

**EI-253**

**EDITH POPJES ( originally ATIE POEPJES)**

**BIRTH DATE: OCTOBER 28, 1912**

**INTERVIEW DATE: 2/23/1993**

**RUNNING TIME: 58:42**

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

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**INTERVIEW LOCATION: HOLLAND CHRISTIAN HOME, NORTH HALEDON, NJ**

**TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 3/1995**

**TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: CHARLES MITCHELL, 10/2006**

**NETHERLANDS, 1920**

**AGE 8**

**PASSAGE ON "THE NEW AMSTERDAM"**

**PORT OF EMBARKATION: ROTTERDAM**

**RESIDENCES: NETHERLANDS: OZINGHUIZEN, FRIESLAND**

**US: MIDLAND PARK, NJ**

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here today, it's February 23, 1993, and I'm in North Haledon, New Jersey at the Holland Christian Home, and I'm here with Edith Atie . . .

POPJES: Yeah.

LEVINE: And in English Edith, it's Edith, Popjes.

POPJES: Popjes, that's right.

LEVINE: Popjes. Now, Edith, that's your maiden name.

POPJES: Yeah. I have never been married.

LEVINE: Right.

POPJES: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. Edith came here in 1920, when she was eight years old.

POPJES: Right.

LEVINE: And I just want to say that I'm very happy to meet you.

POPJES: Yeah, thank you! ( she laughs )

LEVINE: And I look forward to hearing what you remember about Holland and coming here. Okay. Let's begin at the beginning, and you tell me your birth date.

POPJES: Yeah. I was born on October 28, 1912 to my parents, Henry and Florence Popjes.

LEVINE: And where were you born?

POPJES: I was born in Ozinghuizen Friesland.

LEVINE: Will you spell that for me?

POPJES: Yeah. Ozinghuizen is spelled O-Z-I-N-G-H-U-I-Z-E-N.

LEVINE: Now, Friesland is one area of part of The Netherlands.

POPJES: Yes. They are islands, Frisian Islands, yes. And the city, or, yeah, I would call it a city. What would you call Ridgewood? A town? A town? Well, that town, yeah, that's where we would go to buy things. That was close by. And that's where we had to go to, like, have our baptism papers and so forth, a state house was there, you know, of the state. And that's where we had to send for our baptism papers when we were already here in America. Yeah. And that's where my mother and father were married in a state house, first in church, and then they went there, you know. And they were married with four other couples, yeah. At that time they wore a lot of black. My mother had a beautiful black corded skirt with a pretty sequined black top. In fact, I just gave it away to my niece in Florida who loves antiques, and she said, "Oh, Aunt Edith, I would love to have it." So I sent it there. She has my mother's wedding dress, and they got married in 1902. So that dress is about ninety-one years old. Yes.

LEVINE: That's wonderful. Your niece is very lucky. ( she laughs )

POPJES: Yeah. And I gave her a lot more antiques that I had, you know, yeah. And . . .

LEVINE: Well, tell me about your mother. How do, what do you remember about your mother when you were a little girl growing up in Europe?

POPJES: Oh. Well, my mother said that in church the men folks would sit on the

balcony, and the ladies would sit downstairs. And she worked out by people, you know, by farmers, before she was married. And my father nodded at her, which was a sign he would like to see her afterward. So she said, "I was rather tired of working out by the farmers, you know, too, so I was happy, really, to get married, too." Yeah. And my mother, of course we had a well, and they had to pull up the water by pails, and then Mondays was wash day. That was set aside for wash day. And we had one great, big room where the beds were in the wall. Did you ever see anything like that? Well, at that time the beds were in the wall. And we had one great, big room, and one small kitchen, and a little attic where you would have like turnips and things that would keep for the winter, up there, that's where we had, and a big hallway, really.

LEVINE: And what did the house look like on the outside?

POPJES: Well, there was more, there were more families living in it. There was about a three-family home. There was a widow lady living next door to us, and another family on the other side of us, yes. So.

LEVINE: What else do you remember about the house?

POPJES: And very neat. In fact, my mother used to say with all the children home that people would come over. She had a chair standing a certain way, and the people would say, "How do you keep your house so nice and clean?" You know. Well, we were taught that from the beginning. And that's why I was a good domestic. I work out on several places yet. Two half days every other week. And I enjoy it greatly. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Now, when you say your mother worked out at farms, what kinds of things would she do?

POPJES: She did housework, too. And we had a black coal stove with a pretty sterling, you know, it had sterling on the door with all white in between, and she did that with Bon Ami, and then left it dry, and then put it on the door again, and it looked beautiful, really, yeah, yeah. And she taught us, you know. And when these farmers wives would come and see, why, "She had glasses on," she said, "and she would look it over, you know, to see if I did it well." And so when we did things, and she said, "No, that's not quite right," she would teach us do it over, you know. "Do it the right way," she'd say, you know. So we were taught the right way to do housework.

LEVINE: Well, it sounds as though she took a great deal of pride in it.

POPJES: Yes, she did, she did. She baked, she cooked, and sewed, yeah. And was a good mother and housekeeper.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about the clothing that you wore or that your mother wore?

