

EI-252

JESSIE STEINSTRAS EEZMONEIT

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THE NETHERLANDS, 1908

AGE 10

PASSAGE ON "THE ROTTERDAM"

PORT: ROTTERDAM

RESIDENCES: THE NETHERLANDS: LEEUWARDEN  
US: BRIARCLIFF MANOR, NY

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here today in North Haledon, New Jersey with Jessie Steinstra Eezmoneit, who came from Holland in 1908 when she was ten years old.

EEZMONEIT: That's correct.

LEVINE: I'm very happy to be here, and I'm looking very much forward to hearing your story.

EEZMONEIT: Well, it's very nice meeting you, too. Well, as you said, we came to this country in 1908, and as I started to say before, we had a grand welcome. My father met us, in the beginning my father met us on the, at the, at Ellis Island, and we had difficulty entering because I had a sister who was lame, and they wouldn't admit her. So then a friend of my father came back, went back to New Jersey. My

father went back to New Jersey to pick up this friend of his to prove, and they came back to prove that my father was able to take care of him. So we just stayed overnight, and then we came on to Briarcliff Manor, New York. And, as most people know, this is a college town, and we did have a grand welcome. There were very few foreigners there, really none. And we still had, we were wearing the wooden shoes because that's what we wore in Holland. I had never worn shoes until I came to this country. We got these shoes, and they really made such a fuss over us. We went to school all, there were five of us at the time. We went to school, and we learned our ABC's. And as we, and within a very short time we conquered the English language beautifully. My father spoke, had spoken it well. He had good speaking when he was in Holland. And he, they took us, see, I lose my train of thought.

LEVINE: Jessie, maybe I think it would be perhaps best if we started out with the town in Holland where you grew up, and we'll deal with it right there first.

LEVINE: Okay. I was not born in Leeuwarden, but I lived most of my life in Holland, in Leeuwarden.

LEVINE: Can you spell Leeuwarden?

EEZMONEIT: L-E-E-U-W-A-R-D-E-N. It means "lion." "Leeu" is a

lion. Leeuwarden. And we went to school there, and we spoke Frisian. I came from Friesland. We spoke Frisian in the home. But, and school, we spoke the Holland language which, by the way, is a beautiful language. And, but the minute we got into the play yard at recess-time we'd be speaking Frisian again.

LEVINE: How do you spell Frisian?

EEZMONEIT: F-R-I-S-I-A-N. And, uh . . .

LEVINE: And what was Frisian? What . . .

EEZMONEIT: That's a province in Holland, and a lot of people don't realize it, but Holland at one time was all Friesland. The Frisian people are very proud of their heritage, and they have a right to be. And . . .

LEVINE: So you were Friesland?

EEZMONEIT: Yes.

LEVINE: With your family.

EEZMONEIT: From Friesland.

LEVINE: From Friesland.

EEZMONEIT: Uh-huh.

LEVINE: And how, what does that part of your heritage mean to you?

EEZMONEIT: Well, I what will I say, that it has such a wonderful background. The Frisian people are good, honest, they're stubborn, but they're good, honest people. And it's, I just can't explain how I feel about it. I really, I really can't, it's just a wonderful feeling to know that I was born in Friesland. I didn't think so at the time, but I do now.

LEVINE: Now, what, what is your exact birth date?

EEZMONEIT: August the 5th, 1898.

LEVINE: And you were born in the same town that you lived in when . . .

EEZMONEIT: No. We lived in a little town by the name of, very few people have heard of that, it's pronounced "yet" in Holland, but it's J-E-T. It was a, maybe just a few houses in there. And my father had a dairy there. And I don't quite know why they were persuaded to come to this country, but my father

came first.

LEVINE: Well, now, did you, when you were in Jet, did you, is that when you went to school?

EEZMONEIT: No. We didn't go to school there.

LEVINE: Oh, you didn't go to school at all when you were there.

EEZMONEIT: No. Oh, we must have, but that I don't remember because I was ten. Well, maybe. They started school late in Holland. They don't start them as, maybe they do now, but they didn't start them until they were about six years old to go to school.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, what was your father's name?

EEZMONEIT: Charles, Charles Steinstra.

LEVINE: And your mother?

EEZMONEIT: Was Louise Zylstra.

LEVINE: Zylstra?

EEZMONEIT: Z-Y-L-S-T-R-A.

LEVINE: That was her maiden name?

