

EI-1309

JOYCE KUCHAR PRATT

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LEVINE: Today is February the 5th, the year 2004. I'm here in Clinton, New Jersey with [clears throat] Joyce Laura Kuchar Pratt. She is the niece of Lud—Ludmila Foxlee, who was a social worker at Ellis Island for 19 years, and during the peak years of Ellis Island's immigration history. And I have also in this interview collection interviewed Joyce's brother, Miles, who spoke about his aunt, Ludmila Foxlee. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. So if we could maybe start at the beginning and you can kind of give a—an overview, or what you'd like to say about your aunt. And then I'll ask specific questions.

PRATT: Well, I think it's important to know where she came from and what her childhood w—was like, because it helped form the kind of person she was. [clears throat] She was born in Czechoslovakia, what is now the Republic of Czechia [PH]. And her parents came to this country to make a fortune. And originally they were going to go back, as very often happens. And they had a couple of children when they first came, as I understand it. Aunt Lud was the oldest and Jarem was the next one. Jarem Nera [PH] is her name.

LEVINE: And that's J-A-R-E-M?

PRATT: Uh-hmm. And the J is pronounced as a Y. And I don't know just how many first came, but when she got pregnant she went back to have her babies until my father was coming. And they gave up on that and just stayed. And he was the only one born in this country from—for which he was very proud. He said he was an American. [chuckles]

LEVINE: [laughs] Well, I want to say that we have this wonderful family photograph and it—it shows the entire family. So in other words, your aunt went back several times.

PRATT: And—

LEVINE: She had two, in—initially—

PRATT: I don't—I don't know—

LEVINE: —children.

PRATT: —when they first came.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

PRATT: So—and my aunt was very—never would tell me her age.

LEVINE: Oh.

PRATT: So [chuckles] the only thing I can go by is the gravestone that has her age on it.

LEVINE: I see.

PRATT: And it—it was the best we could do.

LEVINE: And what age was that? I mean, what year was she born? Does—do you—1830—

PRATT: 1885.

LEVINE: 1885—

PRATT: Uh-huh.

LEVINE: —to 1971—

PRATT: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: —was her lifespan. Okay. Well, anyway, but it's interesting that—that her mother went back several—

PRATT: Hmm.

LEVINE: —times to—to [unclear].

PRATT: That was my understanding.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PRATT: [clears throat] As the oldest child, she—her parents had the idea that many did at that time that the oldest child took care of the younger ones. And she resented this very much. She wanted to have her own life. And not only that, she wanted to go to college and that was not at all possible. Particularly, her father didn't think girls needed to go to college. But she did take care of her younger children, and then when she was older she made a deal with them, with her parents that she would take care of the grocery store—not grocery store [unclear], candy store, newspapers and things like that, they sold there that they owned. And she would mind the store in exchange for singing lessons. So as a teenager, that's what she did. I don't know how far she went in high school. Obviously, they didn't want her there. They thought she didn't need it. But she was—I would call her educated because she was always into books and she read and read and had all kinds of interests. [clears throat] Her interests were in the arts, antiques, gardening, history. She would read [unclear] and "Fall and Decline of the Roman Empire." She'd read that for bedtime. I think she only read a couple pages a night.

LEVINE: Hmm.

PRATT: And she liked to write. She wrote a column in Czech for a Chicago Czech newspaper. Many years, she did that so she got some money for that. It always seemed that money was short for them. And one time—let's see, if I can keep this a little bit on a chronological order, after World War I was when she was hired by the YWCA to go to the Czech area [clears throat] and work with girls who were kind of stranded after the war. And so they would set up kind of like homes where they could come—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

PRATT: —where they could live and have a decent life. At that time, it was hard for single women, much harder than now.

LEVINE: So she would work with, like, the—the wives of—of—of, maybe, soldiers that—that died in the war or their children, do you think?

PRATT: Well, lots of times they were young girls who didn't have homes anymore. And I don't know the whole story of those. Maybe the—the Y has a history on—

LEVINE: Oh.

PRATT: —just what they did. And of course, she knew both languages very well and she could do a lot of interpreting.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So would—was this in New Jersey, do you know?

PRATT: She went to Europe.

LEVINE: Oh, she went to Czech—oh, uh-huh.

PRATT: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PRATT: The Y was there.

LEVINE: Oh, I see.

PRATT: And I think there were other American ladies in charge of it and she was one of the helpers.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PRATT: And I'm not sure exactly what they did or—or what she did. I hope you can find out.