POPJES: Yeah, well, I tell you, we didn't have overly many. And we would wash a little more often, you know. We didn't have money galore. My father worked in a cheese and milk and butter factory, which was right near us, and so that was not overly much, you know, that he was making. So she

had to, you know, not go above her means either, no.

LEVINE: Now, did she make the clothing that you wore?

POPJES: Uh, not in Holland, no, I don't think so. I don't think she had a sewing machine. I doubt it. But in here, in America, yeah, she would make my work clothes and things like that, yeah. And, of course, she knitted socks and that. Knitting was great in Holland, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember any foods that she cooked that you particularly enjoyed in Holland?

POPJES: Yes. We ate mostly, well, I would say we were fond of pea soup, and we would make a pottage of rice and a pottage of barley fixed with different things in it. And they had barley with, you might laugh at this, but we loved it, barley with raisins and grape juice. And that was a mixture, and people ate that for dessert. In fact, when we came by my cousin in '68, she had that for dessert. Yes, yes. ( she laughs ) And rice the same way. We loved rice, you know. And sometimes cook it with raisins in it, and otherwise just with milk, rice with milk. And they ate a lot of that, really, and soups, you know, soups, too.

LEVINE: What kinds of soups were particularly . . .

POPJES: Well, like I say, pea soup was a great one amongst them, yes, yes. And then, well, I think meat was not overly in abundance, you know. And so we had a great, big garden there, and they would, you know, cook from

the garden, and each resident had a portion of ground on the side of our house. We had to cross a brook on a board about this wide, and each had a portion of ground for their garden. And that's how they had the garden. And they all looked very healthy and well, yes, uh-huh.

LEVINE: Now, what other children were in the family besides you?

POPJES: Well, my two brothers worked out. One is eight years older than myself, and one is ten years older than myself. And they worked out by my uncle on a farm.

LEVINE: I see. So really your mother and father and you lived in . . .

POPJES: And my two, my other sisters, yes. Four girls and two boys in our family, yes, yes.

LEVINE: And where did you fit in as far as the, uh, were you the oldest girl?

POPJES: No, my sister was. My sister was the oldest girl, and then followed me. She was four years older. Then I came, and then my two sisters are in Florida. One is six years younger than me, and the baby is eight years younger than I am. But they're nice, too, they're nice girls, yes. And I was so happy to have family, because I'll tell you, we had a square table, and each sat on one end of the table, you know, father and mother there, and me and my sister here, and two brothers there, and then the two younger sisters at the top of the table, like. Really nice, yeah.

LEVINE: Did you remember, like, a typical day when you were there and, I know that . . .

POPJES: Well, I'll tell you, we had to learn a Holland psalm about once a week. We would all hold hands going to school, and keep reciting that Holland psalm, you know, so that we would know it when we got to school. And we wore wooden shoes, and then they would sit them, they had little cub holes, like, for you to put your shoes in, you know, when you come to school, and that's how we managed, yes.

LEVINE: And did you wear the wooden shoes to school, and take them off when you got to school?

POPJES: Yes, yes, uh-huh. Yes. And they had, like, uh, you know . . .

LEVINE: Cubby holes.

POPJES: Like mailboxes, you know, to put them in. Yeah, yeah. And some used to skate to school. Everything was ice. But, you know, we lived right near a canal, and my mother and father put a chair on the ice for me. That's how I learned, behind a chair, to skate. And then in the middle of the ice, every year in there you would have a tent with chocolate milk. They had chocolate milk for those who skated, yeah. And my mother and father skated, too, yeah.

LEVINE: Would people skate when they were going someplace? In other words . . .

POPJES: Well, you could go from town to town in Holland on the canals, yes. And my grandfather opened a bridge. He was that one who would let the boats through, and he would go down below and stand there, you know, and they would tip him, like, as they passed by, yeah, yeah. Uh-huh. Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, do you remember your grandparents?

POPJES: Oh, yes, I do. Yeah. My father's mother, I was named after my father's mother. Her name was Atie. And she was a widow. My father's father died when that flu epidemic was in Holland, and he died.

LEVINE: Do you remember what year that was?

POPJES: Uh, that was before my father was born. She was carrying my father, and he never knew his father, because he died with that flu epidemic in Holland. More people died when they had that. Today they can do so much more for people who are ill and have that, you know. But in those days, well, they did what they could, I guess, and he died with that. So my father never knew his father, and his mother had to go around with, at that time they would have, like, a bakery that they sell, uh, yeah, with fire works and like that, they'd come with doughnuts and so forth, pretzels and a big cart, you know how they do that. And she would go along the street and sell these things, you know, and make a living that way. Bakery goods, yes. And if we met her on the way to school, oh, she was such a dear. She'd say, "Would you like . . ." And in Dutch, of course. "Would

you like to have a roll of Grandma" You know. So kind-hearted, yes. So lovely, so lovely.

LEVINE: Do you remember any experiences with your grandmother when you were still there?

