EI-1370
NINA JAKOLENKO FORTUNE
BIRTHDATE: FEBRUARY 6, 1940
INTERVIEW DATE: JANUARY 10. 2005
AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 64
RUNNING TIME: 1:10:20
INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE
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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:

UKRAINE, 1951/52
AGE: 11

SHIP:
PORT: BREMEN
RESIDENCES: POLTAVA, UKRAINE; WEST BOSTON, SOUTH BOSTON, MALDEN, BOSTON, MA; POMPANO BEACH, FL

NOTE: BROTHER IS VALENTIN JAKOLENKO, EI-1333

LEVINE: --Pompano Beach, Florida, with Nina Fortune, who came here in 1951 when she was just about to turn eleven years of age. She came from a little village outside of Poltava, the Ukraine.

FORTUNE: Right.

LEVINE: And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Okay, if you would say your name when you came to this country?

FORTUNE: Okay, Nina Jakolenko.

LEVINE: Why don't you spell it?

FORTUNE: Yeah. It's J-A-K-O-L-E-N-K-O. It's actually not correct because when we came to this country, the person that asked us as we got off the

ship, “What’s your name?” I say—you say Jakolenko. They put Jakolenko. It should be a Y, but we are a J now. So—

LEVINE: Okay.

FORTUNE: We’re not—it took us a while to realize it. When we learned the language, then we realized it was all misspelled.

LEVINE: Ah.

FORTUNE: So—but we kept it because it was too much paperwork to—to change it. So, I don’t know.

LEVINE: And that happened at Ellis Island, did it?

FORTUNE: Uh-hmm. Uh-hmm, they misspelled our names. The misspelled my stepfather’s name, also. His is Zolotowsky.

LEVINE: Zol, Z-O-L—[pause] That’s the original name, Zolotowsky.

FORTUNE: Yeah, but the American spelling, they made it with an S instead of a Z.

LEVINE: Oh. I see.

FORTUNE: And it was Andrei, and they screwed that up, too.

LEVINE: Zo-lo—

FORTUNE: Just the way you hear it. That’s a W.

LEVINE: Yeah, and they made it Solotowsky, an S.

FORTUNE: Right. His name was Andre, E-I on the end, which it should be, but they got it E-W, the way the Americans spell it.

LEVINE: Oh, like Andrew.

FORTUNE: Yeah. Yeah, it’s a lot of—

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay. Did that also happen at Ellis Island?

FORTUNE: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Wow.

FORTUNE: Well, the people they had there, they did not speak any other language but American, if I recall, even being that young. They ask you, "What's your name?" and more or less my brother and I, because we spoke—we had—I went to school in Austria and I learned German, so I more or less under—you know, when you know a little German, you know a—you understand a little American. So that's what I recall.

LEVINE: Yeah. Okay. I want to just say at the beginning of this tape that—that I have also interviewed Nina's brother, Val.

FORTUNE: Valentine.

LEVINE: Valentine, and he—his interview is also in this Ellis Island collection. Okay, well, why don't start at the beginning. If you'd say again your birth date and where you were born in the Ukraine.

FORTUNE: Okay. My name is Nina Fortune. I was born February 6th, 1940 outside of Poltava, which is a city in Ukraine.

LEVINE: Okay, and did you live in—how long did you live in Poltava?

FORTUNE: Three years.

LEVINE: Three years.

FORTUNE: Until the Germans came.

LEVINE: Okay. Okay, now, do you—well, why don't you say your mother's name and your father's name?

FORTUNE: My mother's name was Luba, L-U-B-A.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

FORTUNE: Well, she—she married this man, but she was a Jakolenko, too. But now she's—well, when she died, she was a Zolotowsky, so—

LEVINE: I see, but Jakolenko was your father's name?

FORTUNE: Yeah.

LEVINE: And his first name?

FORTUNE: Ah, oh, God. You ask. Constantine. I should know, it's my middle name.

LEVINE: Constantine.

FORTUNE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay, and your mother's maiden name?

FORTUNE: Sneshenko.

LEVINE: Okay, Shmisk—

FORTUNE: It means snow.

LEVINE: Oh.

FORTUNE: Sneshenko, and this means gold, but I mean it's just—

LEVINE: Huh, Zolotowsky means gold.

FORTUNE: Means gold.

LEVINE: And Sneshenko—

FORTUNE: Sneshenko means—[unclear] with snow. Sneshenko. They put a K-O to make us Ukrainian. K-Os are usually Ukraine people.

LEVINE: I see. Now, let me spell that for the tape, S-N-E-S-H-E-N-K-O.

FORTUNE: Yeah.

LEVINE: And your mother's first name?

FORTUNE: Luba, L-U-B-A.

LEVINE: Okay.

FORTUNE: It means love.

LEVINE: Oh, boy. Nice.

FORTUNE: Figured I'd give you a little—

LEVINE: Yeah. I don't know that our names mean—in this country, I don't know that our names have meaning like that.

FORTUNE: No, not like we have. No, no.

LEVINE: Yeah. Okay, so how about grandparents? Did you have grandparents around?

FORTUNE: I did, but I don't know anything about them. I believe they were already dead when I was born.

LEVINE: Okay, do you have any memories at all of Poltava?

FORTUNE: The only thing I have memories of, I was three years old and I remember somebody holding me in their arms and—and I'm—and I saw fire and burning and this was when the Germans were coming. As they were coming to our country, they were burning everything as they came. And I never knew what that meant. You know how you have a flashback all the time? For years I could never understand. I always saw this in my mind. So one day—I'll be going somewhere else with this, but—

LEVINE: But that's good. That's fine.

FORTUNE: In the—my brother and I buy the *Ukrainian Weekly*, which tells us what's going on in our country. We like to know, you know, what's going on and plus hear what the Ukrainian people are doing, and in there there was an article, people who were in the war and their parents had to work for the Germans. They were allowed compensation. So in order to get the compensation, you had to more or less tell your story and I really didn't know my story that well. I knew little flashes, you know, and my mother would never talk about it. It must have been so hurtful to her, she never wanted to discuss it. So I called my brother. He happened to be in Massachusetts, but he lived here and I called him to my house and I said, just the two of us, "Will you tell me exactly, you know, how all this came about?" So he did and then when he mentioned that, now I knew why I had it. It was so traumatic, what I evidently saw, fires and—and people running and me being held by my father. I think I was held by my father and we ran after that because our other family members didn't want to go. They said, "This is our country. We're going to die here. Whatever happens, we're staying," but my mother and father and my brother and I—my father wanted to leave. He didn't want to be there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

FORTUNE: We ran from the Germans.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

FORTUNE: So that was the flashback I always had and it took me fifty-one years to realize what that was, see. It's funny how you never—

LEVINE: Especially when you're not verbal and you—you know, you don't put it into words exactly.

FORTUNE: Hmm. Hmm.

LEVINE: Yeah. Uh-huh.

FORTUNE: So.

LEVINE: Well, now, to—I missed something about—who was going to give the compensation for you to tell your story?

FORTUNE: Ah, not tell my story, but to—the Germans.

LEVINE: Oh.

FORTUNE: The Germans.

LEVINE: So you—when would that have been?

FORTUNE: During the war, after the—well, during the war, when we ran, we were captured by the—by the Germans. We were running. I don't know. We were near some railroad station and—

LEVINE: Just the four of you?