EEZMONEIT: That was her maiden name, yes.

LEVINE: And your, and what about the rest of your family as far as brothers and sisters? How many . . .

EEZMONEIT: I had, we came, my mother came, my father came here first, in 1903, and he was here for, there for three years, in Holland, in America for three years, when he came home to Holland and spent a year or so there, maybe a little more. And then he had been here for a year, and then he sent for all of us, which was my mother with five children, six children. And after she was here she had twins yet, so we were a family of ten children.

LEVINE: Where did you fit in the . . .

EEZMONEIT: Uh, fourth. Fourth from the oldest. There were three sisters older than I.

LEVINE: Are any of you brothers or sister . . .

EEZMONEIT: I'm the only one left of all.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And were you closest to any particular family member, would you say?

EEZMONEIT: Well, the sister that was closest to me was closest

to my age. We were very often taken for twins. We were very close. And if we were on our way to church and one of us was missing the neighbors would say, "Where's your other half?"

LEVINE: This was a sister?

EEZMONEIT: This is a sister, yes.

LEVINE: What was her name?

EEZMONEIT: Burdie, B-U-R-D-I-E.

LEVINE: And how would you describe your mother?

EEZMONEIT: My mother was the soul of goodness. Kind, she was always happy, and she didn't always have everything to be happy about, but my mother was a very happy person.

LEVINE: Did she work at all?

EEZMONEIT: No, no, no, no. Not with the family she had.  
( she laughs ) And in those days, you know, you cooked from scratch and she had, in Holland, at that time, Holland has changed a great deal since then, but at that time no one baked their own bread. Everything was bought at the bakery shop on a

corner. When my mother came here, as I said, we landed in Briarcliff Manor and there was a mountain outside of our house. And we could pick up apples free. We could pick up wild roses. Oh, we thought that was beautiful. But my mother, and blackberries on the mountain. My mother learned to make jam. She baked bread. She was just wonderful. She was a wonderful mother.

LEVINE: Good. Do you remember any of the foods that she made when you were a little girl, before you came?

EEZMONEIT: Oh, yes. Buttermilk was a great thing in Holland, and we made it kind of a soup with barley with the buttermilk. They cooked the buttermilk with barley in it. And in those days, I don't know what they do now, but they milked the sheep, and you used the milk of the sheep over that, and that was just wonderful. That was cold. Or you'd heat it, and you'd eat it with syrup. And that was a good, substantial food. Of course there's always potatoes in Holland. And meat, and vegetables. It wasn't too much different from here. You know, it was a good life.

LEVINE: Do you remember the house you lived in?

EEZMONEIT: Not the previous one, but the one in Leeuwarden, yes. It was a row of houses all made of brick. And that's one thing that startled me when I came to this country. I saw wooden houses. I had never seen anything but a brick house. And you had brick steps going to the streets, and then there was a street that was all brick, and each person would clean their share of the street. No horse or wagon ever came on the street. There was a side street where the peddler and so on would stop. But, and then you'd walk over there and get them, but, and the children had a nice place to play.

LEVINE: Do you remember the cleaning of the streets?

EEZMONEIT: Oh, yes. I've done it.

LEVINE: What did it look like? I mean . . .

EEZMONEIT: Well, you just get on your hands and knees and scrub the, you'd just scrub your kitchen floor. You would scrub that part of the street.

LEVINE: Was that a social kind of event for the women?

EEZMONEIT: Not that I remember of, no, no.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything else about town life that was different there than it was when you came here?

EEZMONEIT: No. I can't say that I can, we may have had some very nice friends there. I can remember a house standing away from us. There was a beautiful home, beautiful to us, that stood on a little hillside there at the end of the street. And their name was Tepstra. And I think he was a doctor. And they had peacocks in their yard, and we children just loved to watch those peacocks. They were beautiful. And they were quite prevalent there. That's one thing that stands out in my mind. But . . .

LEVINE: Well, what did you like to do as a child . . .

EEZMONEIT: As a child?

LEVINE: When you were ten years old, before you came here.