POPJES: Well, that's about it, what I'm telling you, with her good-heartedness of, you know. And, you know, my father's brother was kind of against us leaving because he hated to see us depart to America, but she said to him, "If that boy likes to go to America, don't you stop him." And my father always had that wish, because we had an uncle and aunt living here, and they kept writing to us. And that was my mother's sister, and they kept writing to us, "Come on over, come on over." And my father wrote a letter without my mother knowing it, and he said, "I just mailed a letter to tell them that we're coming to America." And she said, "Can I see that letter?" Because she thought she would rip it up, you know. He said, "It's gone already. It's gone." ( she laughs ) So when we came here, she was kind of homesick first, you know. And I think more people are, you know. But we soon got used to it, and really we loved the land, America. I could sing with everyone, "God Bless America, my home sweet home." Yeah.

LEVINE: How about your mother's mother and father? Did you know them?

POPJES: Yeah. She had a stepmother, though. And, oh, her father was a dear, too, yes. And they had a horse, you know, and I would sometimes go in the barn and be by the horse. And, like I say, he opened the bridge so that the boats could go through. And he would stand on the bottom there,

and they would, he would hold out his hand or a cup, what he had, and they would, as it went by, tip him, you know. Yeah. He was a dear old man. I just handled his picture. I just put it away. I thought, "Oh, there's grandpa." ( she laughs )

LEVINE: Did you ever spend time with him?

POPJES: Oh, well, when we were over there, yeah, we did. Yeah. He was very kind, and they loved to fish there. And we used to be by him when he would fish, you know. Yeah, yeah, uh-huh, yeah. Very good.

LEVINE: And so your mother had one sister over here, and did she have any other sisters in Holland?

POPJES: Yes, she had another sister there, yes, she did. And I saw her yet in '68, yeah, and put her arms around us, walking to the end of the gate, you know, and waving until we couldn't hardly see one another any more. Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you, did your family, was your family a religious family?

POPJES: Uh, pardon? My family?

LEVINE: Were they religious?

POPJES: Yes, yes. We were all brought up as church-affiliated people, yes, uh-huh.

LEVINE: Now, do you remember any festivals or any religious events that you remember from Holland?

POPJES: Well, I tell you, our church did not have a Sunday school, and they had a little Baptist church, like across the street from our church. And they used to have Christmas tree programs, you know. And we learned little songs there, and get an orange and a piece of cake, you know, around the holidays. And I'll tell you another thing that seems interesting. When it was our birthdays, you know, I mean, we didn't have over plenty there, and we would get a piece of cake tied to the wrist of our hands with a ribbon, and we'd walk around with that for a while because it was our birthday, you know. And that's how we celebrated birthdays, yeah. ( she laughs ) And for dolls, I mean, we used to have these clothespins and just dress them up, and had, like, a shoe box to put them in, you know, and put little blankets over them, and dress these clothespins up like little dolls. Yeah, yeah, uh-huh.

LEVINE: Do you remember any other games that you played, or (?)?

POPJES: Yeah, we played hopscotch. And, as you see sometimes on television how they have these poles, and, of course, water would be in between, like, going to a farm or something like that, and we'd put that pole in the center and try to jump over, you know. And I remember one time I didn't make it, and I landed in the water, you know. ( she laughs )

LEVINE: It was like pole vaulting.

POPJES: Yeah, right, right. We did that, too. But we played normally games, really. Like drop a handkerchief behind someone, and they would have to go and get it, like. Yeah, yeah. Like musical chairs, or musical, yeah, we did that. Yeah.

LEVINE: And did you go to school?

POPJES: Yes, I did. Yes, I did.

LEVINE: What was school like there?

POPJES: Oh, very stern. I mean, if you didn't do, they wouldn't dare do that today, but he'd say, "Hold our your hand." You know, and you would get it with a ruler, you know, on your hand, and like that, yeah. And he would watch on Sundays, too, if you didn't sit still in church, and he would would reprimand you on Monday. "I watched you, and you didn't sit still in church at all." And, I mean, we would have to stay after school and like that, you know. But my mother never stuck up for the teacher, uh, for us, really. The teacher was always okay. "You must have done something," they would say, you know. So we were brought up real well, yeah.

LEVINE: Now, there was one schoolteacher?

POPJES: I was blessed, too, with singing. And I used to sing in front of a class. Yes, I did, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember any of the songs that you had to learn?

POPJES: Yes. In fact, when we came to this country and my parents had to go to parent-teachers, that was in that little Wondell school in Saddle River, it was a little country school with four grades in one room, and then they had to ask me would I sing a Holland psalm at the parent-teachers. So my mother and them told me what to sing, and I sang two verses of it, and I still have it in my Holland hymn book, you know, what I sang. And one man who had wandered, we knew him in Holland, and he settled the same place we did in Saddle River, and he had wandered away from the church, he didn't go to church any more and that. And he heard me sing this beautiful hymn, and he returned back to church and that. Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Would it be possible for you to sing something for us?

POPJES: Yeah, I would. Yes, I would.

LEVINE: Oh, I would love to hear you.

POPJES: ( she sings in Dutch ) Yeah.

LEVINE: That's beautiful. Thank you.

