

EI-1385

MARGIT PLOSKON

BIRTHDATE: ?1914

INTERVIEW DATE: JULY 12, 2005

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: ?91

RUNNING TIME:

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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AGE: 6

SHIP: OLYMPIC

PORT: SOUTHAMPTON

RESIDENCES:

HUNGARY: UNGNARAD

THE US: SOUTH RIVER, NEW JERSEY

LEVINE: Okay, today is July the 12th, the year 2005. I'm here in the Ellis Island Oral History Studio, and I'm here with someone who came through Ellis Island when she was six years of age, in 1921, and she remembers it was April 13th. We have the summary from the American Family Immigration History Center. Okay, so as a six year old, Mrs. Ploskon came from Hungary. And I want to say that Mrs. Ploskon's daughter, Marge Helenko, is here with us, and she's going to tell us if we mess up, right? [Laughs]

HELENKO: [Laughs]

LEVINE: Okay, why don't I start by your saying your name when you came through Ellis Island as a six year old? What was your name as a little girl of six?

PLOSKON: Margit.

LEVINE: Margit, and that's spelled M-A-R-G-I-T-A?

PLOSKON: G-I-T.

LEVINE: G-I-T. No A?

PLOSKON: No. M-A-R-G-I-T.

LEVINE: Oh, okay, but it came through as a different name?

PLOSKON: Right.

LEVINE: Why don't you say what your real last name was?

PLOSKON: Lengyel.

LEVINE: And spell that, please?

PLOSKON: L-E-N-G-Y-E-L.

LEVINE: Okay, and it came through here, we have, from the computers downstairs, we have that it was L-E-N-D-E-L-O-V-A.

PLOSKON: Right.

LEVINE: So that can show you how some mistakes were made in the translation. And they have Margita rather than Margit. Okay, now where were you coming from?

PLOSKON: You met from Hungary?

LEVINE: Yeah.

PLOSKON: Ungmegye.

LEVINE: Could you spell it?

PLOSKON: U-N-G-M-E-G-Y-E, Ungmegye.

LEVINE: Now, is that--?

PLOSKON: Ungmegye, that's Ungnarad. It would be like New Jersey, that's Ungmegye; that's the state, you know. But this is Ungnarad, that's the town that we lived in. Ungnarad.

LEVINE: Okay, so just spell the town, for the tape.

PLOSKON: U-N-G-U-A-R—wait. Let me write it down.

LEVINE: U-N-G--?

PLOSKON: U-N-G-N-A-R-A-D.

LEVINE: D, great. Now, say it again, pronounce it.

PLOSKON: Ungnarad.

LEVINE: Ungnarad. Was Ungnarad a place, do you remember it?

PLOSKON: Yeah.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. When you think of it, Ungnarad, what do you remember about it?

PLOSKON: What do I remember? Well, everything good was happening to me over there, because I had grandparents there, and I had, you know, my uncle, my aunt. We lived together.

LEVINE: Oh.

PLOSKON: We came from a poor family, but I mean, we managed. I mean, you know, the best.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. What was your mother's name?

PLOSKON: What was her name?

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PLOSKON: Juliana.

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

PLOSKON: P-A-T-T, Patt.

LEVINE: Oh, and your father's name?

PLOSKON: Alex.

LEVINE: Alex.

PLOSKON: Sandor in Hungarian.

LEVINE: How would you spell--?

PLOSKON: S-A-N-D-O-R.

LEVINE: Okay, and so what was your father doing for work, when you were little, when you were born?

PLOSKON: Well, I guess, you know, they used to work on the farms all the time, you know, in Europe. And then like I said, in 1914 he decided to come to the United States, because he says, you know, like to make a living, so he could bring us over here.

LEVINE: So, he left? Were you born yet?

PLOSKON: No. He left—

LEVINE: Oh, so you never saw your father?

PLOSKON: No, I didn't know my father 'til I saw him the first time when I came to America.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, what did your mother tell you about him? Do you remember, as a little girl, up to six, what you thought about your father?

PLOSKON: [Laughs] Well, I never thought of how he could be, but I mean that I thought he was someplace. And they—would that go on the tape?

LEVINE: Go ahead, it's okay.

PLOSKON: They always used to tell me he fell off a cucumber tree, and broke his neck, that's why I don't have no father!

LEVINE: [Laughs] You believed it, right? Okay, but did you have a picture of him? Did you have, you know--?

PLOSKON: Yeah, we had a picture of him, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And do you know what you thought, as a little six year old, coming to America? Do you know what you thought America might be like?

PLOSKON: Well, I imagined that it must be different over here, because my father was here, and he wanted us to come here to be with him.

LEVINE: Ah, yeah.

PLOSKON: That it had to be a better place.

LEVINE: Yeah. What did your mother do? Once your father was gone, how did she support you?

PLOSKON: Working on a farm.

LEVINE: She worked in the fields?

PLOSKON: Raising food, and everything.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PLOSKON: Everything that she could possibly do.

