

EI-180

PAULINE LESZCZYNA BELCHICK

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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POLAND, 1921

AGE 9

PORT: ANTWERP

RESIDENCES:

- **POLAND: WASLAVE**
- **THE US: SCRANTON, PA**

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here today on June 24th, 1992 in Stratford, Connecticut, at the home of Pauline Leszczyna Belchick, who started out from Poland when she was seven years old, but didn't arrive in the United States until she was nine, in 1921. I'm very happy to be here, and I look forward to hearing your story.

BELCHICK: Thank you.

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LEVINE: Let's start by your telling me your birth date.

BELCHICK: My birthday? After, when I was nine . . .

LEVINE: Well, your birth date.

BELCHICK: Oh, my birth date. Well, that would be, when we started from Poland . . .

LEVINE: Well, you were born on November 11th.

BELCHICK: Yeah.

LEVINE: And what year? 19 . . .

BELCHICK: 1921, is it? No, 1912.

LEVINE: You were born in 1912, and you arrived here in 1921. Okay. What was the name of the town in Poland where you were born?

BELCHICK: Waslove. It's W-A-S-L-O-V-E, or something like that.

LEVINE: Okay, great. And did you live in Waslove the whole time until you left Poland?

BELCHICK: Yeah, I must have.

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LEVINE: Now, what do you remember about that place?

BELCHICK: Well, the houses were like huts. They had the straw roofs. That's the kind of house we lived in. And I was born there.

LEVINE: And how big was it?

BELCHICK: It had a few rooms in it, but I don't know how many. And my grandmother was a midwife.

LEVINE: Oh. Did you remember her delivering any babies?

BELCHICK: No, no, because they never even talked about it to children, you know. They never talked about it.

LEVINE: Did your grandmother live with you?

BELCHICK: Yeah, we lived together.

LEVINE: Now, how many of you and who was living right in your house?

BELCHICK: Well, there must have been the grandfather and the grandmother and my mother and me, and I don't know if there was any other ones. I don't remember.

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LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you don't remember brothers and sisters when you were in Poland?

BELCHICK: I had no brothers and sisters.

LEVINE: Okay. And what was your grandmother's name? Do you remember that?

BELCHICK: No. (Voice off mike: "I think it was Martha.") My mother's name was Helen, so I don't know. (Voice off mike: "Her name was Martha.") Martha.

LEVINE: Do you remember your mother Helen's maiden name?

BELCHICK: Yeah, we did have it. Kotarskich.

LEVINE: Could you spell it?

BELCHICK: K-O-T-A-R, K-O-T-A-R-S-K-I-C-H.

LEVINE: Okay. And your father's first name? Do you remember his first name?

BELCHICK: My father is Michael Leszczyna.

LEVINE: And do you remember your father when he was in Poland?

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BELCHICK: No, because my father left when I was a baby, came to America. And as I said, he sent the papers, the visa, and the money for my mother to come. But I was a sickly baby and my mother wouldn't take that chance, because they said that they would throw me in the ocean if I died.

LEVINE: If you died aboard ship.

BELCHICK: Right. So she waited a while. And every spring she used to go to Holland to work. And this one spring she took me with her. This is too sad. (she is moved)

LEVINE: So from the time you were a little girl, your mother, your father had gone to America, and your mother would go in the spring to work. What would she do when she went?

BELCHICK: She went to this rich farmer. There was a bunch of people who went, you know. They would plant, and they'd be there all summer till fall. And then they'd pick up the crop. And the others went back for the fall, and she came to America with me.

LEVINE: Oh, I see. So that was the summer you went with her, was the summer, in that fall, then you came to America.

BELCHICK: And my grandmother knew that my mother was going to America. She wouldn't tell her, but she took me with her, you know. So she knew that she was going to go.

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LEVINE: Uh-huh. So your grandmother knew that you wouldn't be back.

BELCHICK: That's right. And then I stayed in this big building. It was called Castle Garden, because everybody was gone, you know. And we were coming to America, so we stayed, so I stayed there. And my mother worked, still worked. She helped the farmers out, whatever they needed, so she could make a little money to come here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, now, Castle Garden was in New York, right?

BELCHICK: Was in New York? Well, they had some, it named something like that, yeah, in Holland.

