

**EI-168**

**IRVING GANZ**

**BIRTH DATE: JANUARY 3, 1913**

**INTERVIEW DATE: 6/10/1992**

**RUNNING TIME: 58:25**

**INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.**

**RECORDING ENGINEER: KEVIN DALEY**

**INTERVIEW LOCATION: ELLIS ISLAND RECORDING STUDIO**

**TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 4/1993**

**TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 5/1993**

**POLAND, 1922**

**AGE 8**

**RESIDENCES:**

- **VOLKAVISK**
- **THE US: BROOKLYN, NY, SUNSET PARK**

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here today with Irving Ganz, who came to the United States from Poland in 1922 when he was eight years old. Today is June 10, 1992, and we're here today in the Ellis Island Oral History Studio. First I want to say, "Welcome." I'm very happy that you were able to get here, and I'm able to talk with you today.

GANZ: It was quite an experience getting here. But nevertheless, and we're not going to make an issue over that because it doesn't deserve to be. But we'll do the best we can.

LEVINE: Fine. Okay. Why don't we start by you telling me your birth date?

GANZ: My birthday is artificial. I never really had a birth date. Actually, we tried to figure out the best we could, and we arrived at the conclusion that I was born January 3, 1913. This is not for the pretty ladies to know.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, so that was the best, the closest you could come to knowing.

GANZ: Exactly. This was with discussions with my aunts and my uncles living here in the States, we were able to come to that conclusion. And we adopted those dates to celebrate, because everybody in America has got to have a birthday. ( they laugh )

LEVINE: Good. Well, I'm glad you have one.

GANZ: Thank you.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, where were you born?

GANZ: I was born in Volkawisk, Poland. Volkawisk is not a one-horse town. It is rather a, to my best recollection, it is a town that had, I would estimate, maybe five thousand people, and maybe even a little less or a little more. The town where we lived, Volkawisk, was an active town. While we had our own house, or so I was lead to believe, and it faced the main thorough, one of the main thoroughfares.

LEVINE: Can you spell the name of the town, Mr. Ganz?

EI-168/GANZ

GANZ: I'll do my best. It begins with a V, Volkawisk. V-O-L-K-A-W-I-S-K.

LEVINE: Thank you. Now, do you remember the house that you lived in in Volkawisk?

GANZ: Yes. Yes, I do.

LEVINE: Can you describe it?

GANZ: It wasn't anything extraordinary. It was a plain house that you see on the farms, some of the farms. I had occasion to go to Ellenville where we had relations, Ellenville, New York, that is. And the houses there were very, very similar to what we had.

LEVINE: Could you describe it a little?

GANZ: It was, it wasn't really anything that I could describe. It was just with a door, windows and all on one floor. There were no second floors or third floors. It was all one floor. And for us it was more than adequate.

LEVINE: How many rooms? Do you remember?

GANZ: They weren't separated into rooms. We never got around, or my parents, may they rest in peace, never got around to separating them. How we came to it, I'll never know. Because as we go along you'll know the reasons why.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, who was living in the house with you?

GANZ: In the house it was my father and my mother, may they both rest in peace,

and my brother and myself.

LEVINE: Now what was your mother's name and her maiden name?

GANZ: My mother's name was Hanna Henda, which translated would be Hanna, maybe Hannah. And Henda would be just something out of the storybook. No doubt it is a name that was given to her from relatives that had long passed. My father was a young man. He was, I don't remember. I don't recall much of him.

LEVINE: What do you remember about him?

GANZ: Well, he was, I can show you a picture of him. He had a beard, a short beard. He wasn't very tall, and he wasn't heavy stock. He was on the average I would say maybe five feet nine inches or five feet ten inches tall, and slim. So to some extent I sort of leaned towards his side.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember any experiences with your father?

GANZ: No, no. My father was very busy. He went off to the wars. He volunteered when the First World War broke he volunteered in spite of the fact that he wasn't really called up and there was no need for him to leave us. There was just my mother left with two children, and that wasn't an easy task for a woman.

LEVINE: No. What did your father do for work before he volunteered?