LEVINE: Yeah. What was your mother like? Can you say what kind of a personality she had, or temperament?

PLOSKON: Well, she was a wonderful mother.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, why do you say that? Why do you say she was a wonderful mother?

PLOSKON: Because she took—my sister was bigger than I was, right? So I mean, she always worried about me, that I should be happy. She'd try to get stuff for me to make me happy.

LEVINE: Mm-hm. Can you think of any things you did with your mother while you were still in Hungary? Places you went, or things you did together, or things she told you, or anything like that? Or your grandparents, or your aunt or uncles, anybody, that you remember having, you know, some close relationship with?

PLOSKON: My grandfather, I used to love him. He used to tell me about my father, you know.

LEVINE: What would he tell you? Can you remember anything?

PLOSKON: He used to say, you know, like he hated to see me leave, you know, to come over here, because he won't see me anymore. And then my grandfather dies, so that made it worse for me.

LEVINE: He died when you had, after you had gone?

PLOSKON: No, when we were still there.

LEVINE: You were still there?

PLOSKON: Like I could have been about five years old when he died. So I missed him very much. I mean, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

PLOSKON: But I know how much he loved me, and I knew how much I loved him.

LEVINE: Yeah. What kind of a man was he? How would you describe him?

PLOSKON: My grandfather?

LEVINE: Yeah.

PLOSKON: Like Santa Claus would be.

LEVINE: Did he have a beard?

PLOSKON: No.

LEVINE: No.

PLOSKON: But I mean, a wonderful person that I mean to make me happy all the time. Should I tell you? When he'd be coming home from work every day, he'd be working, he used to wear a hat. And wild strawberries would grow out in the field, you know. He'd pick the strawberries, fill the brim of his hat, bring them me, "Here's for my little one!" all the time.

LEVINE: Oh! So he worked in the fields, too, huh? He worked in the fields as well? Uh-huh. Okay, yeah.

PLOSKON: Yes.

LEVINE: And did you ever go to school over there, or you were too little? Oh, you did go?

PLOSKON: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PLOSKON: Yeah, like a kindergarten, you know, like over here.

LEVINE: And do you remember anything about kindergarten?

PLOSKON: Oh, I remember something, all right!

LEVINE: What?

PLOSKON: Somebody's father was an American. They sent him candy, a Hershey Bar, right? And all I asked her for that piece of silver paper that that came in, right? And I took it from her, and the schoolteacher came, and he gave me a big whack in my hand with the ruler, because I took the paper from her.

LEVINE: Wow!

PLOSKON: That's what I remember about that!

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So this was one teacher in the kindergarten that you had?

PLOSKON: Well, it's a whole class, you know. All the grades were together then.

LEVINE: All the grades were together, so you were with older children, too?

PLOSKON: Yes, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, wow. So you must have felt humiliated, I suppose?

PLOSKON: The what?

LEVINE: You must have felt humiliated?

PLOSKON: And how! And how! But it was my fault that I took it from her, right?

LEVINE: Well, it's not a bad thing! [Laughs] Anyway, okay, so you went to school, and what did you do for fun, when you were still there?

PLOSKON: Like little kids would be, playing. Like over here, you know: running around, playing tag. In the winter time we'd put—my mother used to put bones on our shoes, and we used to go skating with the bones on our feet, you know, on the soles of your shoes.

LEVINE: [Laughs] Really?

PLOSKON: We used to go on a pond like that.

LEVINE: And you had a sister—one older sister?

PLOSKON: Yeah.

LEVINE: And that was it?

PLOSKON: That's all.

LEVINE: That was the family? Uh-huh. Okay, so, let's see. Is there anything else that when you think of life in Hungary before you came here that you ever think about? If you close your eyes, anything you see of that place?

PLOSKON: I used to like all the kids around, all the neighbors. I mean, my Godmother lived in the other house next to us, over there, so I used to, you know, go to her.

LEVINE: Were you religious? Was your family religious?

PLOSKON: Yes.

LEVINE: What religion?

PLOSKON: Reformed.

LEVINE: Reformed. And you practiced? You what, went to church? Did you have any festivals or holidays that were religious?

PLOSKON: Yes, I mean, Christmas, Easter—you know, all the holidays. I mean, we did all that.

LEVINE: Mm-hm. Is there anything different in the way you celebrated them there, than you did after you go here? Was there anything different about Christmas, Easter?

PLOSKON: Well like I said, I was little, so my mother always tried to make, you know, like Christmas special for me, you know?

LEVINE: Mm-hm. Did you have, like, a Christmas tree?

PLOSKON: That's what I was going to say. Somebody promised us a branch from a Christmas tree, and we never got. So my mother said to me, "Don't cry, sweetheart." She says, "We have an oleander plant." So she says, "You'll have a Christmas tree." And she wrapped the nuts and everything, and hanged it on there, so I had my Christmas tree.

LEVINE: Okay.