LEVINE: Well, before that summer when you went with your mother to Holland, did you go to school in Poland?

BELCHICK: I must have. Yeah, I think I did, because I remember carrying a little milk to the teacher.

LEVINE: Milk?

BELCHICK: Yeah, milk. In a bottle.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And did you, what did your mother do, did she do work besides going in the summer to Holland. Did she work besides that in Poland?

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BELCHICK: I don't know what she did. She was a dressmaker, too, so I think that's what she did.

LEVINE: And what kind of a town was it? Was it a big town, a small town?

BELCHICK: It was some place in the country.

LEVINE: Was it a farming area?

BELCHICK: Yes, it was a farming area.

LEVINE: Do you remember what kinds of things people grew there?

BELCHICK: Oh, like wheat and oats. They planted potatoes, vegetable gardens. And they had fruit. They had apples and pears.

LEVINE: Would you say you lived comfortably there, or was it hard?

BELCHICK: No, it was hard. Very hard. Yes, it was very hard. And then from Holland, we came to Belgium.

LEVINE: Well, before, do you remember how the decision was made that you and your mother would come to America?

BELCHICK: I don't know, but my father sent the visa again, and this time she says

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she's going to go to America with me. And that's the way we started out.

LEVINE: Do you remember what your father had written to your mother, or what you knew about America before you set out?

BELCHICK: No, nothing at all, no.

LEVINE: Were you looking forward to coming, or . . .

BELCHICK: You know, I was a happy child, and I was playing with the children. Even if I couldn't speak English or their language. We were in this Jewish hotel.

LEVINE: Now where was this?

BELCHICK: This was in Belgium.

LEVINE: In Belgium. Well, let's first go from Poland. When you left, do you remember saying goodbye to your grandmother?

BELCHICK: Oh, I must have.

LEVINE: And then how did you get to Holland? Do you remember that trip?

BELCHICK: It was on a wagon and horses. Yeah, that's how we got through. It was through muddy roads.

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LEVINE: And there were lots of people in town?

BELCHICK: There were lots of people. They always come in the spring, to help this rich farmer. And for the fall they would all go back home, you know. But my mother and I stayed because we were coming to America. They let her stay.

LEVINE: What do you remember about that summer, about being on the farm in Holland.

BELCHICK: Well, I was always locked into this big building, because I was scared to death, you know, and my mother was afraid to leave me alone. So I was locked into this big building, and I didn't play with nobody or nothing.

LEVINE: What was the building? Do you know? What kind of building was it?

BELCHICK: It was the building that the people who came in the spring, they had a place to stay.

LEVINE: Oh, like a dormitory.

BELCHICK: Yes, yes. One side was for the men, and the other side was for the ladies. And if they were husband and wife, they had a little room of their own. And there was a big place where they could cook.

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LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, was it like a big community kitchen with a lot of different stoves.

BELCHICK: Oh, yes, yes. It was a great big building.

LEVINE: Do you remember that time as pleasant, that summer, or was it not pleasant. What kind of a summer was it for you?

BELCHICK: Well, it was kind of hard, because I was all alone when everybody left, you know. But I don't know how long we were there. Like, we were moving on, you know.

LEVINE: In other words, did you work on more than one farm?

BELCHICK: No. That was the only one. That was the only one.

LEVINE: And so this was a wealthy farmer who got all these people from your town in Poland in the summer. And so you knew . . .

BELCHICK: In the spring.

LEVINE: In the spring. So you knew a lot of these people?

BELCHICK: Oh, yes. They must have been all our neighbors, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And were there other children there?

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BELCHICK: No, I was the only one. Children wasn't allowed. Only people to work. And the only reason I was there was because I was going to America with my mother. I was the only one.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything your mother told you about America?

BELCHICK: If she did I can't remember.

LEVINE: Well, what was your mother like? What kind of a . . .

BELCHICK: Oh, she was a very nice person.

LEVINE: Could you describe her, or say, were there certain things that she taught you that you remember today?

BELCHICK: She always said to me to be a good girl, you know. And when we were in Belgium this year, she was a waitress there because she didn't have the money to come the rest of the way. So the Jewish lady let her work.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, when you left Holland, then, how did your mother and you travel to Belgium?

BELCHICK: To tell you the truth, I don't know how we travelled.

LEVINE: But just you and she alone.