GANZ: I have no idea. I have no idea whether he worked at all. Because when I

was home it was another house that sort of adjoined us that, they were separated but it was only a short distance from our house. And we'd go back and forth. It was a bakery. So we'd go in, back and forth, maybe get something, a piece of cake or a piece of black bread, and to satisfy our curiosity. But actually there was, we were not, we were isolated in a sense that I did not have a childhood playing with a lot of youngsters and running with them because the town in itself was very, very anti-Semitic. So there were two sides. Us youngsters who came from the Yiddish families, and the Gentiles, who hated our guts for no reason that I can possibly venture.

LEVINE: Was the town about equally divided into Jewish people and Gentiles?

GANZ: No, no, no. But there were enough Jewish people in the immediate vicinity where we lived. But for one reason or another we never got too close with any one of them, and especially after my father left for the wars, there wasn't anybody that would take us or lead us or help us or play with us as the American child is accustomed to doing.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you felt kind of isolated as a child, you and your family.

GANZ: No question. There's no question that we were isolated. There were no happy occasions, celebrations, birthday parties and things of that nature. Especially with my father gone. And, as I say, maybe my brother would have been in a better position because he was older and he saw things in a different light. Unfortunately he couldn't be here.

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

GANZ: My father's name was Yankev Schmerl. That's Jack Schmerl. It's difficult to describe.

LEVINE: Is that Samuel?

GANZ: Yankev is Jack, and Schmerl would be Solomon, possibly.

LEVINE: Okay. And your brother's name?

GANZ: My brother's name is Louis. Louis Ganz.

LEVINE: Okay. Was your family religious at all?

GANZ: No. No, not that I can recall, although across the street from us there was a small synagogue.

LEVINE: Did you attend it?

GANZ: Well, I attended in very short occasions. Not too often. The one time that I attended the synagogue, and this was in the late at night, very late at night, to be told that my mother had passed away. So the people, the elders came running to the house and they took us by the hand, they took my brother and myself by the hand, and led us into the synagogue.

LEVINE: And how old were you at that time?

GANZ: I would say, maybe six years old, possibly a little older or a little younger.

LEVINE: And had your mother been ill before that?

GANZ: No. My mother was not ill at all. It just so happens that my father had left for the army, and she tried to keep the house together. Of course, an aunt of mine, may she rest in peace, had volunteered information to the effect that they wanted to cover him up. They had ways and means of keeping him out of the army, but he absolutely wouldn't hear of it. He insisted on going and serving his country. And we never heard from him once he left.

LEVINE: And how old were you when your father left?

GANZ: I was, at that point, about six years old.

LEVINE: So it was in the same year that your mother died? Your father left first and then your mother died the same year?

GANZ: She died afterwards, I would say maybe a year or two later. My mother tried to keep the family together. She ran a little restaurant. She fed people, come in for a kopek or whatever the money exchange was in those years. I don't recall. But nevertheless, she tried to keep the family together, but it just was very, very difficult.

LEVINE: Do you remember the restaurant at all? Can you describe it?

GANZ: It was a place with a house with tables, with one big table, more than anything else, and people would come in. Mostly men were attracted to the house. Women were not. Women had to stay at home and cook and clean and that was a regular rule of the household. So that from time to time, although we

were constantly, I was underway most of the time. I was under somebody's foot. Somebody would give me a little push and give me a little kick, but that wasn't so terrible. That we could tolerate.

LEVINE: Now, were you able to get along? I mean, was your mother able to support herself, your brother and you?

GANZ: She tried very hard. She tried very, very hard. But, however, as things got going there was a war. There was World War I. And, as I say, my father was off to the wars, and there wasn't anything more that we could say about it because there wasn't any mail, there wasn't any letters, there wasn't anything at all. And then of course conscription came about, and that made things even worse. We were able to manage along for a while and Mom, may she rest in peace, tried her best to keep the household going, and especially with the soldiers passing through our streets, they had to come somewhere to grab a bite to eat. They didn't have the rigid regulations that the armies and the navies and so on have today. Today they are restricted. They can do certain things and when they have leaves, of course, it's a different situation, they can do whatever they want. But in those years they just went off and that was it.

