

EI- 1256

LIELO KOSSOR

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KENILWORTH, NJ

LEVINE: Today is September the eighteenth the year 2002. I'm here in Kenilworth, New Jersey with Mrs. L – Lielo Kossor who came to this country when she was six years old in 1927 from Germany. They – she and her family left from the port of Hamburg and we're going to – I'm going to see if I can find out the exact spelling of the ship which was a Spanish sip – ship, something like Sierra Ven – Venama.

KOSSOR: Danna.

LEVINE: Danna.

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KOSSOR: Yeah.

LEVINE: OK, so we're going to – I'm going to have to look that one up. OK, this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. If you'd start by saying the name you were born with.

KOSSOR: My name was Lieselotte L-I-E-S-E-L-O-T-T-E Margot M-A-R-G-O-T Ruth.

LEVINE: And your mai – maiden name was Ruth? Or no?

KOSSOR: Ziermann.

LEVINE: Ziermann. Z—

KOSSOR: Z-I-E-R-M-A-N-N.

LEVINE: OK. Now had – have you ever had any last names besides Zierman and Kossor?

KOSSOR: No.

LEVINE: OK. Now, your birth date, please?

KOSSOR: My birth date is July 13, 1921.

LEVINE: OK, and where in Germany were you born?

KOSSOR: Saalfeld. S-A-A-L-F-E-L-D. Turingen. Thuringia. Turingen. T-U-R-I-N-G-E-N. [dogs bark]

LEVINE: Now, is this a t – is this s town? Is this a city?

KOSSOR: Saalfeld is the town.

LEVINE: OK, and Turingen? Turingen?

KOSSOR: Thuringia is the—

LEVINE: [superposed] Thuringia.

KOSSOR: The – how can I say it?

LEVINE: [superposed] State?

KOSSOR: The section. The section.

LEVINE: OK.

KOSSOR: Thuringia, they say here, it's Turingen.

LEVINE: Oh, Turingen.

KOSSOR: Yeah.

LEVINE: OK. And where in Germany is that? Is that—

KOSSOR: The heart of Germany.

LEVINE: Heart, OK. OK. And you lived in the same place up until the time you left?
When you were six?

KOSSOR: [superposed] Mhm.

LEVINE: OK. Well, let's – let's first talk about life there in Sala – Salafeld?

KOSSOR: Saalfeld. Saalfeld.

LEVINE: [superposed] Saal—

KOSSOR: S-A-A—

LEVINE: Oh.

KOSSOR: S-A-A-L-F-E-L-D.

LEVINE: Ah. OK. Saalfeld. OK. Do you remember Saalfeld?

KOSSOR: I remember it as if it were yesterday.

LEVINE: What do you think of when you think—

KOSSOR: [superposed] But it is completely changed now. The – the section is – it no longer the way it was when I was there.

LEVINE: Well, talk about how it was when you were there.

KOSSOR: I remember it a – I was born in my grandfather's house and across the street was the – this estate that was, like, up a hill and it was way high up. And in the back, away from my – where I was born was a forest and on the right of the forest was a big potato field and wheat field. And now that section was all erased and there's a big hospital built there. That is there still today.

LEVINE: Now, whose father was that grandfather?

KOSSOR: My father's father.

LEVINE: OK, and so they were – he was a Ziermann?

KOSSOR: That's right.

LEVINE: Do you remember that grandfather? Can you remember him?

KOSSOR: Very vaguely. Only – it might be heresay. Because he's the one that taught me to walk. He was in the war—in the past—injured and he had – he walked with two canes and he me hold the canes and taught me to walk that way.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. How about your father? What was his name?

KOSSOR: Kurt. K-U-R-T.

LEVINE: And your mother's name?

KOSSOR: Elise.

LEVINE: And her maiden name.

KOSSOR: Gleim. G-L-E-I-M.

LEVINE: And do you think your mother and father's families were from that central area in Germany going back some generations?