BELCHICK: Yeah, right, right.

LEVINE: And then she went to a hotel in Belgium?

BELCHICK: Uh-huh. And she told them she didn't have no money. That the husband sent the money, but she never received it. So they let her work, because all the Jewish people were coming there that were going to America, you know. They stayed there overnight. How long they stayed there I don't know, you know.

LEVINE: So did you leave from Antwerp?

BELCHICK: Yes.

LEVINE: Is that where you left from? And the hotel was there?

BELCHICK: Yeah, and the hotel was there.

LEVINE: And, describe the hotel. Do you remember it?

BELCHICK: It was a great big building, and it was fenced-off, like from the neighbor, it had a great big fence, so they couldn't see, the neighbors couldn't see in, you know. It was a great big building.

LEVINE: Was it a luxury hotel or, I mean . . .

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BELCHICK: It was just for people that were travelling, coming to America, like to stay overnight, for a week, or how long they had to stay there. And they were all Jews, because they were always praying in a corner, like, or, you know. And I'd say to my mother, "What is he doing?" She says, "You just be quiet. He's praying. Leave him alone."

LEVINE: Was that the first contact you had with Jewish people?

BELCHICK: Yeah.

LEVINE: Because there were no Jews in your town?

BELCHICK: Yeah, there were Jews in Poland. There were Jews. They were tailors. They would make a suit for you for so much amount of money, you know. I remember a little bit here and there.

LEVINE: And were you a religious family?

BELCHICK: Yes, we were.

LEVINE: And what religion?

BELCHICK: Polish.

LEVINE: Was it Catholic?

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BELCHICK: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: And did you go to church regularly, or . . .

BELCHICK: Oh, yes. We always went to church. The horse and buggy, because it was far away.

LEVINE: Oh. There was no church in your town?

BELCHICK: No, no. It was far away.

LEVINE: And was the makeup of your town, would you say, half and half? Half Jewish, half non-Jewish?

BELCHICK: Oh, I wouldn't know. I wouldn't know.

LEVINE: But there was a mixture of both.

BELCHICK: Yeah, right. There were some.

LEVINE: And were there, were Jews looked down upon. Do you remember that, in Poland?

BELCHICK: No, I don't think so.

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LEVINE: Everybody got along together?

BELCHICK: Right. They were like Polish Jews. Yeah, no, I don't think so. I think they all got along real good.

LEVINE: So then the people who came to stay in this hotel, though, were mainly Jewish people.

BELCHICK: Yes, yes, they were.

LEVINE: And what did your mother do?

BELCHICK: She helped with the breakfast, and set the table, like in a dining room, you know. And picked up the dishes and washed them. They didn't have no dishwashers them days, you know. Yeah, helped wash them. She was always busy.

LEVINE: And how long did she stay there working?

BELCHICK: She stayed there a while. I don't know how long, but I remember it was through the summer, and for the Jew lady not to charge her any money, she put a mattress in the attic and we slept on it.

LEVINE: Oh. And were there other children around at the hotel?

BELCHICK: She had a daughter. And like the Jewish people might have had their

children with them, but we didn't bother with them. I was just friends with her daughter. We didn't know how to speak the language, but we got along good, you know. How I wish that I had her address, you know. Like "This Is Your Life," you know. Wouldn't that be wonderful.

LEVINE: As far as you know, did they ever come to America?

BELCHICK: No, they didn't, but they used to write to my mother. And one time they sent a picture. They only had that one child. She was as old as I was, but when they sent a picture, the mother looked like she was going to have a baby, you know. So I guess she had more children after that.

LEVINE: And did your mother have more children?

BELCHICK: Yes.

LEVINE: After she came to America, she had . . .

BELCHICK: I was ten-and-a-half years old, and my sister, twins, got born.

LEVINE: Okay, well, let's, is there anything, do you remember anything that struck you being in Belgium, that was different than what you were used to during that period when you were there in the hotel. Do you remember things that . . .

BELCHICK: Well, I'll tell you. On one side there was no buildings at all, but there was

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a great big fence. And in the evening, there used to be evening, they called them evening girls. Now, as a child, I didn't know what it was, but they were beautiful girls, you know. And they would take them in this certain place. Well, I never knew what it was till later on, you know. My mother told me what it was. And . . .

