

EI-142

CZESLAWA PALENSKA LUTZ

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Oral Historian's Note: Mrs. Lutz's birthday is incorreccted stated as 1897 at the beginning of the interview. The correct year is 1898. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of the Oral History Project, 8/2/1993.

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Tuesday, April 28th, 1992. I'm here in the Greenpoint section of Brooklyn at 64 Diamond Street with Czeslawa Lutz, who came from Poland on July 7, 1914 when she was either sixteen or seventeen years old. Good afternoon, Mrs. Lutz.

LUTZ: Good afternoon.

SIGRIST: Could we start by you telling me what your name was in Poland.

LUTZ: Czeslawa Palenska Aleke.

SIGRIST: Could you spell that last name?

LUTZ: Aleke.

SIGRIST: Could you spell it, please?

LUTZ: No.

SIGRIST: Okay, well, we'll look it up later. And what is your birth date?

LUTZ: 24 April.

SIGRIST: And the year?

LUTZ: I tell you . . .

SIGRIST: 1897.

LUTZ: '97.

SIGRIST: And what town were you born in?

LUTZ: I don't know about that. Oh, I don't know, sweetheart.

SIGRIST: That's okay. Do you remember as a girl what the town looked like that you were born in?

LUTZ: The town was a very nice town, very nice, Poland. We don't have so much things like we have now. And my father have a big farm, and I said three, I have three

brothers and two sisters. And when I was that age I asked my aunt I want to come to this country, and she send me, invited. That cost you only fifty dollars at that time. And I come over here, and since that I'm always here. I love America.

SIGRIST: Let's talk about your father's farm. Did you guys have animals?

LUTZ: Yeah, we had everything.

SIGRIST: What kind of animals did you have?

LUTZ: We had cows, pigs, dogs, lots of horses, all that. A big farm.

SIGRIST: What were your chores on the farm?

LUTZ: I never worked much over there. I was young. I want to watch the children and my sister. I never know how they work on the farm. My mother was so good, she said, "Leave her, leave her. She's going to work a lot when she go another way." You know, mother. I was about ninety pounds. I was very tiny, yeah.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

LUTZ: Named Joseph Palenska. Joseph.

SIGRIST: And what did he look like?

LUTZ: Well, he looks, I looked like my mother. I was only eight years old when my

father died.

SIGRIST: What did he die of?

LUTZ: He catch cold. He fell in the water at wintertime, and he's sick, and leave small children, and he die. He was very good father. I remember he always take us on a lap and sing for us. Because all the children die. My mother have twelve children, only five left. And he was very good to us. That's what I want to remember. Only my sister, not so good to us. She got everything after my father died. She was very mean. That's why I ask my aunt send me money, and she bring me here.

SIGRIST: So who was living in the house after your father dies, your mother and your sisters?

LUTZ: My mother and my three brothers and sister, she was married.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

LUTZ: Francis.

SIGRIST: And what was her maiden name?

LUTZ: My name?

SIGRIST: Your mother's maiden name?

LUTZ: I don't know, I tell you the truth. I know she's Francis, my mother, and my father was Joseph.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's temperament like? What was her personality like?

LUTZ: My mother was a very nice lady, very good religion woman. I love her. She's very nice.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things did she have to do around the farm?

LUTZ: Very, you know, in Poland you have to work very hard. Used to they make the, they have, like wheel, they make the linel, they work very hard. Now it's not like this. Now it's different. Years ago people worked very hard.

LUTZ: Did your mother do the cooking in the house?

LUTZ: Oh, yeah. She do the cooking, baking, all time.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things did she make? What did you eat?

LUTZ: Bread, you know, they make such a big, big rye bread, and lots of linel, make the oil, linel, all the oil. Like this.

SIGRIST: What kind of oil?

LUTZ: Linel.

SIGRIST: Linel. I don't know what kind of oil that is.

LUTZ: You don't know, huh?

SIGRIST: Is that something, is that a Polish . . .

LUTZ: Very good, yeah. Very good oil.

SIGRIST: What did your house look like?

LUTZ: Not such a fancy house. Used to they don't have such a nice, big house, big stove, and you have to go outside and get the water. You don't have the water in the house. Now the people have it different altogether.