LEVINE: What do you remember about the soldiers coming through or the war time?

GANZ: Most of them were friendly, and I don't want to go into the details because it's really not right. I'm sure they're long gone. Some of them were really rough. And when they saw an attractive woman, they would try to put their hands on. And Mom tried to avoid it as best she could, but it wasn't easy, not by any means.

LEVINE: Well, now, what happened to you and your brother after your mother died?

GANZ: Well, we had, we had an aunt and an uncle and grandparents in another town, in a small town that required maybe eight to ten hours travelling in those years by train. And my grandparents decided that that's where we had to go. We had to go live with them.

LEVINE: Had you, did your grandparents live near you?

GANZ: No, not that close. It was at least, I would say, maybe two or three hours by train. Maybe even more. I'm not quite sure. But we got there and everything worked out very well. I remember my grandparents very well.

LEVINE: Oh, good. Now, whose parents were they, your mother's or your father's?

GANZ: They were my mother's. They were my mother's parents.

LEVINE: What do you remember about them?

GANZ: My, I remember my grandfather. He was quite old.

( he laughs ) But he was a very loving man. He really was. He really was, in every sense of the word. He was a baker and they lived in a very big house, a house much larger than ours. And in the middle of the house there was a tremendous oven, brick oven, where he did all his baking. And in the winters, in the town, incidentally, the town, the name of the town, I don't, I've been looking for it on the map and I just can't find it. The town's name, as I can recall, was Shishlowitz.

LEVINE: Do you have any idea how you might spell that?

GANZ: I looked in libraries and I've tried to find the town because I thought maybe possibly I could get some clue, but I'll give it a try. S-H-I, S-H-I-S-H-L-O-W-I-T-Z. Now, the town had no automobiles, no refrigerators, no washing machines. Nothing of the sort. And the winters were very, very rough. And between the ceiling of the house and the top of the oven there was enough space for me, as a youngster, to stand up. An older person couldn't stand up. And my grandfather would take me to sleep up there with him during the cold winter months.

LEVINE: That must be a pleasant memory. Uh-huh. Yeah. And your grandmother? Do you remember her?

GANZ: Oh, yeah, yeah. ( he is moved ) Forgive me.

LEVINE: No, that's all right. Take your time.

GANZ: I'm sorry.

LEVINE: That's all right.

GANZ: I don't want to disrupt. ( he laughs ) I don't want to disrupt your plans. Nevertheless, the short time that they lived, they lived only a short time, maybe a year or two after that, after we came to them. The, that was half our house. The other part there was their son and his family. They lived there. But we had very little bearing, had very little bearing on our lives. We spent

very little time with them. They were busy with their children and they were busy with their work, whatever it might have been. So we never really got close enough to get a true picture of their life and time.

LEVINE: So you went to your . . .

GANZ: We had an aunt, a single aunt. And when my grandparents died, she had to take over, and she did. In fact, I ran into a problem. I developed a bad knee, and I could hardly walk, so my aunt had to go to the one doctor in the town. We would call it, we would refer to it as a dispensary. And you'd have to stand on line until the doctor would get to see you. And we had to come back two, three days as I recall, and she had to carry me, and I was, it's true, I was small, but I was still weight. And she stayed there in line, and stayed there, until finally one day she stayed after the hours. After the hours was finished, and she just wouldn't budge. The nurse came out and said, "I'm sorry, but we can't attend. The doctor is finished for the day." And she started to cry, and she persuaded the nurse to get the doctor to see me. So he did help me to some extent. I was able to walk again, but I wasn't able to run a lot and do a lot of the things that normally kids do. But we didn't have kids to play with anyways to begin with. We were sort of isolated.

LEVINE: Was that because there were no other children nearby, or . . .

GANZ: There were children, but we just were isolated. We were newcomers. We were looked down upon. We weren't part of the scheme. Although my grandfather was primarily concerned and interested in teaching me, in teaching me my religion and teaching me and telling me tales that took place many years ago, which may or may not have been a figment of his

imagination.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything that your grandfather tried to teach you?

GANZ: No, hardly.