PLOSKON: And that was special for me.

LEVINE: Yeah. Now did—were you close to your sister? You were close to your sister?

PLOSKON: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

PLOSKON: Yeah.

LEVINE: So you would play together?

PLOSKON: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PLOSKON: But she, I mean, you know, like, she hung around with other children, too, you know, not only—I was smaller than her, so—

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Was this a village, or was it a small city, where you lived?

PLOSKON: Yeah, it was pretty small. Yeah, a small city, yeah.

LEVINE: Mm-hm. Okay, so do you remember when your mother told you you were going to be coming to America?

PLOSKON: All I know is that she used to get the letters, you know, and what used to be in the letters, that my father's trying to save money so he can bring us over. She used to tell us that, you know, that I'll get to meet my father.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did your sister remember your father, or was she too young?

PLOSKON: Well, I guess she remembered him a different way than I did, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. So okay, so then you got ready. What happened? Were you living with relatives?

PLOSKON: My grandmother, my grandfather, my aunt, and my mother had one brother—we lived in the same house.

LEVINE: Okay, so when you left, everybody else stayed? It was just your mother, your sister, and you?

PLOSKON: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Okay, and do you remember any preparations that had to be done before you could leave? Anything that your mother did?

PLOSKON: Well, I guess all the paperwork and everything, you know, that she had to worry about, you know.

LEVINE: She took care of, right. And then, did you bring anything special that you wanted to have with you? Or, do you remember anything your mother took, packed, to come here?

PLOSKON: Well, she brought that trunk that we have up in the attic, yeah.

LEVINE: Right.

PLOSKON: That. All your belongings that you could possibly bring, I mean, you know, she brought. The featherbeds—she brought three of those. Pillows she brought. And then I says, like in that trunk, you know, like certain things. And she had to prepare my special meal for me to bring on the road, a special kind of soup, and ham, just to make sure I was happy.

LEVINE: Wow! Well, it sounds like you were very much valued, you were made to feel very secure and very important in your family?

PLOSKON: Well, I was happy in a way because I was going to meet my father.

LEVINE: Hm, okay, so you traveled from your little city to where, before you got the boat, the ship?

PLOSKON: Gee, I don't know. We traveled quite a few places. I mean, I think, like [pause] we were in Southampton, you know.

LEVINE: That's where you sailed from, I guess?

PLOSKON: That's where we got the ship, you know, when we got on the ship.

LEVINE: In Southampton. So you left, so you had to travel over some borders, and everything?

PLOSKON: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Was it a long trip before you got to the port? Do you remember that part?

PLOSKON: I don't remember very much, but I remember certain places. You know, the war was going on, and then I mean, you saw, you know, like certain places where the cannon balls were dropped, that had big holes in the ground and stuff. You know, I remember seeing certain places like that.

LEVINE: I see, I see. So, it was, your father came here right as the war was starting, it sounds like?

PLOSKON: Yeah.

LEVINE: He came in 1914. So then the war happened, and he couldn't come back, I suppose, even if he wanted to.

PLOSKON: No, I guess he didn't want to come back—

LEVINE: Or you couldn't get there?

PLOSKON: --because he wanted to save the money, you know, so we could come.

LEVINE: And you weren't able to come during the war years, so you came after that?

PLOSKON: That's it.

LEVINE: I see, okay. And then you could see the effects of the war as you were traveling to Southampton?

PLOSKON: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: So, did you stay in Southampton at all for a while before you got the ship?

PLOSKON: I don't know if we stayed there. We had to be able to stay there, I mean, before we got on the ship, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. And then, the voyage? Do you remember anything about that?

PLOSKON: I remember a real foggy night, and all the foghorns blowing all night long. And it took us seven days to cross.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PLOSKON: Being camped down in the bottom of the ship over there, three of us in a little tiny space.

LEVINE: Were you in a room with a whole lot of other people, or were you in a cabin with--?

PLOSKON: We had our own cabin.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PLOSKON: Yeah, we had our own cabin.

LEVINE: I see.

PLOSKON: But there were three of us squeezed in like, you know, two little tiny bunks in there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, okay. And then, do you remember when the ship reached the New York Harbor? Do you remember coming in to the harbor? Do you remember seeing New York? Or do you remember the Statue of Liberty?

PLOSKON: The Statue of Liberty, that's the first thing we were all looking at.

LEVINE: And what was that like?

PLOSKON: Well, it was something special. You know, something different.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. And then Ellis Island?

PLOSKON: And Ellis Island, then we came here.

LEVINE: Okay, tell me everything you can remember about Ellis Island.

PLOSKON: All the people over here, and like I said, the way the food was served, and everything. You know, like it showed on those plates, you know, how you got the food and everything. And then, like, I don't know if we stayed over here for overnight or two days, but like I remember laying on that iron cot, and there was nothing on there, you know. That's the last thing I remember about here.

LEVINE: Oh. Do you know why you had to stay? Do you know why you had to stay?