FORTUNE: Yeah, my father, my mother and I was three. My brother was nine and we were going to hop on this freight train and my mother had to go to the bathroom. So we're sitting inside one of those, you know, the freight trains, nothing there but the boxcars, and my mother—the train started moving. We started screaming for her.

LEVINE: To come.

FORTUNE: To come. So my mother starts running. So my father gets out to help her and what happens is somewhere the German soldier came and my brother told me they shot my father in the leg, but my mother and I in and the kids, we—we got away.

LEVINE: And your father had to—you mean your father stayed there?

FORTUNE: Well, I—the way I understand it was we wound up in Austria in Vienna and the Germans, when they captured all of—I guess we got captured

with my father, because what happened was we were in Vienna and they divided the women. They were in one building. The men stayed in another building. The kids stayed with the women. This is the way I—I recall.

LEVINE: The—would your brother have been—

FORTUNE: He was with us.

LEVINE: Considered a kid or—

FORTUNE: At that time, yeah.

LEVINE: Nine?

FORTUNE: I was three, so, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

FORTUNE: He was with her and they sent my mother to work in a factory and my father was in the—something to do with fire. Not a fireman, but something with it. You know, when the bombs came, they used to go and put out the fires.

LEVINE: Oh.

FORTUNE: I think that was what he did.

LEVINE: So he was shot in the leg, but he was still—he still made it on the freight train.

FORTUNE: Yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: And you all got to Vienna and then you were captured.

FORTUNE: So we were there and my mother had to work. Well, this was all forced labor. They had—we had to work for them and—

LEVINE: How were you treated?

FORTUNE: I don't recall. To me, I remember a lot of different things like another shadowy thing. It's funny now, you're talking to me, you remind me. Being in this long hall, we're all standing naked and we're being sprayed with stuff, white stuff and I asked my brother that. He says, "You know what that was, Nina?" because that was another flashback to me because that was traumatic, and he said they—they were putting

stuff on us from diseases and bugs and whatever, you know. You know what I mean?

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

FORTUNE: So that was another answer that I got, but I dreamt of these things, but I never knew what it meant and I never thought to ask, to tell you the truth. So that was another thing.

LEVINE: Do you know what the Germans were doing with the stories that they were paying you to tell them?

FORTUNE: We—well, because they—I guess they took them to court, the Germans, because they believed they had free labor. We were forced to work and we should get compensations like everybody. You know, get paid for it. This is, I guess the German government and the other countries all got together and they decided to pay the people who are still alive or their descendants, which my brother and I are. If my mother was alive, she would have gotten more money than, you know, we would because they worked for them, but they only gave us about three thousand dollars a piece for being children in a—in a camp. They—they worked something out. I wish—I should have thought of this earlier. Somewhere I have the information. I kept a newspaper and everything.

LEVINE: So this would have been after the war was over?

FORTUNE: Yeah, this was not too long ago.

LEVINE: Oh.

FORTUNE: Just a while ago this happened.

LEVINE: I see.

FORTUNE: This, I'm talking fifty years going on sixty and half the people that—

LEVINE: Are dead.

FORTUNE: No wonder the Germans agreed to it, most of the people are not alive.

LEVINE: Right.

FORTUNE: They're all dead.

LEVINE: Right, and especially the ones that are alive would have been children.

FORTUNE: Right.

LEVINE: So they get less.

FORTUNE: Right. Exactly.

LEVINE: Yeah. Yeah.

FORTUNE: Well, that's what I recall and we wound up in Vienna and as I told you, we were in different buildings and this is what I recall. Another thing, memory to me is standing outside. I don't know where I was, what building, and looking up. There's these planes and the bombs dropping. I remember that.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

FORTUNE: And what that was, when the bombs, everybody ran. That was the last time we saw my father. We don't know what happened to him after that. We never saw him again. My mother grabbed my brother and I and we ran. My mother dragged us poor children all over Europe, not speaking the language. She was not an educated woman because, you know, Stalin, too, he comes into the picture and he had that famine in 1933, which nobody talks about like it's never happened. But I believe that's how I don't have grandparents, because of it and my mother's mother died when she was born. She was—my mother—my mother's mother died when my mother was sixteen months old, and she had a stepmother, who was—she treated her—she wouldn't let her go to school, nothing. She was like a slave in the house. She would not stop and—my mother had the worst life you ever want to have. From being born to the war. [voices cracks]

LEVINE: Yeah. Yeah. Well, you know, I've read that—that, you know, people talk about the gulag and what life was like in the ghettos, but they say that life outside the camps wasn't really that much better.

FORTUNE: Of course not, but people never talked about it. They were—it was—my mother had a horrible life and you know, I never knew that. Like I told you, we went back fifty years later, my brother and I, and my aunt was still alive. She had one sister. So when we got there, my first question to her, "Tell me what happened to my mother?" because I always wanted to know, and she would never tell me and my brother never questioned her either, and I didn't. You know, when you're European, you don't question your parents. Not like today, you know what I mean?

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

FORTUNE: When they said—you know, that's it, so you don't question it. But when I got older, I always felt sad that I never asked her.

LEVINE: Yeah.

FORTUNE: But I had the opportunity with my aunt and she explained the life my mother had. It was very, very hard.

LEVINE: Was your aunt with the stepmother, too?

FORTUNE: Yes, but she was older.

LEVINE: Oh.

FORTUNE: So—and my mother was younger, so she had more control over her, you know what I mean? She was the baby.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Yeah.

FORTUNE: And that's the way it was. She would send her out to the pasture and, you know, take care of the animals, whatever, and the other one worked or something. I forget exactly what she did, but she was more help to the other because she was older, so she treated her a little differently, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah. So your mother—did your mother and father ever tell you how they met or how they came to be married, anything like that?

FORTUNE: No. I never—I never knew my father. I was three years old, last I saw and I only—

LEVINE: Yeah.

FORTUNE: I didn't even know what my father looked like until, God, when we were living in—in Malden in Massachusetts. When my mother died, my brother wrote a letter to Ukraine because we had no contact with him. In those days, we did not write and my mother would not let us write to them or anything because they were prosecuted there. They would treat them like, take everything away from them. People would be very bad to them. So we never wrote. "Please don't write." So we never wrote and we had no contact, but when the Reconstruction came and stuff, so we decided to go. But anyway, I kind of got ahead of my story here.

My mother died in 1967 in America, in Malden, Mass. So I said to my brother, "Write a letter." So he wrote a letter to the old address that he knew in Ukraine. That letter traveled for six to eight months around Ukraine because my brother—because after the war, the names of towns and everything were changed. So this letter kept going around and around and round, but the only good thing about that was, one of my cousins who was still living in Ukraine in the village used to be a postmaster, worked in the post office. But she was already retired, but the lady she worked with was still there and when she saw the letter, she says, "Hmm, this looks like the maiden name of Vietta [PH] that were," you know—so she showed her the letter and the other cousin and they read it, and it was them. That's how we found them and then they wrote us telling us—and they sent a picture of my father and that was the first time I seen a picture of my father, when I was twenty-seven years old. We had nothing because when we came here, we lived I camps. They had shuffled us from one place to the other. We were dragged around. Don't ask me the names of the towns. I used to know, but I can't think of them. They were all over Austria and we were under the English. You know how they divided all the—after the war, the countries.

