of it, the kitchen, faced the courtyard. Yeah, when I said a courtyard, somebody said, "Oh, that was pretty ra—[unclear]." It was not that kind of a courtyard. They had three outhouses there. And then the front would face the main street.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

YAGEL: I would see the man coming, like the street lights, you know, with the electric—put something into there and gives out—streetlights. And then in between were the two bedrooms. And the only window we had was a little narrow window up on the top where people going up on the fifth—on the other floors could look right into the bedroom.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

YAGEL: That kind of a window.

HELEN YAGEL: A fancy type.

YAGEL: Yeah, it was a—it was a stationary window. You couldn't open it. And then in New York we'd see these men coming around with their little monkeys. And you'd throw out a penny to them, you know. They'd collect it and they'd go on to the next place. And I remember the merry-go-rounds coming around the streets all the time. For a penny a ride you could ride around. It was all very, very nice.

LEVINE: Were you on 19th Street in Manhattan?

YAGEL: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

YAGEL: West 19th Street.

LEVINE: Now, did your father continue to work on ships?

YAGEL: No, my father was a stationary engineer and he did that on the ships. He—always with the boilers.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

YAGEL: And so when he came here, the—the first time I remember he came and worked with my uncle, who was in charge of the building, these off buildings that they had at that time. And I remember my father pitching the coal into the furnace. But then after my father got his own—when the—the—Mr. Bang came along and he saw the—the work, he gave my father a building of his own right away, that he was in charge. And I really never realized or thought anything about my father having that degree, because all they said, "The boss is in." Or my father would stand in the hallway and click the button and let the elevators go up when it was time to. There was nothing—you know, we had operators. And so he had his building. He had a [clears throat] very large loft building in 19th Street. And all these houses were in between. We had a row maybe of 10 houses. And then there were about three houses on—in—[unclear] the other side of the loft building. And my—and this man put my father in charge of these houses, these buildings. His name was Mr. Bang. He worked for—oh, he was down—I met him down on Wall Street too.

LEVINE: B-A-N-G? Is that—

YAGEL: Yeah, Mr. Bang.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

YAGEL: And, oh, the—the person in charge before my father came—I remember my father having a great big ledger and turning the pages, showing Mr. Bang the amount of rents he would collect, for each one had five apartments. There was five flats. And he was so surprised after my father had—he turned in so much more money. Because this man certainly wouldn't go from apartment to apartment to find out if you're living in there or not. You know, you just take their word. So after that, every time there was another building, my father would get it. We were—404 Fourth Avenue. We were down—he had several buildings in all. We seemed a little bit better.

LEVINE: So you would live in the building that your father—

YAGEL: Ah, no. No.

LEVINE: Or one of the buildings?

YAGEL: No, we lived in New York City on 19th Street. From there, my mother had saved enough money to buy a house in West Englewood, New Jersey. We went to Teaneck there and lived there. And—

LEVINE: How long did that take? How long were you in New York before you moved to New Jersey?

YAGEL: Oh—

LEVINE: Were you in schools?

YAGEL: I remember I was in the seventh grade in school. And I had to stay with friends in New York to get credit for the year before I transferred to the other place. And then that was West Englewood we went to.

LEVINE: Well, if we could just back up a minute. Can you remember leaving Grosziegenord—

YAGEL: Grosziegenord?

LEVINE: —Grosziegenord to go to the port?

YAGEL: Well, we stayed with our—my aunt first for a while. We went to Kehl.

LEVINE: Kehl, right.

YAGEL: And we stayed there awhile and then I remember playing with my cousin there. We were [chuckles]—it was a rainy day. She put us up in the attic. And we pasted all the windows with the newspaper. I don't know. But that's what we did. Because I remember and then after, "Do you want to go to the bathroom?" You called her and she'd be on the stepladder and then she'd give you a little chamber, you know, and that was it. And there was all that freedom in those days. And then we went to get some milk. We had a little pail and we went to get some milk and—and I remember, woke up in a bank—gangplank onto the ship.

LEVINE: Oh. What do you remember about that?

YAGEL: Well, it was such a—the experience, you know, of going, it seems so—but I made it all right. And then on the ship my brother became very ill. He developed something, sores on his head, I believe Mama said. And then she was so afraid that she would not be able to come to America, that they wouldn't let her in. But the doctor gave her some kind of salve there.