PLOSKON: There was nothing wrong. I mean that they didn't find anything wrong with us, but I don't know if we had, you know, like if we stayed over or we didn't stay over. I'm not positive about that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. But it may have been there were so many people that you simply did not get processed—

PLOSKON: Could have been [unclear], yeah.

LEVINE: --right away?

PLOSKON: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. But were people, was it a bad experience? Were you treated well? What about the language?

PLOSKON: I can't say we were treated bad. But like I said, I mean, it was so crowded over here. That's what I'm saying. It was like on that picture, you know, like thousands of people over here in that room.

LEVINE: Mm-hm, yeah. And, let's see. And so you must have eaten here?

PLOSKON: I guess so.

LEVINE: Yeah?

PLOSKON: Yeah.

LEVINE: And how was the language? How was it for your mother? Was it difficult? Do you remember?

PLOSKON: It was very hard. It was very hard, because, I mean, none of us spoke a word of English, right? And I mean, everybody's talking different language and everything, you know. And then, I don't know where my father came from, but then my father was here to pick us up.

LEVINE: Oh, so all of a sudden he showed up. And what was it like seeing him?

PLOSKON: He was a big, tall man, standing there. He had a Hershey Bar for me, and one orange. And he says, "And you're my little daughter!" That was the best!

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. So you finally got the Hershey Bar, not just the paper, right?

PLOSKON: Right!

LEVINE: [Laughs] Wow! Well, that must have been wonderful! And remember your mother? Do you remember your mother when she saw your father?

PLOSKON: Well, they hugged each other and kissed each other, you know. And he was so happy to see all of us!

LEVINE: Mm. Now, where had he settled? Where had your father settled? Where was he living?

PLOSKON: He lived in South River.

LEVINE: Oh, in South River?

PLOSKON: Yeah, he lived in South River, and that's the first place we went to stay, in that lady's house that he had a room, you know. He was rooming in somebody's house, so we went there. And we stayed there 'til he found a place for us to live.

LEVINE: I see. Now, do you remember leaving Ellis Island? Do you remember, how did you get to South River?

PLOSKON: I don't know if we got on a train or something, how we went from here.

LEVINE: Okay, and then he was in a rooming house, you might as well say? No? A boarder?

PLOSKON: Yeah, he was, you know, like boarding in somebody's house. He had his own room.

LEVINE: Okay, and do you remember any of your first impressions, like you know, when you first got here, the first few days or weeks? Anything that struck you, as a little six year old, anything that struck you as new or different?

PLOSKON: Well, everything was strange, you know.

LEVINE: Everything was new?

PLOSKON: Everything was strange.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. And you got here in April. Did you go to school right away, or you waited 'til the next year?

PLOSKON: I think I went, you know, like it wasn't even a kindergarten. It was like preschool, you might as well say.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

PLOSKON: And it was A, B, C, you know, three classes?

LEVINE: Yeah.

PLOSKON: And [pause] my mouth.

LEVINE: Oh. [Pause] Okay, so you were in preschool? You went into preschool?

PLOSKON: Yeah, and they—

LEVINE: And what was it--?

PLOSKON: It was like A, B, and C, so there was a little table, and the little ones sat all around the table. And I sat at one table. And if they said, "Go to the blackboard," the teacher said, "Go to the blackboard," I didn't know what she said, so I sat at the other table so I didn't have to go. Then when that table had to go, then I went to the other table. But I didn't want to go, because I didn't understand what was going on, right? So anyhow, I mean, I had a rotten friend in there, and every piece of pencil that she could find, the tiniest piece, she always gave that to me, because I didn't understand American. So she had to pick on me. So one day the teacher decided that, she says I'm saying a bad word all the time, and I had to go get my mouth washed out with soap all the time, with that girl, right?

LEVINE: Oh, the girl taught you the bad word?

PLOSKON: Because she said I was saying bad words. And then the teacher realized that I don't know how to speak in American, so how could I be saying bad words? So then she had to go get her mouth washed out with soap! So that's the first experience I had going to school over here.

LEVINE: Wow! Huh. So what was it like learning English, for you? Was it difficult to learn English? How was that for you?

PLOSKON: It was kind of hard.

LEVINE: How did you learn it? What helped you to learn it?

PLOSKON: Well, you hear it every day, so a little at a time, you know. And the teachers used to take to me. I mean that, you know, like she felt sorry for me, that I couldn't speak in American. And even if she could ask me anything, I mean, I couldn't answer her the right way, because I couldn't speak American.

LEVINE: So did she give you extra help?

PLOSKON: Well, she tried to, yes. She liked me, and she tried to help me, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, what were they calling you in school? By what name were they calling you?

PLOSKON: No, they called me Margaret.

LEVINE: Margaret?

PLOSKON: Yeah, yeah.