EEZMONEIT: Well, of course, we were great skaters. We just skated. In the wintertime, I can remember, there was a long hall in our home, and there were a bunch of skates laying there. And as soon as we came home from school we'd go for those skates and each pick

out their own. And the canal was really across the street from us, and we'd go out skating. And my mother would have a little piece of cake, and I think an apple, on the table for each of us. And she might be out gossiping with a neighbor. They had, it was a very nice neighborhood. And then she knew we were safe. At night the men would go around these canals, fill in all the cracks, so that the ice would be smooth. Now, I talked to Hilda Reitsma [interviewee EI-258] of that. She said it isn't that way any more. She came from Holland many years after I have. Am I talking too fast?

LEVINE: No, you're fine. You're great.

EEZMONEIT: ( she laughs ) It isn't that way any more. It's, when I was telling her about this she said, "Oh, Jessie," she says, "it isn't that way at all any more."

LEVINE: You mean they're not smoothing the ice out.

EEZMONEIT: No, no. They used to do all the traveling on ice. They had horse and sleighs, that merchandise would go by sleigh, by canals. And they had tents all along the way where they sold hot chocolate. They

traveled from town to town.

LEVINE: Well, now, if your mother wanted to purchase something what would she do? Would she go down to the canal?

EEZMONEIT: Oh, no, no, no, no. The peddlers came by the, the main street. They came by every day. You could get anything you wanted or needed and, yeah. And there was a little candy store around the corner from there that, on that main street, that we children could go and spend a half penny. Yeah. And now as you're talking it comes back to me. We used to do these things. I don't have anything written in there of that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember anything about the clothing that you wore when you were in Holland, or that your mother wore?

EEZMONEIT: My mother, well, she wore, she wore, and that is something that my grandmother wore, too. They would cut their hair, put a little gold cap, a half cap on their head, put a lace cap over that, and then put two beautiful pins by your ears to hold them in. My grandmother's was in gold. That showed her station.

My mother had one in silver. So, but she had stopped wearing them by the time we came to this country. She let her hair grow again. But that was a, I have pictures of my grandmother with that, and that is very nice.

LEVINE: Well, now, this gold cap, it covered all of her hair?

EEZMONEIT: No. It was just like two shells on this, on each side of the head. There was a half shell. And there was a wire connecting the two shells.

LEVINE: And could you see her hair?

EEZMONEIT: No.

LEVINE: No, uh-huh.

EEZMONEIT: No. They had the cap on first, and then they had this thing, and then they put a lace cap over that.

LEVINE: Well. And was the lace cap white?

EEZMONEIT: Yes, yes, yes.

LEVINE: And the gold was to designate . . .

EEZMONEIT: The station in life.

LEVINE: Which would be, would it be her age?

EEZMONEIT: No. No, no, no, no.

LEVINE: Or it would be her status?

EEZMONEIT: Yes, yes, yes, yes.

LEVINE: What was your grandmother like? What do you remember about her?

EEZMONEIT: My grandmother, I had never saw her very much. You know, traveling was kind of hard to do in those days, but I remember visiting her. And they had a great, big orchard, and a big farm, and she was such a kind, kind person. She was small, petite, and she was, she was a housekeeper for my grandfather, and they finally got married. She was thirty and he was forty when they were married. And they had ten children, and I remember that she always treated us so good. She was just wonderful. And my grandfather, too. He was such a kind man.

LEVINE: Now, what did your grandfather do?

EEZMONEIT: He was, the orchard man. He was really a trader in

cows. They'd come to him, they'd make a trade. And when the pact was finished the hand, they shook hands, and that was the finish of the deal. They wouldn't think of breaking their word. No, it was . . .

LEVINE: So he would trade cows for, like, apples?

EEZMONEIT: No, no. A farmer would need, would need cows, and he'd go to my grandfather to buy them. That's about the only way I can explain it. They still have cow dealers here that they do it in that manner.

LEVINE: And he would also then sell the, uh, was it an apple orchard that he . . .

EEZMONEIT: No, no. Yeah, he's, I don't remember whether he sold the apples. He had pears too, I know. I don't know what he did with them. I don't remember that. I imagine he must have sold them. Hmm.

LEVINE: Now, this was your mother's?

EEZMONEIT: My mother's people. Uh-huh.

LEVINE: And your father? Do you remember anything about his parents?

EEZMONEIT: My father, no. My father left his home when he was a young man, and I never knew too much about his side of the family.

LEVINE: Do you remember his work as a dairy farmer?

EEZMONEIT: He was a dairy farmer, yes. He was a wonderful man with cows. And, uh . . .

LEVINE: Can you remember any experiences with your father?