LEVINE: At Ellis Island or—

YAGEL: No, no.

LEVINE: —on the ship?

YAGEL: On the ship.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

YAGEL: And so it was cured. But I—then I remember going through Ellis Island through all the doctors there, was like a—a railing that you went through from one to another place. And that was it.

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

YAGEL: Yes, I do remember that. And I do remember seeing the Statue of Liberty.

LEVINE: Did you know what that was then or did you—what did you think when you saw that?

- YAGEL: Well, everybody made a lot—a lot of commotion then, you know. They all shouted.
- LEVINE: Hmm. And then Ellis Island.
- YAGEL: Well, Ellis Island. Then we went there. As I said, we sat there for a long, long time, waited for all—to be processed. We all had a tag on us waiting for our name to be called. And when Mama didn't recognize the name, then finally, a guard came over and looked at our tag and we were dismissed. And then my uncle was there with my father.
- LEVINE: What was it like seeing your father?
- YAGEL: It was good. But at that time children were not as attached to the father as the mother, because my father was always away on the ship anyway. More or less, he was a stranger. But I knew he was there and—and it meant something to us.
- LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.
- YAGEL: But it's a mother figure that always stayed with the child in those days.
- LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Do you remember what you expected or what your mother told you or—when you were first coming?
- YAGEL: No. No, I was very happy being with my aunt. It was a new life for me. I remember the awning she had outside the windows. I had never seen those before. And, oh, in New York City, when we came there, Mama would give me two cents. I'd go down to vegetable man. In the wintertime, he'd have it down in the basement, in the cellar, that he'd sell vegetables.
- LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.
- YAGEL: And for two cents, I could buy a whole bunch of soup greens. My mother always sent me for two cents worth of soup greens.
- LEVINE: [chuckles]
- YAGEL: But—
- LEVINE: Did your mother continue to cook in a—in a German style?
- YAGEL: Yes, yes.

- LEVINE: What—what were the kinds of foods? Do you remember, like, what would be the kinds of dishes that were typical?
- YAGEL: Well, pork and sauerkraut and things, red cabbage and things of this sort that they had.
- LEVINE: Were—were you part of a German community when you got to 19th Street in—
- YAGEL: When—when we got to 19th Street, my mother didn't know anything about money matters. But right up the street was a German delicatessen man. And so she was right at home there. And then she started, from there, to buy some furniture. There was a second-hand dealer, Jewish man. And the Jews at that time always spoke German. And so I—we still have—Helen has those chairs that my mother bought at that time, second-hand store, dining room set. But our first—when—when my father first had his apartment, we—all we had was a wooden crate for a table. Mama had her feather beds from Germany. She brought it over. My father had a hammock because—from the sailor that he had the hammock. And that—those were sleeping—
- LEVINE: Wow.
- YAGEL: —things that we had. Yeah.
- LEVINE: Was there—
- YAGEL: Little by little, she collected and got things together.
- LEVINE: Uh-huh. Were there any other things that she brought? Or did you, as a little girl, take anything—
- YAGEL: No.
- LEVINE: —that you wanted?
- YAGEL: Nothing that I know of.
- LEVINE: Uh-huh.
- YAGEL: All I know, that my mother always said my brother had several pacifiers. And every time she'd look at him, he'd say, "Overboard, overboard."

LEVINE: [laughs]

YAGEL: Evidently, the portholes on the ships in those days must have been operated that you could open them.

HELEN YAGEL: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

YAGEL: Today, they're not. They're sealed.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

YAGEL: And so she—"Overboard, overboard." "Oh, Herbert. Oh, Herbert. What did you do now? I can't buy anymore." But that's all I remember about that. And our cabin—ours—we had a—for four people. So Herbert had his—and my mother and I. And then there was another woman that was on the other side of—that she was in that same room.

LEVINE: Did anything happen in the—during the voyage that—

YAGEL: No, no.

LEVINE: —comes to mind?

YAGEL: The voyage was fine.

LEVINE: So—so when you—so was your mother—were your mother and father part of a—of a German social club? Or did they—anything like that?