- LEVINE: I see, okay. Okay, so you went to school, and I guess then the summer came. And was that a good time for you?
- PLOSKON: Yeah, yeah.
- LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.
- PLOSKON: Because we had a lot of fun. There were a lot of kids in the neighborhood, so we had a lot of fun all the time.
- LEVINE: And were the kids in the neighborhood, some of them, Hungarian?
- PLOSKON: Yeah.
- LEVINE: And were there other groups, too?
- PLOSKON: No, all Hungarian.
- LEVINE: All Hungarians? In South River?
- PLOSKON: Yeah.
- LEVINE: Oh, so you would say it was a Hungarian community at that point?
- PLOSKON: Yeah, yeah.
- LEVINE: The section you lived in was?
- PLOSKON: Right, right.
- LEVINE: Uh-huh. And in school, were there other kinds of children, too? Italian children, Jewish children?
- PLOSKON: Yeah, well, all kinds.
- LEVINE: All kinds?
- PLOSKON: Yeah, yeah.
- LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay, now why was it that your father settled in South River? In other words, was there some kind of work there? Or, other people he knew?
- PLOSKON: I don't know. There were three brothers. Each one, you know, like, they all came to America, his two other brothers. One went to Michigan, and then the other one was in Ohio, and my father settled in South River.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, do you think there any people from your little city in Hungary, besides your father, who also lived in South River?

PLOSKON: Yeah, there was somebody that they knew, you know. Yeah.

LEVINE: I see.

PLOSKON: Yeah.

LEVINE: I see. And what kind of work did your father do when he was first here?

PLOSKON: He used to work in a clay bank, digging clay.

LEVINE: Oh!

PLOSKON: He was a hard worker all his life.

LEVINE: Yeah! He must have been yeah. So what would they do? They would get the clay onto what, trucks?

PLOSKON: They'd make, you know, they'd take it to a plant that they made bricks out of it, whatever they used, you know.

LEVINE: Mm-hm. Okay, and then did your mother work, or did she stay at home?

PLOSKON: Yes, she worked in a cigar factory.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

PLOSKON: Yeah.

LEVINE: Can you say anything about that? Did you ever visit it? Did you ever know what it was like, the cigar factory?

PLOSKON: All I know is she smuggled tobacco every time she came home! [Laughs]

LEVINE: [Laughs] Did she ever work at home? Like, home work, making the cigars, I mean?

PLOSKON: Not home, but like I mean, like, you know, like she used to like to crochet, and you know, embroider. She used to do work like that. She did that a lot.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did she continue to cook in a Hungarian way? Yeah, uh-huh.

PLOSKON: And I lived with her all my life; I never left her. So my husband and I, we'd get up in the morning, and there's our good smell of everything, you know, cooking, baking. You know, so that was extra special.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. Were there any Hungarian foods that she made that were particular--?

PLOSKON: The stuffed cabbage, chicken paprikash, and all the good cakes, all the filled cakes.

LEVINE: Mm-hm. So, was your mother happy she had come here?

PLOSKON: Yes, she was.

LEVINE: She was?

PLOSKON: That we were all together.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh, yeah. And did anybody else come? Any of your cousins, or your aunts and uncles?

PLOSKON: No.

LEVINE: They all stayed?

PLOSKON: Yeah.

LEVINE: Mm-hm. And, let's see. So you went through grade school. When did you stop going to school?

PLOSKON: Eighth grade.

LEVINE: Eighth grade. And why did you stop? What did you do then?

PLOSKON: [Laughs] Should I tell you? I was real good friends with the supervising principal's wife, and I told her we were so poor I had to go to work. So she told her husband, "Sign the working papers for that child, so she can go to work."

LEVINE: Ah, and did you?

PLOSKON: Yes, I did.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, so what did you do for work?

PLOSKON: The first thing I did when I was working, I was baby sitting for my mother's boss. They were in a sewing factory. This was years later, in a sewing factory, and I was baby sitting for their son.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PLOSKON: And then I learned how to sew in a sewing factory, and then I went to work in a sewing factory.

LEVINE: And what was that like?

PLOSKON: Well, you had to push hard, I mean, make different things, like pants factory and blouse factory, dress factory. I did all that work.

LEVINE: Now where was the factory? Where was it?

PLOSKON: In South River.

LEVINE: In South River, uh-huh.

PLOSKON: And then I ended up in Sunshine Biscuit. That's where I retired from.

LEVINE: Oh! So how long did you stay in the sewing factory?

PLOSKON: How long did I stay in the sewing factory? Let's see. Well, my fifties maybe, and a couple years that I didn't work, you know, I was staying home because I had her, and then I had my son. So I was a homemaker, in other words, and I didn't go to work then.

LEVINE: I see. How did you meet your husband?

PLOSKON: How did I meet him? Oh, boy! [Laughs] I was going to a store, and there was a store across the street, and I had to walk past there to go where I was going. And he's standing in the doorway, and he said so me, "Hello." And I said, "Hello." And the guy said to him, in the store, "Who is that?" He says, "Oh, that's my girl!" And that was it.

LEVINE: [Laughs]

PLOSKON: So that was, we were about fourteen years old.

LEVINE: Really! And did you like him? Yeah, wow! So then, did you keep company with him? Was he American-born?

PLOSKON: He was born in South River.

LEVINE: But was he of Hungarian extraction?

PLOSKON: No, he was Polish.

LEVINE: Polish, okay.

PLOSKON: Yeah.

LEVINE: Mm-hm. So, you were fourteen; you didn't get married right away?

PLOSKON: No! [Laughs]

LEVINE: But you kept company until you did get married?

PLOSKON: No, on and off, you know, like we were younger, so I said you didn't bother that much. But I says, you know, then we started going steady, and that was it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what was hour husband's name?

PLOSKON: John.

LEVINE: John, okay, John Ploskon?

PLOSKON: Right.

LEVINE: Okay, and then you stopped working, and you had your two children?

PLOSKON: I had her, and I went back to work, because he used to work on construction, and it was slow. So you know, like, I had to go back to work, to help out. And then I said to him, you know, I says, "Well," I says, we wanted to have another baby, so I says, "You know, that means I'm going to stay home." So then I stayed home for a while. Then my son went to the service, and that's when I went to work. So—

END OF SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

PLOSKON: --Sunshine Biscuit, and you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay, well now, do you remember the great Depression, and how did that--?

PLOSKON: Definitely!

LEVINE: How did that affect you?

PLOSKON: Oh, that was bad!

LEVINE: How did it affect you and your family?

PLOSKON: Well, I mean, everybody had to pinch a penny. I mean, how you going to be able to spend it, you know? I mean, you had a piece of bread, you were lucky. You had a little butter to put on the bread, you were lucky.

LEVINE: Mm.

PLOSKON: That's how that affected us.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

PLOSKON: And then when you had the ration stamps, right? You couldn't get anything unless you had that stamp book, you know, that took a coupon out for a dozen eggs, or a loaf of bread. Or you wanted to get a pair of shoes or something, you had to have that for all that. So that was a bad time, a very bad time, for everybody.

LEVINE: Did anybody, your mother or father, ever think about going back to Hungary when times were bad?

PLOSKON: No.

LEVINE: No, uh-huh. So, do you remember the build-up of World War Two? Do you remember when, you know, it became clear that there was a war in Europe, and that maybe we'd be going into it? Do you remember that, World War Two?

PLOSKON: Well, they were talking about it, but like I said, I mean, my husband never had to go, because you know, then he was working on construction, and then, like, they were working in Camp Kilmer. You know where that is. I mean, you know, like the railroad? You know, like all the tracks and everything that they had to keep in good condition, on account of, you know, that the soldiers were traveling to Camp Kilmer, right?

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PLOSKON: And then during the war, like, he was an air raid warden around the neighborhood. You know, like, you had to have all the lights out, completely. It had to be dark all over. So during the night, I mean, that's what he was doing during the war. You know, like, he did that in our neighborhood.

LEVINE: I see. But your son--he went into the service?

PLOSKON: My son, he was in the Marines for four years.

LEVINE: Wow! Now, what is his name?

PLOSKON: John.

LEVINE: John. Okay, and so he went into the Marines. And then did he see action? Did he go--?

PLOSKON: He was in Vietnam.

LEVINE: In Vietnam? Oh, okay, so World War Two, no, but Vietnam is where he went?

PLOSKON: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PLOSKON: So he was there.

LEVINE: Okay, okay. So, let's see. Sunshine Biscuit—how long did you work there?

PLOSKON: Fifteen and a half years.

LEVINE: Oh! And did you like--?

PLOSKON: Steady second. [Laughs] Steady second shift!

LEVINE: Steady second, uh-huh.

PLOSKON: I liked it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PLOSKON: Yeah, I liked it. Going from a sewing factory to go work in there, it was altogether different.

LEVINE: What was different?

PLOSKON: Well, I mean, you're working with the cookies, right?

LEVINE: Yeah.

PLOSKON: So that made a big difference. And the job that I had, I mean, the cookies were coming through the ice, you know, like a big, long ice tunnel. And I had to catch it in a tray, and I had to make sure, pile it high. And then the girls would get it from me, and then they'd put the wrappers over it, and packed in.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah. So was there like a union involved? Were you a part of a union at all?

PLOSKON: Yeah. That's the Bakery Local.

LEVINE: Oh, Bakery Local! [Laughs]

PLOSKON: Yeah, Bakery Local.

LEVINE: Did you ever have any problems? Did you ever strike? Did you ever--?

PLOSKON: No.

LEVINE: No, no. You felt like you were being treated well?

PLOSKON: Well, yes, all the while.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, okay.

PLOSKON: All the while.

LEVINE: Yeah, okay. So, okay, so then you retired. And then what did you do?

PLOSKON: What did we do? We used to go to Vegas a lot, and we'd go to Atlantic City a lot. So, that was it. And then my husband started feeling, you know, like slowing down. So I said that was the end of Atlantic City.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

PLOSKON: And then like I said, I live alone.