POPJES: It was a very nice hymn. Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you know what it says?

POPJES: Yes. I mean, it talks about heaven, what a wonderful place that is where

everything is clean and without sin. And it speaks of heaven, yes, yeah.

LEVINE: Well, thank you very much. That's wonderful. Okay. Now, is there anything else that you remember about the town, or about Holland?

POPJES: In Holland, yes.

LEVINE: What else do you think about when you think about your early childhood there?

POPJES: Well, of course, you know, I have wonderful relatives, too. And we stayed over there the night before we left for America.

LEVINE: Where did you stay? Whose . . .

POPJES: Yeah, that was my uncle and aunt's house where we stayed overnight.

LEVINE: And all your sisters.

POPJES: He brought us to the boat, yeah. They brought us to the boat, yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything your mother or father had said about America, or what you expected before you actually came?

POPJES: Well, I tell you, my uncle and aunt, my uncle was a foreman of the Eckert's Farm in Saddle River, so our men folks got a job right away on the farm,

and they had a boarding house next door where some of the men stayed, and my mother cooked for a while for these men from the farm, and they would sleep over, some of them, and we had to make the beds and like that, you know, for them, and my mother cooked. But they had, the men had to point out for us what ketchup was, like all the things, like, we had to learn. And there was a store there, of course, that was post office and grocery store combined. The store is still there, but it's a real estate place now. And we would point to different things when we went to the store. And my mother said one time, "I have such a headache. Do you think that the store would have this Holland perfume?" She would put that with a cold, you know, put some on a handkerchief and put that up against her head, like. And so we went to the store, you know. And, well, we didn't know how to make the men know but we went ( she sniffs ) like this, you know, sniff, you know, and like that. And just then my uncle came in, and then we said to him what we wanted, and then he said to the grocery man, and he said, "That was a good way to tell him." ( she laughs ) So we had good laughs, too, you know. But I started from easy books in those four grades, and I graduated yet from the eighth grade at age fourteen, so I did my best. And then when I went back in '68 they said, "Oh, you don't have an accent at all, you know. You talk very well." Yeah. So I was pleased about that. Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Well, were there many people, did you know other people who had come to America? Before you actually left Holland . . .

POPJES: Well, you must have met Hilda Reitsma. Well, she said they came on a boat earlier from, didn't they, than we did? ( she laughs ) Yeah.

LEVINE: I haven't spoken with her.

POPJES: Ah, you didn't speak with her yet. Well, she's beautiful, too, yeah. And we came over with a lot of Polish people. There was a lot of Polish people on the boat. And my father said he remembers this, because we were at times very seasick. He said that storm would arise, and the waves, now, you know the size of the New Amsterdam, one of these Holland boats, that the waves went over the boat, he said. And then they would call on the loudspeaker, "No one on deck." You know, "No one on deck." And so we faced storm, too, yes. Uh-huh.

LEVINE: The New Amsterdam was the name of the ship.

POPJES: Yeah. That was the boat, yeah.

LEVINE: And it left from Rotterdam.

POPJES: Uh, yes, yeah.

LEVINE: Well, tell me about, when you went to your aunt and uncle's house the night before you left.

POPJES: Yeah, right.

LEVINE: And it was you and your . . .

POPJES: And I slept in the wall, you know. Their beds, too, were in the wall, but they had, he was an interior decorator, a painter and decorator, so that was my father's brother. He had money, you know, so they had their house beautiful really. And the beds in the wall, too, were beautiful, beautiful drapes on the outside, you know, and that. So that's where I slept that night, yeah. Yeah, real nice.

LEVINE: Who was traveling with you when you arrived?

POPJES: Our whole family. Two brothers and three sisters, beside me, yeah. And, of course, my mother was pregnant at the time and gave birth the next year to my sister Lillian, yeah. And everybody, you know, would say, "How is the baby? How is the baby?" Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: You went, was your uncle and aunt's house in Rotterdam?

POPJES: No. It was in, in the town next to ours. That's what I'd like to say. In Ozinghuizen there were only, well, shall I say it was a little town with maybe one store, two stores, maybe, a saloon, and a factory to work in, several farms, you know. But then the town next to it had the school, had about three churches, and that had a great shopping area, yeah.

LEVINE: And that, what was the name of that town?

POPJES: Heeg, Heeg. H-DOUBLE E-G. And that was like, yeah, North Haledon now is to Wyckoff, you know, close by. IN fact, you could walk it, yeah. And that's where we went to school and to church, yeah.

LEVINE: Was the school a one-room school?

POPJES: No, that was, at the Holland school, no, that had more.

LEVINE: More classes.

POPJES: Yeah, uh-huh, yeah.

LEVINE: And, okay. So your uncle and aunt lived in Heeg.

POPJES: In Heeg, in Heeg.

LEVINE: In Heeg.

POPJES: Right.

LEVINE: And then what happened? You stayed overnight. And then . . .

POPJES: And then, of course, they traveled with us to Rotterdam, and we had to carry certain things, you know, each. Yeah. But we had, like, our bedding and that, feather beds and all that, in big cases, you know, and big boxes, like, nailed shut, and that, that they took. They must have sent that earlier, you know, to the boat.