YAGEL: No. The only connection they had, they were both Lutherans. But my father came from one part of Germany; my mother came from the other part. My father came from the eastern part; my mother came from the northern part. And she only met him—she told me that she was a waitress in a restaurant. Her mother was very, very strict, for one thing. And her mother always put her—at that time, when you were 14 years old, girls went out to work to support the family, to help support, or be independent. And at that time the families were larger. I think my grandmother had 13 children. And my grandmother would see to it that my mother always worked for her family and did the housework and so on. And that did not suit my mother. As she got a little bit older, she wanted something different. She wanted to see something of the world. She went on a steamer one time, some part in Germany, I

know, on the map. And my mother—my grandmother heard about it. She stopped that right away. She had to go back to work for the family again. And then after my mother left again, she worked for this restaurant. And that's where she met my father, because the sailors all came to this restaurant. They had a—I'd looked to find out more about—they had a rest—a place where sailors came for—until the ships would sail again, would take two or three months. And he would be in there that—they would come over to eat in the restaurant. And that's where my mother met him.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

- LEVINE: And is there anything else about—well, how about learning English? How was that for you?
- YAGEL: Wasn't an issue—trouble at all. No. I just took right to it because I loved it. I loved the stories that they—I heard. I never heard such beautiful fairy tales. They were—just thrilled me. I—
- LEVINE: Do you remember what—any of them in particular that—that really made you—
- YAGEL: All of them.
- LEVINE: Uh-huh.
- YAGEL: I had never heard of such a—nice stories. I was thrilled all the time that—I took right to reading then. I know one time my mother and papa woke up at nighttime or in the—in the morning and they looked for me, couldn't find me in the—in—in our apartment, flat on 19th Street. And there I was, sound asleep in the corner with a book. I got up. I couldn't wait to read some more.
- LEVINE: Oh.
- YAGEL: And I used to love—love to read.
- LEVINE: Uh-hmm.
- YAGEL: But—
- LEVINE: How about the community where you lived? Do you remember, like, the pharmacy, the doctor, the library?

YAGEL: [unclear]

LEVINE: Any of the things—

YAGEL: In Germany?

LEVINE: No, in—in—

YAGEL: No, in New York. Well, all right. What I remember, I went to P.S. 56 and that—we lived in 19th Street and that was at 18th Street. And a policeman would always be on a corner and let you cross by our self. That was a very nice thing to do, took the children over. At that time, you wouldn't believe it, but in New York we had outhouses in the schools. There was a big courtyard. And at that time, the schools all—either all for boys or all for girls. It was—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

YAGEL: And no doors. It was just one room right after another and you'd go out—the courtyard and that was your toilets out there.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Did you have toilets in—where you were living? Were the toilets in the house or outside?

YAGEL: Not—not 19th Street. They were in the—in the courtyard.

LEVINE: In the courtyard, right. Uh-huh.

YAGEL: But we had our own because my father was superintendent of the buildings. And so we had a lock on our door. No one could use ours. And my mother made me clean that every Saturday. She had beautiful pictures there, calendars [chuckles] hanging there, you know. I'd have to wash up down there and the others did—the doors would fly open all day long, you know. Not ours.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

YAGEL: We had special ones.

LEVINE: Right. And what else about the—about the flat? Did you have, like, kerosene lights or—

YAGEL: Oh, no. No. We had gaslights.

LEVINE: Gaslights.

YAGEL: And coal stove—irons. Coal stoves, wash tubs all in the kitchen. And so I had those two wash tubs there. This one—coal stove. And the two windows in the front. And Mama had a couch on over here, a little desk over there. Yeah. That was it.

LEVINE: Did you have—what do they call it—a very small space between the two buildings? What—

YAGEL: No, these—

LEVINE: An air shaft or a—

YAGEL: No, no. These were all attached.

LEVINE: Oh, all attached.

YAGEL: All attached, one whole row, 19th Street. They called it the Yankee Row.

LEVINE: Oh.

YAGEL: Yeah. Must have been about 15 altogether. And then—then the big loft building in between, and then after that, about three other houses there that belonged to the same, Yankee Row. But they were separate.

LEVINE: Were there a lot of other ethnic groups living there that had come from—from Europe?

YAGEL: Yeah. There would be—we had a lot of Italians there. But, you see, right away you get in touch with your own group. Mama looked for the Germans and the Jews. We were attached [unclear] to the Lutheran Church, which was a few blocks away. And there was a good companionship there, a good fellowship.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

YAGEL: It was very, very pleasant.

