EI-256
HELEN GURINSKY WEINBERGER
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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, Ph.D.
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POLAND, 1921
AGE 12

SHIP:
PORT: AMSTERDAM
RESIDENCES:
? POLAND: KAMINETZ-LITOVSK
? US: PATERSON,CLIFTON, NJ

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm here at the home of Helen Gurinsky Weinberger in Clifton, New Jersey. It's March 1st, 1993. Mrs. Weinberger came from Poland in 1921 when she was twelve years old. Well, I'm very happy to get to talk with you and I look forward to hearing your story.

WEINBERGER: Okay. What can I tell you?

LEVINE: You can start by telling me your birth date and the town you were born in.

WEINBERGER: I was born in a small town quite a distance from Warsaw. The name of the town I was born was called Kaminetz-Litovsk.

LEVINE: Can you spell that?

WEINBERGER: L-I-T-O-V-S, Litovs, -K, Litovsk. L-I-T-O-V-K-S. I came here with my mother...

LEVINE: Well, before you, before we talk about your coming here to America, let's talk about Litovsk and -- and what your life was like as a little girl up to the age of twelve. Did you live in the same town the entire time?

WEINBERGER: I was born there and I lived there up till the time we left we left for America.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, can you describe that town?

WEINBERGER: The reason, the reason we came to America because my mother's entire family was here many years before us.

LEVINE: I see. Well, tell me what you remember of Litovsk.

WEINBERGER: Well, my father had a small hardware store and he made a comfortable living for those days, for our, our kind of people. It wasn't very luxurious but it was equal with other people in our circumstances. We went to Kheder [parochial school]. My, I, I have -- I had an older brother. He went to a private Kheder and to a private teacher that taught him history and arithmetic and different things. And I went to a school where female teachers taught me also a little bit Hebrew and a little bit Jewish and so on.

LEVINE: What was the school like?

WEINBERGER: Well, it was a private school.

LEVINE: Were there a lot of children in a class?

WEINBERGER: Not very many that I remember and very different than, than school here. When I came here and I came to public school the classes were much bigger and everything was altogether different.

LEVINE: What other differences? What other differences? What, talking about the school in Poland, how was it different?

WEINBERGER: Well, it was a smaller class. It was a female teacher that catered to each individual. I, I don't remember wh-- if we got any kind of meal there or not and then we came home. When we came home our mother's were home. The father usually stayed in the store in the business that he had. Or if he was a worker he was away in the shop or wherever he was. And that's the way it was. My father was sick for many a years. He...

LEVINE: What did he have?

WEINBERGER: He had stomach trouble. He died in 1920.

LEVINE: Oh.

WEINBERGER: He did, he did not want to come to the United States.

LEVINE: Why didn't he want to come?

WEINBERGER: He -- twice my mother's family sent -- sent him papers he should come and also we should come, the mother and chil -- two children. He said, "Amerika iz a treyfe medina." Which means it's not a kosher land. "Here," he says, "I am with my people. I know I'm kosher. I go to synagogue. I'm – I'm different. There from what I understand, everything is different." And therefore twice he sent back the papers that my mother's brothers and sisters sent for us to come here. And he refused to come. He suffered from stomach trouble, oh, for about two or three years. Our town didn't have very big professors or very big doctors or surgeons or anything like that.

So he was taken to the nearest bigger town than ours which was called Brest-Litovsk. And he was there in the hospital for about two or three months. And I remember he died in 1921. And I remember going to the cemetery where he was buried. And -- and that was the end of --. Then it so happened by coincidence that a week before he died, we, my mother received papers that my brother and I should come. And my mother figured that if the children will be here in the United States, my father will be convinced more readily to come also. But he died a week before the papers came. It just didn't work out.

So after we said Shiva (which was, which is mourning period) my brother (he was fifteen years that time, he was three or four years older than me) with the papers he went to Warsaw. There was the American Consul. And he explained to them there. He showed them the papers that my mother's brothers sent for us. But, he says, my father just died a week ago. And under these circumstances my sister and I cannot go because we cannot leave our mother here all alone. So on the same papers the American Consul wrote, "Mother may go as well."