LEVINE: They were on the other side of the fence.

BELCHICK: They were on the other side. On the sidewalk they would walk, yeah. They were beautiful, though, and they dressed beautiful. And that was their business. They were on the other side. I remember a little of that.

LEVINE: And do you remember when you and your mother were getting ready to leave for America?

BELCHICK: Yes, I do. I had a few toys, and I left them for the girl, and the lady that was here with her daughter, they took us to the ship, and they bid us goodbye.

LEVINE: And do you remember anything you took with you? You, or your mother, brought with you?

BELCHICK: No, nothing. And we didn't have no suitcases. We only had a bag, you know, full of clothes. One time in New York we went to the ladies room, and we got locked in somehow.

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LEVINE: This is at Ellis Island.

BELCHICK: At Ellis Island. And you know we stayed there all night until a man came and opened the door, and he said oh, he had no idea that somebody was there all night. But it was such a big bathroom, ladies room, you know, that one side was a toilet, and on the other side there was nothing. And . . .

LEVINE: So that was your first night in America? Locked in the ladies room.

BELCHICK: Yeah. And then this here, well, I'd better tell you about this here. What's on the water?

LEVINE: The Statue of Liberty?

BELCHICK: The Statue of Liberty. Yeah, they wanted everybody to see Statue of Liberty but nobody knew what it was, you know. My mother had a name for it, and I've been trying to figure out what the name was, but I can't, till today I can't.

LEVINE: Do you remember what it meant? It meant "Statue of Liberty"?

BELCHICK: It meant like Statue of Liberty, but I don't know how to say it, you know?

LEVINE: So do you remember coming up on deck to look at the Statue of Liberty?

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BELCHICK: To come out?

LEVINE: When the ship was coming into New York Harbor, do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty then?

BELCHICK: I must have, and my mother did too, I guess, you know.

LEVINE: But it just didn't mean anything to you. You didn't know what it was.

BELCHICK: No, it didn't mean nothing, no. I must have, my mother did too, I guess, you know.

LEVINE: But it just didn't mean anything. You didn't know what it was.

BELCHICK: No, it didn't mean nothing, no.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember seeing New York City, the skyline, with the buildings and all that?

BELCHICK: Yeah, we did, but we said what a big place it was, you know. Everything was so new to us. Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, what kind of a voyage was it?

BELCHICK: For me it was wonderful because I was all over the ship, and my mother was very sick and she was always throwing up. We had one little room

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and it had a cot upstairs, like up and down, you know. And somebody else was supposed to be with us, but I don't know whether they didn't come or what, but it was just the two of us in that little room, and windows here.

LEVINE: Well, in other words, you weren't way down in the hold of the ship where the steerage passengers were? Do you remember . . .

BELCHICK: I guess not, because we had a room.

LEVINE: And where did you eat on the ship? Was there a dining room?

BELCHICK: There must have been. I don't remember now, but there must have been. Oh, I'm sure there was.

LEVINE: So you were running all over the ship. Do you remember anything about that?

LEVINE: Yes, and you know what? The ones that was working on the ship, they said where am I going, and I said, "To America to see my father." And they said, "Your father has a big beard." To me, you know. And I said, "No he don't." And then I would ask, come down to my mother and ask her, and she says, "Oh, no, your father's clean-shaven. He's a nice man." Do you know what? When he came out, my father had a beard. (they laugh) And he came to New York to see us, and they wouldn't let him see us.

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LEVINE: Why was that?

BELCHICK: I don't know, but they wouldn't. Yeah, they wouldn't let him see us.

LEVINE: So do you remember when the ship came up to Ellis Island? Do you remember getting off at Ellis Island?

BELCHICK: Yeah, I remember getting off.

LEVINE: And what was that like? What was your impression of Ellis Island?

BELCHICK: Well, everything was so big. It was new and big to me, you know.

LEVINE: Were there lots of people there?

BELCHICK: Oh, there was loads and loads of people, yeah.

LEVINE: And do you remember the examination?

BELCHICK: They put you all in one room, all naked, women and children, before you got off, yeah.

LEVINE: And did you have to, like, go thorough showers and stuff like that?

BELCHICK: Yes, we did.

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LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember anything specific?

BELCHICK: But there was nothing wrong with my mother or me, you know. We were perfect, thank God.