LEVINE: So you remember it fondly, those years?

YAGEL: Oh, yes, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And—and then, why was it that you moved to New Jersey?

YAGEL: Well, we wanted a place of our own. We wanted a house. In—in New York too, my father was in charge of those buildings. At Halloween, he used to worry about that because you'd hear the boys running across the roof and—and getting doors or whatever and making a big bonfire in the middle of the road. I remember that. My father always had a dog for protection. And then the children would come along the street. If you walked there, especially, say, a man with his suit, they would have flour in—in this stockings—at that time, we all wore high stockings—and hit the men all the time. And the stocking make all white, ruin their na—navy blue, you know. Oh, it'd just be a terrible thing. And when I moved to New York and I saw goldenrods, I thought they were so beautiful. I used to pick them on the way to—on the train, used to try to give them to people in New York. I thought they would appreciate the flowers [laughs] like I did. I thought they were just wonderful. Ah.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

YAGEL: It was good—good memories.

LEVINE: Now, did your father continue to—to work in these buildings after you moved to New Jersey?

YAGEL: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

YAGEL: Yes, he—he worked in New York. Then he came home by train. Unfortunately, my father died in '24.

LEVINE: Oh.

YAGEL: Was early. And I was working on Wall Street then. I was working in—first, it was the Equitable Trust Company and then they changed it, Chase Manhattan.

LEVINE: Oh.

YAGEL: [unclear] Broad. It was just opposite the stock exchange. So once in a while, I would meet him on the train coming home.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So how long did you stay in school and—and why did you stop? Did you stop to—

YAGEL: What do you mean, school [unclear]?

LEVINE: Did you—you went—did you go to high school?

YAGEL: I went to college. I—in New York, as I say, I went to seventh grade. And then we moved to New Jersey and then I graduated from that school there in New Jersey [unclear] grades, grammar school. And then I went into high school. And then my mother went over to Germany in 1921—

LEVINE: Why—

YAGEL: —to visit her relatives. And at that time she just—before the war, they had planned to go back to Germany to live, my mother and father. And when she saw the conditions in Germany, she said, “Never again.” She said, “America is our country. We’re going to stay here.” But in the meantime, they had sent all—all their money over. My—my father’s brother was a architect and he was building this house for them.

LEVINE: Oh.

YAGEL: And when Mama saw the conditions, she said, “No, no. We can’t stay there.” She stayed there four months. And I was in high school and at that time, to me, Mama left in—must have been around April. And I was really happy about it because I could keep house with my father and I didn’t want to go to school then. I didn’t have to go to high school, get the—test time, you know. So my mom came home, said, “No, no.” Oh, I remember now. The—the berries that my mother picked were called preuselberren. [PH] And she brought over a big container like that of the preuselberren to America.

LEVINE: Hmm.

YAGEL: They were like a cranberry.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Now, when you say conditions were so bad, was it because of World War I—

YAGEL: Yes.

LEVINE: —that the conditions were so—

YAGEL: World War changed everything.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

YAGEL: And then she said, “No, we’ll stay in America. America is going to be our land.” And—

HELEN YAGEL: There was a financial problem, wasn’t there? The banks were—

YAGEL: Oh—oh, the money my mother had sent over was all gone. So she only had our house. But then after that she was all right. She kept on.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So then you—you—when you finished, did you work in Wall Street after you finished high school or after you—

YAGEL: No. I went—from high school, I went in—I don’t finish high school. I went to Egan’s [PH] Business School in Hackensack, New Jersey. And then I got a job in Equitable Trust Company on 37 Wall Street. And then they merged with Chase Manhattan and that was 11 Broad, opposite the stock exchange. And I worked there for six years. And then I met my husband and got married and we went to Highland [PH] Falls, New York.

LEVINE: How did you meet your husband?

YAGEL: [chuckles]

HELEN YAGEL: Mutual friends.

YAGEL: My mother would never—at that time, my father died already.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

YAGEL: And she looked for support from me. She didn’t ever want me to leave. My sister was 10 years younger. And she made it very—very hard for me to ever leave her. And every friend—every boyfriend I had, she made it impossible for him to come back to the house again. And this one man came all the time but she always came along, brought my sister along with her. So always the three of us out—

HELEN YAGEL: On the dates.