So right then from Warsaw he sent a telegram to this uncle of ours that has claimed he will be responsible for us in case, you know, we don't have food. That my father just died a week ago. I'm here at the Warsaw Consul and we have permits to bring Mother along as well as my sister and I. And within about a week or ten days, we got the additional money to buy an additional certificate, you know, for the ship.

LEVINE: They sent, your uncle sent the money?

WEINBERGER: Yeah. The -- my uncle sent additional money and my brother was able to go the place where they sold Shifskarten. That's means permits to go on the ship. The, you know, he bought a permit to go on the ship for my mother as well as us. For us, they were paid already. But for my mother, it was a new thing. So he arranged that and we had to wait maybe a month or so and the three of us came here to the United States. I'm sure he must have written to my uncles or telegrammed [sic] to my uncles that everything is worked out and we will be going on this and this ship and it's due to arrive in New York at Ellis Island, such and such a date and that's it. And sure enough it worked. It didn't work out the way we expected it because after being five days on the water, there was some trouble with the ship and the ship had to turn back from where it started out from. I think it was Antwerp.

LEVINE: What was the name of the ship?

WEINBERGER: I don't remember. I don't remember the name. Maybe I mentioned it in years earlier, I don't know. But we had to go back to the port where we started out from, get the ship repaired and start out anew. So we were on the water in the ship maybe twelve or fifteen days because -- and when we came to New York, my mother said to me (I remember this very clearly.) "Bezest ," in Yiddish she spoke to me because we only knew the Yiddish. "Dorten is dein Onkel Ike." "Dorten ist dein," you know, in other words she pointed out her brother that came to, to greet us. And that was it.

We came off. We were tested whether we had lice before they let us in. We were examined whether we had eye problems, eye troubles or they -- and they questioned us about other problems, whether we were sick or what, when. And after a couple of hours interviews in Ellis Island, we were discharged and we were able to go back with my uncle. And there were other aunts and other uncles there, the family, at the shore after we came off -- to greet us. And we came there. We were brought to Patterson, New Jersey because that's where my grandparents lived. My mother had four brothers there. The one that sent and three others. And she had two sisters there. They were all married, they were comfortable. They came here in the early nineteen hundreds. They were already established. And they wanted us to come much earlier but my father objected and that's why the long delay.

LEVINE: Okay. Let's go back a little bit to, to Poland before you left and tell me, do you remember any religious occasions and how you, how you observed them or celebrated them in Poland?

WEINBERGER: Oh, for sure. I mean, we were good-standing Jewish family members in the schul. My mother didn't go every Saturday to schul but when there were holidays, naturally she would go and the children -- we would go, too. And what -- whatever celebrations of the, that week or that day we participated with everybody else together. But it was all on a small scale. It wasn't like a temple here, you know, with a lot of rich people or what or when. Everything was conducted, you know, just a neighborhood schul. You know. And we were taught what is kosher, what is not kosher, that we were not allowed to eat certain foods and we have to observe certain rules and regulations according to the Jewish dictates -- to the Jewish laws. And we didn't know any better. We didn't question anything. We took for granted that's the way it has to be.

LEVINE: Now the town you lived in...

WEINBERGER: What?

LEVINE: The town you lived in.

WEINBERGER: Yeah.

LEVINE: Was it mostly Jewish?

WEINBERGER: Oh, no. No. There was a lot of Christian people, too. But -- and I remember not far from where we lived there's a big church, like going up a hill and a big church. And certain days, the Christian people would come there, you know, certain prayers -- Christian prayers. And the store keepers were anticipating for, for those days. Because after those Christian people went to church, they would come on the row of stores and they would buy their whatever wares they needed. So that was a good business day, you know? And my father, as well as other people.

It was a row of stores and that was mostly Jewish earn-- Jewish owners. And the Christian people used to come and buy whatever they needed in this store and in that store and so on. There were also a lot of robberies. Many a times, the Jewish stores were robbed. They broke

in and they took away things. There wasn't a good feeling between the Christian and the Jews. The Christians, I think I'm correct in saying they hated the Jews. Yeah. Many a times they, they, pogroms on a small scale. They would burn here or they would burn there or, you know, start up a -- a fight with a Jewish person. There wasn't an harmoni-- a harmonious feeling. We didn't get along too well with them. Not with all. Of course, there were fine people as well. But there were hoodlums, like we find here are hoodlums also.