LEVINE: So how long did it take you? Do you remember?

BELCHICK: No, I don't remember how long we were there. But after, when we got from that ladies room, a man put us on a train and they gave us breakfast and I don't know whether we came to Scranton, Pennsylvania, because we came on a train. Then there was a man to meet us, and this here. And he said that he was a friend of my father's, and my father went to New York to meet us. It's funny that he didn't see us, you know. So he brought us to the place where we lived, and he said to my mother, "This is your house." And she understood a little bit, you know. He said, like, "That's yours," you know. And she understood it. But nobody was home, because he was in New York. And then he took us to another neighbor about half a mile away. This was in the country, because my father lived in the country. And their name was Michaels. And this man that took us, his name was Mr. Lirosky. And he said, "They're good friends of your father's. So you'll stay here now." And they took us in for the night. And the next morning my father came there and he said, they said that they're not going to say nothing to him, and see what he says, you know. And he says he don't know what's the matter, but maybe Helen and Pauline didn't want to come out again, because they weren't there. And they

brought us out. They said, "No, here they are." My mother was so shocked that he had a beard, you know.

LEVINE: And do you remember what you thought when you first saw your father, because that was really the first time that you saw him, and you knew him.

BELCHICK: Yeah, that's the first time I ever saw him. She kept saying, "That's your dad. That's your dad." But I didn't have a father for so many years, you know, that I was mostly in to my mother, yeah.

LEVINE: So did it take a while to get used to having a father around?

BELCHICK: Yes, it did. Yeah, it did. But he worked in the mines, so after a while he left us and he went to the city to work in the coal mines, and we lived in the country. And we were just the two of us.

LEVINE: I see. Well would he, what would he do? Go off for periods of time to work in the mines?

BELCHICK: Yeah, he worked in the mines. And there was no cars in them days, you know. If he got a ride with somebody, well, then he'd come to visit us. And if he didn't, he didn't. He'd stay over the weekend. So we went through a lot of hardship. So my mother had the twins, and then she had another baby, my brother, John.

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LEVINE: What were the twins' names?

BELCHICK: Anna and Arleen. They're both living, and my brother passed away.

LEVINE: So was your mother a housewife, then, when she was in Pennsylvania?

BELCHICK: Yeah. And after a couple of years, we had cows, too. We had a little dairy. But my father was a big gambler. He used to go out with the young men, you know. He was a good gambler, and he earned money for them, you know. He, I don't know how to put it, but he made money for them, and they always took him, the young fellows. When he was young, they knew him, and they took him always, you know. But when he got older they didn't want him. So my father got to gambling, and my mother worked the farms so hard. And I helped her, and my sisters, they were small, because I was ten-and-a-half years older than they were, and my mother finally left my father.

LEVINE: And how old were you then?

BELCHICK: I was married at sixteen, and I had my daughter when I was a little over seventeen. And I have a son, I was a little over seventeen. There's about fourteen months between the two of them. My son Gene and my daughter Josephine. And we lived a little while there, then we moved to town.

LEVINE: Well, how was it for you in the beginning learning English?

LEVINE: Well, I'll tell you another thing that I had a hard thing. In Poland everybody had earrings, you know, gold earrings, even children did. And I had beautiful gold earrings. And when I went to school I went to a Protestant school, and they used to make so much fun from me, on account those earrings that I couldn't stand it, you know. So you know what I did, I took one off and lost it, and then I came home and I told my mother I lost it. And she says, "Well, we'll take the other one off then." And I had peace.

LEVINE: Were you chided by other children because you were an immigrant?

BELCHICK: Yeah, yeah. And they shortened our name to Lazina, L-A-Z-I-N-A. It is real nice, you know. But my father wouldn't see it. He says it's got to be that long name.

LEVINE: Say the long name.

BELCHICK: Lazina.

LEVINE: Well, that's the way it got shortened.

LEVINE: And this is L-A-Z-I-N-A, the American way.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And the Polish way.

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BELCHICK: The Poland way was Leszczyna. It's Leszczyna in the Polish, really, but in English it's L-A-Z-I-N-A.

LEVINE: And could you spell the Polish?

BELCHICK: L-E-S-C-Z-C-Y-N-A.