LEVINE: That would be interesting.

PRATT: So that's how she got connected with the Y. And after she came home, she worked on Ellis Island and her commute was interesting, because she lived on a farm at one end of town. And it was several miles to the railroad track and where she got her train. Her husband would drive her and I'm not sure if at first he didn't have a horse and buggy. But they did have a car most of the time. He'd drive her to the railroad. She'd get on the train, which took her to the edge of the Hudson River, and she'd take another train to go under the river. And then she would walk to the ferry slip to Ellis Island and reverse the thing to go home.

LEVINE: And home was in Montvale, New Jersey.

PRATT: Home was in Montvale. And she liked the train commute because she could read her religious lesson. She had her time all to herself and she always had other books that she could re—read. One time, she took me to Ellis Island. This was after it had closed. And she showed me where the doctor would examine people and some of the things there. And when she came—walked—was walking to or from the ferry, she would often stop at a secondhand bookstore and bought a lot of secondhand books, as you can see by her—

LEVINE: Yeah.

PRATT: —library. [clears throat] Let's see. She also took me to museums. She wanted me to have culture. So she was the one that introduced me to Rembrandt and Frans Hals [PH] that that sort of thing. [clears throat] On the farm, she helped by selling the produce at the stand. We often had family gather—I'm skipping around to different things.

LEVINE: Yeah.

PRATT: We often had family gatherings, particularly around Memorial Day, because her father's birthday was around that time and so was Aunt Mildred's. Aunt Mildred was a sweetheart. And we'd picnic and there'd be a ballgame and ice cream kept on dry ice and roasted corn in the husk.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

PRATT: And then, let's see. I should mention George Reil—R-E-I-L. He came to Ellis Island and h—his papers were not in order. He was from Germany and his family couldn't support the large family they had. So he went to South America, first to Argentina, and walked across the border to Bolivia. And I don't know where he got a boat that came to New York. But when he got to New York, his papers were a mess. So Aunt Lud asked him if he wanted to work on a farm, and they gave him room and board and not much else as far as salary was concerned. And he stayed there for years and years. He must have come at the end of the 1920s. He remembered me as a little kid. So I don't know exactly when. And—

LEVINE: How do you remember him?

PRATT: He was an interesting man. He was very intelligent. He had a very raspy voice because I think he had his tonsils out and they messed it up. So he's hard to understand. You know, he had a German accent, plus the raspiness. But he saved everything, every penny he could. And after

World War II, he was able to go back and he could see his mother again, until she died. And then he didn't go back anymore, not very often anyway. [clears throat] So—

LEVINE: And he worked on the farm all those years?

PRATT: Uh-hmm, yes. When it was—Aunt Lud wanted to write a will after Uncle John had died to make sure things would come out right. And she asked me if we had knew a good lawyer. Well, Bob went to Hamilton College, my husband. And one of his friends was a lawyer and he remembered him as being Phi Beta Kappa, very smart, and he did that kind of work. So I introduced them but I wouldn't go and have any part in doing the will. I didn't want to be involved in that. So [clears throat] he set it up and the only thing I said to my aunt was, you know, "Reil has no family here. And when something happens to you, what's going to happen to him? And I hope that you can make some provision." Well, it turns out that the lawyer and Aunt Lud discussed it and decided that Reil could stay in the house also he wanted to. He could move if he wanted to but he could stay there if he wanted to. And that's what he decided to do after she died.

LEVINE: So how long did he live there after she died?

PRATT: I'm not very good at dates. I'd have to look it up. He died—he's buried in the family plot and he died in 1983. So not only that, did they set that up, but the decided I would be the executrix.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

PRATT: Aunt Lud and Uncle John had no children of their own. The way the bought the farm was using some of the insurance money after Jarem's husband died, because they decided that Jarem's children should not be brought up in the city. And they wanted to bring them up in the country; it would be better for them. So Jarem and the children moved out to the farm with my aunt and uncle. And I guess the two sisters didn't get along terribly well because Jarem went back to New York, and she was dating and Aunt Lud didn't approve of that. Whatever happened, who knows? And I was too young to know what was going on. So there was Vera Kruka [PH] and George Kruka. And they did grow up on a farm with Aunt Lud and Uncle John.

LEVINE: Oh, I see. But her sister wasn't on the farm. She—and so [unclear].

PRATT: He left. [unclear] left.

LEVINE: Your Aunt Lud brought them up. Uh-huh.

PRATT: You w—you might say so. Yeah.

LEVINE: Hmm.

PRATT: But she was—I think because she was always given so much responsibility, she was kind of bossy and she knew what to do [chuckles] with everybody.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

PRATT: And [chuckles] that probably had something to do with the friction with her sister.

LEVINE: Yeah.

PRATT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, if we could just go very far back, do you know what city or town in Czechoslovakia the family came from?

PRATT: We tried to find that out and I did some work. We were in Salt Lake City for a convention and it was two blocks away from the Family History [unclear]. So I would dash down there and try to look it up. I found my—it's all through the women for the Mormon—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

PRATT: —thing. They do their genealogy through the women.

LEVINE: Oh.

PRATT: So I found Anna Hoffman [PH] Kuchar married to Joseph Kuchar, which are the right names. But they were in Switzerland.

LEVINE: Oh.

PRATT: And I don't know whether that was the same person or not. I couldn't confirm it. Now, what was your question?

LEVINE: What city or town that [unclear] in Czechoslovakia they—

PRATT: Yeah, somebody did find a name and we haven't been able to—to verify it. Doris Kuchar did some work on it. I'm not finding it. Somewhere in here, it's in a town that starts with K, and we think that's probably what it is. But I can't find it.

LEVINE: Oh, you have the ship's manifest of—is that of the initial—

PRATT: This is my mother's [unclear] when I was looking at—

LEVINE: Oh, okay.

PRATT: No, this is my mother's and it's the census in New York City.

LEVINE: Oh, I see. Uh-huh.

PRATT: I looked for my aunt—to this other side of the family and did not find it.
But I did find my—

LEVINE: I see.

PRATT: —my mother's.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, if you come up with the town, that would be of interest.

PRATT: It's in these papers somewhere.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, we'll—we'll get it at the end, maybe. So in other words, what do you know about your grandmother and grandfather before they came here? Do you know what your grandfather did for work in Czechoslovakia?

PRATT: No. He was an insurance man here—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PRATT: —you know, in this country. But I don't know what he—we know very little about it.

LEVINE: Do you know anything about life in Czechoslovakia?

PRATT: For them, no.

LEVINE: No.

PRATT: I really don't.

LEVINE: Okay. So she—your Aunt Lud was—was the oldest and you think—about how old might she have been when they came?

PRATT: Well, once I asked her and, because she doesn't want to tell me the a—her age.

LEVINE: Her age, right.

PRATT: [coughs] She says, "Well, I guess, 10. [laughs]

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. Okay, so somewhere around 10, right?

PRATT: [chuckles] They were back and forth too, so, you know.

LEVINE: And she went back—when her mother went back to have more children, did—did other family members go back with her, do you know?

PRATT: That's only a presumption, which I would presume but I really don't know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. And do you think maybe your Aunt Lud came through Ellis Island originally?

PRATT: No, they didn't come steerage or anything like that.

LEVINE: Ah.

PRATT: They paid.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PRATT: They paid for their voyage.

LEVINE: Yeah.

PRATT: And they must have had something because they were able to do it [chuckles] several times.

LEVINE: I see. So when they came to this country, your grandmother and grandfather with the children they had, where did they settle?

PRATT: New York City. Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Oh, okay.

PRATT: Seventy-third Street and that area. That's where the Czech people were living.

LEVINE: Right. So—so your Aunt Lud would have grown up in Yorkville. That—that's the section of New York.

PRATT: I think so. Yeah.

LEVINE: So she would have been there till about when? Do you know when—did the family move or did she move—

PRATT: No.

LEVINE: —when she married or—

PRATT: The family stayed there. And when she had these singing lessons, she got a job with an operetta company and traveled with them.

LEVINE: Wow.

PRATT: Yeah. So that's another part of her story. And that's where she met her husband. Her husband was in charge of the scenery. He could paint the scenery.

LEVINE: [laughs] Okay. So—

PRATT: [clears throat]

LEVINE: So she—she probably did well in school if she wanted to go to college and she was obviously bright and [unclear].

PRATT: Yeah. As far as I know, and I have no idea how far she went in school.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Yeah.

PRATT: A shame, really. Yeah, she had a mind that should have been developed to its fullest.

LEVINE: Yeah.

PRATT: And the only way she did was through the books.

LEVINE: Right. Well, do you think that—do you know anything else about that period, that phase in the family's life in—around 73rd Street on the Upper East Side of New York City? Anything else that sort of comes to mind that she might have said or—

PRATT: I have one story.

LEVINE: Oh, good.

PRATT: My father was the youngest. Aunt Lud was the oldest and her sister was the next oldest. And he told a story that when he was little he had curly

hair, and his two sisters dressed him up in a Little Lord Fauntleroy suit, curled his hair into ringlets down his shoulder [laughs] and sent him out in the street to play. And that's how he learned how to fight. [laughter] And they never did that again. [laughter]

LEVINE: So he was the oldest?

PRATT: My—

LEVINE: Father?

PRATT: My father was the youngest.

LEVINE: Oh, your father was the—who was the oldest?

PRATT: Aunt Lud.

LEVINE: Oh, okay.

PRATT: So the two sisters primped him all up when he was little—

LEVINE: When he was little. Uh-huh.

PRATT: —and sent him out.

LEVINE: Wow. Wow. [chuckles] Okay, so then do you know why the family moved to Jersey? Or did the family move to Jersey? Or that just happened later?

PRATT: Aunt Lud and Uncle John and Jarem moved to New Jersey to get a place for the children to grow up. And then it was several years later that they—the store was sold that Aunt—my grandparents owned. And they bought a farm not far from Aunt Lud.

LEVINE: I see.

PRATT: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Do you know anything about that store? I—I assume that was in—around 73rd Street somewhere?

PRATT: Seven—Seventy-first, Seventy-third.

LEVINE: Hmm.

PRATT: Somewhere in there, yeah.

LEVINE: Did you—

PRATT: This is—

LEVINE: —ever hear anything about that store?

PRATT: My aunt didn't like it. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Because she had to work in it.

PRATT: She had to—

LEVINE: Ah.

PRATT: Yeah. And the story was that she went in the corner somewhere and read a book. [laughs] I don't think she did a good job minding the store.

LEVINE: I see. [chuckles]

PRATT: That's not what she wanted to do with her life. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Right. And anymore about her—her theatrical phase and when she met her husband?

PRATT: Not really. She met some people there that she kept in contact with all her life. And I've lost track of who they were. You know, it was way before my time. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Yeah.

PRATT: Yeah.

LEVINE: So her husband painted scenery. Now, did he—is that what he continued to do? Or he became a farmer or—

PRATT: Well, after they moved out there, yeah. He also would dress windows in stores. That was a—another thing that he did.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. So did she—did they work on the farm before she took the position at Ellis Island, do you know? I mean, was the farm up and running when she started work at Ellis Island?

PRATT: They bought it in 1917 and I don't know when she started working in EI—you probably have that.

LEVINE: Well, we do have that. Yeah.

PRATT: Yeah.

LEVINE: We'll have to put that together.

PRATT: So 1917 was when they bought the farm.

LEVINE: I see. Uh-huh. And did—I know she worked for the YWCA at Ellis Island.

PRATT: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Now, when did she go to Czech—

PRATT: That was before that.

LEVINE: So was she on the farm and then she was called to do this—

PRATT: I don't know how the transition was made.

LEVINE: Well, [unclear] was after World War I, you said.

PRATT: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, so it was around that time, somehow.

PRATT: Yeah. I don't know how long she was in Europe, either. She traveled around there quite a bit and she bought peasant costumes. You know, they would be different in different areas; different communities would have different styles. So she bought these, mostly women's, and then she gave one to each of her nieces somewhere along the line, so I still have one.

LEVINE: You do?

PRATT: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Oh, wow.

PRATT: As a matter of fact, I used it because during World War II, I was in college and they asked us to go and—and entertain the troops. So I put this thing on and sang Czech folk songs [laughter], which Aunt Lud had taught me.

LEVINE: Had taught you. [laughs] Great.

PRATT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Great. So was Czech spoken in your—in your—when you were around, was Czech spoken, I guess, by your grandparents—

PRATT: Yes.

LEVINE: And—

PRATT: Uh-hmm. But Aunt Lud always spoke English to us.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

PRATT: And she had to—her parents, she would speak Czech. But she wanted to be an American.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PRATT: Yeah.

LEVINE: And how about her husband? He was English?

PRATT: He was born in England, uh-hmm. A very intelligent person.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PRATT: Artistic. He thought he was quite the lady's man. [laughs]

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Yeah. Oh, let's just leave that because it'll pick up—

PRATT: Oh.

LEVINE: —static. So he was—he was—d—you have no idea when he came as a little boy or later?

PRATT: No, I know very little. He had one brother. They never had chil—you know, Aunt Lud and Uncle John never had children and the brother had one child that lived in California. And the brother and the daughter died; I don't remember when, probably 19—about 1940-some—by 1950, I think they were both gone.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

PRATT: [clears throat]

LEVINE: I see. So I would assume that somehow the YWCA contacted her about Ellis Island, or maybe she contacted them.

PRATT: She could have gone directly after working in Europe. She could have gone directly to Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

PRATT: Because there—not that many years.

LEVINE: Right. It's roughly—

PRATT: Yeah.

LEVINE: —the same time. Yeah. Okay. So now what did she—anything she told you about her Ellis Island years? Because that's very interesting to us.

PRATT: [clears throat] Well, I think her motivation was to help these poor people, who would come without knowing the language, without knowing the rule of—for doing things. And that would be why she did it. And she felt that they were deserving of coming into this country and wanted to help them.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Now, of course, she came in not knowing the language—

PRATT: True.

LEVINE: —herself. Right?

PRATT: True.

LEVINE: And how did she learn all those, six, was it, languages she could speak?

PRATT: I guess she just picked it up.

LEVINE: Hmm. Do you think she picked it up at Ellis Island, or when she went to Ellis Island she already knew languages, for some—

PRATT: I don't know, really. [clears throat]

LEVINE: Hmm. So did she ever tell you about either her duties there or particular cases that she handled?

PRATT: I think that's—that—that was in the diary, I think. You have the story about fitting them with coats, fitting the women with coats because they had second hand clothes. And the—you know, they'd be cold in the winter, and they would take them to the—this place where there were second hand stuff and give it to them.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PRATT: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PRATT: I don't know much about it. No.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, she must have enjoyed the work. I mean, to have stayed 19 years.

PRATT: Uh-hmm. I think she felt she was doing some good.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PRATT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Yeah.

PRATT: [clears throat]

LEVINE: And—

PRATT: And she liked earning a little money.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PRATT: You know, that was kind of hard to do. So that, you know, a little bit here or a little bit there and they were able to manage until World War II. And then they really ran into trouble because the stand where they selling the food was right on the road. And people didn't have gas to go anymore. They used to go up to summer places in New York State. It was right on the New York State borderline. So right across—you know, not far away were summer places for people. And the people just didn't have the money for the gas, or have coupons for the gas, I mean. So that business was—and of course, the antique business was out of the house, and they didn't do that either.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

PRATT: So two sources of income were gone.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And her husband was mainly working on the farm. He wasn't working [laughter]—

PRATT: I don't know. He got around. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Okay. [chuckles]

PRATT: [clears throat]

LEVINE: So she—

PRATT: They had a cow and a—my mother would get the milk from the cow and my Aunt Mildred and probably Aunt Ruth so that, you know, he—his morning tour was to deliver the milk to everybody.

LEVINE: Oh. [chuckles]

PRATT: [laughs] He did—he did what he wanted to, I think. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Okay.

PRATT: Yeah. He'd get on the tractor once in a while but he wasn't a real farmer. [laughs]

LEVINE: Right. Okay. [chuckles] I got it.

PRATT: Reil did the work. [chuckles] You know, Reil.

LEVINE: W—yeah.

PRATT: After he got there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And d—did you—I'm not sure if you mentioned when he arrived on the scene at Montvale.

PRATT: Reil? I was born in 1926 and he came after that and remembered—remembered me as a—as a small child. He would talk about—

LEVINE: Okay. So r—right around 1930, early '30s?

PRATT: Something like that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PRATT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And let's see. So then he actually became the farmer. Is that—is that the way it worked?

PRATT: He was the farmer, right.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

PRATT: My dad worked there when he was probably 17 or something like that because he—he spoke of one orchard that he helped plant.

LEVINE: Oh.

PRATT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah. Now, how was your father in relation to his older sister? His oldest sister?

PRATT: They got along, yeah. But my father was his own person. He didn't let anybody [chuckles] push him around too much.

LEVINE: And she obviously was hers.

PRATT: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Of course. [chuckles]

PRATT: Oh, yeah. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PRATT: But she liked to tell people what to do. That's what I'm trying to—

LEVINE: Yeah, right.

PRATT: —say.

LEVINE: I get that idea.

PRATT: He would only put—put up with so much of that.

LEVINE: And how about you as a—as a child growing up with this woman as your aunt? What—what was it like for you, being in relation to her?

PRATT: Well, she was always telling me what to do, too. When I had acne, which teenagers get, you know—pre-teen, I guess—she insisted I use cold cream at night. And of course, that made it worse. Said, “Well, I do this every night.” [laughs] And it was good for her so she figured it was good for me.

LEVINE: [unclear].

PRATT: So that was the kind of advice sometimes you would get but didn't work.
[chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

LEVINE: So now, did she have a number of nieces and nephews that she was in contact with?

PRATT: Yeah, Vera and George were niece and nephew—

LEVINE: Right.

PRATT: —that stayed with them. And they were almost old enough to be my parents. There was a big gap. And then the three boys, Frank, Joe and my father, Miles, each had children, and there were eight of them, eight of us.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

PRATT: So altogether, there were 10 cousins. The older ones, we didn't contact with so much.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. So was she an active aunt [chuckles] in relation to her nieces and nephews?

PRATT: Oh, she's family-minded, yeah.

LEVINE: Yes, uh-huh.

PRATT: But most of the family did not allow her to—[laughter] to dictate too much.

LEVINE: I see. Uh-huh.

PRATT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And let's see. And how about with Reil? W—was she—she obviously took him under her wing—

PRATT: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: —in a way.

PRATT: But she always kept a distance and my family didn't think it was right at all, but Reil had to eat in the kitchen and they were—eat in the dining room.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PRATT: So then I think he continued to do that the whole time. [clears throat] But after Uncle John died, she leaned on him rather heavily to keep the farm going. And she would say that he was her assistant and, you know, kind of elevated him a little bit that way.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PRATT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah. And w—was he—was he an easygoing man? Was he—what—what was his temperament like?

PRATT: I would say he was easygoing. He thought he was fortunate to have a home and—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

PRATT: —security. So after he died, then I had to sell the house and everything. I contacted the relatives in Germany. Three of them came out and stayed in my house and they—we—trying to find the will. And Bob, my husband, was there too and they're going through the desks and trying to find something of Reil's, because he kept to himself pretty much. And my f—my husband found it and he looked at this—not the will. He found income tax—that we knew where the will was because I did know the lawyer that he used. Not—not the same one my aunt did. But [clears throat] the will indicated how much he was worth because he had a lot of stocks.

LEVINE: Oh.

PRATT: And when my husband comes back, you can ask him what the worth was but it was a lot more than anybody knew.

LEVINE: Wow!

PRATT: So he was very, very frugal.

LEVINE: But your aunt—at some point, she began to pay him for his work?

PRATT: Well, he—I think he got 2,000 a year, something like that. Yeah. They paid him but it wasn't much.

LEVINE: Hmm. Wow. And he lived in the house?

PRATT: Yeah. There was an old part of the house that was attached to this brick one that you see.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

PRATT: I don't know if you have a picture of it. Let me just look at—[clears throat] look at these. I kind of think not.

LEVINE: I think the house is with the new batch that you were going to have copied.

PRATT: Uh-hmm. No. I don't have—but it was—

LEVINE: Maybe you could just describe it.

PRATT: There were two rooms downstairs.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PRATT: And then, like an attic that was divided up. So he slept in this other house, no heat.

LEVINE: Wow.

PRATT: He was happy with it. He didn't have heat in Germany.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PRATT: He was used to that.

LEVINE: Were you aware of him during World War II when we were at war with Germany? I mean, was—

PRATT: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: —there any—any repercussions with him about that?

PRATT: No, he didn't approve of Hitler at all. I mean, that was—certainly not. And some of the people, perhaps his family, would help hide Jews.

LEVINE: Oh.

PRATT: And they were definitely against—

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

PRATT: And anti—anti-Nazi-ish.

LEVINE: I see. But it sou—doesn't sou—you said your—your aunt wanted to become American and wanted to—was an Amer—saw herself as an American.

PRATT: I think as dual.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

PRATT: Really. She never gave up who she was as a [coughs]—excuse me. [coughs] Never gave up her Czech background. [coughs]

LEVINE: Shall I stop it for a minute?

PRATT: Mmm, yeah.

LEVINE: We're going to pause. [tape off/on] Did her mother and father become citizens? Do you know? Yeah. She became a citizen [tape off/on]—resuming here, were saying that your—your aunt became a citizen.

PRATT: Yes.

LEVINE: And were not sure about Reil.

PRATT: I don't know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PRATT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Did he socialize outside of the family, do you know?

PRATT: Not very much. Not very much.

LEVINE: Hmm.

PRATT: He would sell at the stand also so he met people there. [clears throat] And we would invite him, you know, for Christmas or whatever we were doing.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PRATT: But aside from that, I don't think he had very much social life. He did have a girlfriend once [clears throat] and—

LEVINE: Was she a German person?

PRATT: No.

LEVINE: No?

PRATT: It was just another gal up the street on another farm. [laughter]

LEVINE: I see.

PRATT: That's when he was younger and, of course, I wouldn't know—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PRATT: —too much about that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay. So, let's see. Do you know the circumstances under which your aunt stopped working at Ellis Island?

PRATT: I think they closed it down.

LEVINE: Well, that was '54 and I think she stopped—

PRATT: Yeah, m—she must have stopped—

LEVINE: —before that.

PRATT: —before that.

LEVINE: Yeah, she did. Oh, but they di—it did stop being the peak of immigration through Ellis Island. It was more deportation, actually, later on.

PRATT: Mmm.

LEVINE: So maybe she stopped when the—when [unclear]—

PRATT: Probably the Y didn't—Y didn't work there.

LEVINE: Pardon?

PRATT: Probably the Y wasn't working there anymore.

LEVINE: Okay. And did she—did she ever talk about, like, coordination with other religious groups that were also—she—her title, I guess, was social worker, even though she did translation and—

PRATT: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: —I'm sure lots of things—

PRATT: She never said anything about other groups.

LEVINE: How about colleagues? Did she ever talk about people she worked with? Did she socialize with them? Do you know anything about that side?

PRATT: No, she did have a lot of friends and they'd come out to the farm but I never met them—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PRATT: —that I remember.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So—

PRATT: [clears throat]

LEVINE: —she was—she was a sociable, affable—

PRATT: She was socia—yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

PRATT: So was Uncle John. [laughs]

LEVINE: [chuckles] It sounds like he was, yes. S—and you talked about religion. Do you—what was the religion? The family religion?

PRATT: Well, it wasn't the whole family. She was a Christian Scientist.

LEVINE: Oh. So she became that herself? That wasn't the family's religion?

PRATT: Right. I think the family was probably all born Catholic in—in—

LEVINE: Czech—

PRATT: —Czechoslovakia, or Czech. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Czech. Was she—was she very active as a Christian Scientist?

PRATT: No, she never went to church. She studied on her own, which was typical of her, so that I'm not sure that other Christian Scientists would agree with how she went about it.

LEVINE: Okay.

PRATT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PRATT: She never would go to a doctor. She didn't want her husband to go to a doctor.

LEVINE: And that was part of their religion, you mean?

PRATT: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PRATT: Yeah. [clears throat] It's a interesting religion. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Yeah. Are there any other facets of her—of her being? I mean, she—apparently, she was rather domineer—or could be domineering.

PRATT: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: She—she was apparently caring. I mean, she helped a lot of people.

PRATT: Oh, yes. She always wanted to help people.

LEVINE: And hardworking.

PRATT: Yes.

LEVINE: And—

PRATT: Oh, the work ethic in that whole family was very, very strong. Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: How about the columns she wrote? Do you know anything about them?

PRATT: They were like home col—columns. She would talk about springtime being the time for planting and she'd philosophize about that and, because she was planting her garden. And she had correspondence concerning it. You know, people would read it and then send her letters—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

PRATT: —th—[clears throat] through the newspaper.

LEVINE: And then would she respond in the newspaper?

PRATT: [clears throat]

LEVINE: Like to people's—

PRATT: That, I don't know.

LEVINE: —[unclear]. Uh-huh. Do you know what the name of the newspaper was?

PRATT: I don't remember.

LEVINE: But it was a Czech newspaper and it went around—did it go far around the country or—

PRATT: [unclear] in Chicago. It was a Chicago newspaper. There were a lot of Czechs in Chicago at that time. I don't remember the name. I'm sure it went to other places besides Chicago. I don't remember the name.

LEVINE: Hmm.

PRATT: I guess I knew once.

LEVINE: Did—and nobody has, like, a copy of articles she wrote or her column?

PRATT: [clears throat] Well, you saw how full that house was.

LEVINE: Yes.

PRATT: [clears throat] And [clears throat] she had diaries. She would keep it about two months; she'd keep the diary. [chuckles]

LEVINE: That—before it was full, you mean?

PRATT: No.

LEVINE: Oh.

PRATT: She just didn't have time to write in it. So you'd get little splotches here and there—

LEVINE: I see.

PRATT: —of what—what she was thinking at the time.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So how was she in her ol—she was obviously very active during her life. What about as she—

PRATT: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: —was in her old age? What—what did—was there a change?

PRATT: Well, she kept going and wouldn't admit if she wasn't feeling well or something like that, you know. So—

LEVINE: Hmm.

PRATT: Now, she slowed down like most of us do when we get older.

LEVINE: Right, right.

PRATT: A—and I think she was 87 when she died. Is that what it shows? She was born in '85 and died in '71. So, [clears throat] whatever that is.

LEVINE: Yeah, right. So she had a ripe old age. And she relied more on Reil in those years. And—

PRATT: Yeah.

LEVINE: —was she a companion with him more as she got older or not?

PRATT: Well, he did the cooking after—Uncle John used to do the cooking and then he did it. Aunt Lud was a terrible cook.

LEVINE: Oh.

PRATT: [laughs]

LEVINE: And that's what Kuchar means, right? [laughter] [unclear].

PRATT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay.

PRATT: So—

LEVINE: Okay. Well, is there anything else you can think of, either about the—kind of the immigration experience in general of the entire family and, specifically, your aunt? Or anything more about Ellis Island or—

PRATT: [clears throat] Well, o—on my mother's side of the family, her father had a shoe store in the same community there. And he would bring young girls who wanted a job, and they would be maids or nannies for Americans. So somehow, he had a connection for bringing them in and making the connection, because you weren't allowed to come into the country unless you had a place to stay. So he was kind of a go-between for that.

LEVINE: And were they coming from Czechoslovakia?

PRATT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PRATT: Yeah. He was Czech too.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PRATT: I'm a hundred percent Czech. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Oh, well! [laughter] Yeah.

PRATT: Well, that's just the way it is. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PRATT: [clears throat]

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I guess—I mean, did she, like, offer advice or values or, you know, how you should live kinds of—that kind of—kind of guidance to you, growing up, that you recall?

PRATT: I don't think it was specifically said.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

PRATT: You know, they didn't define it as "values," you know, but by example, the work ethic, certainly.

LEVINE: Yeah.

PRATT: And [clears throat] the usual good things in life, you know. Lying, cheating and all that was all a no-no.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PRATT: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Yeah.

PRATT: What kind of values were you thinking about?

LEVINE: Well, I was just thinking of any attitudes or—but what you're saying is—

PRATT: Mmm.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

PRATT: Yeah. [clears throat]

LEVINE: Yeah.

PRATT: She would philosophize, sort of.

LEVINE: Do you remember any of her [chuckles]—were they Christian—were her—they her—her version of Christian Science or—

PRATT: I'm trying to remember. [clears throat]

LEVINE: Yeah. It's kind of a very—

PRATT: Yeah, it's—

LEVINE: —nebulous question.

PRATT: Yeah, right.

LEVINE: Yeah.

PRATT: I—I can't put a finger on it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay.

PRATT: I think you get the idea.

LEVINE: Yeah, I do. Yeah. Okay. Well, if you can think of anything else before we close—

PRATT: Not at the moment.

LEVINE: Okay. Okay. Well, if you do—

PRATT: But, you know, you should feel free to call me or—

LEVINE: Oh, thanks.

PRATT: —or w—write or whatever.

LEVINE: Okay, thank you.

PRATT: If you have questions, you can write to me and I'll answer—

LEVINE: All right.

PRATT: —as best I can. We have e-mail too.

LEVINE: Okay. And I—I want to just repeat, as I did with your brother, Miles' interview, that we have this draft of—of your aunt's book—

PRATT: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: —at Ellis Island. And it's very well written and it's very, I would say, comprehensive.

PRATT: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: And so that's a lot of material about Ludmila Foxlee.

PRATT: And you have the case histories right there. And you might have little indications in the manner in which she writes them what her attitudes were.

LEVINE: Yes. That's very true. Good point.

PRATT: [clears throat]

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I want to thank you so much—

PRATT: Well, you're welcome.

LEVINE: —for a most interesting interview and it really is a—a boon, I think, to the collection to have, you know, you speaking about—

PRATT: I'm glad to do it.

LEVINE: Well—

PRATT: And if there's anything else, please, let me know.

LEVINE: Okay. And we have—Joyce has brought all kinds of pictures and there'll be more—

PRATT: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: —to come. And they'll be in the folder in the Oral History Research Office, so—

PRATT: I need your address so I know where to send them.

LEVINE: I'll have to give you that. Okay. Well, I'm going to close here and I thank you very much. I'm speaking—

PRATT: You're welcome.

LEVINE: —with Joyce Pratt and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service signing off.

[END OF INTERVIEW]