LEVINE: You live alone. So what are you looking forward to now?

PLOSKON: Enjoying my family as much as I've got them.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And when you think about being Hungarian, and being American, how do you put that together in your own way?

PLOSKON: You know, put it this way: I mean, certain things I think of, I think of it in Hungarian.

LEVINE: Oh!

PLOSKON: Prayers that I learned from my mother, all different little prayers in Hungarian. When I'm going to bed at night, I always say those little prayers in Hungarian.

LEVINE: Oh! Could you say a prayer in Hungarian for the tape? Could you say one now?

PLOSKON: Yeah. You want me to?

LEVINE: Yeah.

PLOSKON: [Hungarian]

LEVINE: Ah. Do you know what that would translate to?

PLOSKON: That was "Our Father."

LEVINE: Oh!

PLOSKON: The Lord's Prayer, "Our Father."

LEVINE: Mm-hm. So you pray in Hungarian before you go to bed, sleep? And do you dream in Hungarian, or do you dream in English? [Laughs]

PLOSKON: That depends. That depends! [Laughs] That depends.

LEVINE: You've done both?

PLOSKON: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

PLOSKON: And you know, it was so funny. Sunday afternoon, I didn't have anything to do. I'm sitting in the backyard, you know, and I'm thinking of the whole neighborhood, you know, that who lived where, how many children were in their family. That was in the neighborhood where I live right now. And then I thought back to when we came from Europe, that who are

neighbors were, how many children they had, what their names were—all that. And my son came over, and I said to him, “You know what I was just doing?” He says, “What?” I said, “I was sitting out there, reminiscing,” I says, “All about those days in the Hungarian section, and all about the days I live over here, that how many people lived, you know, that I knew of.” And then I says, “All the children in the families,” and I says, “To remember all their names and everything!”

LEVINE: Wow! When you think of that first phase, when you were, before, when all those families that you remembered—how do you feel about that time, now? When you were first here, and other people were also here?

PLOSKON: You know, in a way I felt happy, but then I felt sad, because a lot of those people that I knew died.

LEVINE: Mm-hm. And your husband, when he did die, you had been married how many years?

PLOSKON: Sixty-six years. I was in the hospital. I said to the doctor, I said, “Nobody’s going to take him from me.” But they took him.

LEVINE: Well, hopefully he’s at peace, huh? Yeah. Okay, well, when you think back, of coming here, as a six year old, do you think that had any influence on your personality? Do you think the fact that you had come from someplace else, and settled in a new place—do you think that made a difference on how you did things, thought about things, approached things? Do you think it mattered?

PLOSKON: Well, I’m going to tell you one thing. I mean, my opinion about everybody: there’s something good in everybody. That’s how I always felt. That’s how I always felt! I don’t think I ever hurt anybody, intentionally, that I know of—never in my life, that I could remember, that I ever hurt anybody intentionally.

LEVINE: Hm. Can you remember any things that your mother or your father tried to teach you? In other words, things they wanted to instill in you, that you would know, and you would act by? Can you think of any lessons they tried to teach you?

PLOSKON: Well, we were born, you know, like I mean, in a poor family, and we were brought up strict. So, I mean—

LEVINE: Strict in what way? What was strict? What were they strict about?

PLOSKON: You’re not supposed to do this, or you’re not supposed to do that, because it’s wrong.

LEVINE: Mm-hm. Were they both religious? Mm-hm. Are there any things that you learned from your mother and father that you tried to pass on to your own children?

PLOSKON: Love.

LEVINE: Ah!

PLOSKON: Love!

LEVINE: That's a big one!

PLOSKON: And we have love. In our family there's an awful lot of love.

LEVINE: Mm-hm.

PLOSKON: Because if it wasn't for them, I mean, I wouldn't be sitting here.

LEVINE: And you said you wanted to come back here?

PLOSKON: Yes.

LEVINE: Why did you want to come back?

PLOSKON: I had to come. This place was drawing me. It was drawing me to come here, because that's the first place I ever came to the United States. And God bless America, that's all I go to say. The way people could travel today, and the way all those people traveled at the time when we came over here—there's no comparison! No comparison!

LEVINE: When you say the way they travel, you mean by airplane? Are you thinking the way they travel today--?

PLOSKON: No, that's what I'm saying. I said, it's so easy for people to do everything! And look at those people, how they had to struggle to earn that dollar! I mean, to be able to do what they did, right?

LEVINE: Mm-hm. So before your mother and father died, do you think they were comfortable? Had they managed to work and to make a comfortable life here?

PLOSKON: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah, okay. And how about your sister?

PLOSKON: Well, I mean, she had a decent life, too. I mean, you know, but in the end, I mean, she died, and I was left by myself. I mean that, you know, that I had my family already.

LEVINE: Yeah, right. Did you ever visit? Did you ever go back?

PLOSKON: No.

LEVINE: No. Did you ever want to?

PLOSKON: I have relatives out in Budapest, Hungary, that I remember. But I mean, you know, like everything that was going on, I mean, I never heard from them anymore. So, that was it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah.

PLOSKON: And I liked my husband, because he came from a big family, and I had only, you know, one sister. And I said this way I got into a big family, a big happy family. So I said, all the holidays were so special all the time.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what do you feel proud of? What makes you satisfied, that you've done in your life?

PLOSKON: These!

LEVINE: [Laughs]

PLOSKON: Them.

LEVINE: They're you're jewels, huh? Uh-huh.

PLOSKON: That's the best part of my life.

LEVINE: Your children, yeah.

PLOSKON: Because I only was, you know, like, I only had the one sister. I said, this say, God bless them, I have one son and one daughter, and all the grandchildren. I said, I couldn't be happier!

LEVINE: Yeah. So how many grandchildren?

PLOSKON: Seven, and five great-grandchildren. So I accomplished something in my life.

LEVINE: Yes, you did! Yes, you did, uh-huh.

PLOSKON: And my husband used to love all those children, all the grandchildren. I mean, "Grandpa! Grandpa!" all the time, "Grandpa!"

LEVINE: Uh-huh, great. Okay, well, is there anything else you can think of, that we might not have covered, that has to do with your coming here, and you know, growing up, and getting married, and living your life, having your children? Anything else you can think of that we maybe haven't touched?

PLOSKON: I don't know. Maybe I could think of something. I mean, mention something.

LEVINE: Well, is there anything about, did you keep up with Hungarian, either groups, or customs, or--?

PLOSKON: Yeah, yeah. And then when I got married, and my husband was Polish, then I mean, you know, like with his family and everything. So I says, it was, you know, our family was different, and his family was different. But it was a happy, you know, happy occasion all over.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, let's see if your daughter Marge wants to throw something into this interview. Is there anything, Marge, that you would like to either comment on, that's been said, or anything you'd like to bring up?

HELENKO: Well, one thing I was very surprised at is when we looked up the boat she came over on, which was the Olympic, and that's the sister ship of the Titanic, her mother, her sister, and her, were number twenty-five, twenty-six, and twenty-seven on that boat. With all the hundreds and hundreds of people on there, they were one of the first ones to get on, and that really shocked me. And the fact that we could trace all the way back to the exact day they came here.

LEVINE: Mm-hm.

HELENKO: Ellis Island is really a treasure. It's really a treasure. And I'm glad she's here!

LEVINE: Yeah! [Laughs] Well, I am, too!

HELENKO: [Laughs]

LEVINE: We all are!

PLOSKON: I was going to say, and there was a minister when I was small, in Hungary, and they didn't have any children, and they wanted to adopt me in the worst way!

LEVINE: Oh, when you were--?

PLOSKON: When we were in Europe, and my father was here. And the minister, they didn't have any children, and they wanted to adopt me.

LEVINE: Yeah.

PLOSKON: And my mother said no way was she giving me up!

LEVINE: Aw. Can you describe yourself as a six year old? How would you describe the little girl who came here, through Ellis Island, when she was six, practically seven? What kind of a description would you give to yourself when you were coming in here?

PLOSKON: I was happy that we came. That's one thing I was, happy that we came here.

LEVINE: Yeah. Were you a shy little girl? Were you an outgoing little girl?

PLOSKON: Well, I was quiet, but I mean that, you know, I mean, everything changes, right?

LEVINE: [Laughs]

PLOSKON: [Laughs] And it changed for the better!

LEVINE: Uh-huh, okay. All right, well, I think maybe we've covered everything. And I want to thank you for a very nice interview.

PLOSKON: I hope it was, you know, worthwhile.

LEVINE: It was certainly worthwhile. I'm so glad that you came to visit Ellis Island, and that I got a chance to interview you!

PLOSKON: I couldn't wait, I'm telling you! I couldn't wait to come. But like I said, I mentioned that when my husband was able to get around yet, you know, and I said to her, she said, "There's a lot of walking, Mom." So I says, you know, I guess, my husband said that he wouldn't be able to do all the walking. So I says okay. So then now it came that when my grandson mentioned, he said, "Grandmom," he said to me, the week before last. He said, "Grandmom, next Tuesday, I'm marking it on your calendar, we're going to Ellis Island." I said okay, and that was it.

LEVINE: So you have two grandsons with you?

PLOSKON: Yeah, those two boys.

LEVINE: Yeah, what are their names?

PLOSKON: Yeah.

LEVINE: What are their names?

PLOSKON: J.P., we call him, John Patrick, and then the other one is Jimmy, yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I want to thank you again.

PLOSKON: Okay.

LEVINE: And we're going to close off here. And I'm speaking with Margit—who is called Margaret, right?—Ploskon, who came here as a six year old, in 1921, on April 13th. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm closing off.

END OF INTERVIEW