LEVINE: But your father wanted to keep that name. Now, was your father, did he want to keep Polish ways in general?

BELCHICK: He did, but he never went to church. And he wouldn't let us go. We lived among the Protestant people, and I always went to church with them, you know. So then they came over and wanted to know why don't we sign up, you know. And I told my mother, because my mother didn't understand English at all, you know. Like I picked it up in school easy from the children and this here. And my father says, "No, you're Polish. You're a Catholic. You are what you are, and you're not going to go to their church." But I went to Sunday school anyhow with the children.

LEVINE: And how did your mother feel about that?

BELCHICK: She liked it, because the Protestant people were very good to us. Oh, they were very good. We didn't know what Catholic people were like, you know, because it was all Protestants.

LEVINE: Do you remember what it was? Was it a Lutheran church? Do you

remember what kind of Protestant . . .

BELCHICK: No, a Methodist or a Baptist, one or the other.

LEVINE: How about your mother? Was she bent on becoming Americanized, or did she want to retain some of the ways that she had from Poland?

BELCHICK: No, she liked it.

LEVINE: Did she learn to speak English?

BELCHICK: Yeah, she did. She learned from the children. Yeah, she learned from the children. And if she didn't speak it, she knew what it was, you know.

LEVINE: Would you tend to speak Polish at home, or would you speak English?

BELCHICK: Only to my, yeah, to my mother I would, yeah. But now my mother passed away 23 years ago, and we don't speak Polish at all. And my husband passed away 23 years ago.

LEVINE: How did you meet your husband?

BELCHICK: Well, I was only about fourteen years old, and he had sisters going to the same school that I was going. It was called The White School. And this here, and their name was Belchick, and they used to call them, "Woodchuck," you know. And I says, "Oh, that's terrible that they're

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calling them names like that, you know." And they said, "Well, they've got to come over and visit us." And they had sisters, and my sisters were younger, so they brought some clothes from their sisters for my sisters. And little by little my husband came along with them, or else he brought them in the car, and, because I was so young, and he was only four years older than me, he used to go through the fields to come and see me because he didn't want the neighbors to see that he was coming to see me. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Because you were young.

BELCHICK: Because I was young, yeah. So I went with him two years, and after two years we got married.

LEVINE: And what was your husband's name?

BELCHICK: Joseph Belchick.

LEVINE: Joseph. Uh-huh. And then what did your husband do?

BELCHICK: He worked the mines.

LEVINE: In the coal mines.

BELCHICK: In the coal mines.

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LEVINE: The same as your father?

BELCHICK: Yeah, but in different mines, yes. We had a gristmill, too.

LEVINE: Oh. What was that like?

BELCHICK: It was like a flour mill that from wheat you could make flour.

LEVINE: Do you remember that process of making the flour?

BELCHICK: I remember it was like cleaning the wheat or oats for the neighbors, for their cattle. But I don't remember if we ever made flour, but we had a gristmill. It had a great big wheel, and it was by water. It was run by water.

LEVINE: What did you do when you cleaned the wheat?

BELCHICK: They cleaned it away somehow, so it was good for feeding. You know, like for the next year. I don't know how to put it.

LEVINE: Was it like sorting through or something?

BELCHICK: Yeah, yeah, yeah, like the wind went through it, or something.

LEVINE: Now, in other words, you and your mother, or your mother had that?

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BELCHICK: My father had the gristmill a long time ago, but he very seldom used it. And after it got old, he didn't use it no more.

LEVINE: So did you say you had cows?

BELCHICK: Yes, we did. We had a few cows. And my mother took care of them while he worked in the mines.

LEVINE: So did you have other animals, too?

BELCHICK: No, because this here. My mother was the only one that could milk the cows. When I went near the cows they used to kick me, you know. So she had to milk all of them. Maybe we had about six or seven. Maybe a can of milk, a big can of milk, you know, like forty quarters, a can or two of milk.

LEVINE: Would you sell the milk?

BELCHICK: Yes.

LEVINE: And then did you grow anything also? Food, I mean, like vegetables.

BELCHICK: Just for our own use.

END OF SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

LEVINE: How long did you stay in school?

BELCHICK: Until eighth grade, and then I quit. And when I was sixteen they let you go, you know. You could go without any trouble.

LEVINE: And was school a pleasant experience?