SIGRIST: How did you heat the house?

LUTZ: How do they keep the house?

SIGRIST: How did they keep the house warm?

LUTZ: They keep they warm, they have a big stove. They would put lots of wood all the time, warm, wintertime. They baked the bread and store for lunch, big stove. You can, I can tell you, explain, you know.

SIGRIST: Did, how many rooms did you have?

LUTZ: Oh, we had about four or five. My father would say that we had two houses. We have plenty. Some people have one room, we have lots of room because my father always building, he wants the children to have it. I remember he used to say, "My children will never go to another side, look for bread. I have lots of bread." After he die, everything changed.

SIGRIST: How did things change after he died?

LUTZ: Well, because my sister take everything, and she was not so good to us no more. She take, you have a thirty-five, they call it, grand lin, that's a lot. She have everything, and give us only three hundred dollars each, that's all.

SIGRIST: Why did she end up with everything?

LUTZ: I don't know, because my father die and my mother think she's so good, and she do it, but she was only one married, and she make big mistake, my mother.

SIGRIST: What happened to all the animals on the farm?

LUTZ: Well, they were, my sister take it. My father always buy more, and after my sister married they always sell the thing, always sell the thing. Now I still got a letter, I wrote my people in Warsaw. Last year one, my little nephew here, he was working, now he's teaching. And I got his wife, a teacher in Poland. Maybe you read, in Warsaw. Yeah, it's a nice place.

SIGRIST: How were things difficult for your mother after your father died?

LUTZ: Oh, she was feel terrible.

SIGRIST: Did she have to go to work?

LUTZ: No, she worked around the house, helped the daughter. That's why she was still feel bad that I have to come here.

SIGRIST: You said your sister was living with you and she was married, so she was, her husband was . . .

LUTZ: She was married. Yeah, she inherited everything. He was in America too, once, and she have everything, my sister.

SIGRIST: Let me ask you the names of your brothers and your sister.

LUTZ: My brothers all die already.

SIGRIST: Right, but what were their names?

LUTZ: One Edward name, one name Joseph, one name Alexander, and my sister name Mary.

SIGRIST: What was Mary.

LUTZ: And my name. They all die, my brothers and my sister. I'm only one from the family. I'm the strongest one. I don't know. God don't want to take me, I guess.

SIGRIST: Let me talk to you about religious life in Poland. What religion were you?

LUTZ: Catholic, very good Catholic.

SIGRIST: Was there a church in this town?

LUTZ: Oh, yeah. We have a school, we have a nice church.

SIGRIST: What do you remember the most about that church?

LUTZ: I remember that church was awful nice church, very nice. I liked that so much. Only they're old-fashioned. That church was about three hundred years since they got that church, make all bricks. I still remember that church. Yeah, you know, what you call that thing where the priests wear in the church?

SIGRIST: Like a robe?

LUTZ: Yeah. My, I just sent one to Poland. Somebody buy for my son Eddie when he died, and I sent it off with her.

SIGRIST: I see. When you were a little girl in Poland was your family a religious family?

LUTZ: Very religious.

SIGRIST: What did you do? Did you go to church every day?

LUTZ: No, no every day. When we were small we go to church like you go to catechism, you go to school. And after you go every Sunday like here, you know. Some people go every day, and some people don't. I'm very religious. I don't go every day because my legs hurt. I go on Sundays.

SIGRIST: And in Poland you didn't go every day.

LUTZ: No, no. I was young. No, I don't go every day, no.

SIGRIST: Can you explain to me in Poland what maybe Christmas was like for you?

LUTZ: Oh, Christmas was beautiful, just like here. They make Christmas tree. They don't have such a nice thing. They make from paper, they hang the apple on the Christmas tree, the walnuts. They always got Christmas tree. Very good holiday. Nobody do anything, just pray and then sit and eat. Here, you know, people don't care.

SIGRIST: Did you have a dinner, a Christmas dinner?

LUTZ: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Now, who would have cooked that.

LUTZ: Mother always cooked.

SIGRIST: And what kinds of food would she have made?