LEVINE: Any ideas? Things to live by, or any kind of . . .

GANZ: The only, his main objective was to teach me the religion. He was primarily a very religious man, but a very loving and gentle man. My grandmother, as good as he was, she was even greater. ( he is moved ) She was, she watched, especially me because I was the youngest, and in spite of the fact that I had the problem with the knee, she paid all the attention to me. I was her pet. She couldn't spent enough time with me. And remember, this was a big household. This was a household that contained my grandfather, my grandmother, my aunt, my single aunt, the married couple who had either one or two children, I'm not quite sure, but they were infants.

LEVINE: Well, then, how did it get decided that you would come to America?

GANZ: My grandparents died, and that settled the issue. My aunt, my single aunt couldn't cope with two boys, and my uncle had his responsibilities with his family. And we had people here in the States. I had an aunt and uncle. My two aunts and two uncles who were married and had families. And they were sending help. That's how we managed, incidentally, to get by. I overlooked that very important fact.

LEVINE: They were sending help to your mother?

GANZ: They were sending help to my mother, may she rest in peace, and then they were also helping out their parents in the town of Shishlowitz. Consequently, there was help coming, and as long as help was coming we were able to live comfortably. Not to any access, but it was comfortably under those conditions. And when my grandmother and my grandfather died, that took everything from us. And then, of course, my aunt, who was left with the responsibility of taking care of two boys, so she started corresponding with my uncles here in the states. And it didn't take very long before the decision came through that we should go to the United States.

LEVINE: And what was this aunt like, the one that was the single one?

GANZ: She was a very nice person, but she wasn't interested in children. She had no use, especially for me. With my brother she treated him very nicely so I learned later on, but I'm not concerned of that. Because she was older, and she could reason with him. But maybe I was a little wild. Maybe I didn't have the same upbringing as my brother did. My brother was a quiet person, like he always was. He would just run about and did what he was supposed to do, and there was no talk back, and there was no arguing. I was a little bit more of a revolutionist. Is that the term? ( he laughs )

LEVINE: Do you remember any experiences with your brother in Poland?

GANZ: With my brother?

LEVINE: Yeah.

GANZ: Yes, yes. My brother loved to ride trains. He loved riding trains. And when we were still living in Volkawisk, he managed to grab me and get me to go with him. And he would think of nothing, especially when a train would slow down, to jump on the train, wherever it went, but he always found his way home. It was amazing. He got me to do it once, I think. Maybe not even that. But that was part of the story. But when we came to the States, of course, then there was a question of breaking us up. Incidentally, HIAS was responsible for, HIAS, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society was very well-known. I've been donating to them from day one. And they, I'm sure you know of them. And they were responsible for bringing over. At that time, I have a picture of it if you'd care to see it.

LEVINE: We'll look at the pictures after, okay?

GANZ: Oh, okay. When we came over we were together on a bunk, in a boat. It must have been maybe seventy-five youngsters all around our age.

LEVINE: These were youngsters that HIAS was responsible for bringing over.

GANZ: Exactly. And they did a remarkable job. They had a man in charge, but of course I was never, I never saw too much of him around, because taking care of that number of youngsters, and youngsters can be pretty tough and pretty rough to handle, but they seemed to do a very good job.

LEVINE: Now, the other children, were they in a similar situation to you and your brother, these other seventy-five . . .

GANZ: I wouldn't know a thing about them. I didn't know where I was. My brother

could have helped out tremendously, but unfortunately he's not a well person and as much as I would have liked to have him come here, he couldn't possibly manage. He doesn't recognize anyone. He's presently living with his daughter and he doesn't know me, he doesn't know anyone. He only has someone who feeds him and takes care of him and takes him for a walk.

LEVINE: I see. So you, were you, when you were with the seventy-five children coming over, were you in steerage? Were you in the bottom part of the boat?

GANZ: It might have been. I couldn't recognize it for steerage. Although it was, we had to go downstairs, there were bunks and I, if I remember correctly, my brother wanted to sleep on the top bunk and for me on the lower bunk. And I just didn't want it. So we had a little dispute. And when we'd have a little dispute, we'd each go our own way until things cooled down.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, what was the voyage like?