LEVINE: How about during the war, what—what was your mother doing as her work, do you know?

FORTUNE: Must—they made her work in a factory, something with batteries or something. I really don't know.

LEVINE: And what did you do as a child—as a young child?

FORTUNE: You know, I really don't know. I was just there. We were just walking the country, for all I know, and then it would—when the war got over, this is when we wound up in camps. I don't know where we were half the time. Hiding in bushes, in forests.

LEVINE: With your brother?

FORTUNE: Yeah, just the three of us. Yeah. My mother dragged us all over. She would go to a farm and beg for food. You know what I mean? Or sell whatever clothing we had to—to—so we could eat. We were all over. I really couldn't tell you. That's all I know, but my mother—I don't know, for a woman that didn't speak English—I mean speak their language, didn't read or write, she took care of two kids.

LEVINE: Amazing.

FORTUNE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, so that happened from the time you were taken from your home—

FORTUNE: Right.

LEVINE: Or ran for your life.

FORTUNE: Right, in 19—it would be 1943.

LEVINE: ’43.

FORTUNE: Because I was three years old, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah, and then until the war was over, ’45.

FORTUNE: And when the war was over, ’45, and then I was six and from there we were in camps.

LEVINE: And when you were camps, what—what was life like in there—in those?

FORTUNE: Well, they gave us one little room the size of that room there.

LEVINE: [unclear] room.

FORTUNE: I had a stepfather. My brother and I, five people living in no heat, nothing. They were like cardboard. It was very—and they used to give us like once a day bread and it looked like—I guess it was soup, but it looked like water to me, you know, liquid. It was nothing fancy or anything. And the only thing, there were so many different nationalities, you know, that—that we survived. We used my—they used to go to—this was after the war, of course. They would go to the farmers and ask for work or whatever, or people would raise animals in the camps, you know, because they allowed us one room and a little piece of land in front of the building and you do what you—you know, what you do with it.

LEVINE: So you grew things?

FORTUNE: Yeah, we grew—my—I remember flowers in the front, vegetables in the back and then my father got a pig and a couple of chickens and my—my stepfather was a veterinarian. He was a very big—under Stalin he was like one of the—what would you call them? Like these big farms that he ran and he used to be in charge of them. He had a very important job.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, like a—yeah, okay.

FORTUNE: A vet. So when he was in camps, he—by being him what he was, he even knew how to treat people. If they had problems, they would come to him. My father would do—my stepfather would do what he could, you know, for them.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

FORTUNE: Take care of them or advise them, whatever.

LEVINE: Did your mother meet your stepfather in the camp?

FORTUNE: In the camp, yeah. That's where she—don't ask me where, what camp because all I remember as a kid, being shuffled here there, there, there, you know.

LEVINE: From camp to camp?

FORTUNE: Yeah. Yeah, because they couldn't make up their mind what to do with us all after the war, I guess.

LEVINE: Were you always in the English part of a camp? I mean, that was ruled by the English?

FORTUNE: Yeah, the English. It was under—yeah, the English, it was their sector, as they were called. There was an American sector, Russian sector and the English. We happened to be—where we wound up, happened to be English and that's where, you know—

LEVINE: So were all these camps in Austria?

FORTUNE: The ones I was into, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh. And—and you'd go like from one camp to another for some reason?

FORTUNE: I don't know why. You would have to ask my brother why.

LEVINE: Yeah.

FORTUNE: Maybe he didn't even know either, for being how old he was.

LEVINE: Right.

FORTUNE: Who would ask, you know?

LEVINE: Yeah, right.

FORTUNE: They didn't ask us.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, it sounds like your—your stepfather was a big help to the family. I mean—

FORTUNE: Well, if it wasn't for our stepfather, we wouldn't be in this country because in those days after the war, America would not take women, single women.

LEVINE: Oh.

FORTUNE: The only place that single women with children were allowed was Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Brazil. In order to come to America, in those days, you had to be—have a husband so he could support you. Plus you had to be healthy. If you had any health problems or you were an invalid, America wouldn't even look at you. They wouldn't even—you were not allowed to come to this country.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

FORTUNE: So—

LEVINE: Well, do you think your mother was—was sort of thinking that way? I mean—

FORTUNE: What do you mean thinking?

LEVINE: As far as—as far as marrying—you know, being married would make it better for everybody.

FORTUNE: Well, my mother would have gone to another country, but my brother and I, we wanted to come to America because as kids you hear other kids in the camp saying, gee, their families went there and used to say, "Oh, if you go to America, there's gold on the streets." That was the saying. But for a kid my age, when I got to America, I go, "Ma, where's the gold on the street?" That was my first question. But they didn't mean it that way. They meant if you worked hard, you'd get somewhere, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

FORTUNE: Those are the little things I recall.

LEVINE: So your mother probably wanted to please you and your brother?

FORTUNE: Well, yeah. It would have been easier for us, I guess, than the other countries and—so she met this man and they went out together and she married him and they have one son. I have another younger brother, Nicholas.

LEVINE: And he was born in the camps?

FORTUNE: He was born in Austria in a camp, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

FORTUNE: I mean, well, they took him to the hospital. The hospital it was born. My mother went to the hospital in Linzt [PH], I believe, or Gratz. One of those.

LEVINE: So did—did—did anybody have to work in those camps?

FORTUNE: I guess my—they did, my father and my mother. I don't know what they did, though. I really couldn't tell you.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

FORTUNE: We were there, that's all I recall.

LEVINE: So your brother—now, he had—he had—

FORTUNE: He had jobs, yes. He used to have to shovel snow, I remember, in the winter. He—they used to have go clear the forests for them. All that kind of stuff, yeah.

LEVINE: Right.

FORTUNE: But me, I was a kid, so I just hung around.

LEVINE: Yeah. Yeah. So—

FORTUNE: But then after when they settled us in some of these camps, we were going to learn our own language in the camp, but the Austrian government says, "Well, you're in this country, you have to learn our language." So I had to go to Austrian school. So didn't my brother. So—and we were back and forth, back and forth. By the time I got educated, I was quite old—older myself. I got, you know—I lost out on a lot of things.

LEVINE: But—but you—so you learned German and you went to school in German in the camps?

FORTUNE: In German, I think up to the third grade. No, not in—no, outside. We had to go the camps.

LEVINE: Oh.

FORTUNE: Oh, yeah. They made us go to their school and we had to walk there. There was no, you know.

LEVINE: And what was that like, going to the school outside camp?

FORTUNE: Well, I'll tell you something, the Austrian people didn't like us, the teachers. I recall as a child being treated, talked down to. You know, when you're a child you feel all that.

LEVINE: Sure.

FORTUNE: And they always used to say [German], means in other words, "You're an outsider. Get out of our country." That's all. I recall that a lot. It wasn't very nice. Not nice at all.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, so you must have come to America by the time people were being repatriated back to the Ukraine, which in a way was a death sentence.

FORTUNE: Well—

LEVINE: Right?

FORTUNE: To say that, I recall as a kid being in this camp and there were Russian trucks outside and me as a child with a bunch of kids, they said, "Come over here," you know, "we want to talk to you." So a kid, you know, you're innocent, you walk up to them. So they said, "What's your name?" Of course, you tell them your name, what your father's name is, anything. Says, "Talk to your mother and tell her if she wants to go back to Ukraine, we'll take her back. She'll have a good life and this and that." So I go and tell my mother. I got the beating of my life. [Laughs] "Don't you dare talk to them," because we heard stories. They took a lot of these people, we never heard from them ever again. I don't know what they did with them. We never heard anything. Never, and even when we went back, you know, we asked. Those people were not there. I don't know. They must have punished them for leaving. They—because I think in those days the Communists

expected us to go back, you know, and who wanted to go back to that horrible life that we had, as it was.