LUTZ: Ah, they have everything. You know, different cook, like here. They got potatoes, they got meat. They have plenty of meat, they got eggs, they got milk, cheese, because you got your own over there. We don't have to buy there. Only we don't have like oranges, they don't have in Poland. Now they got plenty. Before they don't have any.

SIGRIST: Did your father also grow vegetables on this farm?

LUTZ: Mmm. We had vegetables, a lot of vegetables. We had lots of trees, apples and pears, plums. Yeah, I remember that.

SIGRIST: Did your mother put up food for the winter?

LUTZ: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What, what did she put up?

LUTZ: They don't make so good like they make now. They make dry everything. I remember, the pears they make dry and the prunes they make dry. They don't make so good. Now they're smarter. They make everything now.

SIGRIST: And where did she store the dried fruit?

LUTZ: They have a special room. They got it, like closets, you know, in the basement, and she put over there. Some people got it, some people don't have anything. Just like here. The same thing.

SIGRIST: It sounds like you were really quite comfortable, actually.

LUTZ: Yeah. And over there now it's much better. It used to have been not so good. The war come, you know, after the war, everything going now.

SIGRIST: Well, let's talk about World War, well, of course, you were here already.

LUTZ: I just come in here. My friends don't come no more. My friend was supposed to come and she never come because they don't let them come. I don't even hear one letter from my family. I never see my mother no more. I was in Poland 1960. I was there. And everything was so different, I can't believe it. I would say, I say, "Let's have (?)." I can't believe it. Everything changed.

SIGRIST: Did you go to school in Poland?

LUTZ: Yes, I go to school. Not much.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me what that was like, going to school?

LUTZ: Well, in school, funny over there. It's a lot of children who have a lot of things

they take into school. The poor did not have a room for kids. Not like here, you know, you always go to school. I only go a little bit to school.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things did you learn?

LUTZ: Well, I used to know Russian and Polish because they don't let us learn lots of Russian. Only three days Russian, only two days Polish. Now it's different, altogether different. I don't like how it was before.

SIGRIST: Was the school one big building, or . . .

LUTZ: Not a big building. Nice, new school.

SIGRIST: And were all the kids in one room?

LUTZ: In one, yeah. Well, they have different classes, like here.

SIGRIST: Do you remember your teachers?

LUTZ: Well, I don't, a nice teacher I have. He used to tell me when I go to this country I should write to him. I didn't know how to write letters. I had to learn myself here, because . . .

SIGRIST: What did you know about America when you were in Poland?

LUTZ: Everybody wants to come to America. I don't know everybody. That's why I

always say, "Ooh, I wish I can go." And I just wrote a letter my aunt, she's my godmother and my mother's sister, she said. She right away send me money. It only cost you fifty dollars before, that's all. Now it costs you a lot of money to come here.

SIGRIST: In Poland did you have other family members who lived nearby?

LUTZ: Oh, I got lots of family, only I can't remember. I got grandma, I got aunts.

SIGRIST: Let's talk about your grandparents. Whose side of the family, did you have grandparents from both sides of the family?

LUTZ: Yeah. I only remember my mother, my mother grandma.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about her?

LUTZ: Well, I don't remember it so good, no, because she die while I was young. I never remember much, I tell you the truth. It's too long already. I'm this quiet, I was thinking sometimes. Only it's too long.

SIGRIST: It's been a long time.

LUTZ: Yeah, it's a very long time.

SIGRIST: Were both your parents from this town?

LUTZ: The same town, the same town, my parents, from Poland.

SIGRIST: Do you know how they met?

LUTZ: I don't know, only my mother was very, my aunt tell me, because I always talk to my aunt, and my aunt say my mother married for the man. He was about thirty-five, she was only nineteen. She was very pretty, and he was rich and she was poor. And in Poland they don't care how you look as long as you have lots of money, they like you. I'm not talking about the love, only the money. And they get along nice. She got twelve children and only five left.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, when your father died, do you remember was there a service for him in the house, or was there one in the church?

LUTZ: In the house. In Poland used to be three days you lay in the house. Here you lay in the undertaker, and after take you to church and bury. And I remember my brother only one year old when my father died. We were all small children.

SIGRIST: Tell me, talk a little bit about your aunt, who's already in America. When did she come to America, do you know?