GANZ: Rough in some instances. It wasn't rough all the way. It was rough when we were, I would say we had gone about maybe forty percent, fifty percent of the way. Oh, no, even more, we were closer, when a storm came up. And it just so happens we were out on deck. I was on deck. My brother went his way, I went my way. And I was, I remember distinctly being on top deck and all of a sudden they were vining ropes, heavy ropes, to hold on to, because not only was it raining, but it was windy, and it looked like a storm was going to break out. And they immediately warned us to get down to our bunks, and that's what happened. The boat, of course, was rolling, and it was quite an experience in itself, but you can't really write a book about it.

( he laughs )

EI-168/GANZ

LEVINE: Was it exciting for you as a child?

GANZ: It was exciting and while to some people it's fearful, I didn't have any fear. Because I'd been through so much and saw so much and lived independently, I think I was more independent than any. Although my brother, too, was independent. He'd go away for hours on a train.

LEVINE: Let's pause right here, Mr. Ganz, so that Kevin can turn the tape over.

GANZ: Okay.

END OF SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

LEVINE: Okay. We're resuming here on side two. You were saying that you and your brother were really very independent.

GANZ: Of each other.

LEVINE: For your age.

GANZ: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: Could you talk about that a little bit, how . . .

GANZ: Well, there isn't much to say. He went his way, I went my way. And especially when we came to the States, to the United States, he went to a family where there was a newly-married, by comparison a newly-married couple who were bent on raising a family. So they took my older brother. They felt that he was more established, not established in the financial end of it, but he was more, he was easier to handle. I might have been a little bit wild. I wanted, and I guess I was a little spoiled, especially with my grandparents. They let me go and let me do, and on the other hand when my grandfather would take me up, I'm going back to . . .

LEVINE: Poland, uh-huh.

GANZ: . . . that part of it when he would take me up to the top of the stove. It was like paradise for me. The winters were rough, and I never forgot that.

LEVINE: Before we go to how you got settled in the United States, do you remember when the ship came into the New York Harbor?

GANZ: Yes. Everybody else had something to say. ( he laughs ) I'm trying to recall what was the famous term that they used, but I can't get it to come out clearly. But it seems that everybody thought, well, here we are, God Bless America. That's my words, but nobody thought to say that, but today they do. They learn that from a song, and there's no reason why it shouldn't really be that

way.

LEVINE: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

GANZ: Oh, yes. Yes, that's the lady that's washing the clothes. ( he laughs ) That was just a gag. We all knew that it represented something of America. And besides which, the famous saying aboard ship, in fact even in Europe they said, "The United States," or "America is the golden medina." Can you translate that? The golden medina. That's a golden land.

LEVINE: What had you heard about the United States before you came here?

GANZ: I didn't hear much about it because I had no communication with anyone. The only, as I say, I was independent. I didn't have any reason to mingle with the youngsters there. Or if I did maybe I was too young, or maybe they were too old. Whatever the reason, there was no. I was anxious to get to my destination. That was the major part of my life, and who was I going to. I knew there were two families, and I didn't know, I had no choice where I was going. It just so happens the one who greeted me was a cousin.

LEVINE: Did someone come to Ellis Island to meet you?

GANZ: Yes. Oh, yes, yes. Very definitely.

LEVINE: Tell me what your first impression was when you got to Ellis Island and what happened to you here.

GANZ: Nothing very much happened here, nothing very much at all. Because it's

overwhelming now. It seems that this is not the same Ellis Island that I came to.

LEVINE: What's different about it?

GANZ: It, for one thing I think it was maybe one-quarter the size of what we have today, maybe not even that much. It was an entirely different, it was something that I felt was a stopover point, that's all. I couldn't visualize the grandeur that, I just can't believe what had happened here. I had been here previously, and even then I came home, and I'm overwhelmed. And I think it's a great tribute, a tremendously great tribute, to our country, to our people.

LEVINE: Well, when you came here, do you remember the examinations and do you remember . . .