YAGEL: And one day, we were driving through—I said, “God was always with me.” Driving through a town, and we were in New Jersey. We were going out to Marlborough, New York and she saw this sign on the street, a banner right across that said, “Highland Falls Fire Department Carnival.” And Mom said, “Highland Falls. I

know somebody that lives in Highland Falls. Miss Stapper [PH]. She lived in—a floor beneath us in New York City.” And Fred said, “Well, we’ll go and visit her next week.” Well, the next week we went to visit her and Mama made arrangements for me to stay right there because the bank had wanted to send me away for rehabilitation for three weeks someplace else, [unclear], New York. And the very next night when I was there, the neighbor came over to visit this lady because she did his wash. His wife had died six months previous. And he saw me sitting there and he said to this lady’s son, “Larry, why don’t you take the young lady out?” And he was very, very shy, [unclear]. And [unclear] said, “Well, if you don’t, I don’t.” Well, the thing wound up that two years later we were married. So that’s how I came to Highland Falls, New York.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. When you say rehabilitation, you mean, like a vacation or you had some problem?

YAGEL: No, [unclear] my father had died.

LEVINE: Oh.

YAGEL: And the house was so torn up. My mother was so upset and, well, we were all upset. And she—she just wouldn’t let me go.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

YAGEL: As—even as a child, she used to say to me, “See that lady there? She’s a good girl. She always stays with her mother.” She never wanted me to leave her.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So it must have been hard for you to get married.

YAGEL: It was hard. It was hard, yeah. But I know, even on our—when we went way—after we were married we went to—on our honeymoon, the first—first night. You know, everybody’s still was at home where I had to live there. The whole family had met there. And they called up to the hotel where we were staying, you know, on our way to the Thousand Islands. And they all had something to say, “Wish you well,” and all this. They tried to put my mother on the phone and she wouldn’t come to the phone. She felt so hurt that I had left.

LEVINE: Hmm.

YAGEL: But it was all healed up in time.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. Well, how do you think of yourself now as German and as American? Do you—do you feel like you have parts of you that are each one of those or—

YAGEL: No, I know—the company has done—America has been wonderful. And you still have a little German and you like to speak to—some of that comes of German. You talk a little bit. But as for desire to live there ever, it could never be. But it's nice to visit. I went over there last year on a Rhine Danube cruise. That was beautiful. I met my cousin. I—I don't think I had ever seen her before, maybe as a very young child. But she—we used to send her care packages during the war. And in appreciation, when she got on her feet again, well, she said they had it very, very hard. They had to leave where I was born, travel to—nighttime through the woods.

LEVINE: Hmm.

YAGEL: And because she said the soldiers came in and would stab the packages that you have, or your clothes, whatever. And it was very, very hard to leave, she said. And she had three children and she traveled all night long with the children. And so, anyway, she got to the southern part of Germany. And so she sent us a—each one of us a German—a cuckoo clock from the Black Forest.

LEVINE: Oh.

YAGEL: So I want—I wanted to meet her and thank her. So we met in Austria then after our Rhine [unclear] met.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. How is it for you, seeing Ellis Island now, today?

YAGEL: Very emotional.

LEVINE: Hmm.

YAGEL: Very emotional, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And when you look back, do you think—do you think having come here as a little girl—do you think having immigrated made a difference in you, in your personality? Do you think that there were any effects of that, of changing countries and cultures and—

- YAGEL: It's a whole new life. I am so thankful that my father brought us here. What would I have had in Germany today? I look—all the suffering I would have gone through with that war and all—my mother's hometown all Polish today and my father's all Russian. There is no more, except the southern part of Germany, the culture might still be the same, but not the rest of it.
- LEVINE: Uh-hmm.
- YAGEL: No, I—I'm so thankful my father had the foresight to bring us to America. He knew war was coming because he had lived on the ships and—and the book that I read all about how Germany was starting to build the U-boats. And he said—he pleaded with my mother, "Come." And Mama said, "No, I won't leave my country and I don't want to leave my sisters here." But he just sent her the tickets and she had to come. So that's how we got here. I'm so thankful.
- LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Do you think—with a lot of families uprooting like that and coming, caused a lot of problems. Do you think it did that in your family?
- YAGEL: Oh, no, no.
- LEVINE: No?
- YAGEL: No way. And I—the best thing that my mother did when she went over to Germany, saw the conditions there then in 1921, that made her realize the benefits she had here and how much better off she was here. No, no.
- LEVINE: And how about you, growing up here? Did you have any heroes or heroines? I mean, people that you looked up to, whether you knew them personally, or you just read about them or heard about them. I mean, were—was there anybody that stands out in your mind that you looked up to and maybe wanted to be like or—
- YAGEL: No, I just appreciated—appreciative of everything. Really, every—everything pleased me so. I was so happy. Everyone was so good and so kind.
- LEVINE: In—
- YAGEL: I—I've been blessed with everything. When I went to—I had to leave New York in—in the seventh grade. This other family—it was a German family; they took me in there. I stayed with the