LEVINE: Right.

FORTUNE: Starvation and everything else. I mean, it was just as bad with the Germans as—as Russians, the Communists or, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah. Could you say anything about your attitudes toward the whole Stalin and—

FORTUNE: Well, let me tell you this. When I was a young child, I resented Stalin. I resented Hitler. I hated them. I really did, but as I got older, now that I'm in this country and I look back on my life, like my brother says, "He did us a favor, Hitler," in a way. Even though we suffered as we did, we have a better life than my cousins that are there now have. We got—we have more opportunity. More of everything, you know, but a lot of people don't think like that. But see, this is my—I don't believe in holding on. I think it will make you a very miserable person by holding on to—to the past because you can't change it. So you have to go forward in life, and that's the only way you can do it. You have to go forward and leave it alone because I had no control over it, and I'd just go on. And now I just—I'm not angry. I'm not—that's the way it was. That's it. But when I was younger, God, yes, I was awful. I used to, when I met any German people here, I—I used to give them the business, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, how about the Stalin and the whole [unclear], the whole cooperative—

FORTUNE: Yeah, that was—that was hard. That I resent to this day because it—my mother, well, she suffered more than I did. I was only born there, but she had a very hard life. They all did. They starved. I—when we went back, my brother and I in 1990, we asked our cousins in the '33s. She says, "What we used to eat, you wouldn't believe it." Cardboard, grass, they would put together and eat. They had it worst because we left. Not that we had it any better when we—my mother had us. We ate rotten potatoes, grass, anything that was on the ground, you know, just to survive because there wasn't anything. But they had it just as bad. They starved them and everything else. They had a very, very hard life. They're amazed—a lot of people died, and they survived. I guess we're strong stock in our family.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

FORTUNE: You know.

LEVINE: Well, you know, was—were—were your family like farmers? In other words, when—when—

FORTUNE: Oh, when we lived there in Ukraine?

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

FORTUNE: My father was a railroad man. He worked for the railroad. My mother stayed home and took care of us kids, I guess, and that was it.

LEVINE: But when—

FORTUNE: And she sewed and everything for, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

FORTUNE: That's how I know.

LEVINE: Well, when the Soviet Union was—was—was having people work for the good of the country and all that, did that change your father's life or your mother's?

FORTUNE: Well, it was a very hard life because—ah, ah—my brother mentioned something. This is not from my age. You know, I don't know much about it, but when the Germans, before they invaded us, they—my father's belief was try to get along with people, you know, but we were—nobody trusted anybody. You couldn't talk to a—you know, it was very—whatever you said, the next day you could be gone. My stepfather had—he was one of eleven in his family and one of his brothers said something against the government. The next morning, you got up, you never saw the brother. My brother—my stepfather to this day never knew what happened to—to him. He was gone. It was—you could not—you could not trust anyone to talk to. That was the life before Hitler came, too. So it was just as bad.

LEVINE: Yeah.

FORTUNE: You know. Even your neighbor you couldn't trust to tell them, because they could turn you in and that's the way it was.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

FORTUNE: That's the way I understand it.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

FORTUNE: This is all hearsay now I'm telling you because I was too young to know.

LEVINE: Yeah. What do you think the effect, just looking back on it now, the effect of the first three years? I mean, you were affected, even though you couldn't verbalize anything.

FORTUNE: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: And then—then after that in the camps and all that, what—what ramifications does it have for you now, do you think?

FORTUNE: Well, for me I think it made me a stronger person. When I came to this country because my mother and stepfather did not speak English, more or less, my brother and I had to stand up for ourselves. I went to school and I learned the language and—

LEVINE: Was that difficult?

FORTUNE: Self-sufficient. Oh, school was very hard. Let me tell you, I got here, I was eleven years old. Like you and I were talking about, the Spanish. When I got here, they don't say, "Oh, we'll put you in a school for foreign." They put me, eleven years old in a first grade in American school. You know how—how humiliating that was? There's these kids this small, and there I stood out. I was already in the fourth grade when I—third or fourth I was supposed to go into. That's how I learned English and I used to go home every day and cry because I felt so bad that I was put into this situation. So later on, I think I stayed in the school maybe a year and then we found—there was a school, a special school they had in Boston for all foreigners and it didn't mean any special language. It meant all of us, the ones that came and wanted to learn and get a—so, they learned the language and everything. Then they could go into regular school. We had Chinese people, Lithuania, Armenian. You name it, but all the teachers were American and none of them spoke any other language but American. So we were put in these schools, classes and those teachers were the most dedicated you ever saw, and you know, we learned. We learned. But the teachers spoke English, but at least we were all different age groups, more or less. They tried to put us together with—

LEVINE: So you didn't have the humiliation of—

FORTUNE: No, but the first year was tough.

LEVINE: Yeah.

FORTUNE: That I couldn't handle. That was very tough. But that was easier to deal with, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, you were talking about you learned self-sufficiency.

FORTUNE: Yes.

LEVINE: As a result of all the trials that you went through.

FORTUNE: Hmm.

LEVINE: Yeah.

FORTUNE: Well, yes I had to. I had one mother, you know. I mean there was just her taking care of my brother and I, and then I had a stepfather who was a stepfather but he was—I mean, he was there for us, but he was not a father to us, especially to my brother. Me being a girl, I had it easier, but I recall as a child—it must have been when my mother married him or they were living together by then, I don't know. And I called him "Father." He says, "I'm not your father. You have a father, so don't call me father." I've never forgotten that. I remember being very, very young. So that kind of woke me up, you know. And life was very tough for my brother and I, even when my mother married and we came into this country. Very tough.

LEVINE: Yeah.

FORTUNE: We came on a ship. I think I told you.

LEVINE: Yeah, the Greeley.

FORTUNE: Yes.

LEVINE: It was Greeley.

FORTUNE: We were only supposed to be on it for two weeks and a storm came up. We were in a storm and what happened, there was another ship that capsized and we were the closest ship. So we had to go to that ship and stand guard until another ship came because in the even they started sinking, we would have to take the people. I recall that.

LEVINE: Wow.

FORTUNE: So most people took two weeks to get to America. Us it must have been eighteen days before. We were so glad to see land.

LEVINE: Wow.

FORTUNE: So that I recall, too.

LEVINE: Do you recall leaving the camp? Finding out that you were going to America?

FORTUNE: Yeah. They brought us to—I think it was Bremen Station. We got on—we have a picture—somewhere I have a picture of us. We're dressed and we've got these big tags on all of us, you know, to be put on the train and then you go onto a—when we were in Bremen, what happened is my younger brother—he was born in Austria, as I told you. He was three years old and he had like a pimple on him or something and they would not let us get on the ship. We had to wait another two months and they put him in the hospital because that's the way it was in those days. You had any diseases. They checked us from head to toe and they gave us all kinds of shots. We were not allowed in this country until we got—we were healthy and prove it. So we wound up not going on that same ship. We had to wait two months until that—whatever rash my younger brother had, Nicholas, on his belly, whatever. Then they let us go on.

LEVINE: So you were in—in Bremen—

FORTUNE: Yeah.

LEVINE: For two months?

FORTUNE: Uh-hmm. We had to stay there until he got—they okayed for him to come.

LEVINE: And what—what kind of accommodations? I mean, how did you live there?

FORTUNE: Do you know, I don't recall. It was very confusing to me.

LEVINE: Yeah.

FORTUNE: My brother said they put my younger brother in a hospital. Would not let my mother go see—see him, and he said she used to stand outside crying, you know, and everything and she could hear him screaming up there. You know, the kid. They were not very gentle people to us, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

FORTUNE: That's the way it was.

LEVINE: Yeah. Huh. Okay, so when the ship came into the New York Harbor, do you remember that part?

FORTUNE: I remember it was very confusing. I remember lines and us. You know, how you shuffle and you go from one place to the other and you give your name and all this and that. We were being processed, I recall that, but I really didn't pay too much attention. I was too overwhelmed looking around at all these people and—and after we got processed, we were—we had to sit and wait for a train because we were going to Massachusetts. We were given an option to go to Plainsville, New York or Massachusetts. So we chose Massachusetts because the priest sponsored us to bring us to America from Massachusetts. That's how we got here. We were sponsored.

LEVINE: Oh, how did you happen to get this priest involved, do you know?

FORTUNE: I don't know. My family must have heard from one another. You have to be sponsored. When we were in the camps, in those days, in order to come to America, you had to be sponsored. Somebody—like, I don't know if they do it today, but in those days you had to have a job, a place for them to live before they can come here, also. That was the other stipulation that they had. And this priest sponsored us. He paid our way to come here. He found us a three-room apartment in the West End in Boston and when we got the apartment, there was nothing. Everybody lent us a piece of bedding, whatever, because we came with one little trunk and the clothes on our backs, two pillows and a blanket, I think, were just about—and a couple of bowls my mother had. That was all we had when we came. So everything that ever got, people lent us or they lent us when my mother and father. We got here, my mother and father and my—my brother went to work the next day. My father went cleaning, in a cafeteria cleaning tables. My mother used to clean offices and my brother worked for my stepfather in cleaning, and I used to have to watch my younger brother. That was what we did.

LEVINE: Now, the people who loaned you things, were they from the congregation at the church?

FORTUNE: No, they were people that came over just like we did, but they were there ahead of us, so they had a little. But when they found, like they would buy us a bed, but we had to pay everybody back. We had to pay the priest back. Everything that we received, we had to pay back.

As we worked, we paid, you know, our way and for everything that was given to us.

LEVINE: Hmm.

FORTUNE: So that's how it went.

LEVINE: Now, was this priest from what? From a Russian—

FORTUNE: He was a Russian priest, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

FORTUNE: In Boston. There was a small church. I don't know where because in those days we didn't have cars. We didn't travel around. We stayed more or less in the area. We were rare. And we used to go to church in the Fenway at those days, I recall.

LEVINE: Well, that was some distance, wasn't it?

FORTUNE: Yeah.

LEVINE: You must have taken a trolley or—

FORTUNE: Trolley.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

FORTUNE: We've taken trolleys. A lot of people walked, believe me. Would you believe?

LEVINE: Wow.

FORTUNE: But that's the way it was. In those days you didn't have a car to jump into and all that. Yeah. Or, whoever had a car, I mean, we all piled in and went with them, you know. I really don't recall, but you know, back and forth I recall. Mostly trolleys I think, yeah. Now that I think back with my mother and stepfather.

LEVINE: Can you—can you say anything else about that neighborhood, the West End part of Boston?

FORTUNE: I loved it, the West End because there were—I saw Black people, which I never seen in my life until I came to this country. I was—I was like in awe of them. When I saw them, I said, "My God, look at this." I never seen them. There were Polish people. Italians, Jewish people

and the building we lived in, we had—there was a nice Jewish lady and she was so good to us because she felt for us all the time. Or if she had any food or anything or any extra dishes, she would give us, you know, so we could use it. I remember living on the third floor. She lived on the first. She was alone. I guess her husband died and her kids were gone, but she was very good to us. And Italian people, they felt bad for us. Like when I was a kid, they lived across the street and she would invite me over to her house and feed me, you know. In those days the TVs just came in and I used to go in and there and big eyes. We didn't have anything, so they used to invite us. It was nice. People were very good in those days and they looked out for you. Not like today, and it didn't have to be Americans. I mean, these were all international. We were like a boiling pot of all nationalities and they all—we—we all got along, you know, to tell you the truth. It was never a problem.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

FORTUNE: We all got along, every nationality that was there. I recall my stepfather—in those days we had drugstores. You go to the drugstore man, you say, "Gee, my wife has this, that." He would let him—my father would tell him the compound because he was a doctor himself, and he would mix it up for my father and my father would give it. He used to know how to take all the stuff off you, the spots. He used to sell it. I mean, the little things you did to raise yourself up, as you lived here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

FORTUNE: That's the way it went.

LEVINE: Wow. Well, having all these experiences with a number of different kinds of ethnic people—

FORTUNE: Uh-hmm. Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: In the camps.

FORTUNE: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: And in the neighborhood.

FORTUNE: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Do-do—do you think that your attitudes toward different types of people were formed in those ways?

FORTUNE: Hmm. Hmm.

LEVINE: And—

FORTUNE: I think I was very fortunate because I feel when you are put—I mean, more or less you were thrown into the situation. You are more appreciative of people. You understand people better. Not like a lot of them that look at today, the wars with other countries. America does not understand the Arabs at all. I'm sorry to say they don't. Not that I know any better, but—

LEVINE: You know you don't know, right.

FORTUNE: You go back in history, we do not understand these people. They think money is the answer, you can tell them what to do. No, they're dead wrong. But me, I appreciate the people I've met along the way because I enjoy people. I love talking. As you know, I could talk forever. But I—I was very lucky. I mean I met all kinds of people.

LEVINE: Yeah.

FORTUNE: I had Jewish friends. I had all kinds. I had Italian. I mean, we all got along. I don't know why, but that's the way it used to be, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

FORTUNE: And some of them in the West End were Americans actually, the people that lived there.

LEVINE: Yeah.

FORTUNE: But we hung around together. I had a Polish girlfriend, Jewish girlfriend and what other? Italian, Polish, Ukrainian. My God, Russian. We had everybody.

LEVINE: Hmm.

FORTUNE: And when I think of the people that I hung around with, we were like—when we got together, we were like an international group, you know. [Laughs]

LEVINE: Yeah.

FORTUNE: But today it's not like that.

LEVINE: Well, what do you feel proud of? What—what gives you satisfaction that you—that you've accomplished in your life?

FORTUNE: I feel proud to be in this country. To this day I appreciate it. This country. [voice cracking] I think a lot of it and I feel sad the things that happen now, you know. Oh, you've got me going here.

LEVINE: Aw.

FORTUNE: But I had opportunities which if I was in the old country, I'd be on a farm somewhere digging, you know what I mean?

LEVINE: Yeah.