GANZ: No, there was no examination as I can recall. We landed, and the first thing, everything seemed to be in a turmoil because everybody was looking for somebody, and somebody was looking for everybody. And in the final analysis, I wound up with a young lady, and I looked at her and I said, "Ye gods, that can't be my aunt." Because we were accustomed to seeing old people for relations, and here was a young lady, I think maybe around your age, maybe a little older. But nevertheless, she took me around and I didn't know what hit me. She took me around, she hugged me. And I don't know where my brother was at this point. But he, too, at that point, was being met by a couple who were without children.

LEVINE: Now, what was your aunt's name, the one who met you?

GANZ: That wasn't an aunt. That was a cousin.

LEVINE: A cousin. What was her name, do you remember?

GANZ: Ida.

LEVINE: Ida. And so that was a cousin that you, you went to live with that cousin in that family?

GANZ: Exactly. I didn't go to live with that cousin, although we all lived together. I went to live with my uncle and my aunt.

LEVINE: And what were their names?

GANZ: My uncle was also here to meet me. My uncle and Ida. My uncle's name was Max, Max Ganz. My aunt did not come. She was taking care of the business that they were in.

LEVINE: Can you remember your first impression of Max Ganz when he came?

GANZ: Max Ganz was not a very warm individual. He did what he had to do. He never, well, I can't say never, he did lift his hand to me once, but my aunt would never permit it. My aunt became my mother. And I wasn't ready to accept her as my mother, however, somebody interceded and had a long talk with them, with me.

LEVINE: Do you want to talk about that?

EI-168/GANZ

GANZ: ( he sighs ) I feel that I should, because they had three daughters, and I was the only boy. So, of course, to them I was a big thing, a very important thing. A very important purpose, I should say. And I had a wonderful, wonderful life with them, especially my mom, my second mother.

LEVINE: And what was her name?

GANZ: Rebecca. And she was an inspiration to me.

LEVINE: In what way?

GANZ: In many ways. She gave me love. She really and truly was everything that anybody could want. ( he is moved )

LEVINE: That's wonderful.

GANZ: Well. ( clears throat ) She fought a winning battle, but she passed away too early in life.

LEVINE: How old were you when she passed away?

GANZ: Oh, now it must be anywhere from ten to fifteen years. I lived a long time with them. They were very good to me. My uncle, who I was to call my father because if I called Rebecca my mother then I have to call him my father, he was a tough man. He wasn't the most gentle kind of person. He liked his women and his liquor. He was entitled, may he rest in peace. ( he laughs ) He worked very hard. He did, he did. That's one thing, he did not neglect his family, but he didn't know how to be kind or how to be gentle, or how to be

loving. Everything that my mother, may she rest in peace, had, he didn't have. He wasn't mean. He tried to hit me, but my mother would jump in the middle. She would immediately. And, mind you, here's a woman that has three daughters, took care of a business while my father went out to work as a painter. And run . . .

LEVINE: A house painter?

GANZ: My father had, a house painter, yes. And my mother had took care of the store while he was away working.

LEVINE: What kind of store was it?

GANZ: A paint store. That's where I learned the paint business. But no matter, she would make my lunch when I'd come home from school, and she would guide me.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything she taught you?

GANZ: Everything, she taught me.

LEVINE: What kinds of lessons did she want you to learn?

GANZ: Gentleness, kindness, loving. I don't think she gave her own children, the three girls, the amount of love she gave me. It's not fair to say that, but she was a wonderful person in my life. She was an inspiration.

LEVINE: Did you start school soon after you arrived here?

GANZ: Yes. I started, I tried school. Not that I tried school. I had to be registered in school. And my mother, I referred to her now as my mother, took me, the term had already started. And we had to go to a public school in the area.

LEVINE: Where were you, by the way? Where were you living?

GANZ: Our paint store was on 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue in Brooklyn, opposite Sunset Park. ( he laughs ) And she had some pretty hectic times with me. Sometimes the kids would get rough with me. In one instance one of the kids, I was standing still and we had those showcases that used to be in the middle of the street. I don't know if it's during your time. I doubt it. But they'd have a showcase especially showing hats or small items, and it would be just a couple of feet away from the storefront. And I was standing there and the kid in this case come staring down and pushes me right into the showcase. But I was none the worse for it. ( he laughs ) I was taken back by it, and shocked by it for a while, but the school that I attended was, we had the store on 42nd Street and Fifth Avenue in Brooklyn, as I mentioned and, excuse me. ( clears throat ) And the public school that I had to attend was on 47th Street between Second and Third Avenues. Oh, no, I'm sorry, between Third and Fourth Avenues. This is in Brooklyn. And the school had some Jewish kids, but it was practically ninety percent Gentiles. And they brought me into class. They didn't bring me into class. I first had to go to the assistant principal to be registered, and my mother took me there. And the assistant principal said, "I can't take him in. I can't register him now. Classes have already started. They've been, everybody's been assigned. And besides, we don't have any room for the likes of him." My aunt said to me, "Little father," we used the term Tatala. It's a favorite term, "little father," "tatala." And she says, "Come.

We'll report this to the Board of Education." In her broken English. And she, and the principal, of course, was stunned. She didn't expect anybody to talk to her in that manner. She says, "Wait a minute, wait a minute." She said, "Now, maybe I can find . . ." She changed her tune. And I was registered in the class. They sat me next to a German boy and German and Yiddish, if you know, is a little bit on the same scale. And he was able to interpret some of the things to me, and I was able to talk to him to some extent. And I learned later on that this kid had no mother. He had a father who knew only one thing, to beat the hell out of him. He was good at beating him. And to feed him, to clothe him. Whatever he could lay his hands on. I took him to the store. I went to the store for lunch. We had a kitchen in the back room. And I introduced him to Mom and everything is okay. She didn't say, "No," and she didn't say, "Yes." But after that I knew he had no lunch money, or there was no such thing as lunch money. Lunch, something to eat, break up the day. So there was a hallway, I would tell him to stay and wait for me. And I'd run in the back where my food was waiting me. Mom would be busy in the store taking care of a customer or two, or maybe on the telephone, and I would take the sandwich and I would sneak out. And in one or two instances Mom said, "Where are you going?" (Yiddish) "Where are you going?" I said, "I'm going outside, and I'll be right back." One day she says to me, she corners me, she says, "Why don't you bring your friend in. We have enough to eat for him, too."

LEVINE: So then was this a person you remained friendly with for . . .

GANZ: I remained friendly with him for quite a while but, of course, he was the kind of kid that could get you into lots of trouble. He was constantly in trouble in school, with his friends. He was constantly, his father had reason for talking

to him and trying to get him to straighten up, but not to beat him. He beat him regularly. I bumped into him years later, walking with a group of youngsters his age, and was having a grand time. He greeted me, grabbed me around and hugged me, and he kissed me, and I said, "Get out of here. That's girl stuff." ( they laugh )

LEVINE: When you came to the United States then, you were less isolated. You had more friends . . .

GANZ: I was a lot less isolated. I had three girls in the house.

LEVINE: What was it like?

GANZ: And every one of them wanted to have their say over me.

LEVINE: Well, in other words, was it an adjustment for you to get used to being with people and . . .

GANZ: It wasn't a difficult adjustment. It wasn't a difficult adjustment at all. In fact, within a month or maybe even a little longer, my brother decided, not my brother, but my aunt and uncle who my brother was with, decided to come and pay us a visit. And for some unearthly reason, I did not want to see my brother. I must admit to it, because it bothers me to this day.

LEVINE: Do you have any idea why?

GANZ: I don't know why, and I couldn't find out. I just didn't want to. Maybe I was afraid that I wouldn't be leaving.

LEVINE: That would make sense.

GANZ: That was the only answer I could come up with myself, but that's a poor excuse. He still was my brother. He still is to this day.

LEVINE: Then did your brother come and visit?

GANZ: He came and he visited, and I ran up to Sunset Park, which was right across the street. But then my sister, one of the girls, the older girl, came looking for me, and she says, "Come, come back to the house. Your brother's already left."

LEVINE: Then did you see your brother after that?

GANZ: Oh, yes, yes, yes. I realized what a damn fool I made of myself.

LEVINE: Well, you were a child who'd been through a lot.