LEVINE: Did you go by horse and wagon?

POPJES: Uh, I think by train.

LEVINE: By train.

POPJES: I think by train, yeah. Uh-huh.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Do you remember anything that you or your, anyone else in your family brought with them besides the bedding?

POPJES: Bedding and, uh, yeah, we had, but we put that in between the beds, that they wouldn't break, you know, like a little, they used to have these little kerosene stoves that you could cook soup on, like a three-lighter, you know, it would light three with kerosene, yeah. And I had one yet in my little apartment in Midland Park, which I also gave to my niece, you know. I had that for show, really. Uh-huh, yeah. And make soup on that, and so forth, yeah.

LEVINE: How about you personally?

POPJES: And then, of course, we had an oil lamp. An oil lamp, yeah, yeah. And I had that converted. That's in that book, there, converted to electricity and used it here. Yeah, yeah. Uh-huh, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh, so you had, you traveled with a lot of trunks and . . .

POPJES: Yeah, yeah. And we had, like, a, you know how a den is on a boat, like, with bunk beds, you know, two here, slept on top of each other, two here. I think the men folk had a separate one, but we, you know, had a, yeah.

LEVINE: Were you down in the hold?

POPJES: Yes, yes, uh-huh.

LEVINE: So when you got to Rotterdam, was it a long journey?

POPJES: Well, yeah. I (?). Not overly, no. Because we had to have our pictures taken there before we went, you know, and, yeah,

LEVINE: Were you examined also before you . . .

POPJES: OH, yeah. That was a must, I guess. Yeah, I'm sure we did. Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: And did you stay in Rotterdam for any period of time before you left?

POPJES: No. I think, uh, I think we went on the boat then. Yeah, yeah. Uh-huh.

LEVINE: So . . .

POPJES: Very exciting time, of course, you know, yeah, really.

LEVINE: And were your mother and father excited, too?

POPJES: Yeah. Well, she was a little doubtful more or less, you know. But anyway, oh, we were going. You know how kids will jump. "We're going to America." You know. ( she laughs ) "We're going to America." Yeah. It was really exciting, yeah.

LEVINE: And so what about the trip over?

POPJES: Yeah. Well, like I say, that was two weeks of seeing nothing but ocean, you know. Yeah, that was really something, yeah.

LEVINE: And what were the accommodations like in the steerage? Do you remember it?

POPJES: On the boat, you mean?

LEVINE: Yes.

POPJES: Oh, we got our meals. They would yell the meals over the loudspeaker, and my little sister, she always went with my father. She would jump and say it in Dutch, you know. "Oh, potatoes, gravy and meat," she would say. ( she laughs ) Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: So did you go to a dining room, or did you . . .

POPJES: Yeah, I think it was a dining area, yeah, to eat, yeah, uh-huh. But some of

us had, you know, we were seasick, really, and couldn't eat at all times, no. But my little sister and my father, ( she laughs ) they were never sick. They made the trip good, yeah. They did, yeah. And she was always with my father, yeah. I told her about that not long ago, yeah. I said we were talking about Ellis Island, I said. And imagine they're very interested in finding our name now. I had to tell you that when I was naturalized, you know, there are a lot of people by that name P-O-E-P-J-E-S, who are great skaters in Holland, yeah. "But here," my brother said, "why don't we have that E taken out? I think it sounds better, you know, in America, yeah." So then when I was naturalized I asked if that could be done, and he said, "Oh, yes, that can be done." So then I had the E taken out. We had the E taken out of our name. And then just P-O-P-J-E-S. Yeah.

LEVINE: And the rest of the family did that, too?

POPJES: Yeah, uh-huh. Yeah, uh-huh. Yeah.

LEVINE: What else do you remember about the voyage? Is there anything else?

POPJES: Well, when we, like I say, we had to stop in at Ellis Island, you know. And I remember them looking in our eyes and pulling our eyes wide open, and there was a, yeah, I can see him yet, honestly. A big, tall, in uniform, black man, a soldier, like, you know. And he kept yelling, "In line! In line! In line!" You know, my brother said, "You remember more than I do," he said. ( an announcement is made over the public address system ) Yeah. "But now that you say it," he said, "I remember that." And they would step out of line once in a while to see how much longer, because my mother

stood there with little two-year old on her, you know, arm, and that. I guess my father took over once in a while, but anyway it was tiring, you know. "And what did we get?" I said. I remember two hard boiled eggs. We stood in line for two hard boiled eggs. That's what we got there on Ellis Island, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: How long were you there?

POPJES: Well, I would say we laid over there a couple of weeks.

LEVINE: Oh!

POPJES: Yeah. Till they found out, I don't think some people passed. They had to go back, I guess, you know. Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you . . .

POPJES: But, oh, I was so happy, you know. Because we, we all had to go through that, you know, and be examined and that. And you were kind of nervous, you know, what they were going to say about you. But we all passed. Yeah, we all came with healthy bodies and, you know, yeah. And you don't catch things so quick either. No, no.

LEVINE: You were saying before we started the tape about the eye exam.