LUTZ: I don't know. I never can tell you about that. She was here a long time. She was an old maid. She was about forty years old. She worked in a place. And our other aunt married and she got the house, and she stayed in Brooklyn, then I come to her house.

SIGRIST: Was she working in America, this aunt? Did she have a job?

LUTZ: She was always working. She working in a place where the rich people is.

SIGRIST: Doing domestic work?

LUTZ: Home work, home work.

SIGRIST: I see. But let's get you to America. Let's talk about, you said your aunt was writing to you and wanted you to come?

LUTZ: Who?

SIGRIST: Your aunt.

LUTZ: I ask her, I ask her.

SIGRIST: Why did you want to come?

LUTZ: Because I thought America was too beautiful, and it is beautiful, and you get nothing for nothing. And I come over to America and I stare on the sidewalk and I look around like this because before people don't have it so nice, they have black sand, black stove, and they was washing outside, and I thought, "That's Poland." I said to my aunt, "This is America?" She say, "Sure, what do you think? Dollars growing on the trees?" she say. I can't believe it. It was different, altogether different. Now it's

America.

SIGRIST: You had a whole different idea about America.

LUTZ: All different, all different, yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, so how did your mother feel about you leaving?

LUTZ: Well, she cry, and I cry. We feel bad. All the neighbor come, two people, and my mother said, "Take care of my daughter." And I take care of the people, because older lady very sick on the ship, and I was not sick. They went eight days take to come here, that's all.

SIGRIST: In Poland, when you were going to say goodbye to your mother, did she give you a little dinner or a party or something like that?

LUTZ: No, nothing, no. She only give me a cross, you know, to wear, a cross.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you packed, what you took with you?

LUTZ: No, a little bag or something, a very little bag I take. A little basket, I remember, and I got a few underclothes. And I bring (she laughs) a big piece of cheese for my aunt because she wanted, that's all. I didn't bring nothing. Only I was very happy, when we come and see Liberty, everybody clapped their hands and said, "That's America. This is Liberty."

SIGRIST: Do you, what port did you leave from? Do you remember?

LUTZ: Antwerp, I think.

SIGRIST: You left from Antwerp?

LUTZ: Yeah.

SIGRIST: How did you get from Poland to Antwerp?

LUTZ: A train. You have the train come to Germany. And I was first time in my life on a train.

SIGRIST: What did that feel like?

LUTZ: Ah, it feel funny. I feel happy because I was first time on a train, first time on a ship. Never been sick. I buy oranges all the time, and I put a nickel. I thought a dime it's too little, then I give a nickel. I thought that's the bigger. The man say, "That's the little one." And I never forget, I buy a banana. I never see that in Poland. And I look like this, and I look. I said, "Gee, I want to know how you eat that." And somebody crossed, "Do like this." And tell me open. I never liked banana, and I never like it now. I eat sometime because it's good for you.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the boat?

LUTZ: The boat?

SIGRIST: What was the name of the boat? Do you remember?

LUTZ: I never remember. Wood, big boat, a very good boat. I used to remember. Now I forget it, the name. Very good boat. Only eight days, take.

SIGRIST: Now, were you traveling alone?

LUTZ: No. I traveled, some neighbors come.

SIGRIST: Who were the neighbors?

LUTZ: They lived by, near us. And my Mama say, "Take care of my daughter." And the people, the woman so sick on the ship, I take care of her. She was very, you know, lots of people very sick on the sea water.

SIGRIST: Were you sick?

LUTZ: No. Never been sick.

SIGRIST: So tell me a little bit about the boat ride. What did that feel like?

LUTZ: It was nice. Then when it goes like this you have to be strong. (she gestures)
You put your plate on the table, it's just going, plate, like this. You'd be surprised how that ship's going like that. It was a good ship, only you're afraid. Just everybody on the

ship. You just sit and wait.

SIGRIST: Now, when you were on your way to Antwerp on the train, did you feel the unrest that's going on in Europe at this time? Were things very tense? Because the war was just about to start.

LUTZ: No.

SIGRIST: It never affected you.

LUTZ: No, nobody.

SIGRIST: Well, what else was there to do on the boat?