FORTUNE: But my brother and I really appreciated, you know, being here, having the opportunity, I mean. And we're self made. When we had to this country, we had no family. What my brother has and I have, we earned ourselves. Ourselves. Nobody gave us anything. Everything we have, we can we—we got it ourselves. So, I'm proud of that. Not the way it is today. People come from another country, they have a slip of paper telling you where the welfare office is, where to get the money. These are the stories I've been hearing and I think that's horrible. Horrible. But, no, I love this country. I would never—I would never talk against it because, I mean, it gave me the opportunities. Where else can you do what you do in this country? And I feel sometimes people who talk down about it, should try another country and live there for awhile. Even today, you cannot say things still to this day, when you go certain areas. Even when I went back to Ukraine, you know, last time. I went back twice. The last time I went back, they asked us not to speak English. We had to talk our own language the whole time because there was a lot of undercurrent and a lot of Mafia and people were not—again, going back to the old ways that if you have family in America, they don't look kindly on you. So they—we were like a secret, you know, visiting. We could not talk.

[END OF SIDE A]
[BEGIN SIDE B]

FORTUNE: --again going back to the old ways that if you have family in America, they don't look kindly on you. So they—we were like a secret, you know, visiting. We could not talk. Good thing my brother and I can speak the language. My sister-in-law who's Italian, she couldn't talk at all when we're outside. Only in the houses. It was funny. That's the way it was.

LEVINE: Wow.

FORTUNE: And I don't know what they were scared of when we where there last.

LEVINE: What—what year was that?

FORTUNE: Hmm, '98, somewhere there. But you know, you see the term—turmoil now in Ukraine with the president's poisoning.

LEVINE: Yeah.

FORTUNE: And there's a lot going on. There's going to be something, some war. Really. I mean, not that I'm an expert, but you know, in order to—look how many years it—two hundred years, America, by the time all the wars—

LEVINE: Oh, right.

FORTUNE: So it's going to take time for that country and I'm not going to visit it right now. Not the way it is. I'm not going to get stuck there because I don't think I could survive under those conditions.

LEVINE: Yeah. How do you think about your Ukrainian—being Ukrainian and being American?

FORTUNE: I'm very proud of being Ukrainian because that's my country. I was born there and I'm very proud to be an American, which I am. I'm a citizen. We became, all of us.

LEVINE: Your mother and father [unclear]?

FORTUNE: No. My mother, no. She did—well, she died. She didn't have the opportunity. The poor woman. We just—she did in 1967. So, like my brother and I when we sit down sometimes, "Gee, I wish ma was alive now. She could have an easy life." But she can't, she's dead. [crying]

LEVINE: Yeah. Yeah. Do you feel like the American Dream was achieved in your family?

FORTUNE: I think so.

LEVINE: Even for your mother?

FORTUNE: Uh-hmm. But see, when my mother died, it was still very hard. She lived with me and my kids, and my stepfather lived with me. We were just starting, you know, to earn a little money and I was older. My brother was older, you know, so we could be helping them. But—

LEVINE: Yeah. How did you meet your husband?

FORTUNE: Well, being a foreigner, we used to go to foreign clubs, like there used to be German clubs. There used to Polish clubs. Lithuanian clubs in those days.

LEVINE: All in Boston?

FORTUNE: Yeah, they were all over. Like Cambridge, Somerville, some of them. South Boston and he was the type that liked the foreign people. He enjoyed them. He was American and that's how I met him.

LEVINE: So he—he would go to these clubs?

FORTUNE: Yeah. He would—he had a friend and my brother was one of his friends and that's how I met him.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

FORTUNE: He—my brother brought him over to the house.

LEVINE: Was he Ukrainian by—

FORTUNE: No, he was—

LEVINE: Background or not?

FORTUNE: No.

LEVINE: No.

FORTUNE: No, he was an American Canadian background. Canadian Scotch, something. A mixture of a little—you know, a mongrel. That's the only way I can put some of these people in this country. They're mongrel because they've got a little bit of everything.

LEVINE: I'm one of them. [unclear]

FORTUNE: What are you?

LEVINE: I'm a mixture of—well, my father's side was Russian, Jewish Russian.

FORTUNE: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: My mother German and—and English and a French grandmother.

FORTUNE: Wow. What a combination. [Laughs] See, I'm pure Ukrainian. Hundred percent. Not—no mixtures.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

FORTUNE: But my kids are now, so.

LEVINE: Well, let's see. I guess I've already asked you about—I guess, is there anything else you can think of that I might not have thought to ask, that you think, you know, had to do with either life before you came or growing up in an immigrant family, community? Like, how about the upward mobility. When—how did that start and what—

FORTUNE: You mean, as I was growing?

LEVINE: [unclear]

FORTUNE: Well, it was very hard because we didn't have much. I didn't have the opportunities that the kids today have. I mean, I could never go to school, college or anything. We didn't have anything. Whatever we had went into the apartment that we had, and my parents were old. I mean, my stepfather was sixty-four. My mother was in her forties when we came, and he tried so hard to learn the language and he couldn't. You know, some people are not meant to speak only one language, and that was stepfather. He tried. He used to walk around with a dictionary in Russian, translation to American. He would know the word for an hour. You ask him in an hour, he didn't know the word. It was sad, but he tried so hard. My mother had a hard time learning the language, you know. So it was kind of tough.

LEVINE: So did your mother, as you and your brother got older then, your—did your mother—was she able to stop working or did she keep cleaning? She was cleaning the office buildings?

FORTUNE: She—yeah, in Boston on Beacon Street. She used to do the offices, and she even—my mother was a seamstress. She did a lot. She worked in a factory. You know how the piecework? She done that, and later on she—when I got married and had kids, she used to watch my kids for me while I worked, you know. That's the way it was.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

FORTUNE: So.

LEVINE: When you married, did you live in the West End of Boston?

FORTUNE: No, we were already in South Boston by then because there—we would—I would have been still there, but what happened is they decided to take the West End and knock everything down and rebuild it. And they went around telling us, "Oh." And I'm very stupid because I signed the papers. They said, "When you come back, after we rebuild, you can come back and live here," because the houses were—well, if you've been to the North End?

LEVINE: Yeah.

FORTUNE: That's the way the West End was.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

FORTUNE: And, well, it was prime property, which we didn't realize it, being on the Charles River. There's the Charles River, we were right there. Right, and all you do is walk over Beacon Hill and you're in Boston. I mean it was prime. So they made us all move out. We had to move out. We had no choice. People who didn't want to sell their homes had to sell them and that was it. If not, they took it by—what's the word I'm looking for?

LEVINE: Some—some legal—

FORTUNE: Yeah. Eminent domain, whatever.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

FORTUNE: They just took everything away from the people. So, we wound up in South Boston because you can only afford what you can afford. And after they built it, I went to inquire and in those days one room was five hundred dollars. Now, I'm talking 1959. So how can we go back, for people who just got here? Tell me? That was a—that's how we wound up out of there, but we would have still be living there, I think, because we liked it. It was beautiful, you know. It was nice.

LEVINE: Yeah.

FORTUNE: I mean the North End, we went—we had no problems. It was nice. People got along, period.

LEVINE: Yeah. So I guess the whole community that was there dispersed?

FORTUNE: Well, yeah.

LEVINE: And did most of them go to the South End or—

FORTUNE: No, they went different places. Dedham. I recall Dedham. West Roxbury. Braintree. Let me see, what other way did they go? That's some of the people that I know. We all—whatever anybody could afford, you know, in the towns. Cities, I should say.

LEVINE: Was there a kind of path that families took as they—as they became more established and they started to earn more money and they could—could move to other places? Was there kind of a—a sequence of places that people tended to go to around Boston?

FORTUNE: I don't know what you mean by that.

LEVINE: Like in—in-in New York, it would be like people maybe started out in the Lower East Side, and then when got a little bit ahead of the game, they maybe moved to the Bronx, which was more like—

FORTUNE: No, see with my mother and stepfather, it didn't happen because he was older. South Boston, from there my brother got married. Then I got married and I moved to Malden and where my mother and father were living in South Boston, they were tearing that section down. Seems like where we went, they tore things down. So they came to live with me. I told them, "Well, come live with me. You can watch the kids and I'll work," but they never had the opportunity. We kids, ourselves, you know, did it.

LEVINE: Yeah.

FORTUNE: The best we could.

LEVINE: So did you stay in Malden until you came to Florida?

FORTUNE: Yeah, I lived there thirty-six years.

LEVINE: Oh.

FORTUNE: In Malden, yeah.

LEVINE: Well, why don't you say your husband's name and your children's names?

FORTUNE: Okay, my husband's name was Walter Fortune, Junior. I have a daughter named Nadia and I have a son named Steven. I gave them Ukrainian names. Actually, just—you know—

LEVINE: Yeah.

FORTUNE: And I don't know what else. I have grandchildren, five of them.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

FORTUNE: All Americanized.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

FORTUNE: Nice kids, but like I told you before we started recording—

LEVINE: Yeah.

FORTUNE: I don't know what else you want to know.

LEVINE: Well, why don't you mention something about your life now?

FORTUNE: Well, like I told you, I worked for the National Park Service and he wanted to retire. He had a business, a car business and we decided to buy here, the house in Pompano because my brother already was living here. And the reason he moved to Florida, his health was not that good. He has a heart problem, so the weather was good for him. So they moved here and we came on vacation a few times and one time we came on vacation and bought a house. [Laughs] And we were going to retire here and live here, but you can plan all you want, somebody dies and you're alone and you just go on. So two years ago, I decided to live here. I sold the house in Malden. My kids didn't want it. I got rid of all the furniture and what I was doing was living with my son because he has a house in Tewksbury and then I would come here. But then I said, "You know, this is enough. Now I'm staying here." I can't move around anymore. I'm going to be sixty-five next month, so.

LEVINE: So what's your life like now here?

FORTUNE: Right now, actually when I first came I was very lonely because I was alone and I never in my life been alone. Do you know that? And it hit me after my husband died. I'm sitting here one day, I says, "You know what? I never in my life been alone." I've always been surrounded with people all my life I lived. From my mother and stepfather, my husband, and my mother comes back with me and lives with me. Then I have my own family. Then he dies. I come here and I'm alone. It took me a long time. So I sat here month after month, nobody came knocking on the door. I says, "You know what, Nina? You got to get out there." So I started looking through the paper. I said, "Let me join

a few things." So I started—I joined Tai Chi because I have an arthritis problem. So I started that. I made a friend that way. Then I joined the Garden Club and I met more friends. Even though I had my brother down the street. He lives seven houses down, but they're married. I'm alone. I could not depend on him. I had to make my own life. So that's how I started. Now I have a lot of friends. I joined a lot of things. I'm involved in the church and you know, tell you the truth? I'm very happy. I'm content, is the word. I might not have much, but what I have, that's all I need, and see, we never had much so to me I don't miss what I don't—you never had, you know. But what I—I want to fix this, but I'm too lazy to do it. I says, "You know what, fine." No, I have what I need. So the word is contentment.

LEVINE: Oh, wonderful.

FORTUNE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, what are you looking forward to?

FORTUNE: Ah, just to continue the way I am, really, and I more or less have—this is the first time I have to do for me. Usually it's always for everybody else. So it's kind of funny that it's no one. I say, "I gotta go there. I'll be home blah, blah." Now, I can go and nobody cares when I come home. [Laughs] To tell you the truth, I feel like a teenager. Seventeen years old, I'm starting all over. [Laughs]

LEVINE: Yeah. Wow.

FORTUNE: And that's about it.

LEVINE: Is that a Ukrainian blouse that you have on now?

FORTUNE: No, would you—

LEVINE: It looks like it could be.

FORTUNE: No. No, I know it does, but—

LEVINE: It isn't, uh-huh.

FORTUNE: No. That's Ukrainian. See that?

LEVINE: This?

FORTUNE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

FORTUNE: That's a symbol of trisu [PH], three. Trinity.

LEVINE: Tell me what that means.

FORTUNE: Trinity.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

FORTUNE: It's a symbol of Ukraine that we've had all our lives, centuries. It's a symbol.

LEVINE: Was is it? It's a butterfly?

FORTUNE: No, that stuff—no, that—I stuck that. Oh, I'm—I forgot I'm still on here.

LEVINE: Wait. Yeah, you can—

FORTUNE: I've already forgot that you were—this thing is here. No, I just put that there. This shouldn't be here. This is all—

LEVINE: Oh. Oh, I see.

FORTUNE: A symbol of Ukraine.

LEVINE: Can you say anything else about it?

FORTUNE: What?

LEVINE: What—it's a trinity.

FORTUNE: It's supposed to be a story of three brothers united, you know, to take care of the country and all that. It's like a—like we have the eagle in America and that's like our—what's the word I'm looking—excuse me. I need water. I have dry mouth here. Can I get you anything?

LEVINE: Well, I think we're just about done.

FORTUNE: Oh, you still have the thing on?

LEVINE: Yeah, I still have it on.

FORTUNE: Oh.

LEVINE: Is there anything—

FORTUNE: I thought you already shut it off.

LEVINE: Is there anything else you want to say? We got a couple a minutes left on this tape. Anything you can think of that maybe we didn't cover.

FORTUNE: Not really, I can't think of anything. I think more or less I told you everything, you know.

LEVINE: Did you visit Ellis Island at all?

FORTUNE: I wanted to and what my daughter has been trying to do, see, she's doing the genealogy on all of us, and right now Ukraine has no paperwork on any of us yet because they've been in so many wars, so many things. Like I wanted her to dig back into history in my family because none of us really know and my cousins don't remember. They had a hard life, also, being living there, and you know, they were all brain washed. The first time we met them, my brother would tell us the history of how the war and all, and they said, "Oh, no, that's not how it was." See, they were written differently. In their country when they went to school, they were taught differently.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

FORTUNE: My brother—

LEVINE: Their history books were—

FORTUNE: Yes. We told them, "No, that's not true. The government lied to you." You know how many times we—my brother argued with them? Because my brother's good with history. He's very good. You know, he's very smart. When he's interested in that, he remembers all those things. But they were misled about a lot of things, but now because the country's free, they're realizing that they were lied to all their lives in what's happened in that country.

LEVINE: And what—what is it like for them to realize that?

FORTUNE: It's—my—my cousin, one of my cousins, she almost went out of her mind because when the reconstruction came, they lost everything. You know, a lot of people lost everything. The money they had was worth nothing. She said she couldn't even buy—the money she saved for her retirement and everything, she couldn't even buy a pair of sneakers, she said, after they—reconstruction, everything. They lost everything.

LEVINE: Explain to me because I don't quite understand—

FORTUNE: Well, when Gorbachov came into—did his reconstruction, you know, free country, let's say.

LEVINE: No longer the Soviet Union.

FORTUNE: Right, nobody—for seventy years they'd been told what to do, where to go, where to work, and you know, then the country said "No more." So when that happened, Ukraine was independent. Didn't have to depend on Russia telling what to do, and everything just fell apart in the country. The people that saved money had money and none of it was worth anything. They all lost. They had to restart all over again, a lot of them. I'm talking about my family, which I know they lost everything. There was nothing. They had to restart.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

FORTUNE: She had to go to work back all of them, you know, and—

LEVINE: Even though she was like retired, she had to go back to work?

FORTUNE: Right. They were all retired. Now even to this day my older brother, he does odd jobs, like how he met people in Tamarack.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

FORTUNE: That money that he earns, he takes then and he sends it to them. That's how they live there because there's not that much work out there. The only work they have, some of my cousins who are young in their thirties, they work for the Mafia, for all we know, because every time you ask, you never get an answer what they do. So it's pretty tough.

LEVINE: Hmm.

FORTUNE: Pretty tough out there. They do get—now finally they're getting their social—like pensions. After the reconstruction, my cousins who were retired, didn't get their pensions for years. So we used to—when I was working, my brother and I would send money, but my—mostly now my brother does it because I'm on my own and I don't have as—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

FORTUNE: I don't have the extra that I can give. I do send, but not like I have to. But more or less, my brother's supporting them.

LEVINE: Wow.

FORTUNE: You know.

LEVINE: But they are starting to get pensions at least?

FORTUNE: Yeah. Well, before that they weren't getting anything. So of course, they write this to my brother and we saw it when we went. You see they live in—they've still got the steel roofs. The—we saw the house where we were born and it's still people living in it. It's just a little dirt road. No cars could even get by. I mean, from here to here.

LEVINE: Hmm. Uh-hmm.

FORTUNE: You know, they're still—there this Russia sends a man on the moon and everything, and look how the people lived? They still have outside water. They don't have bathrooms inside. They have outhouses. To this day, this and this is what, 2005? Still the same.

LEVINE: Hmm. Well, you must have a very strong bond with your brother, having been through so much together.

FORTUNE: Not really. We used to fight all the time. My brother used to—because of not having my father, he thought he was the father figure.

LEVINE: Father.

FORTUNE: And he made sure I went to the straight and narrow. All I remember, being at Hampton Beach, chased by him with a broom. He wanted to beat me up. That's all I know. Because I wasn't doing what I was supposed to or whatever. That's—oh—

LEVINE: Well—[tape off/on] –here with tape two, because Nina remembered something that seems important to get down on tape. Why don't you tell about when you wrote—your brother wrote the letter?

FORTUNE: Okay. I think I—in the first tape I told you my brother wrote a letter telling them that my mother passed away in 1960—ah, '67 and the letter traveled for eight months before we got an answer back and they told us they were sorry to hear that my mother passed away and they thought we were all dead because we never heard from them. And then in 1990 we went to visit Ukraine for the first time and we still had relatives there. I had four cousins and an aunt and of course there's second cousins and so on. But as I was talking to my aunt, she told us the story—she told me the story that my father came back in 19—in

the ‘80s sometime looking for us and he thought after the war that my mother and I and my brother went back to our country—to our country. And when he went there looking for us, my aunt looks at him and she thought we were with him. He says, “What do you mean you came here? We thought she was with you. She never came back.” So my father, to—was in shock to find out that we were not there and my aunt, when she found out that my mother and my brother and I were not with him, she got so angry at him. She started reprimanding him and telling him, “You mean to tell me, you don’t know where your wife is? What happened to her? Where you’ve been and everything.” She just starts screaming and yelling at him, that she never found out what happened, where my father. I—we believe, by just listening to her what she told us, that he was somewhere in prison and we never knew that. We found out my father was alive when we wrote the letter, telling them that my mother passed away. So when I got that letter, I cried for a week.

LEVINE: Hmm. Hmm.

FORTUNE: And that’s the time I got a picture of my father. First time.

LEVINE: Your cousin sent it?

FORTUNE: Yeah. The only picture of my father that I have.

LEVINE: And is that picture taken of your father when he came to—back to visit to find your mother?

FORTUNE: No, this was one of the pictures that—that my aunt had of my father.

LEVINE: I see.

FORTUNE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

FORTUNE: Oh, maybe he gave it to her. I don’t know. Somehow, but I—what she did was, my aunt, she sent it here and I have the picture. It’s the only picture we have, so I made a duplicate for my brother, also. So at least I know what he looks like. All my life, I never knew what the man looked like. Of course, we had no paperwork, no ID. We have no identification. I have not—no birth certificate. All I got is naturalized that I’m a citizen. So—

LEVINE: Right. Well, now, did your cousin know--when your father came back to find your mother and you and your brother, did—did your cousin know that you had come to America?

FORTUNE: No. But only that letter. When they received the letter that my mother died. We wrote them telling her she died, she realized we were alive. They thought we were all dead.

LEVINE: Right.

FORTUNE: They never knew.

LEVINE: But he—then your father, when he came, he found out your mother had died.

FORTUNE: Right.

LEVINE: But you and your brother were here.

FORTUNE: Yes.

LEVINE: But then—

FORTUNE: Because my aunt was so upset with him. She was devastated that she—nobody knew where we were, and there's my father without us. She just let out on him. She's—she was sorry to this—when I saw her, that she should have thought more, but she was so angry she sent him away and he never came back. And when my brother and I were in Ukraine the first time, I tried to find him. Like in the hotels they have—in those days you had to pay everybody, you know, but nobody could tell me where he was or if there was any family.

LEVINE: Did you get any leads whatsoever?

FORTUNE: No. We never got any leads, until the second time we went to Ukraine and the man that was on the—you know, the tour bus, tour man, he was from Poltava, the same town that we were born in. We went to Kiev and when we told him where we were born, my brother kind of formed a friendship with him and he—and my brother asked him to see if he could find any of our family members. And he took a long time, but I think he gave my brother a couple of names, but we never could get a hold of them. I don't know if they were our relations or not, in Odessa somewhere. So that—and that's about it. We don't have any. My mother's side we have. My father's side we—we don't know anything about him at all because he came from Odessa. He wasn't from Poltava like my mother.

LEVINE: Hmm.

FORTUNE: And I don't know how they, you know, met or anything.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

FORTUNE: There was so much turmoil, you know, in my life, I really don't know exactly everything.

LEVINE: Yeah.

FORTUNE: Like people today they go, "Gee, I have a grandparent. I had this." I can't even say that because I have nothing. I have none of that.

LEVINE: Right.

FORTUNE: So.

LEVINE: Yeah. Wow.

FORTUNE: That's about it. I don't want—

LEVINE: Well, that's sad for your father, too, isn't it?

FORTUNE: Yes, it is. Not to know they were—that we—well, he knows we're alive.

LEVINE: Well, he knows you're alive, but maybe he doesn't have the wherewithal to track you down or—

FORTUNE: No. No. No, the way the country was when we went, no. You have to have money right now. Even then and to this day still in order to find people. They—you got to pay off. That's the only way.

LEVINE: Yeah.

FORTUNE: It's tough.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, thank you very much.

FORTUNE: Okay, dear.

LEVINE: And we're going to sign off again here.

[END OF INTERVIEW]