POPJES: Yeah, yeah. I think that must have been pink eyes, you know, that they could see in your eye if you were not well or that, yeah. I remember that

very well, yeah. And they pulled your eye wide open, you know, to look in your eye. And some people by that did not pass, no. And you know how people are. They pass it on. Oh, we had to have our eyes, you know, they had to have your eyes examined. Yeah, yeah. ( she laughs ) They would pass it on down the line, you know. "You know what they're doing? They're looking in your eyes." You know, yeah. "Some people aren't going to make it." You know, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: So do you . . .

POPJES: But that great big building, I remember that, you know, yeah. I remember that, yeah. Uh-huh, yeah. And then in Hoboken Church, that's where my uncle met us, yeah.

LEVINE: In a church?

POPJES: He met us. There was a Hoboken Seamen's Home. Do you remember that? Yeah. That's where we went then. And then my uncle picked us up from there, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember the accommodations if you . . .

POPJES: Well, my uncle had a little Ford car, you know.

LEVINE: Well, I mean, before that, at Ellis Island. You were there for you think maybe as long as two weeks.

POPJES: Yeah. I think it was almost a few weeks. Yeah, we must have slept there, yeah. I don't remember much about that, no. But I think it was that, yeah.

LEVINE: And do you know why you were there for that long?

POPJES: Yeah, because of the illness on the boat, yeah. They did not let us in the country until that was passed over, yeah.

LEVINE: I see. So on the boat there was some kind of a contagious . . .

POPJES: Yeah. There must have been illness, yes. Uh-huh.

LEVINE: So they kept everyone.

POPJES: Yeah.

LEVINE: Until, I see. Okay. So . . .

POPJES: There were people, too, who had lice, you know. Like I say, we came over with the Polish people, and a lot of them had lice, yeah. And, well, they were cleaning them up on the boat really, you know. And, well, fortunately we didn't catch that either, no. And then I remembered my uncle, you know, with tomatoes. He came out the following day with nice, red tomatoes. He called it apples, you know. "Here's a nice apple for you." In Dutch, of course. ( she laughs ) And we bit in it. ( she laughs ) You should have seen our face! Yeah. Nobody liked tomatoes at that time. Now, but now I love them, you know, now with, oh, yeah, a nice

hamburger with a slice of tomato on it hits the spot, doesn't it? Yeah, it does.

LEVINE: Well, how about when you got, went to Hoboken? Your uncle met you there.

POPJES: Yeah.

LEVINE: That was the uncle that your father had written a letter to?

POPJES: Yes, right, right, yeah. And they were very happy, of course, that we came, yeah. Uh-huh.

LEVINE: And . . .

POPJES: And my mother was, you know, the lady who was nurse to her, yes. She could talk Dutch too, and that. So they used to get together and have a cup of tea and like that, you know. So it wasn't that she was in a strange land that she couldn't converse or anything, because, and my mother picked up the language a lot better than my father, because he always worked with Dutch people. They laid aside walks after the farming, then they didn't farm any more, but he took a job here with some man by the name of Sybesma, and he was a contractor, and they got a better job, you know, of laying cement sidewalks and all that, and so they made better money, too, I'm sure, yeah.

LEVINE: Can you spell the name of the . . .

POPJES: Sybesma? S-Y-B-E-S-M-A. Yeah.

LEVINE: So your . . .

POPJES: In fact, his, yeah. One of his granddaughters isn't here, too. Yeah, yeah. Uh-huh.

LEVINE: So your father was then, um, I guess you'd call it working with stone, paving.

POPJES: Yeah, with the cementing, yeah. And my brothers too, yeah. And when we bought a home in Midland Park, it was new, like, the basement was all dirt, yes, but men folks laid all the cement on the walls and the sidewalk around the house. They did all that, yeah, themselves. Yeah. And graded it, you know. It was just put up, really. The attic was just one attic. WE had to have rooms made in there.

LEVINE: Now, where did you go first? Where did you live when you first came to this country?

POPJES: In Saddle River, on the farm there, yeah.

LEVINE: And how long did you stay there?

POPJES: Well, I would say maybe a half year, yeah.

LEVINE: And did you go to . . .

POPJES: And then my sister was born in the other house near the school where we lived. And the church was right, almost two doors up was the church and the Sunday school building, and that's where we first to the Lutheran Church, you know. If the men couldn't make it to the Midland Park Church we'd go there, yeah. Uh-huh.

LEVINE: What was school like here? How was it . . .

POPJES: Well, we had four grades in one room here, and they had easy books, of course. And I would say maybe nine in each class, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: And were there others . . .

POPJES: And then we had, you know, a black family already, yeah, in the school. And, mind you, I worked of late in the home where we lived, the colored, you know, the black family, yeah. And they had it re-done and that, and it was beautiful, antiquish, historic home, yeah. And I worked there since, in '88 I retired and moved to Arizona, and I still hear from them. Yeah, yeah. Uh-huh. Yeah.

LEVINE: Well . . .