LUTZ: Nothing. They had a play, some kind of games they play, and some people look in, like they have radio they play. And just sit and wait, and wait. One help to another one, lots of people. Very lots of people sick on the boat.

SIGRIST: Did they feed you on the boat?

LUTZ: They give you good stuff to eat, sure.

SIGRIST: Where did you eat?

LUTZ: They have a dining room. Oh, yeah, they have a big room. Only I don't like that cook. I hardly never eat it. Everything cook on a steam, you know. You have to used

to it. That's why I buy that oranges and bananas, because I don't like it. When you eat you get sick.

SIGRIST: Can you describe where you slept on the boat?

LUTZ: I had a nice bed, yeah. I have a nice bed. About three, two, three people on a room. Everybody have a small bed. It was nice on the ship, very nice.

SIGRIST: Were there lots of other immigrants, people from different countries, on the boat with you?

LUTZ: All kinds of people. You always stay with your group, you know. All kinds of people I see, all kinds of people. I was afraid of black people because I never see that people in Poland. I was afraid when I seen them. They were just as good as we are.

SIGRIST: Did, because of the war beginning in Europe, did you have safety drills or anything like that on the boat?

LUTZ: No, they have something. They tell us, only I forget how it looks like, they explain us anything happen, they have some kind of (?), only nobody put it because boat was very good, very good. My friend come, take about three weeks to come. Only I never have a letter from Poland no more because the war stopped it. I was lucky. Last ship.

SIGRIST: So the woman that you're traveling with, she's sick the whole trip.

LUTZ: The whole travel. I don't see her, we're supposed to write to another one. We go, and she go a different way, I go a different way, I never see the people no more.

SIGRIST: How long was the trip?

LUTZ: Eh?

SIGRIST: How long was the trip?

LUTZ: Only eight days. Only eight days. That's all.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

LUTZ: Oh, boy, we was happy when we see that. Everybody clap their hands, I tell you. We say, "We're in America, we're in America." Oh, yes. Over there I don't like it because it looks like jail when we come in. Big fence, big yard, and only a few benches people stay. And I just can't remember I stay overnight, I come in the morning. Because they only have a small bed and spring, no pillows, no mattress, nothing, on that island here.

SIGRIST: This is at Ellis Island.

LUTZ: Yeah.

SIGRIST: How come you had to stay overnight at Ellis Island?

LUTZ: I'm just thinking about it because, see, maybe we come night time. They don't let me go until my aunt come over pick me up, you know. And I was staying and begging and then I see when she come over, and I started crying. She said, "Don't cry, I take you right out." And I remember she had to show the bankbook and I thought maybe she send me to school, and she don't send me to school.

SIGRIST: What did Ellis Island look like to you?

LUTZ: Eh?

SIGRIST: What did Ellis Island look like?

LUTZ: It looked terrible, like jail. Terrible. It looked dark, and big thing, and a yard and terrible, just like jail. Don't look nice at all.

SIGRIST: Was it crowded?

LUTZ: It was quite a lot of people. We were all in the corners, people sit on the benches, yeah. And I know they give us either breakfast or lunch, I don't know what it is. I remember I take piece of bread and I wrap it, and I say maybe tomorrow they won't give us nothing to eat, then we have that piece of bread. And my aunt come and pick me up.

SIGRIST: Did, your neighbor that you were traveling with, did she ever get better? Was she with you at Ellis Island?

LUTZ: She got a husband. Her husband take care of her after. Only in the daytime I help her. She go in different directions. She go in some place, different place. I come here to New York and she goes different ways. And she give me address, only I never write, never know where she's going.

SIGRIST: The aunt who came to meet you, you haven't seen this woman in a long time, right?

LUTZ: Oh, I don't see her. I have her picture.

SIGRIST: So you've actually never seen her?

LUTZ: No, no. And I have, and she have my picture.

SIGRIST: Well, what did it feel like to have to go with someone you didn't . . .