daughter there until we—until it was time for me to move to New Jersey. New Jersey, met so many nice people. Next to us was a Irish family, American. And I don't know. Everybody's been lovely, so kind, so good. I never felt any different than anyone else. I didn't feel that I came from Germany—that I was German. No, I thought I was American.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. Yeah. Is there anything else that—over this period of time? Anything else that you can think of that maybe we—I mean, I'd still like you to sing some of your German songs that you were sung to [chuckles] as a child, if you would.

YAGEL: [pause] I don't think I could sing now.

LEVINE: No? Okay, okay. Let's see. Is there anything else then that—that you can think of? Anything, either going back to Germany or—or coming here? Being in New York. Now, you—you married and you had one child?

YAGEL: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: And his name?

YAGEL: Arthur.

LEVINE: Arthur, uh-huh.

YAGEL: Arthur and Helen. They're both wonderful to me.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. What would you say were the high points and the low points of your life?

YAGEL: I don't have any high points or low points. They were all good points to me. Of course, it was a very sad thing when my father died. He died so suddenly, had a heart attack. Came home. He went down to the depot to go—go on the train. He was sick and the neighbor sent him home by taxi and a couple hours later he was dead.

LEVINE: Hmm.

YAGEL: And the doc—and they sent a—[unclear] called up the bank where I worked and said I should come home immediately. But the doctor said he had acute indigestion. Mom said, "How could he have acute indigestion? He ate the same food as I did last night." They'd never recognize heart trouble at all in those days in 1924.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

YAGEL: Of course, the—another low point for my mother—not so much for me—my mother and father—but they lost a boy when he was only, oh, five, six years old.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-hmm.

HELEN YAGEL: And what about your other brother? You had another brother.

YAGEL: Well, he was only—yes, my—my mother had another baby. But she said she never felt that so much as [unclear]. He must have been around 11 months old when he died. He—he just would not take the bottle. He wouldn't take her breast for feeding. And she used to get all kinds of milk. I remember buying condensed—evaporated mil—no, Eagle Brand milk. She tried everything and the child just would not eat. He developed summer complaint. And I guess at that time a lot of children had that. And Mama said she couldn't even dry—get the wash dry because it was so hot and muggy all the time. He died in August. And so Mama said she just gave up with the child because she knew he could not get well.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

YAGEL: That just came on, whatever that was, but—whereas, she said with the other boy, they had pleasure, could talk and laugh. One thing the boy said to Mama when she took him shopping, "Oh, Mama. Look at that. That boy never washed himself, did he?" That's the first time he ever saw a Negro. "Look, he never washed." Mama said, "No, no, no, Herb. That's—that's the way he is." But he didn't understand that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Can you remember any other—you had such good ones of—of things that you saw for the first time when you first came. Were there—were there any other things that you remember being—being new and different to you that—that struck you early on?

YAGEL: Well, one thing my—my mother noticed when she came to America with—to eat. My aunt had this beautiful table set all the time and big, long tablecloth [unclear] with a white bread. My mother had never seen white bread before. And she said she felt so ashamed, because that's all she kept on eating. She ate the whole loaf, time and time again, day after day, because they

always had rye bread. You never saw white bread before. And— but then, after, when she was back in her own apartment, she realized rye bread was the thing. And so we never had white bread anymore. [chuckles] She got her fill then.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

YAGEL: It seems though, white bread was for the rich people, not for the poor. And Germany at that time, where she came from, they all ate the—

LEVINE: Oh.

YAGEL: —wheat bread.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-huh. So was your husband German then?

YAGEL: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: And—and was—was that—I mean, was it—well, your mother really didn't approve anyway. But, I mean, you were sort of meant to marry someone—

YAGEL: Oh—

LEVINE: —who he was German?

YAGEL: No, my father was dead already. That's why she didn't want me to go to. He had—he had died in '24.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

YAGEL: And I—and I married in '29.

LEVINE: Oh.

HELEN YAGEL: But Papa was born in Highland Falls.

LEVINE: Oh, he was German descent but he was—

YAGEL: Yeah, the man I married.

LEVINE: —he was American.

YAGEL: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

YAGEL: German descent. Sure.

LEVINE: Okay. And how about your greatest satisfactions? What—what have you—when you look back on your life, what would you say—

YAGEL: All I can say is God blessed me my whole life through. I've been richly rewarded. Miracles have happened in my life. It was a miracle when—that I ever came to Highland Falls. If that sign hadn't been up there on that street, Mom said, "Highland Falls," I never would have been there. Ah, I [sighs]—I wanted to work after—oh, when I was in—with my husband after my son went into the service and he got—he was married to Helen just before he left. I said, "Arthur, I've got to do something. I can't stay home." He says, "Oh, you have enough work to do [unclear]." "I don't want to." I said, "I want to go work." He said, "No, you can't go to work." And I said, "Do you mind if I go to school?" And he laughed. He thought it was a joke. How old was I then, Helen?

HELEN YAGEL: Let me see.

YAGEL: In my 50s, anyway.

HELEN YAGEL: You were probably 49 or 50.

YAGEL: And I went to Ladycliff [PH] College. They were—happened to be in town. Went to the nuns and I was not a Catholic. And the nuns said—well, they took—took me in. They sent for all my credentials because I had them from all over. I had gone to night school while I was in New York. And from the business school they got credentials. And then [sighs]—

HELEN YAGEL: You graduated in '57.

YAGEL: I graduated in '57 from Ladycliff, yeah.

HELEN YAGEL: Yeah.

YAGEL: And then graduation—

LEVINE: Great.

YAGEL: Just before graduation, the nuns said to—"What are you going to do now, Hertha?" And I said, "I don't know. I just wanted an education. My husband wouldn't let me work. I wanted to do

something.” [chuckles] “Would you mind teaching in—in Sacred Heart in town?” I said, “Oh, that’d be fine.” The—the—Sister Mary Macla [PH] went down to New York to speak to the—down—archdiocese. And they said, “Why do you want a Protestant woman coming into our—teaching in our school?” And she said, “She’s a good Christian woman.” So then I taught there two years. It was \$180 a month and no protection of any kind. I went to the priest about a half a year before I left. I said, “Father, I want Social Security. I want some kind of—something.” “Don’t you have a son? He’ll take care of you. What are you worrying about?” I said, “Father, it’s different today.” He—“Oh, we’ve got our grandmother living with—our aunt living with—we were all one happy family.” I said, “Father, it’s different today. We don’t do this anymore.” “No.” So then I left and I went over to the public school. And I had all my credentials and I worked. Later on, I got my master’s. So that’s how it all worked out.

LEVINE: Wonderful. What were you teaching?

HELEN YAGEL: Elementary.

LEVINE: Elementary school, uh-huh.

YAGEL: I had the—

HELEN YAGEL: First grade. You had first grade.

YAGEL: First grades of—third in Sacred Heart and then the first grade. And then my son, too—he be—he was a teacher in high school.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Wow. Well, that’s quite an accomplishment. That’s wonderful.

HELEN YAGEL: [unclear].

YAGEL: I wouldn’t have had that chance in Germany. [laughs]

HELEN YAGEL: When her son got his master’s, she graduated from Ladycliff.

YAGEL: Yeah. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Wow. Okay. Well, is there anything else you’d like to say before we close?

YAGEL: I don’t think so, dear. I think it’s all—

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I want to thank you for a most interesting interview—

YAGEL: Thank you.

LEVINE: —full of lovely little vignettes about life and what you—what you saw when you got here and what you did. Anyway, I have been speaking with Hertha Yagel, who came from Germany when she was just six years old in 1912. She's 92 at the time of this interview. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm signing off.

[END OF INTERVIEW]