EEZMONEIT: Well, one thing, not myself, but my brother. He was about three years old when we came to this country, and he must have been about seven or eight. One day he followed my father. This was in Briarcliff. He followed my father into the barn. He always did, he was always following my father. And there was, the barn held about a hundred cows, and then in the back there was a place where they had the bulls. And one of the cows, the cows naturally went into the field. They must have gotten into that part where the bulls were, and lifted the latch, and the bull got out of the pen, and it was the most vicious bull of all. And my father saw that, and he, and for once my brother was not with him, and he jumped up on a hay loft and threw his hat into the pen, and the

bull after that hat, and my father quickly closed the pen.

LEVINE: Would you say you were a farm . . .

EEZMONEIT: Product. ( they laugh )

LEVINE: You really knew about farms and farming when you were a little girl?

EEZMONEIT: Yes, somewhat, yes. I didn't pay too much attention, but my father was really, he really was wonderful with animals.

LEVINE: Do you remember, did you have tasks or chores that you did as a little girl?

EEZMONEIT: No, no. I think each one took care of their own pretty well. It was, we were a large family and we helped each other. But my father insisted upon English being spoken in the house.

LEVINE: In Holland, or here?

EEZMONEIT: No, here.

LEVINE: But when you were in Holland you were not speaking Dutch in the home, or . . .

EEZMONEIT: We spoke Frisian in the home. We always, even, my mother always, she never conquered the English language completely, and she, we'd speak to her in English, and she'd answer us in the Frisian language. But that was just natural.

LEVINE: Now, did you know Dutch as well as Frisian when you came here?

EEZMONEIT: Yes, yes. Oh, yes.

LEVINE: So if you were playing with your playmates in Holland would you be talking Frisian, or would you be talking Dutch?

EEZMONEIT: No, the Holland. Yeah. But certain groups, we'd just be talking Frisian. It depended upon who we were playing with.

LEVINE: Do you remember any games you played or activities, the kinds of games?

EEZMONEIT: No. I think we played hopscotch and jumping rope. Outside of that, I don't remember. We had a good place to play hopscotch on that street that we scrubbed. ( she laughs )

LEVINE: What about the inside of your house? Do you remember it at all?

EEZMONEIT: Not very much different from this. I do remember that we had, we lit with gas, and that was in 1908. When we came to this country, and we were really in farmland, we had to go back to kerosene lamps, and my mother thought that was terrible. ( she laughs )

LEVINE: Do you remember why your father came here initially?

EEZMONEIT: Saw better opportunities to come here. Hmm.

LEVINE: And so he left when you were about five.

EEZMONEIT: Hmm. I imagine I was about that. Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: And then how did your mother get along with him here for such a long period of time?

EEZMONEIT: Well, at that time I think there were five children, and she managed to, no. My grandmother took one of my sisters. She lived with my grandmother for, oh, quite a few years, until we came to this country. And my mother always had help. You just always had a maid. She didn't do it all alone. She managed very well.

LEVINE: Well, now, it sounds as though you were, you were comfortable.

EEZMONEIT: Yes, we were. Yes, yes.

LEVINE: You were not in need.

EEZMONEIT: In dire circumstances, no. We were not. I do think that my mother's sisters were much better situated than she was, and she said she'd rather be poor in a strange country than in her own country. So . . .  
( she laughs ) Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, did your mother's sisters live near you? Were they . . .

EEZMONEIT: No, no. It was all distance, a distance away. And traveling was hard in those days, you know. It wasn't easy, no. We did . . .

LEVINE: How would you travel if you did travel?

EEZMONEIT: I don't know. The only way is the horse and wagon, that I know of. Hmm.

LEVINE: Were there any holidays or festive occasions that you recall?

EEZMONEIT: Christmas, naturally, and Santa Claus Day. They do not celebrate Christmas as we do here. The gifts are exchanged on the fifth of December, and that's Santa Claus Day, and we all children looked forward to that. And Santa Claus comes and strews some kind of little, we'd call them peppernuts. They were little, I can't think of the name of them this minute, but it's a little cookie. And he would strew them. But we had gifts. And we didn't, we weren't supposed to see him.

LEVINE: Would he distribute the gifts at night?