LUTZ: Well, you know, I can't explain you how you feel. You know, you're so, you don't see nobody, and they know you. In 1986 I go to Poland, my brother with three boys. When I come over they were all grown up big and I'm old lady. And say, "That's my daddy." Say, "That's Joseph." And I say, "Oh, my God." I say, "I can't believe it, that's you." You know, because you change. You can't, when you live together, you're different. When you live like this, you don't think that's your family. I don't believe it that's my family, and I always feel bad because I don't see my mother. I want to see my mother so bad. And I was four weeks there going all over. I see lots of things there.

SIGRIST: So you aunt came and got you at Ellis Island.

LUTZ: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And you had stayed overnight at Ellis. Is there anything else that you remember about Ellis before we move on? Do you remember, uh, being in the area waiting for your aunt?

LUTZ: Yeah, I waited for my aunt, sure. I sit on a bench and talk to another woman, call me back twice, only they don't say right my name, and she comes. I bet you they call you. And after third time I say, "Yeah, that's me." And I grab that little basket, and I leave that piece of bread (she laughs) and I go see my aunt. That's when.

SIGRIST: Did they do any kind of examinations, uh . . .

LUTZ: Oh, you have to have a good examination.

SIGRIST: What did they do?

LUTZ: When you go on a boat, you know, they have to see your eyes, they have to see your throat and see you're all right. When you're sick they don't let you go.

SIGRIST: They did that before you got on the boat.

LUTZ: On the boat.

SIGRIST: And that was in Antwerp?

LUTZ: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And then did they do that at Ellis Island too?

LUTZ: No, no, no. Only they watched the papers, who was going to take you, and don't bother. Only on the boat, before you go on the boat.

SIGRIST: All right. So your aunt came and got you at Ellis. Where did she take you?

LUTZ: To Brooklyn, to my other aunt.

SIGRIST: Did they live together?

LUTZ: No, she, that other aunt, she got a house and children. And when she bring me here she was single, she was working out in a place, then she comes every Sunday. And I have a job right away.

SIGRIST: What job? What job?

LUTZ: They make the thread, in a factory. They make the thread. It's very easy. Big spool go, and you just put it like this, and you watch it with a trundle hook. Very easy, I have a job. I think four dollars in a week, four dollars. (she laughs) Four dollars, my

husband used to make eight dollars. Not like now.

SIGRIST: Did you live with your aunt at this time?

LUTZ: I only live with her two weeks, two weeks after.

SIGRIST: And then where did you go?

LUTZ: Well, she wants me go work in a place because she say you learn something. She doesn't want me to work in a factory. Only I don't like it. I go in one place, I come back. I go to another place, I come back. I don't like it. After I find very good people, Presbyterian people, and I work. And I marry from that people. They're just like father and mother for me.

SIGRIST: When you did this kind of work in people's houses, what kinds of things did you do?

LUTZ: Well, you have to do like you do home. Clean a little bit, cook, and wash the dishes, wash the clothes, iron. Working hard, working hard.

SIGRIST: How did you learn English?

LUTZ: Well, I have to learn because, you know, I'm not speaking such fine yet, broken a little bit, yeah. I am glad I can speak that way because my children know how to talk Polish because they go to Polish school, and my grandchildren, nobody can speak

Polish.

SIGRIST: But how did you learn English when you were a girl here in America?

LUTZ: I was just working with some lady, she was teaching, and she was always showing me the can, she always tell me how to set the table. She helped me so much, that woman. She was very good to me. I stay two years before I met, even when I'm married we stayed ten months, together, my husband and me. Lovely people.

SIGRIST: So how old were you when you got married?

LUTZ: I was eighteen years. And I was nineteen when I had my first baby.

SIGRIST: So your husband, was he Polish also?

LUTZ: Oh, he was Polish. You see the difference, he come from the Lublin. Maybe you read in the papers sometime, Lublin?

SIGRIST: Yeah, sure.

LUTZ: Big city, he come from there. I never know him over there. I see his family when I was in the Poland.

SIGRIST: So how did you meet him?

LUTZ: I just, you know, like you meet the people, going, somebody have a little party.

My husband played beautiful accordion and he plays the piano and he plays the violin. He was two years over there. And that time they have a party, and he plays the accordion, and my friend bring me there. He looking at me, and I looking at him, and he give the accordion to somebody and he ask me I go dance with him. And he says that he always make the (?), and the kids back home, first my boyfriend. I like him so much.