KOSSOR: [superposed] I do believe so. I believe they were from that area.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KOSSOR: Not – not exactly the town, but the area.

LEVINE: So they – so they and maybe their parents were born in Germany. Were German.

KOSSOR: Yeah.

LEVINE: OK. When you think about Saalfeld, do you have memories of either your house or the town or things that you did?

KOSSOR: [superposed] The – the area where I was born very definitely. I remember the house and the terrain. There were fruit trees on the property and there was a big garden in the back that my grandfather had and he raised rabbits. And I had a white Angora rabbit as a gift from him to me.

LEVINE: Now, what did your father do for work in Germany?

KOSSOR: Oh, boy. Here it was called a metal-spinner. There it is *Metalldrücker*.

LEVINE: What do – what does a metal-spinner do?

KOSSOR: Well, he [dogs barking] he made all my mother's pots. Rounded and flat. So he worked on a lathe that revolved and he had tools that shaped the metal and in this country he made cowlings for the airplanes— Westinghouse and – he worked for them.

LEVINE: So he continued in his field.

KOSSOR: [superposed] Here.

LEVINE: [superposed] Here.

KOSSOR: Very much so.

LEVINE: OK.

KOSSOR: He was very much in demand at that time.

LEVINE: And did you have sisters and brothers in Germany?

KOSSOR: No.

LEVINE: So you were the only one. You were the first and the only—

KOSSOR: [superposed] That's right. Right.

LEVINE: That came here. OK. Do you know why your father left Germany the year before you did—at that particular time why he left?

KOSSOR: Because he lost everything in that inflation that they had where my grandfather told him to keep his money in the bank this – safekeeping. Well, that was no good because when the money lost its value, all the money that he had put away—that he couldn't get at—was gone. So he – literally he lost his fortune and came to this country because he had nothing there and his brother and his sister-in-law and sisters were in this country already. They had come over way earlier.

LEVINE: And where were they – where had they settled?

KOSSOR: In Newark.

LEVINE: [superposed] Newark.

KOSSOR: And one was in Long Island—a sister lived in Long Island. And another sister in Michigan. So he – we were established pretty well in this country.

LEVINE: So where did your father go when he came here?

KOSSOR: Oh, let me think now. Union City, I remember he mentioned that name and he lived there for a while and he found work [dogs barking] in Newark and the place where he worked in Newark. He – he worked all his life—all the while he was here, in fact he retired from that company, which moved out of Newark to – oh, boy, someplace in south Jersey. So – but he was with that firm all the while. He—

LEVINE: From the time he first came? Wow.

KOSSOR: Well, no. First – first he worked in Union City until he found this place in Newark that was more conducive to his work. And that's the place he stayed with—William Bergfeld and Company—till he retired.

LEVINE: And they made – is – is that what they did? They made pots and pans and things?

KOSSOR: No, they made—

LEVINE: [superposed] No, oh that was – airplanes.

KOSSOR: That was in Germ – he made my mother a set – two sets of dishes and his – like, they had guilds there, way back, and he had to make something to prove his worth in his work. And they traveled over there. I mean, to go from one country to another was like going from one city to another here. And he had to make a – a piece to show how good he was at his work and he made a – a tea set for my mother. And the – what do you – what would you call the—

LEVINE: The tray?

KOSSOR: No, the – the – the—

LEVINE: The teapot?

KOSSOR: Sugar and creamer and the coffee whatever.

LEVINE: [superposed] (laughs) Pitcher.

KOSSOR: Pitcher or whatever.

LEVINE: Yeah.

KOSSOR: Well, he made that and he made fo – and – he wasn't married then yet, so he gave the set to his sister, one sister, and she wouldn't relinquish it to my mother, so I don't know where that set is now. I wish I did.

LEVINE: Yeah. So when he came here he – did he then saved up some money and sent for the rest – for you and your mother?

KOSSOR: That's what – that's right. That's what he did. That's why we came the year later. He saved up the – the passage money so she couldn't – not first

class, but she was not a tourist class in – in the ship that she was on. It was a freighter.