BELCHICK: Yes, it was. I learned English, and I liked the children. They had parties, and I went to their parties.

LEVINE: You mean like birthday parties?

BELCHICK: Yeah.

LEVINE: And did you have teachers that were good?

BELCHICK: We all had teachers, we had a teacher, her name was Josephine, and she says, "Pauline, when you get married and have a daughter, name your daughter Josephine." And guess what her name is? (she laughs) You know why? Because Joseph is after my husband, Joseph, and "ine" is after Pauline.

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LEVINE: Uh-huh. Let's see, is there any, were there any kinds of food that your mother made?

BELCHICK: We didn't have much food, to tell you the truth. No. We had chicken, so we had chicken, eggs, milk and bread. That was mostly our food. Then once in a while my father would bring a piece of meat from town.

LEVINE: Were there other children that were Polish in your school at all?

BELCHICK: Well, the Belchicks, they were Polish too. Yeah.

LEVINE: Were they like the only other family, or were there other families, too, that socialized, that were from Poland?

BELCHICK: No, I think they were the only ones.

LEVINE: Oh. So you sort of stuck together, your families, because you were both from Poland.

BELCHICK: Yeah. But they came from town, too. They lived in town, and they moved to the country. They had a little store in town, wherever they lived.

LEVINE: Yeah. But your husband was a miner.

BELCHICK: He was a miner. He always worked in the mines.

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LEVINE: Did he ever tell you stories about the mines?

BELCHICK: Yeah. One time he cut his leg terrible somehow, and he come home. They told him to go to emergency, you know, to get it fixed up. He wouldn't, because they'd give you a couple of days off. So he came home, he bandaged something on his, like a towel around his foot, and he come home. When he got in the tub, and I saw the blood, I fainted. But he wouldn't listen. He took care of it himself, you know, and he got better. Because he was a workaholic. He always worked, you know.

LEVINE: Now, were the unions involved with the mines?

BELCHICK: Yes, there was. There must have been.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about that, about his being in the union?

BELCHICK: Yeah, because I get black lung, now that he's gone. See, so that's from the mines.

LEVINE: He had that black lung disease?

BELCHICK: Yes, he did. He was only sixty years old.

LEVINE: Oh. Is there anything else that we might have skipped over that has to do with either your life in Poland or your journey that took, apparently,

over a year, a year-and-a-half to get here, and then settling here. Is there any, are there any other experiences that you might . . .

BELCHICK: I can't think of any.

LEVINE: Well, are you happy that you came to America?

BELCHICK: Oh, yes. I'm very happy. Even if my father and mother separated, I'm still happy. My sister and I, in 1975, we went to Europe for two weeks. And I had a cold before I went, and I should have got a shot, you know. But my sister said, "If you get a shot," she says, "you won't go with me." And she says, "Don't you dare go to the doctors." And I went there with a cold. And so I wasn't feeling good, and we went to the Polish doctor, it was a lady doctor, but I still wasn't feeling good. And I couldn't wait to get back. Nothing agreed with me, and everything smelled for me, you know. It didn't smell good. They had a well outside. And I says, "Oh, my goodness. It should have been covered, like, with something very heavy, but it wasn't, you know." And so we were there two weeks, and I couldn't wait to get back. And I says I would even kiss the ground when I got back. (she laughs) And I said to my sister, "If I should die, send my body to America." So I said my father was bold, you know. I'm still not against him because we were in America. Because if we were in Poland, we'd have been married there, you know, and had children there. And they suffer so much out there, and we had it so good.

LEVINE: Do you have grandchildren now?

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BELCHICK: I'm a grandmother of five. (Voice off mike: "Six.") Six. And a great-grandma of four. ("Five.") Oh, I'm sorry.

LEVINE: You just had another one.

BELCHICK: Yeah, my granddaughter adopted a baby. Her name is Jessica Rose, and she's only about a month old. (Voices garbled. Mrs. Belchick tries to get up.) Oh, I forget that I'm wired.

LEVINE: Well, it sounds like you have had a very rich life.

BELCHICK: Yes, it does. I could write a book. (they laugh)

LEVINE: Okay, well, I think maybe that's a good place to stop, and I want to thank you very much for talking with me. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm signing off, having been speaking with Pauline Belchick.

BELCHICK: And I thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW