

EI-184

GERTRUDE COOPER KLEMENS

BIRTH DATE: NOVEMBER 22, 1901

INTERVIEW DATE: 6/25/1992

RUNNING TIME: 43:16

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 5/1993

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 7/1993

POLAND, 1906

AGE 5

RESIDENCES: POLAND: KUPIRNSKA (VILLAGE) NEAR WARSAW

US: NYC – CHERRY STREET

Oral Historian's Note: Mrs. Klemen's home is located near railroad tracks and a very audible train passes periodically on the recording. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of the Oral History Project, 7/6/1993.

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. It's June 25, 1992. I'm in Brookline, Massachusetts at the home of Mrs. Gertrude Cooper Klemens, who believes she came from Poland in 1905 when she was five years old. So once again, I'm very happy to be here.

KLEMENS: And I'm glad, very happy to meet you, too.

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

KLEMENS: My birthday is a day to be remembered by many people. It was November 22, 1901, and November 22nd is the day that Kennedy was shot, so you can never, never forget it. It was, of course, not that year, but that's the date.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And where were you born?

KLEMENS: I was born in Poland in some small town or . . .

LEVINE: Village, maybe.

KLEMENS: Village, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember the name of that place?

KLEMENS: Uh, I remember my mother used to say Kupirska, which means very little to me. But my mother did work in Warsaw. That was the big city at that time.

LEVINE: So Kupirska.

KLEMENS: Kupirska.

LEVINE: Kupirska you think was near to Warsaw?

KLEMENS: It must have been on the outskirts in a little village, you know.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, now, you were only five years old when you came over, but

do you remember anything of your life in Poland?

KLEMENS: I remember a little bit of my life, or maybe it's things that have been told to me when I was a small child.

LEVINE: What do you remember, or what do you think you remember?

KLEMENS: I remember I was told that my father was in the service and my mother was, at that time, pregnant with me. However, at that time it didn't matter if he was a soldier, he had to serve whether he had a wife to support or not, and I was born while he was in the army. He was in the army three or four years, the usual time that they had to serve, and then he was supposed to be, uh, discharged. However, at that time Russian declared a war with Japan, so they didn't let him go. He had to serve. And he had a sister in New York, and he wrote to her, told her that if she didn't send him a ticket that he would be sure he'd be killed. His sister was, they were very, very close. His sister had very little, but when the people came over from Russia in those years they always had jewelry, watches, jewelry. Somehow they had accumulated that. She pawned everything she had and she sent him a ticket to come, and he paid off the guard, and that's how he escaped and never served. And that's why I never knew my father. When I was born he was in America.

LEVINE: Do you remember, well, who were you living with? Were you living with your mother?

KLEMENS: I was living with, my mother had to work. She had no way of supporting me, and I think she was a cook or did cooking for people and at that time she told me that she gave me to a wet nurse. That's what they did in those days. However, one day she came and she found me in a deplorable condition, not clean or anything and she was heartsick, so she took me with her, and I think I stayed with her, then, maybe two or three years old.

LEVINE: Now, were you the only child?

KLEMENS: Yes.

LEVINE: And did you live with grandparents or any other family members?

KLEMENS: No, no. My mother didn't have any parents. They were gone. In fact, I'm named after my grandmother. I did have a grandmother on my father's side.

LEVINE: Do you remember her at all?

KLEMENS: Slightly, hardly. I have her pictures. That's all I remember about her.

LEVINE: Was she in the same town as you and your mother?

KLEMENS: She was probably in the same town, possibly.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you didn't have, did you have a large extended family? In

other words, uncles, aunts, cousins?

KLEMENS: My mother had a sister, and she lived with us in one room. I remember it, one room.

LEVINE: Could you describe what you remember of that room?

KLEMENS: Well, I imagine it was one great big room where there was a bed and there was an oven where they baked. They used to bake bread or challahs, and sell them, and that's how they made, sell it to the peasants there. They were very good cooks. And I guess that's how they made their, that's how I remember they were very good, they used to do a lot of baking in these and they had these great big ovens.

LEVINE: Do you remember any food that you ate as a young child in Poland?

KLEMENS: Oh, not especially, really, except real old-fashioned Jewish food that they cooked. I don't think I paid too much attention to the food.

LEVINE: Were you a religious family?

KLEMENS: My family, my mother was very religious, very orthodox, and very observant.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about the religious observances from when you were in Poland?

KLEMENS: I don't know where they went to services. I think, frankly, what I was told, they would hire a horse and wagon and they would drive them to the city, because I'm sure they observed the holidays.

LEVINE: But there probably wasn't a temple in your little town.

KLEMENS: Oh, no.

LEVINE: Were there very many Jewish people in your town?

KLEMENS: I hardly think so. See, I don't remember that at all. I wasn't taught religion at that time. I know that my mother was extremely religious. My aunt was. They always kept a strictly kosher home and observed the holidays as best they could. But I imagine that how they got to the town where there was some kind of services was with a horse and wagon. They would hire a horse, a man that would drive them, a Gentile man.

LEVINE: In the one room that you were living in, was this in a house?

KLEMENS: Yes.

LEVINE: Was it an apartment within a house?

KLEMENS: A house. It must have been one, I remember just one room. It's very

strange. And we were living with my aunt, and she had two boys, one a little older than me, and one younger. And the younger one, I remember a cradle, and I, they used to ask me to rock him in the cradle.

LEVINE: So it was your mother, her sister, her sister's two sons and you.

KLEMENS: And my mother's husband and my father . . . No, my mother's husband and my uncle were brothers, and two brothers married two sisters.

LEVINE: Was that usual at that time?

KLEMENS: Well, no. I suppose it happens. That's why I was very close to those two boys. They were more like my brothers as we grew up. We came to America first. Then they came, and they lived with us for quite a while until, in those years, somebody always took somebody in to get them started. There was no handouts, no aid of any kind.

LEVINE: Well, do you, now, did you go to school when you were in Poland?

KLEMENS: No, no.

LEVINE: You were too young.

KLEMENS: I was too young, and probably wouldn't be allowed to go to school. My mother wasn't able to go to school. My mother couldn't read or write. But my father . . .

LEVINE: Why wouldn't she . . .

KLEMENS: They didn't allow them to.

LEVINE: You mean Jewish people?

KLEMENS: But my father was very well-learned.

LEVINE: How did he get to be so educated?

KLEMENS: You know, I wonder myself. He knew about five languages. When they were very young, the people then used to take, wrap them up, about ten, and send them, well, today's lifestyle they say a rabbi or a learned man, and there they would live and study, and that's where he lived until he knew how to pray, he knew Russian, he knew Hebrew, he knew the religion very well. He was very well-learned. And my mother, they never allowed her to go to school.

LEVINE: Well, now, was it partly because she was a woman as well as Jewish that she . . .

KLEMENS: It was women, especially Jewish women. They were always persecuted all through the ages, Jews were persecuted. And you will find many of the elderly Jewish people that came, they were illiterate. They didn't know how to read or write. But she knew how to pray. She knew every when and how by just going to the old

shuls at that time.

LEVINE: What was your mother's name before she was married?

KLEMENS: Warshawsky. W-A-R-S-H-A-W-S-K-Y.

LEVINE: Okay. And what was her first name?

KLEMENS: Sara.

LEVINE: And her sister's name?

KLEMENS: Her sister's name was Skittel.

LEVINE: And your father's first name?

KLEMENS: Hyman.

LEVINE: And your cousins' names? Well, what, then, so your cousins had the same last name as you, Cooper.

KLEMENS: Cooper. And his sister's name in New York was Cooper because she married an uncle, which is also unusual.

LEVINE: And what were the, what were your cousins' names, the boys you lived with?

KLEMENS: The boy's name was Harry and Hyman. We called him Herman afterwards, later on it became more Americanized.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, do you remember playing with your cousins when you were in Poland? Do you remember games you played as a small child, or anything like that?

KLEMENS: No, no, no. I don't remember them at all because we came here before them. It was a custom in those years for men to come first, sometimes meet a woman that he liked, and he just wouldn't send for his wife, or divorce his wife. However, my mother felt my father is in America, he'll never send for her. So she had two brothers in Boston, and she wrote to them that she'd like to come to America and they sent her a ticket. And she told me, this is one thing I remember so distinctly, "If anybody asks you your father's name, say he died." Because she was, she felt that he wouldn't come to take her off the boat. So if he isn't there she'd have no problem. But he did come.

LEVINE: Well, was she in correspondence with him?

KLEMENS: What?

LEVINE: Were they writing to each other?

KLEMENS: I imagine they were.

LEVINE: So he would have known, she probably told him when she was coming.

KLEMENS: Oh, he knew that she was coming, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember how much the tickets cost by any chance?

KLEMENS: No, I would have no idea.

LEVINE: Or the name of the boat?

KLEMENS: No, I wish I did.

LEVINE: But you left from, where did you leave from, do you know?

KLEMENS: I have no idea where I would have been leaving from, because my mother worked in Warsaw, some place there.

LEVINE: Do you remember actually packing up to go?

KLEMENS: I don't remember packing up to go, but I remember, of course we went steerage, way down, I imagine. And I must have been very sick. Everybody was puking down there. And I contracted the measles on the boat, so when we landed at Ellis Island I was separated from my mother. I was put, now I recognize it, and they showed us the hospital where they kept those that were detained, and it must have been very frightening for a small child. I didn't know the language and I didn't know what happened to my mother. And, you know, now that I think back, but my father

came to visit me as soon as he heard I was there, and he came every single day.

LEVINE: Do you remember your first meeting with your father?

KLEMENS: Yes, and he told me he was my father, and he always came with some kind of a toy, a little automobile, something I'd never had, or a doll or something. He was a wonderful father, very lovable. And when I got better we came to, he took us off the boat and took us to New York, and we lived on Cherry Street.

LEVINE: What do you remember about Ellis Island? Do you remember any experiences there?

KLEMENS: I just remember being in a room all by myself, and I didn't know what happened. And I assume that I must have been crying and frightened, I didn't know where my mother was. If they did tell me I wouldn't know because I didn't speak the language.

LEVINE: Do you know where, now do you know where your mother was while you were in the quarantine?

KLEMENS: No. I think when my father came he explained it to me, he must have. I imagine that he did, because he would come every single day to visit me.

LEVINE: But your mother didn't.

KLEMENS: My mother couldn't. They wouldn't allow her to. I didn't see my mother all the time. I was isolated, and she couldn't come to see me.

LEVINE: Was she staying at Ellis Island?

KLEMENS: Yes. They had, when I went to Ellis Island they showed us. We went through the hospital where people that got sick stayed, and where the parents stayed. They were detained, and I was quite impressed with that. And I said to my daughter, "Can you imagine what they did to me?" I says, "They might have told me that I was sick, I was going to stay there, but I wouldn't understand. I didn't speak anything but Yiddish." But when my father came I think I was comforted and he couldn't wait until when I got better we all, he had a little apartment for us on Cherry Street on the east side of New York. Do you know New York? Do you know Cherry Street?

LEVINE: Yes, uh-huh. Do you remember leaving Ellis Island?

KLEMENS: No. I'm . . .

LEVINE: Well, you were young.

KLEMENS: I don't, I must have been (?) then. No, I really don't recall. But I remember going to Cherry Street.

LEVINE: What do you remember about Cherry Street?

KLEMENS: I remember that there was a bedroom without windows, and maybe a living room. And I think, if I'm not mistaken, the toilets were in the yard. There was no facilities for that.

LEVINE: Now, when you lived in Poland, did you have running water and toilets indoors? When you were in Poland, did you have running water in your house?

KLEMENS: No, no, no.

LEVINE: So you didn't have toilets and . . .

KLEMENS: We had, no, no. There were no such thing as toilets. We had, I think they would have what do they call the pumps tjat tjeu, from the well. They'd pick up, and they'd wash the clothes. Like you'd see on television today in India, where they wash their clothes. That's where the clothes were washed.

LEVINE: By the pump.

KLEMENS: Not by the pump, by the water, by the . . .

LEVINE: By the river or whatever.

KLEMENS: River. That's right, that's right. There's no such thing as running water. That's unheard of.

LEVINE: Do you remember when you came to New York and to Cherry Street, do you remember whether you thought it was nice, or you were disappointed, or you . . .

KLEMENS: No. I can't say that I had an opinion because I didn't know any better. I didn't come from a glamorous place to that, but now that I look back it probably was very, very meager, because my father made all of three dollars a week.

LEVINE: What did he do?

KLEMENS: He was a sheetmetal worker, and he worked on roofs at that time. He was jack of all trades and master of none. He was a very handy man, he could do anything. But he became, he got any kind of a job, but the immigrants it was, of course, you can't compare it, but if you read any of the books, how they struggled. The factories, there was no unions, and all of that. It was very rough. But they made it on their own. I always remember, we always had somebody living with us. One person brought over somebody else. It was an uncle or a cousin, they had no place to go. We had, everybody had a boarder, if you know what I mean.

LEVINE: And were they usually related to you, the people who stayed?

KLEMENS: Oh, of course. My father had a young brother. He had no place to go. Well, they came with us. There was always room, if it was on the floor or, this is an interesting story I like to repeat. There were, the neighbors were very close. If anybody

was sick, there would be chicken soup brought in or taken care of. My mother was expecting some other relatives. My mother told me this story. And we didn't have enough chairs. Maybe four people were coming, or five, and we had two chairs, maybe three, there were three of us. So she went and knocked at the neighbor's door next door and asked her if she could borrow her chairs for her company. And she said, "Of course." Well, the company came, and my mother must have gotten busy talking to them and probably sat on a bed or a couch, and this, and I know her name. Her name was Mrs. Orkin, because my mother mentioned it a million times. She knocked at my mother's, our door and she says, "Mrs. Cooper. I feel terrible. I borrowed your chairs and I forgot to return them. You have company." Instead of saying, "Here." To make her feel that it was her. Now, she says, "Where do you get neighbors like that?" And my mother has talked about that all through her lifetime. Apologizing to her, she says, "Here are your chairs that I borrowed from you."

LEVINE: Isn't that wonderful.

KLEMENS: Now, you don't get that kind of a closeness today.

LEVINE: Now, is it O-R-K-A-N?

KLEMENS: Huh?

LEVINE: How would you spell that neighbor's name?

KLEMENS: O-R-K-I-N, I think. Orkin. Because Mother mentioned that many times, and it stayed in my memory because, as I said, we always have somebody stay with us. Everybody had borders, either to help pay the rent or give somebody a chance to get on their feet.

LEVINE: Well, now, after you came, then your mother's sister came and your cousins, and they stayed with you?

KLEMENS: No. They stayed with my aunt. The sister that took, that sent a ticket to my father pawned all her jewelry, everything that she ever had, and to add something about her plight, she had five children. She lived on I think Ludlow Street, is there a Ludlow Street? Five flights walk-up, three rooms, five children. And when my father came to America, she was so delighted to see him, and he saw her plight, he says, "I'm going to get myself a room." She says, "No, you're not. We'll move." They all slept on the floor. They all had these feather comforters that they took with them, and he stayed there one night and he got himself a room because he realized that she was in bad circumstances, yet she pawned everything that she ever had to send for him. And he all his life said, "My sister saved my life." And he did pay her back for the ticket so she could get her jewelry, and my mother used to say, "You paid her back. What do you?" He says, "I could never pay her back." There was such love, and I loved her so dearly. She was my very favorite aunt.

LEVINE: What was that, her name? What was that aunt's name?

KLEMENS: It was Sara, too. I'm almost sure it was Sara. And they had moved to Brooklyn, near Coney Island, near Coney Island. Near Bensonhurst. You know Bensonhurst?

LEVINE: Yes. Now, did she, what was her married name?

KLEMENS: Her married name was Cooper. I said she married . . .

LEVINE: Oh, she married . . .

KLEMENS: She married an uncle. And while I lived in New York during the summer, I think I lived there three years, I would go there for a month or two to stay, and her daughter, my cousin, her youngest daughter and I were very close, would take me swimming, would take me to the beach, and I just was, I had the best time in my life. The only thing I resented was that my mother wouldn't let me stay too long. She was lonesome. But I had such a good time, she says, "I want my baby, I want my child to come back." So I didn't stay as long. I would have loved to stay, but I went there every summer for about three years, and I went to school.

LEVINE: You went to school in the Lower East Side, or . . .

KLEMENS: Yes. I have a picture of that school that I went to. Would you like to see

it?

LEVINE: After we finish I would like to see it.

KLEMENS: I'll show it to you.

LEVINE: What do you remember about the school?

KLEMENS: I know it was an ungraded class, and you'll notice in the picture there were big girls. They put everybody in one class. And it, and they must have told us they're going to take pictures, to put our hands on our shoulders, and I had that picture. And then we were able, I was sure we bought it for very little, and I still have it till this day.

LEVINE: Was it hard for you to learn English? How did you learn English?

KLEMENS: In school, I imagine.

LEVINE: Do you remember learning it? Do you remember learning English?

KLEMENS: I must have learned English right away. You know, you pick those things up.

LEVINE: Now, so most of the children in the school were immigrants as well.

KLEMENS: That's right. That's right. That's right.

LEVINE: Were they mostly from Poland, or . . .

KLEMENS: No, no. I guess they were from everywhere. Like you to go Ellis Island, I didn't know where they were from. But when you settled in New York on the East Side, they were mostly the Jewish immigrants from the land where they were persecuted. My mother was never allowed to go to school. No women were, no Jewish women. I don't know about any others. My father got a good education, because he was sent away from home at the age of ten.

LEVINE: And how long did he stay?

KLEMENS: I think until he was a young man. I don't know just how long he stayed. But this is interesting. My father was quite a smoker. He smoked a real Russian cigar, hasson, and I says to him one day, "Papa, why do you smoke so much? How come you smoke so much?" He said, I says, "Where'd you learn to smoke so much?" He says, "Well, I had a rabbi, or a teacher, who said if they learn this passage, the one that learns the passage first and knows it well, I'll give him a cigarette." And that's how he got sick, he got hooked on cigarettes in those days. He says, "I got more cigarettes than anybody else." And unfortunately he died of lung cancer.

LEVINE: Did your mother and father want you and did they themselves want to become Americanized?

KLEMENS: Very much, my father especially. My mother said, you know, there's an expression in Europe, "America the golden land." She says, "Where's the gold?" She saw people struggling. You know, it was a let down. But as soon as he was able to, he took out his first papers to become a citizen, and he did, and he voted. And I . . .

LEVINE: Do you remember when he became a citizen?

KLEMENS: Oh, I certainly do because when he became a citizen every time they had a rally, the candidates, he would go to listen. I don't know if you heard of Curley, in Boston, he was the mayor.

LEVINE: Oh, yes.

KLEMENS: (Mrs. Klemens coughs throughout.) And he was, he would drag me along, too, because we had no facilities like they do today. And he would listen to their point of view, and make suggestions. And I remember saying to him, women didn't vote then, and they were going to vote for women, the suffragettes, I said, "Pa, please vote for the women to vote." He says, "Yes, I certainly will." So he was a very broad-minded and very. And he was so proud of his citizen papers he had them framed and he always looked up to it. My daughter has it framed today as an heirloom. She kept it. It was falling apart and she had paid eighty-five dollars to have it put together because she wanted that as a remembrance of her grandfather.

LEVINE: Would you like to take a break and get some water or something? (Mrs. Klemens has been coughing.)

KLEMENS: I think I will. (break in tape)

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: We're resuming now after a break for some juice. And you were talking about your father, that he was for women's vote, and has was very interested in voting once he became a citizen.

KLEMENS: Yes, yes, yes.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything of the political times that you remember your father and his views about, uh, particular political . . .

KLEMENS: Well, I remember when the women got the vote we were all elated. And I was glad. And he voted for the women, because I begged him to, and he said he would. I was a youngster. And our mayor was Mayor Curley and I remember that he was sent to prison for something, but he still was very popular with the people in Boston.

LEVINE: Was he popular with your father, do you remember?

KLEMENS: I don't think so. I don't think so.

LEVINE: Let's see. So your father, your mother and father wanted the family, wanted themselves, and wanted you to become Americanized, do you think?

KLEMENS: Oh, yes, very much so.

LEVINE: They wanted to leave behind the ways of Poland?

KLEMENS: Yes.

LEVINE: Or did they keep some of those ways and customs?

KLEMENS: No. My father wasn't as religious as my mother. My father was more liberal and more Americanized. But as they got older he became active in the temples and served in the capacity of a president. And he was very capable of, he was a leader, I would say.

LEVINE: And what was your mother's personality like?

KLEMENS: (she pauses) My mother was a very good soul, very honest, very devoted to my father. She was a wonderful wife. They always, she always did things that would please him. In those days the man or the husband was the head of the household and the king. I remember never eating until Papa came home. We all ate

together as a family to show respect.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything else that she did in order to be, to please him?

KLEMENS: Well, she always begged him to become more religious, and she always begged him not to work on the Sabbath and she always said to him, "No matter how much you make, I'll manage. I don't care. I don't want you to work on the Sabbath." And in his later life he did, he stopped working and he became very much involved in all the temples that he ever joined. He was either the president or the secretary or head of the cemetery department or something. He was always active in that capacity, I would say.

LEVINE: Can you think of any sayings or any values that your mother or your father tried to instill in you?

KLEMENS: Well, the values, they said my father was, and mother, they were extremely honest. If a bill was due on the first, it was paid then or before. We were never allowed to buy anything paying out. We always had to have the money before we bought. Those are the values, I would say, that I have always held to this day.

LEVINE: Now, were you an only child?

KLEMENS: Yes.

LEVINE: But you, but your cousins were kind of almost like brothers?

KLEMENS: Oh, yes. We lived together when they came, for years together. Because then when they accumulated a little money and we did, we bought a house together on Grove Street in Boston. We couldn't afford a house by ourselves. And it was a three-family house, so we had one apartment, they had one apartment, and there was a store downstairs, and my father had the store. He was, as I said, he was sort of a plumber, did all kinds of fixing, a handyman. And that's how he went in business, he went in business for himself. He didn't work for anybody when he came to Boston.

LEVINE: And then did he employ other people? Or it was his own business and he worked.

KLEMENS: No. (she laughs) No.

LEVINE: Well, how did you meet your husband?

KLEMENS: (she laughs) Well, let me start from the beginning. In my day we didn't go away for the summer. We couldn't afford to. Most of the people are, my friends are in the same category. So what we did as young girls, we ran a dance and made money and we rented a cottage in the different suburbs. We went to, we made about three hundred dollars selling tickets and we rented a cottage for the summer. We went there weekends, and boys did the same thing. And that's how we met them. We met, I met

my husband on one of those summers. And quite a few of my friends met their boyfriends at that time. They had cottages nearby, and we'd meet on Saturday night and have dances with a Victrola. And strange enough, we had a lot of fun.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And do you remember what it was about your husband that attracted you to him?

KLEMENS: (she pauses) Well, I know he was very attentive of me and he was very much in love with me and he said, "You'll never be sorry for marrying me because I'll always adore you." Something like that.

LEVINE: And what was your husband's name?

KLEMENS: Jacob.

LEVINE: That's Jacob Klemens.

KLEMENS: Klemens, yeah. And that's why this little boy's name is Jacob. My grandson thinks a lot of his grandfather. He used to love to play chess, and he taught my grandson how to play chess, and now he's an avid chess player and he plays on the team there where he works.

LEVINE: Well, now, what did your husband do for work?

KLEMENS: My husband, after we went into the real estate business . . .

LEVINE: Here in Boston, or in . . .

KLEMENS: No, in Boston. He lived, he was born in America. He was born in Chelsea. That's a city outside of Boston. It was a very nice town, a very nice city. And he went into business for himself. He had an uncle. His father died when he was four years old, but he had an uncle that he was very close to and it was very successful in that line, buying property. So he got a lot of advice from him. And I think he followed into his footsteps.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So then he stayed in the real estate business?

KLEMENS: Yes.

LEVINE: Okay. And then you had three children?

KLEMENS: I had three children.

LEVINE: And what are their names?

KLEMENS: Two live in Sharon. My two daughters live in Sharon.

LEVINE: And what are your daughters' names?

KLEMENS: Adele Walman, and Helen Fine. They both, and Michael lives in California, and he's married to the most wonderful girl that ever lived. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Now, and you have how many grandchildren?

KLEMENS: Uh, (she pauses, counting) six grandchildren, six grandchildren and five great-grandchildren.

LEVINE: And how do you think about your life now, about, you know, being born in Poland and coming here at an early age and looking back on the whole thing?

KLEMENS: Well, being born in Poland is way in the background of my life because I was just a little small child. But through my lifetime we've had our ups and downs. We've had rough times, as everybody else does in life. But, as a whole, I can say that it wasn't too bad, that we made the best of the situations as they arose.

LEVINE: And how many years were you married before your husband died?

KLEMENS: Sixty-two years, so that's a long time. (she coughs) I hope that doesn't register.

LEVINE: The cough? It will. Shall I stop it a minute? (break in tape) Okay, we're resuming again after a little break.

KLEMENS: We had planned to go to Florida for a month, and I had gone into town to get a new jacket or something and I came back and he had had a stroke and he was rushed to the hospital and I nursed him for about five years. Then it came, towards the

end my children wanted me to send him into a nursing home because they felt it was too much for me, but I thought about it, I said I would, and then I would think of it, because his mind was very clear and very sharp and I could never in a million years do that. And I handled him. It wasn't easy, but I did. So I says life has its ups and downs, but it isn't always, but we have to make the best of the situation.

LEVINE: Well, how do you feel now about your old age? I mean, just thinking about this period of your life?

KLEMENS: Well, I'm very, very grateful that I'm blessed with three wonderful children and they're very caring and they're very interested in me. And I'm concerned about every day because my health is failing and I recognize it and I sometimes see the writing on the wall that I may go into a nursing home, but they said, "No way," so I'm holding my own. I'm living one day at a time. What else can you do?

LEVINE: Well, maybe that's a good place to stop. I want to thank you so much . . .

KLEMENS: You're very welcome.

LEVINE: For such an interesting group of memories that you've put forth today.

KLEMENS: I have to take out that picture and show you, that we took in New York. It must have been in 1906. And I'm going to see if you can find me in that picture.

LEVINE: Okay. Just, wait, watch the microphone. This is Janet Levine, signing off for the National Park Service, and I've been speaking with Gertrude Klemens.