LEVINE: Oh, a freighter. Uh-huh.

KOSSOR: That's all I know about it.

LEVINE: Well, so, did he – did he see – did you have a house? Did you have to, like, sell a house or anything like that?

KOSSOR: We left my grandfather's house.

LEVINE: Oh.

KOSSOR: They were still over there. In fact, years—many years—later, my father had my grandmother come over. My grandfather had died then and she willed the house to her youngest son and she came over here. And she lived with my other uncle—one of my father's brothers—they lived close – across the street from one another here in Kenilworth.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. OK. So, it was you and your mother who were leaving and traveling together to get here. Do you remember anything about what your mother brought with her or the – the preparations to leave?

KOSSOR: There wasn't much she carried – she had two trunks. A fairly big size and smaller one—that was all she had. And she brought feather comforters and clothing that we had and nothing else. They didn't bring anything else. No dishes or – just nothing else. When we came over here we found – after we came to my one uncle and aunt in Newark and as soon as they could they found an apartment in a – a – a complex – a apartment complex, you know, the railroad—

LEVINE: [superposed] A tenement.

KOSSOR: F – flat, yeah. And I have someplace in my closet the receipts for the things that they bought – they first bought when they came to this country. And some of the receipts were, like, on a – a – a – a – (laughs) it was funny. Paper bag, you know, one table, two dollars, and one chair, fifty cents, and all – this is written on, like, this was a – a bill. And so their living room had the trunk—it wasn't a trunk, it was a reed – you have some over in – in the museum over there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KOSSOR: The woven – they had these cases made over there.

LEVINE: [superposed] Oh, uh-huh.

KOSSOR: The woven—

LEVINE: Is it straw? Or is it—

KOSSOR: No, no. Was it straw? Reeds, like, you know.

LEVINE: Oh, OK. Reeds.

KOSSOR: They had this – that was a trade over there. They made these trunks for travel.

LEVINE: Oh, OK.

KOSSOR: So we had those two and one we – we had in the living room with a table cloth over it and a couple of chairs and then we had beds. My mother,

father had a – one bed in one bedroom and I had another in another bedroom and then they bought a – a kitchen che – table and chairs. What else? That was it. And from there we then moved to Elizabeth. That's where I started school, by the way. I was seven before I started school. And I graduate – I was – June, in July I was eighteen and I was in the upper third of the class in the high school. So from there I went to Drake Business College – I only stood there for a year; I had a job by then. And – in Newark for a real – real es – real estate agent.

LEVINE: Well, just to back up a minute—

KOSSOR: Mhm.

LEVINE: When you and your mother left, do you remember saying good-bye to everybody? Your grandfather and all? No. And do you remember traveling to Hamburg? How about the voyage? Anything?

KOSSOR: I think it was very overwhelming because I was an only child. I – we lived with my grandmother and grandfather with my mother and father until he left for America and as far as traveling from there to Hamburg, I don't remember anything. It was just (laughs) I remember an incident, thought.

LEVINE: [superposed] OK.

KOSSOR: My mother had a [dogs barking] problem with me getting shoes because I always wound with the shoes getting to small for – being to small for me. So this one day we went for a walk and I complained my feet hurt, my feet hurt, my mother picked me up and sat me down on the turf there to see what was the matter with my shoes. And she sat me on an – on an anthill (laughs). [clapping noise] I remember all this, I mean, this was like, five years old, six

years old. And she sat me on the [LEVINE coughs] anthill and I remember that – I don't know what her – heresy or what, but, like it was yesterday.

LEVINE: Huh.

KOSSOR: So, my memory goes far back.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, now how would you describe yourself as a six-year-old little girl coming to this country? What kind of a little girl were you?

KOSSOR: [dogs barking] Re – tired because I – I was an only child. I was two years old when my mother had me crocheting, so she spent a lot of time with me but that's all I remember as far as achievements, accomplishments, or what.