SIGRIST: So, let's see, what year did you get married then?

LUTZ: '18, 1918.

SIGRIST: 1918.

LUTZ: 1919 I have my first son.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about what you found different in America than where you'd been. What was the hardest to get used to?

LUTZ: Well, there was a little bit hard because you can't speak English. That's the hardest thing to be, because you try it and you don't know. Even I go to work for this lady, how I want to do something I don't know. She tell me bring wood from the cellar. I'm looking all over in the cellar that wood. I never forget it. I couldn't find it. She come down, she said, "Look." One time they wanted carrots, and I bring a baby. I thought she look for baby carriage. It's so hard, you'd be surprised. Very hard. That's why you try very, very hard to learn. And when you're young, you catch fast. Now it's a little

harder for me.

SIGRIST: You were a little bit older when you came.

LUTZ: I know, yeah.

SIGRIST: What about America did you really like that was so different, and you just loved it because it was so different.

LUTZ: At the beginning, you know, I was very lonesome for home. The beginning takes you quite long. I would say, "I'm so sorry I come." I say, "What I what is make enough money pay my aunt and I go right back." I always told my friend. I say, "I'm going right back." And after I stay a year, you different. You know the people, you know a little bit how to talk to people, and you never think about it. I thought I never stayed long. I always say I'll go right back, yeah. In your life, because you're used to people, lots of nice things here, better than over there. Now they have it good over there.

SIGRIST: Were you writing to your mother?

LUTZ: Oh, yes. Only for a whole year. With the war time, the letters don't come. I don't hear nothing, and she don't hear nothing from me.

SIGRIST: Was that difficult for you?

LUTZ: Oh, it was terrible. Oh, yes. You feel awful. You know yourself you have a

family, you have a mother. Then you know how you feel. I cry all the time for my mother. And that lady sometimes ask me, "Why you crying for?" And I don't know how to tell her, I say, "Mama, Mama." Then she know what I mean. It's hard. It takes a long time before you're used to the place.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: What about your sister and your brother-in-law? Were they still living with your mother in Poland?

LUTZ: Oh, they don't, they die a long time.

SIGRIST: But, I mean, at that time.

LUTZ: That time they lived together, yeah. They lived together, and my mother stay over there, only she don't have no good, because my sister was very mean to us. No. And my brother, my sister's husband, he was better than she is. She got everything. We don't have nothing.

SIGRIST: Did any of your brothers come to America?

LUTZ: Oh, my brother was here, he died about ten years ago. My brother, he left a little niece here. Two nephews, two nieces.

SIGRIST: But when you were, those first few years, you know, 1918, when you were first married, did your brother come over?

LUTZ: Yeah, I have a brother here. When he was too far some place, I was one year here till he come. He was in Chicago or some place. I was here already and he come over. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Talk to me about religious life here in America. What, did you become more religious when you came to America, or less religious?

LUTZ: No, same. I always keep the same like my mother learn me. And my children, too.

SIGRIST: Did you work for Catholic families? No, you said you worked for Presbyterian.

LUTZ: They were awful good people. They let me go to church every Sunday. And they're nice people, I never met the people like this. They take me out, and they were lovely people. She tell me, what would she say? Like Catholic people don't used to eat Friday meat, now they eat. The lady always say, "You know, there won't be too (?)." You say, "You don't have to eat meat today. Take something else." Very nice. They come for my wedding, they come to the church to see me. Lovely people. Die already. They all die.

SIGRIST: Did you, did you ever feel any prejudice because you were Polish in America, or because you were an immigrant? Did you ever experience any kind of . . .

LUTZ: No, not with that. I met some people there, and I never think it, you know. I'm always proud who I am. I never think I'm afraid or something, no. No. I always think the same thing that I was all my life, I'm Polish. And my children are very good children I have.

SIGRIST: Did, in the house where you worked, the Presbyterian family's house that you were working in. Did you do any of the cooking?

LUTZ: I do it.

SIGRIST: Did they let you cook Polish things?