EEZMONEIT: Yes, yes. Yeah. We didn't, we're not supposed to see him. He would strew them, and we'd never see him. But we all looked forward to Santa Claus Day. And to this day I always remember the fifth of December as Santa Claus Day. And at Christmastime they celebrate it in a religious way. It didn't interfere with the gift giving. And, well, they had I think one Christmas tree for the whole town. So when we came to this country, and these girls from the college came and gave us our first Christmas, they had a Christmas tree in our house for us, and gifts for all of us children. They treated us

royally.

LEVINE: Now, were you a religious family?

EEZMONEIT: Average. Hmm. Average.

LEVINE: Were you, does that mean you would go to church . . .

EEZMONEIT: I'd, we'd go to church and Sunday school. I can remember my mother taking us to church, and I don't remember the church well. I remember going, the street that we took was a beautiful street. The trees just met overhead. It was lovely. And they had, in those days they had little footstool warmers. It was a little square box with hot coal in it. And the women could put their feet on those little stoves, they called them, and keep warm.

LEVINE: In church.

EEZMONEIT: In church. And my mother always had some peppermints with her, so she'd give each of us children a peppermint so we'd be quiet in church.

LEVINE: And what, did your mother sew the clothing you wore?

EEZMONEIT: No, my mother was no seamstress. No.

LEVINE: And how, would you purchase it from the peddlers who came, or how would you . . .

EEZMONEIT: I don't remember how we did that. I don't remember.

LEVINE: Okay. Is there anything . . .

EEZMONEIT: It wasn't important to me, you know. I was there, and that was all there was to it.

LEVINE: Well, how did it get decided that the rest of the family would come?

EEZMONEIT: They were, see, they were born here. My mother, those children, the children that she came with were born in Holland. Then we had two more. One died, and we had two, we had twins, a brother and a sister, that was born in this country.

LEVINE: And do you remember when it was decided that your mother and the children would be coming here?

EEZMONEIT: No. We came in September, I remember. But otherwise than that, no.

LEVINE: Do you remember leaving the . . .

EEZMONEIT: Oh, the children, my friends and all, oh, "We'll be

back." And, of course, we never did. Some of my sisters went back. One of my sisters went back about four times, another one about three times, another one once. I had no desire to go back.

LEVINE: Were you looking forward to coming? Do you remember going to . . .

EEZMONEIT: Oh, yes, oh, yes. We were, very much. I don't think my mother was. ( she laughs ) She had to leave all her loved ones behind.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about what you expected before you actually got here, or what you knew about America before you came?

EEZMONEIT: No, no. We did look forward to going, I think, because I remember my brother, he was just a little fellow, and he was always with my mother. And he'd say, "Mom, when are we going to America?" And she'd say, in Dutch, then, "Oh, when a ship with money comes over." And then she'd say, uh, he'd say, "Mom, when is the ship with money coming over?" He was so anxious to get here, you know. He was just a little fellow. And there are certain things that stick out. And he was a cute little fellow.

LEVINE: Were there many people from your little town going to America at that time?

EEZMONEIT: No. There was a neighbor of ours that went on the same trip that we went. And we went, we came over on the new Rotterdam, which was a, it was only its second voyage. And it took us nine days to come over, which was very, very quick. Because it was 1908, you know, and it was, as a smooth trip, it was good. We had fog, I remember.

LEVINE: Do you remember leaving your home?

EEZMONEIT: Yes.

LEVINE: And what was that like, the actual departure?

EEZMONEIT: I believe it took us, I don't know how it was. They must have had a horse and wagon. They took us. And, no, an uncle of mine came. And he brought us over to, I guess the embarkment point was Rotterdam. Hmm. But outside of that, I don't, I think my mother must have, it must have broken her heart to leave all her loved ones behind, but she knew what was best for the children. And she was always happy here. She said that she was glad she had come, and

she was acclimated.

LEVINE: Did you have to wait in Rotterdam for any period of time?

EEZMONEIT: No, no.

LEVINE: Did you have any examinations?

EEZMONEIT: Oh, yes, indeed. Oh, yes, indeed. We had examinations as we entered the boat, and I think we had two on our way, and then another one when we came off the boat.

LEVINE: And the, what was, where were you? Were you in a cabin on the boat? Were you in . . .

EEZMONEIT: Yes, yes, yes, yes. Uh, I don't remember whether it was second or third class. I don't even remember that. But we were treated well, I know that, and the food was good.

LEVINE: Did you go to the dining room for food, or did the food, do you remember if you ate the food . . .

EEZMONEIT: I think we must have gone to the dining room, but I don't remember. I really don't.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about the boat or the voyage?

EEZMONEIT: The trip, the people on the upper class seemed to take pity on my mother with all her children. And I had two sisters who were very, very winsome. And they treated her, they treated them so well. They would get up there, and they got things there that we wouldn't get where we were. And there was a romance came out of that. Not my sister, a friend of hers. There was a man somewhere there that, I forgot what his position was in that upper class. And they finally got married and lived happily very, they lived in this country. Hmm.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: So, after nine days the ship came into the New York Harbor. Do you remember coming into the harbor?

EEZMONEIT: Yes, I remember, but believe it or not I don't remember the Statue of Liberty. But I remember very well, I remember my father saying, you know, we're sort of a slow nation. He says, "You can't, you have to step on it a little bit." Getting on the

trolleys and all. And everybody was in such a hurry. We just couldn't fathom that.

LEVINE: Do you remember Ellis Island when you got there?

EEZMONEIT: Yes, yes. I do remember that. Because they detained us there, you know. And I see pictures of it now, and it comes back, you know, that we were there. And, as I said, they detained my sister, and then my mother, she wore braces. And my mother had made her dresses a little longer hoping they wouldn't notice, but they did. And, as I said, when my father could prove that she would be no burden to the country they admitted her. And then about, oh, I'll say a month or so after we were in this country one of my sisters became ill, and the city nurse came in and saw my sister, who was crippled. And she said, "If you will let us take this child to New York we'll operate on her and it won't cost you anything." And we couldn't imagine that. But they did. They took her, and they operated on her. She never wore braces again. She wore, she walked with a limp, but the braces were gone for good.

LEVINE: And, now, was this a problem that she was born with?

EEZMONEIT: No. Uh, we didn't know it at the time, but when we think back she must have had polio. And she didn't get out of the hospital until after Christmas. She was there about three months, or close to three months. Because I've forgotten, I think it was measles or scarlet fever or something broke out in the hospital, one of the children's diseases, and they wouldn't, uh . . .

LEVINE: Was it a social agency that somehow was responsible for immigrants, or who was it that took her . . .

EEZMONEIT: This visiting nurse that came into, the city nurse, from Briarcliff Manor, see, came in there, and took care of my sister, who was ill. And when she saw this sister she, mmm.

LEVINE: So what were your impressions of Ellis Island? Is there anything else that you remember . . .

EEZMONEIT: No, I don't remember. It was a lot of people. That's all I remember. And my father had a time keeping us all together.

LEVINE: What was it like seeing your father?

EEZMONEIT: Oh, wonderful. ( she laughs ) Great, great. Yeah.

LEVINE: So he came to Ellis Island. And then you all left with him eventually . . .

EEZMONEIT: Yes.

LEVINE: After you came.

EEZMONEIT: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: And where did you go?

EEZMONEIT: Then we went to Pleasantville, New York State, because the house that was in Briarcliff, and that's about a mile from Briarcliff Manor. And the house that we were to go in was not ready for us. So we stayed in Pleasantville in a little house. I look at it now and think how did we do it. But we did, we stayed there for a month. And we loved it because it was country and it was mountains. And, you know, Holland is as flat as a doornail. You could see for miles and miles and miles. It's very pretty. Holland is a very pretty country, especially Friesland. It's all green fields and canals and windmills. There were so many windmills, and they're not, Hilda tells me that there are very few windmills in Holland any more. Hmm.

LEVINE: Well, they were used as a source of energy.

EEZMONEIT: Right, right, right.

LEVINE: Well, now, do you remember your initial impressions about the United States, some things that you saw or heard?

EEZMONEIT: As I said, the thing that impressed me most was to see all wooden houses. In fact, I said to my father, "Don't they have nice chicken coops here?"  
( they laugh )

LEVINE: Well, now, what was your father doing here?

EEZMONEIT: He had a dairy.

LEVINE: He did the same work as he did in Holland.

EEZMONEIT: Yes, yes, yes.

LEVINE: And that was in Briarcliff?

EEZMONEIT: Yes, yes, yes. We went back there a couple of times. I've done a great deal of driving in my day, and I used to take my mother and my sisters all out for drives. And we'd go back there and see it, and it changed a great deal. Yeah.

LEVINE: So then did you start into school fairly soon after you . . .

EEZMONEIT: Yes, very shortly after that we started school, and school was about, oh, half a mile from our house, maybe a little bit more. It must have been a little farther, because we did not come home for lunch. We carried our lunch. No, we did come home for lunch, and the teachers were trying to ask one of my sisters, did we go home or did we eat our lunch here? And she couldn't get it. And she's trying to, she had the glass in front of her, and the teacher said, "Eat, eat." And my sister thought she asked this and, "I have to say eat," so she turned to the children, and she said, "Eat, eat!" But, you see, we knew nothing. It's very difficult at first.

LEVINE: And how were you treated by the other children?

EEZMONEIT: Very well. Yeah, oh, yeah. We were a novelty there. They made a big fuss over us. As I say, we had a grand welcome to this country. We really did.

LEVINE: And do you remember anything about learning English,

any times that you had a breakthrough in learning or anything like that?

EEZMONEIT: No, no. The only thing I remember, writing to my grandmother, and writing all the, ( she laughs ) all the words in English, and then have the translation in Dutch along side of it to tell her what, the words I had been taught. ( she laughs ) Yeah. It was difficult, too. We were very fortunate to land in a spot where the English language was spoken properly, because I have no accent. I know, people have told me that, and anyone born in, even at the age of ten you really, my oldest sister was fourteen, and she always had just a little accent. But it's very seldom that you can, at that age you come from the other side and not have an accent. But it was, we were taught. No English, no slang. No slang at all. And when I came to Garfield, we came to Garfield from New York State. I was amazed at some of the words. I didn't know because we were taught the proper words.

LEVINE: How . . . I'm sorry, go ahead.

EEZMONEIT: Such a thing as "ain't." We wouldn't think of using

that.

LEVINE: How long did you stay in Briarcliff Manor?

EEZMONEIT: In Briarcliff? About three years.

LEVINE: So then did you go to school in New York?

EEZMONEIT: In Jersey, yes, yes. Yeah.

LEVINE: And your father, was he speaking English quite well when you . . .

EEZMONEIT: Oh, my father went to school in Holland until I think he was thirteen, which was terrific in those days for, at that time. And he spoke the English language, he took English up in Holland. He spoke the English language very well. In fact, he was sitting around a table at the farm one day, and they were all at the dinner table. The men farmed, the farmhands. And he says, "I prefer this, and I prefer that." He says they soon knocked that out of him because they didn't, weren't that, they didn't use the etiquette that way, let's say. So, but we were very fortunate.

LEVINE: Did your father become a citizen?

EEZMONEIT: Oh, yes. Yes, and the minor children all became citizens through him.

LEVINE: And your mother?

EEZMONEIT: My mother too, yes. They were all citizens, yes. That's something he wouldn't neglect.

LEVINE: And were they, as far as wanting to keep some of the ways from Holland, were there things that you or your father wanted to hold onto?

EEZMONEIT: No, no, no, no. My mother might have. I don't remember. But she, well, there were certain things she did that she always adhered to. But my father was, he really felt that we were in this country now, and this was the way we should live.

LEVINE: Can you remember any of the specifics of the things that your mother did?

EEZMONEIT: No, I can't say so. No. And really when you analyze it, it wasn't so different. You did things very much the way, of course they were very, very clean. Everything had to be just so. And, but, uh, Holland people are known for their cleanliness. They really are. And some of them deserve it, and

others don't.

LEVINE: Was life here by and large better for your family?

EEZMONEIT: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Yes, it was. ( she pauses )  
Well, you think you've had enough of this?

LEVINE: Well, this is, everything you have to say is very,  
very interesting, so . . .

EEZMONEIT: Thank you.

LEVINE: Whatever you can remember more, I would like to  
hear. Let's see. How about, how long did you stay  
in school here?

EEZMONEIT: Oh, let me see. Not too long. I didn't graduate  
from elementary school. I didn't like school. And  
I begged to stay home.

LEVINE: Hmm. Do you know what the, why you did stop when  
you stopped?

EEZMONEIT: No, I don't know. I just didn't like it. And  
whether I didn't like the restrictions or what, I  
don't remember.

LEVINE: Well, did you work then?

EEZMONEIT: No, no.

LEVINE: You stayed home.

EEZMONEIT: I stayed home, yes, yes.

LEVINE: Then did you work at some point later?

EEZMONEIT: Yes, later. Many years later I started in an embroidery shop, which was lovely. It was very nice. Very nice work. It was, there were machines, sewing machines, about five or six girls sitting in a row. And they made the embroidery on ten-yard machines in another room, and anything of the pattern that was left out we would put back in there again. So it was interesting. And it was clean work, it was nice work.

LEVINE: Did you stay there very long?

EEZMONEIT: Oh, I don't remember. I imagine so. I think I worked there when I got married. I must have worked there quite a few years.

LEVINE: Do you remember meeting your husband?

EEZMONEIT: Yes. ( there is an announcement made on a public address system in the background ) We used to pass

a house on our way to Sunday school, and there was a woman in there that knew me well. And her brother was staying with her, and he had just broken up with an affair. And she said, "Gus, there's a nice girl you should meet." And I would have no part of him.

( she laughs ) But he wore on me. ( she laughs )

LEVINE: Did you, how long did you see him before you actually got married?

EEZMONEIT: Oh, I guess we were together about two or three years. ( there is an announcement made on a public address system in the background ) And then we, I was married at the age of twenty-three.

LEVINE: So, now, was he also of Dutch . . .

EEZMONEIT: No. He was born in Holland, but his people were German. They were Germans.

LEVINE: So your last name is a German name.

EEZMONEIT: Mmm. Although they tell me it's of French origin. If it's pronounced correctly it's, that's what it is. I took vocal lessons some years ago, and this teacher said to me, "Oh," she said, "that's definitely French." She said, "It means 'gold,

wealth.'" "

LEVINE: Now, how do you pronounce it in the French manner?

EEZMONEIT: Eezmoneit. [ets-mo-neet]

LEVINE: (repeating) Eezmoneit. Let's see. Then, did you have children?

EEZMONEIT: I had two children, a boy and a girl. And I had, they, between them I have five grandchildren and eight great-grandchildren.

LEVINE: And what was your father, your husband's first name?

EEZMONEIT: Gus.

LEVINE: Gus. And your . . .

EEZMONEIT: Gustave.

LEVINE: Gustave. And your two children's names?

EEZMONEIT: Mae and Edward.

LEVINE: Well, do you think that your being born in Holland and living there for the first ten years has affected a lot of your life?

EEZMONEIT: No, I don't think so. I've been here too long to,

no. There are certain traits, I imagine, but I can't see them myself. No.

LEVINE: Well, and you're enjoying your life now?

EEZMONEIT: I enjoy my life. I've had a very good life all the way through. Of course, we had trials and tribulations. Who doesn't? But when I look back, I was very fortunate. My husband was a very good man. He was a good father and a good husband and, no. And I had a lot of pleasure from the rest of my family. I was very fortunate.

LEVINE: What are you most proud of that you . . .

EEZMONEIT: Oh, I don't know.

LEVINE: ( she laughs ) You're not going to tell.

EEZMONEIT: No, I can't think of. Well, maybe some of my church work I did, because, and I didn't, I didn't realize this myself. Only the other day our minister was saying, he said, "Jessie, you may not know it, but you have influenced so many people." And, I shouldn't say. ( she laughs )

LEVINE: No. I think, I think it's a fact. It's not tooting

your own horn. It's probably, when you say church work, what in particular do you mean?

EEZMONEIT: I was, I started off being a Sunday school teacher, and I was a superintendent. I was in a choir since I was thirteen years old, and I was president of different organizations, and children coming in to Sunday school. I love children, and they know it. I love my work. I worked with retarded children for a while, too, which I enjoyed very much. No, I've been rewarded over and over again.

LEVINE: And at this point in your life, do you find that you reflect back on your whole life and . . .

EEZMONEIT: Not too, naturally. When I'm alone, sitting alone, I think back. For instance, the other night I had a dream, and my next to my oldest sister, she says, "Oh, Jessie, come on in here. I have a surprise for you." And I walked into her house and there were all my sisters and brothers sitting around the table. Hmmm.

LEVINE: So is there anything that you would say about this phase of your life and work that you're doing?

EEZMONEIT: That I'm content and happy. Uh-huh.

LEVINE: Well, that's wonderful, and I think maybe that's the perfect note to end on. I want to thank you very, very much.

EEZMONEIT: You're so welcome, my dear.

LEVINE: It's been a real pleasure.

EEZMONEIT: Thank you.

LEVINE: And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here with Jessie Eezmoneit, and we're here in North Haledon, New Jersey, and it's February 23, 1993, signing off.