LEVINE: Wh – so you would say you were – were you shy? Were you a—

KOSSOR: I would say yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KOSSOR: Mhm.

LEVINE: And [dogs barking] when you first got here, do you have any recollection of coming into the New York Harbor?

KOSSOR: I do remember being way up in a boat and my father on the dock and he cried when he saw me because I had lost so much weight. I was skin and bones when we got here, so it must've rough crossing and that was a – from that boat with my aunt and my cousin. See, they're—

LEVINE: [superposed] Oh.

KOSSOR: The husbands came over in twenty-six and we came over in twenty-seven.

LEVINE: Oh.

KOSSOR: And that's the boat we came over on.

LEVINE: I see. So you were traveling with your aunt and your cousin as well as your mother?

KOSSOR: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KOSSOR: The four of us.

LEVINE: Right.

KOSSOR: Came over.

LEVINE: Now, how did you mother get along for that year? Was your father sending money back, or—

KOSSOR: That's all I know.

LEVINE: Yeah. So how about Ellis Island? Anything that you remember about that?

KOSSOR: [superposed] All I remember there is this long room, I don't know how – what boat came in there, I don't know how I got, but I do remember coming down this and you had to – we – we're not low-class because we didn't have to get sprayed and all that stuff for—

LEVINE: Lice.

KOSSOR: De-loused and what – all that. We didn't have to go through that. But this long, long room that we had to come in – in – in file to this desk where the – the—

LEVINE: Inspector.

KOSSOR: Officers, inspectors and they were very nice to us and incidents, again. They had me walk—'cause I have a hip condition. I was born with – I was born lame. But he had me walk up and down to see if I was walking all right, and I did. And my cousin (laughs) my aunt – the night before we were to dock she gave him herring for supper, whatever, and h – he could not tolerate herring. He broke out in a rash from head to foot and she was scared stiff. Every time we had to go for inspection for something she was the head of the class, you know, because I had a – a – something and she didn't. But that day, when he was all puffed out, she was at the end of the line (laughs). Which was very natural.

LEVINE: So what happened with – when he was inspected? With – with this rash?

KOSSOR: I guess they knew that it was just a rash, it wasn't anything serious, you know, so she had no problem. But she was scared stiff.

LEVINE: Do you remember what she and your mother thought about, you know, I mean, what had they heard about being sent back or what they were feeling when that happened?

KOSSOR: [superposed] N – not that I know – that I know that they discussed anything like that. Six-year-old doesn't care for those kind of subjects. They were with dolls and stuff.

LEVINE: OK, so, then you – did your father meet you at Ellis Island?

KOSSOR: No – no. No. Hoboken, as far as I know, when the boat docked to discharge the passengers.

LEVINE: So, do you remember the reunion with your father.

KOSSOR: Yes. All I remember, though, is him standing on the dock and me on the boat coming down the – the gangway. That's all.

LEVINE: And then you went to Newark? Is that – was that where you went?

KOSSOR: Newark.

LEVINE: OK.

KOSSOR: Yeah.

LEVINE: And did your father have a place for you?

KOSSOR: No – no. No.

LEVINE: You went—

KOSSOR: We went to my aunt and uncle who were established there.

LEVINE: Now, that's not the aunt that came with you. That's—

KOSSOR: [superposed] No. No – no.

LEVINE: OK, right.

KOSSOR: This was my father's oldest brother and his wife. We went there just to go s
– have someplace to go and then we had that railroad flat that we lived in for
a while. And that's – from there I went to school. I was seven by the time I
went to school 'cause I couldn't even talk. I'd come up to my mother and
say, "I know what this means. I know what this means." That's how I
learned to speak English. So my mother had an accent till the day she died.
My father was very good in his vocabulary and all—my father was a very
learned man and he was one of six children and there was a – a professor in
the town that wanted – my father was very – oh, what can I say? He could
write very well and this professor realized he was well-learned, he wanted
him – he would even pay for him to go to college. But my grandfather, with
six children, did not just one to go. So with that my father lost out. So. But
he was very good in writing, in letters that he wrote. He was very learned,
he was very bookish. I think that's where I got it from. 'Cause books are my
love. Oh, I love books.