LUTZ: Well, they ask me sometimes. They don't, like sauerkraut and things. I don't know much about Polish cooking. I was young, my mother do it so good. I hardly don't cook. Only my friend, live across the street, woman, born here, and she learn me. She tell me how to make pie, she tell me how to make French fries, she tell me how to make muffin. And I do it so fast, and that people always give me every month dollar more. I have twelve dollars the whole month. Just to think, twelve dollars. And I learn everything fast because, you know, when you're young you do it.

SIGRIST: In those first couple of years in America, what did you do for fun? What

did you do for entertainment?

LUTZ: Well, we used to go a lot, like picnics, all the family go. You know, picnics, summertime. I used to love to go to Coney Island, take my children. I love it. And I love to dance. Oh, I was crazy about dancing and singing. I used to love it. My husband used to play, he got piano. I get along very nice. Now only I'm very lonesome, very lonesome.

SIGRIST: Let me ask you two questions. One is how do you think your life would have been different if you had stayed in Poland?

LUTZ: I don't know. I don't know. Now it's different, Poland. It's different altogether. You can't believe it that they have the nice things. Only they got hard times, because they don't have a job. You read in the paper. I have two letters this week, I got about three postcards for Easter. I always thought of my little, send him a package. My son die, I got so much clothes, I send everything to them. They need it.

SIGRIST: Let me ask you one final question. Are you glad that you came to this country?

LUTZ: I'm glad. I'm very proud. I love America. I'm citizen, and I love America. Anybody say something about it, I can break his neck. Some people come over now, you know, and they want to, and make some money. A woman make ten dollars for one hour. And they say, "Ooh, here, lots of things, such expensive things." And I say,

"You should be happy you come. You make money. Years ago we don't make no money, work for nothing." It was Depression. You was too young for Depression. You was here Depression? No. It was terrible. I lost the home, we lost the home and everything here because the Hoover was President at that time. No work. My husband not working for two years, and I have a small four children, and we have a very, very hard time.

SIGRIST: What was your husband doing at that time?

LUTZ: Well, he work in a factory. They make the razor blades, and he working, and they make material he working after a long time.

SIGRIST: And he lost his job in the thirties?

LUTZ: In Depression time.

SIGRIST: Now, were you working at that time, too.

LUTZ: I was working all the time. I worked thirty years.

SIGRIST: Doing the same . . .

LUTZ: No, I'm working in the buildings, very hard, New York. For thirty years I'm working, all my life, because I have to help raise the family. And we lost the house. I owed the people money. I have to work and give it back to the woman.

SIGRIST: Yeah, those were dark days.

LUTZ: Yeah, yeah. And the bank take the money because you don't pay the taxes, they take your money. People don't pay the rent, they throw the people out. I say, "I can't do it." He say, "They're going to throw you out." That's what they do it. The (?) was good, after I'm working, my son, all the son started only taking to Army. He was forty years in a big war, Leten, Guam, he was all over. Thanks God he come back.

SIGRIST: When did you become a citizen?

LUTZ: Oh, that's a long time already, maybe forty years.

SIGRIST: What was that like for you, to become a citizen? Was that exciting?

LUTZ: Well, where I used to work we had to take citizen papers. I work in the Chrysler building. And you have to take citizen papers. I was so happy, yeah. It was hard because a few things ask you you know, and some things you don't know. Only they let you pass.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things do they ask you?

LUTZ: Well, they ask you which President, what that means Fourth of July, what that means all kinds of holidays, which first president, what color the flag. You know, it's easy, easy.

SIGRIST: And was that a proud moment for you, becoming a citizen?

LUTZ: No, it's not much people, no. George was very good. I told you I don't pass because it's worse for me the spelling. See, L-U-T-Z is very easy. In Czeslawa it's a little hard because I use a (?). And what's hard, I was afraid I don't pass. And after that's all right.

SIGRIST: I see. Well, Mrs. Lutz, I want to thank you very much for letting us come out here.

LUTZ: Well, I don't know. I don't think I help you much, because, you know, with all the people come over on the island, they maybe look around, maybe see more things. But you're young like this, you just sit and you want to wait to get out from there, that's all.

SIGRIST: Well, anyway, this is, I want to thank you, and this is Paul Sigrist signing off for the National Park Service with Czeslawa Lutz.