POPJES: And you know what happened is one of these fellows that had lived there passed by, and he happened, this man and lady I worked for, he was in the yard, and this fellow stuck his head out the door. He said, "Mister, I

was born here." He said, "Well," he said, "that's interesting. Would you like to come in and see how it's changed about now?" So he stopped his car and oh, he looked around, you know. And he said his grandmother lived there even, you know. Yeah, yeah. So it was interesting for him, too, yeah.

LEVINE: How was the school different . . .

POPJES: The school?

LEVINE: . . . in this country, compared with when you were . . .

POPJES: No, I would say it was real nice, yeah, real good. Yeah.

LEVINE: Did you, were there other children from The Netherlands?

POPJES: Yes, of course my uncle and aunt's two girls, yeah, two children, yeah.

LEVINE: And in the community as a whole, were there other people who had immigrated to this country?

POPJES: No, not immigrated. They were born here, yeah, yeah. And, you know, with us playing with them, and we soon got onto the language a bit, you know, children do, yeah. And that, through us my mother learned it, you know, yeah.

LEVINE: If you can think back to when you first came over here were there some

things that you saw, or . . .

POPJES: Well, I'll tell you, the first thing that struck us, you know, was, and that was in October, was Halloween. We didn't know a thing about Halloween. And all these people that were dressed up with white sheets over, and all came to the door. My father threw open his hands, he said, he's scared, you know, what was this all about. And he soon learned that there's a day set apart for all these funny tricks and funny dressed up, you know, yeah, they did. But actually, we didn't know what that was all about, yeah.  
( she laughs ) We really had to get used to Halloween, yeah.

LEVINE: Is there anything else like that that was very different for you?

POPJES: Well, I'll tell you, and instead of a fire truck ringing the bell and that, they had these big, uh, iron, you know, circles by the road with a hammer, if there should be a fire, why, you just go there and ring, and hammer on that, you know. And I guess that rang pretty far in the neighborhood. I remember that it was countrified, you know. Now it's so built up, Saddle River, but at that time in 1920 the houses were kind of farms really, yeah, more countrified. Yeah.

LEVINE: And how about your mother and father? Did they become citizens?

POPJES: Uh, yeah. My father went with us. Yeah, he did. I don't know about my mother. She died already in '36, yeah. He outlived her forty years. He got to be almost a hundred. Yeah, he was a hundred and almost two months beyond that, and he lived with me, yeah. And I had a big

celebration in the back yard for him, yeah. About a hundred and seventy-five people. I advertised it, you know, in the church bulletin and so, and about, I had a guest book out, a hundred and seventy-five people came. Yeah, I had tables set and all, you know. It was really nice. Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, now, you stayed in school. You graduated from grade school.

POPJES: Yeah, I did.

LEVINE: And then what did you do after that?

POPJES: Well, I'll tell you, on that day you just went to work. And I turned fifteen on October 28th. I graduated in June, and my neighbor, who graduated with me, part, half of the street was Wyckoff, and half was Midland Park. And so to get our working papers we had to walk all the way to Wyckoff to get our working papers in some school there. And I started right on my birthday, my fifteenth birthday. Yeah. ( she laughs )

LEVINE: And what was your first job?

POPJES: Uh, a quill winder in a textile firm, yeah. My sister was working there, you know, and, well, I got the job right away, yeah.

LEVINE: Now, a quill winder?

POPJES: Yeah, quill winding.

LEVINE: What did you actually do?

POPJES: Let me see. Uh, take that cube a minute that's up there. I have my picture on there by a machine. Right there.

LEVINE: Okay. Maybe you can describe for the tape.

POPJES: Yeah. Well, you see those quills there, they come from a bobbin with yarn, and they wind around those quills there, and then that's ready for the weaver. The weaver takes those quills, and he puts them in his loom, and his loom goes back and forth. IN fact, they've already made tablecloths and drapes for The White House with big eagles on it and that. Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: So a quill is actually like a, uh, what?

POPJES: This long, about, yeah. And the thread winds around there, yeah, when your machine goes, yeah. And they have a gate to keep it tight, you know, so that it will be kind of tight around the quill. And then the weavers come and take those quills, and they put it in their loom, and the loom goes back and forth and weaves the material.

LEVINE: I see.

POPJES: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, what did you do after that job?

POPJES: No, that was my job.

LEVINE: You stayed with that job for a long time.

POPJES: But when they were slow, at times they would get slow, then I would do some housework. You saw plenty ads in the paper, you know. And then I would tell them what had happened, and then I would work for them until I got called back to textiles. And she says, the lady said it, "If it ever happens again, I can get you my friends to work for, so you can call me any time." So I always had work. Yeah.

LEVINE: How long did you stay with the textiles?

POPJES: Well, that was, in that place, in 1960 they broke up.

LEVINE: Oh.

POPJES: I tell you how cheap they must work in Italy, because they would get things imported from Italy and still make money on it in selling it here, so that stopped us from work really, yeah. And we were laid off then. But I was one of the last ones, and I only lived a block away, and it was so handy for me. I was really sorry.

LEVINE: But you must have been there close to thirty years?

POPJES: Yeah. I worked fifteen years in one textile firm, and then I got a job.