LEVINE: And that was – was that true from the time you were a little girl?

KOSSOR: That I can't tell you for true.

LEVINE: Mhm.

KOSSOR: It was over here that when I learned the language and all a – I know in high
school I lived in the library, so where that came from – it was my love of
books.

LEVINE: Yeah. OK, so you're – how did your mother feel about coming here? Was she enthusiastic, or—

KOSSOR: [superposed] She had no—

LEVINE: Or not? Or—

KOSSOR: She was very enthusiastic because my father was here and she was a very family oriented person. I mean, she crocheted laces and – everything had laces in the house. I mean, bed linens and all. Everything. Some laces were that wide.

LEVINE: [superposed] Three inches wide, uh-huh.

KOSSOR: So she was very domestic.

LEVINE: OK, so you – you started school. And were there other children who had immigrated in your school with you?

KOSSOR: No, not that I know of.

LEVINE: So, were you – you weren't able to speak by the time you started school. How did that – how was that for you?

KOSSOR: It was hard, but I learned to speak then and I used to come up to my mother, "I know what this means, I know what this means." And with that I learned the language.

LEVINE: Now, were your mother and father continuing to speak German at home?

KOSSOR: Yeah. 'Cause my mother couldn't speak English and – and I don't know she never even – she had no talent for – for languages. And it's funny because to my mother I spoke German; to my father I spoke English.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. OK, so you stayed in school and then you went for a year to – to a specialty—

KOSSOR: [superposed] Yeah, Drake – Drake Business College.

LEVINE: [superposed] Drake Business.

KOSSOR: In Newark.

LEVINE: OK. And then did you – did you work for a while before you got married?

KOSSOR: Oh, yeah. I worked for a real est – estate agent and then I worked for a cutlery company in Maplewood. I was a – a – in the office there. I did switchboard work and everything you could think of.

LEVINE: And how did you meet your husband?

KOSSOR: Through my husband's cousin. She said she had a cousin who was in the army and she thought that it would be nice if I could correspond with him. That's how I met him. I never met him actually till he wound up in Hawaii and I didn't meet him till he came back to this country.

LEVINE: Was this during World War Two that you – uh-huh. Oh, I see, so you wrote to him while he was in the army first.

KOSSOR: Yeah.

LEVINE: So what was your idea about him before you ever met him?

KOSSOR: I – he ha – wrote nice letters and I met through his cousin, again, he came to my house and I was out the first time he came to my house and they told him where I was. I was out socializing that evening with a girlfriend and he came there and met me.

LEVINE: And did you—

KOSSOR: [superposed] That was in Irvington.

LEVINE: Did you like each other when you first met?

KOSSOR: We got along very well, so that was a good sign.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KOSSOR: And he wasn't a womanizer, so [dogs barking] we were compatible.

LEVINE: Right. Now had his family immigrated or anything, or were they all born here?

KOSSOR: His – his parents were from Austria-Hungary when it was Austria-Hungary. They spoke Hungarian, that I know, and his parents were born over there. So—

LEVINE: So then you got married. And did you continue to work? Or did you start raising a family or what did you—

KOSSOR: No, I was married ten years before we had a family. But I never went to find out why not. It was just one of those things. I was bound and determined

that I'm not going to the doctor's. The Lord wants me to have a family, I will, otherwise, forget it. 'Cause I had girlfriends that I went to work with who had sisters and had tests done why they weren't pregnant, and it was so horrible (laughs) I didn't want any part of that. So it was ten years, almost to the day, that my first – I was first pregnant with Steven.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So, let's see. Where you living then? You always stayed in New Jersey, is that correct?

KOSSOR: Yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: OK.

KOSSOR: When – after I was married, we lived in West Orange. Then we – we g – I came here.

LEVINE: Oh.

KOSSOR: So I've been here since 1950.

LEVINE: Mmk. And this is Kenilworth.

KOSSOR: Mhm.

LEVINE: So you had your first son and then—

KOSSOR: And I knew I wasn't going to have only one 'cause I was only one. So fifteen months later I had my second and then I had a miscarriage and I always think that that might've been the girl I should've had, which I didn't. And then about five or s – five and six years between tho – those three Michael

was born. And I found out why I had a miss—my blood type is R-H negative. [pause] Yup.

LEVINE: So then you – did you stay home when you were raising the boys? Uh-huh. And then h – did you ever return to work at all?

KOSSOR: When my youngest was eleven years old, my husband's place of business – they – they changed hands. My husband worked for Edison—Thomas A. Edison in West Orange—

LEVINE: [superposed] Oh, yeah.

KOSSOR: And that was his alma mater, so to speak. I mean, he – that was – for him—

LEVINE: [superposed] You mean he actually worked for Edison? I mean, he – the man?

KOSSOR: Edison Company.

LEVINE: Oh, Edison Company.

KOSSOR: Yeah. He – he knew Edison himself, he was there when my husband worked there.

LEVINE: Did he ever talk about it?

KOSSOR: Oh, always. He was – Edison was his, like I said, alma mater. I mean, there was nobody, nothing that was better than Edi – Thomas A. Edison company. And then they sold out and they got rid of a lot of the people and about three or four stayed with the company that bought Edison—McGraw—and he stayed with that company till he retired.

LEVINE: Now, did anybody become a citizen? Did your mother or your father?

KOSSOR: Y – oh, yeah. Both of them did.

LEVINE: [superposed] Both of them did. Uh-huh.

KOSSOR: And I c – because, being six, I was a citizen through my father, so I never went into it myself. So, I have his papers.

LEVINE: Mhm. Did you – do you remember the Depression at all? Like, you—

KOSSOR: I remember my father coming home from work with fifty cents for salary and it was very, very meager at that time.

LEVINE: Do you remember any hardship, you know, that the family went through at that point?

KOSSOR: I was too young to absorb that type of background. It's just – my mother and father saw that I was clothed and fed and that's all that concerned me. So—

LEVINE: And how about the Second World War? Do you remember the build-up to it, or—

KOSSOR: [superposed] I remember being with friends on Broad and Mark – Broad and Market in Newark when the announcement of the bombing of [dogs barking] Pearl Harbor was.

LEVINE: What were people – do you remember the reactions and—

KOSSOR: Panicky. It was awful. But that's all that – that was at the time. It was panicky.

LEVINE: So you – you remember – do you – did you do anything in war effort? I mean, were you – you were working at that time, I guess.

KOSSOR: [superposed] Yeah. For that cutlery company.

LEVINE: How about the – thinking about yourself and also your mother and father, do you think that coming to this country had an impact on the way they thought about things or the way they did things or their personality?

KOSSOR: [superposed] Oh, very definitely.

LEVINE: [superposed] In what ways?

KOSSOR: It was a very different lifestyle from what they had in Europe—until my father lost everything they were doing fine. But when he did, then he decided – at that time Germany was very unsettled and he left there and he came to this country. And as far as concerning me, I was too young to know and care.

LEVINE: Did you ever run into any anti-German sentiment when World War Two was being acted out?

KOSSOR: It was mixed. It was a very open – if somebody disliked the Germans, they voiced their opinion and I figured they're entitled to their opinion, that's all. 'Cause I wasn't about to take sides and I know, like, my father he was very – very European as far as his outlook and he did not like the Italians. But instead of keeping his mouth shut or tolerating, he gave his opinion out loud, which I resented because I didn't like hostility and – and prejudice and the outlook. 'Cause my outlook was accept and if somebody – something or

somebody was not good or to my liking, I ignored them, that's all. I – it wasn't anything to discuss anti.

LEVINE: Mhm. Did he – was – did any of his friends – do you know, were you aware, of, you know, some Germans were rounded up and – and taken as enemy aliens.

KOSSOR: [superposed] Yeah. No, my father wasn't. No.

LEVINE: Anybody in – that you knew? Were you part of a German community at all or not?

KOSSOR: In Irvington – when we moved to Irvington the street we were on was quite German and my father, the best friend he there was a Jewish grocer. And they had – he had a back room and they gathered there – all different – and they were very friendly – very friendly group.

LEVINE: And so it was mix of all different kinds of ethnicities.

KOSSOR: [superposed] Yup. Yup – yup. Yup.

LEVINE: Ah—

KOSSOR: And my father was not antagonistic like – at one time it was against the Jewish and then it was against Italian and then it wa – you know how it – the different – and – but it wasn't anything harmful, it wasn't any antagonism in all. So – and this grocer who was Jewish, they had a ball. They really did (laughs). So. You're Jewish, aren't you? The *shana tova* [a good year].

LEVINE: (laughs) Actually, I wasn't raised Jewish so I'm not—

KOSSOR: Oh, really?

LEVINE: But I – I—

KOSSOR: Well, that was Jewish greeting for the holidays.

LEVINE: Yeah, I figured it was something like that. OK, well, let's see (clears throat). How about values and attitudes that your mother or father tried to instill in you that maybe you did the same—

KOSSOR: [superposed] They never – never – now you this, now you that – never, never. So, my opinions and my feelings to anything were my own.

LEVINE: K.

KOSSOR: That's about all I can say as far as that goes.

LEVINE: Did they hold on to some of their German ways even in this country?

KOSSOR: [superposed] Oh, always. Sure.

LEVINE: What kinds of things do you think they – they kept as – from their old—

KOSSOR: The – the cooking and the lifestyle. My mother was strictly a homemaker and she cooked delicious meals. And baked (breathes in). The cake – my father, doing his work, he made her stainless steel bake sh – you know, sheets, with the rim. She made – oh, she made cakes like see yi yi.

LEVINE: Now was your family religious at all?

KOSSOR: We were Lutheran and that was it. We went to church not – I did, and my mother. My father was – go to church or don't. Didn't make any difference. But we were not overly absorbed religiously. Just normally.

LEVINE: And how about – what would you say looking back on your life were some of your greatest satisfactions?

KOSSOR: Oh, graduating high school. And then finding employment. And that first job I had with that real estate agent was a horror because he was – you couldn't touch anything because you'd leave a fingerprint. I mean, he was, like, not for real (laughs). And then I quit there and I worked for the cutlery place and that was – the boss there, he was German with a b – heavy accent and his wife and they were just wonderful people. And he had a son and they were just wonderful. And I worked there till I left to get married.

LEVINE: Oh. Now, did your mother and father have anything to do with some of the German societies here in this country?

KOSSOR: Yeah, my—

LEVINE: [superposed] Clubs, or—

KOSSOR: Oh, what the heck was it? It was just a group of German people that were together. It was like a – I can't even remember what the name it was. It was just a – a society where they met for holidays and – or they met for, like, on weekends for socializing. It wasn't anything political or anything derogatory or anything like that. And, of course, when the war was they looked down on German gathering, so they stopped the – the gathering together because it wasn't anything bad or anything, but then they had their eye on them and – and they didn't like that because they didn't do anything

wrong and didn't feel that they should be, you know, watched so closely.
That's all.

LEVINE: Yeah. Let's see. Is there anything else about – well, you visited Ellis Island recently. How did it feel to you?

KOSSOR: Weird (LEVINE laughs). It really did, because I was so please my son took me. And he – he felt that that was my due. I mean, seventy-five years is a long time to remember and he took me over there and we had a ball that day. We really did.

LEVINE: Mhm. Well, you have a special connection to the place.