GANZ: Yeah, but there's no excuse even for children. We didn't, we weren't really coached or coaxed into living what we consider today's world. It's a different world today. Brothers and sisters aren't that close either in the present. I don't see it. I wish it were so. Family life is not the kind of a life that I envision, although I have a wonderful wife. My children are great. My son lives in Texas.

LEVINE: Tell me how you met your wife.

GANZ: I learned the paint business, as I told you, and I helped out in the store whenever I had time. And I decided, I graduated high school and I decided I wasn't going to college. This broke Mom's heart. She absolutely wouldn't hear of it. She wanted me to go to school. She wanted me to continue my education. In the final analysis, I decided that I'll compromise, I'll go to night college. So I did for a while. I went to night college, but I had to get a job. I had to be independent, financially and otherwise. I didn't want to live sponging off of family. Maybe they were being denied because of the addition that they had. But nevertheless, I got myself a job. I went to see some people, and I was hired in Manhattan on Chambers Street. It was a paint store, the same type, except on a much larger scale. I had a tremendously good education in the field with these people. Paid me well for the time. I put in long hours, but they paid me very well. And when I came home with my first pay and I handed Mom some money, she said, "No." ( he is moved ) She was a remarkable person. I wouldn't take no for an answer. That was it. I worked there for about five years, and then I decided, well, I had to make another move. I have to take stock of myself and see what I'm capable of. Let me see if I can go out and get another job. Maybe I have overstayed my welcome here. When I asked him for a raise, he wasn't very receptive. I said, "Well, then I'll have to leave." Then he came along and gave me a two dollar or a three dollar raise. So, in the final analysis, I was with some salesman, and I told him that I'm looking to make a change. So I went into a place in the Bronx, another store that had a very big operation in hardware, primarily, but they wanted to develop their paint department. So they gave me charge of the paint department. I needed a secretary. So they assigned my wife as my secretary.

LEVINE: Do you remember when you first met her?

GANZ: I interviewed her, and I found that she could fill the bill. She didn't know anything about the paint end of it, but there wasn't anything for her to learn. She wasn't going to do any clerical work, just a letter every once in a while, maybe some phone calls, or maybe write some checks. This was run as a separate division. That's the only way I would have it, and that's why it worked out. I was there for about five years, too.

LEVINE: Well, we have only about five minutes left, so I want to cover your wife's name.

GANZ: My wife's name, Sally.

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

GANZ: Gennett. G-E-DOUBLE N-E-DOUBLE T.

LEVINE: Okay. And you and your wife have how many children?

GANZ: We have two children.

LEVINE: And what are their names?

GANZ: My son's name is Robert, Robert A. Ganz, Robert Allen Ganz. My daughter is Karen.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And is there anything that you would like to say about what you're proud of that you've done in this lifetime?

GANZ: I'm proud of my grandchildren, both of them. They're great kids. Sometimes they're neglectful, but that's to be understood. I would like to have them close by. They live in Texas. My son just, he has a job with Exxon. He's a chemical engineer. And he goes on various assignments, and he stops off to visit. In fact, he was just here a couple of days ago, and I would have loved to have him here, but the assignment took precedence.

LEVINE: Well, tell me, is there anything that you would want to say about the life that you've had? I mean, starting out in Poland with a rather tragic life, and then coming to this country and what's transpired since.

GANZ: The most wonderful thing that happened to me is coming to the States. I had nothing really at Poland or Volkawisk or Shishlowitz could offer me that would give me the opportunities. This country is a marvelous country. I only hope and pray that the people who are born here realize the values that they have, and that they can utilize to their own best advantage. It's a remarkable country. God Bless America is a term that's definitely in order.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, this sounds like a good place to stop. I want to thank you very much, Mr. Ganz, for coming today.

GANZ: I certainly appreciate the opportunity. If it will do some good for someone, or give someone of more security that they have right here, there's nothing much more that they can look forward to.

LEVINE: Okay. Thank you very much.

EI-168/GANZ

GANZ: Health and happiness. That's what counts.

LEVINE: Okay. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service on June 10, 1992, signing off.

END OF INTERVIEW