When that was tied up I went here, and I worked several years at night, and then I got on day shift, and I worked there also fifteen years until it broke up. I was really sorry, because it was only a block away from home. Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: What else have you done in your life that you, that you were interested in and enjoyed doing?

POPJES: Well, I liked my job there. Yeah, I did. Yeah. And, well, I was busy engaged in, and I liked society work, you know, to be, we had a society in our church and all the ladies get together. And we used to knit bandages for leprosy patients in Africa. We had a missionary from Africa who we supported, and we would knit, they just had to be so wide and of a certain thread, you know. And we would knit the bandages and send them to the leprosy colony in Africa like that, yeah. Uh-huh.

LEVINE: And is there something that you can think of that you are very proud of having done?

POPJES: Well, that my father lived that long, and he was not, you know, some parents, they have to go to this child for so long and then they get transported again to the other? My father had a wonderful life, because he could read the paper, he could sit on the porch and relax and watch TV. And we used to play checkers and all those games and like that, yeah. And he enjoyed, and he had a lovely nature. Some people when they get older they get cranky, but he loved his grandchildren. And if I had the girls over, my society over, I would get all these books with the

grandchildren in and pictures of years ago. And said, "Pop, for tonight, you can look through these books. I'll bet you'll enjoy it." You know. And the girls just pondered over how satisfied he always was just doing that. Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Well, now . . .

POPJES: And we had a nice family life, you know. We were very close, and always had good times together. In fact, New Year's Eve I would have everybody over, even though I moved my parlor suit on the porch, and asked the undertaker if I could borrow several dozen chairs, you know, and he would bring up several dozen chairs, and I had all games playing musical chairs, had all different hats, you know, musical hats, and one would be left without one, you know.

LEVINE: (?) in the family.

POPJES: Yeah, yeah. We had a lot of fun, yeah. We did. We had a lot of fun, yeah.

LEVINE: Well, what would you say about this phase of your life?

POPJES: Well, I'd say, "Oh, God, how good you are to me." I, you know, had to move from my big home, and then I had to look for a little apartment, and I didn't know where I was going. I had an ad in the Bulletin, I had an ad in The Christian Herald that went to thousands of homes, and I heard nothing. I went to real estate places. "Do you have a nice little apartment

for me?" I said. "Don't price it too high, you know, four hundred dollars, that's my (?) really." And here, I'll tell you, I prayed about it. And here, the last week, I said, "Well, we'll have to move, you know. I have to move, but I have no place yet to go." This opened up in the Record, The Bergen Record. And one of my niece's cousins called her up and said, "Tell your Aunt Edith to call right away. It's in Midland Park." And I called right away, and he said, "Can you come six thirty tonight?" I said, "Yes, I can come six thirty." So I came, you know. Another big fellow came in, he said, "What's the bedroom like?" He said, "Too small, too small." Well, it wasn't, I could fit my bedroom suit in it, you know, and a bookcase I had in there, quite nice. And, well, he didn't take it. "Well," the man said, "I have another lady coming tonight." I said, "But are you still going to have a lady come tonight if I tell you that I want to take it." He said, "You give me a twenty-five dollar deposit, and then they're yours." I was so happy I had twenty-five dollars with me, you know. So I gave him twenty-five dollars, and I thought, "Oh, that's settled." And it was a block away from my church. The bank was next door. And the two buses ran by my home. ( she laughs ) Well, all I can say. And then, you know, my minister, he took us out one morning for breakfast. That's several years ago. And then he said, "Edith, I think it would be good if you looked into the Holland Home." He saw me, he used to see me sit there, you know, on my patio. And I enjoyed being in my apartment. I had it very nice, you know, really, so close to the bank and the church and stores, really. And, well, I thought I'll put my name in here. And I waited a year-and-a-half. It's really through my minister that I'm here, and I praise God really for being here, because I have it so good here. And I never knew that this would be laid away for me, you know. And then I always say, "Lord, whenever you call

me home, I'm ready to be with You, too." You know? Yeah, that's how I feel, yeah.

LEVINE: That's wonderful. Well, in closing, is there anything that you would say about the fact that you were born in The Netherlands.

POPJES: Yeah. I'm proud of my historic life. I'm proud to stay to people, "I'm a Hollander, I'm Dutch." Yeah. I am. Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, I want to thank . . .

POPJES: And it's a great, uh, I mean, a great feeling that you were born in a good land too, really, you know. Accordingly to standard living and like that. I'd been brought up, and I'm so happy I had the bringing up of being poor and getting up in the world a little bit, you know. Yeah. And that's the joy of it really, yeah.

LEVINE: Well, I want to thank you very much. It's been a pleasure speaking with you.

POPJES: You're welcome. And nice talking to you, too, really. Yeah.

LEVINE: And I want to say thank you, and I've been here today with Atie . . .

POPJES: Yeah, Popjes, yeah. Atie Popjes.

LEVINE: ( she laughs ) . . . in North Haledon, New Jersey. And it's February 23rd

today, 1993.

POPJES: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: And this is Janet Levine, and I'm signing off.

POPJES: Okay.