KOSSOR: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

KOSSOR: I really do. I wish I could do it more often. That – that boat ride over, that ferry ride is just, oh, wonderful (LEVINE laughs). But I can't call on my son all the time. And the other two have their – well, in Pennsylvania. My son, his son Nicholas is a judo – oy, is he ever judo. He's got trophies and medals like you wouldn't believe. In fact, he is now up in New York State at some judo where he's going to school up there and learning. I think he's prepping for the Olympics.

LEVINE: Oh, my goodness.

KOSSOR: Yeah.

LEVINE: Wow. That's wonderful.

KOSSOR: Yeah.

LEVINE: How did September eleventh and the bombing of the towers – how did that affect you?

KOSSOR: I'll never forget that morning my son called me—David, the middle one—called me and said, “Mom, put your television on. They bombed in New York.” I said, “What?” I mean, it was like, what are you doing, giving me a story? I could not believe it. I put the television on and I couldn't believe that either. I think that was the most horrible experience in my life. It really was. And, oh, those people that – i – it's just – my girlfriends knows – knew several people that lost their lives through that. I didn't have any knowledge of any people, but I thought of them as a whole. It was awful. Just absolutely awful.

LEVINE: Let's see. Is there anything else you can think of that we may not have covered relevant to six-year-old that you were coming here—

KOSSOR: Six-year-old memories are very short when you're eighty-one (laughs) if you know what I mean.

LEVINE: [superposed] Uh-huh.

KOSSOR: Because six-year-olds don't – they remember up to a point, but after that the years take over and things change and the outlook changes.

LEVINE: [superposed] True enough.

KOSSOR: But that visit, on my seventy-fifth anniversary—to Ellis Island was weird. It really was. Because I remember pictures of Ellis Island when they let it deteriorate and that affected me very adversely, 'cause I didn't like that. I –

Ellis Island to me was like the first home and when it was deteriorating, I d – “How could you let that happen? How could you?” And then when it – they rebuilt and then when we went over there on the – in August – oh, I just stood there and I marveled at what they did to it and how I was so glad it was kept and is being kept the way it is. And I’m looking forward to more visits there.

LEVINE: Absolutely. Well, you’re most welcome. You let me know when you want to come.

KOSSOR: [superposed] OK.

LEVINE: [superposed] OK, well I think this is a nice place to end and I want to thank you for a lovely interview and this will now be part of our Ellis Island oral history collection.

KOSSOR: Oh, I’m so glad because I don’t know, the – it was a – the young man in the library had said, I think, that I would now be – have a place in Ellis Island that I didn’t have before. Because they stopped – they used to have the record of it, you know, where you could find it on – on the—

LEVINE: [superposed] On the Internet?

KOSSOR: Hm?

LEVINE: On the Internet, you mean?

KOSSOR: Yeah.

LEVINE: [superposed] Yeah.

KOSSOR: And I wasn't there and my father and my – who was there? Oh, the – the ones that came before—

LEVINE: [superposed] Earlier.

KOSSOR: Were mentioned there but my father wasn't mentioned and my mother wasn't mentioned and my aunt and my cousin and myself were not mentioned.

LEVINE: That's because the records only go up to 1924.

KOSSOR: Right, right and we we – came in twenty-seven.

LEVINE: [superposed] After. Right. Right.

KOSSOR: That's why. And this young man in the library said that if I had this interview I will, again, be in – in the records.

LEVINE: Well, you – you're – this interview will end up in the place that's part of the library that's called the listening room. And we have computers and the interview tapes and eventually transcripts can be called up in that room. So that's what he meant, that you're – you'll be on—

KOSSOR: [superposed] I see. Yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: On record at Ellis Island in that capacity.

KOSSOR: He said, of course, as far as the – the government is concerned you – they know you're there. But Ellis Island now will know better that you were there (laughs).

EI-1256 KOSSOR

LEVINE: Yeah, that's true enough. Well, thank you so much. And I've been speaking—

END OF INTERVIEW