LEVINE: What did, what did people do for work in that town? What kind of a town was it?

WEINBERGER: I know, where we lived across the way from us was a big building and was a shoe maker there. And it was not a wooden structure, it was a brick structure. Before we came here during the Second World War, there was fighting in our town.

LEVINE: You mean after you came here?

WEINBERGER: No, before. In 1917, 1918.

LEVINE: Oh, the First World War. Uh-huh.

WEINBERGER: The First World War when Russia became communist and so on, there was fighting in our little town. And the bullets were -- in, in our town there was a big, big, it was called kommunitze slup [ph]. It was a big structure in comparison to the -- World Trade market. You, Trade Center. Well, it was a big, big, big, high --maybe ten or twelve floors high -- brick building. And when there was fighting, whoever was in town -- whether it was the Germans or the Communists -- they would go up on that big, big, big building and they would shoot. And when we heard the shooting starting, my mother would say, "Let's close the doors and let's go across the street and hide in that brick building.." A little bit more safe.

Or during the war time, during the time my -- my father was very sick -- couldn't make a living from the store, some of the gardens or the -- where you plant vegetables, you know, whether the fruit gardens or the vegetable gardens -- were without owners. So some of us went and used, took whatever fruit was on the trees and dug out whatever fruit was planted there because some of the owners of these places left for safer ground. And we also had a cow because a cow, you had the milk, you had the cheese and so and so forth. So whenever the shooting started, my brother and a friend of his would go to the pastures to bring the cows back they shouldn't be killed.

And one time the shooting went on for many a months. And one time were my brother and his friend were going to -- to the place, to the pasture to get the cows; my brother's friend right along side of him was killed and my brother remained alive. It was just a miracle that he was saved. Another time my brother went, also when the shooting started, he went to the stall where the cow was stationed. The roof from the -- from the stall came off but neither the cow nor my brother were killed. We lived through very scary, very hard, very difficult years between 1917

when the started until 1921 between the Germans and the Russians and -- and so on.

It was very, very difficult. The Germans, when they came in, they would say, "We're going for inspections to the houses." That was a pretense. And we would fix up, not we but you know, the women would fix up the homes, make it look nice and clean and put out. And they wrote down whatever they saw of value, whether it was candlesticks or a china closet, you know, a tshay nik [teapot] that was of big value. They wrote it down and four days later they would came -- they would come and say, "You give me this, you give me this, you give me that." And that's the way it was. And a lot of the times the young men or the young husbands or the young folks, they took them for arbeit for work. They had to dig ditch, they had to dig this and that and so on. It was very, very hard, very difficult to live through those scary years.

LEVINE: Did they take you brother?

WEINBERGER: One time my brother was in the house. And a cousin of mine was in the yard. And she saw the German man, his name was Puttermann We knew, he used to go around and -- and get the men. And she yelled, "Khayam, Puttermann is -- Puttermann is here. Puttermann kommt. Puttermann kommt." He heard her and he ran out and he hided [sic]. He, he hid himself. And he -- Puttermann heard and he ran around, he ran around but I guess it was my brother's luck. And he never caught up with him. It was a miracle, three or four times like that. My cousin was caught. This one the -- my cousin yelled -- her brother was caught and they took him. And after he came -- after they discovered he had frozen legs and frozen arms, they discharged him and he came back home.

LEVINE: And did you -- was he, was he able to...

WEINBERGER: Well, after a while he recuperated, you know and doctored up a little bit and so on. And many years later -- they came, this cousin and her brother came here. Their father died in Europe, too. Their father was not here. And they didn't have mishpokhe here, they didn't have family here. But cousins of theirs brought 'em over and they came. They couldn't come to New York, they came to Cuba. And they lived, those two cousins lived in Cuba for a many a years. Until Castro became, you know, the, -- the ruler. My cousin was a young girl about my age. She married in Cuba. She had three, three daughters and a son. You know, gave birth to them. And she died already three years ago.

LEVINE: They left Cuba when Castro came into power?

WEINBERGER: Yeah. Before, about a year and a half or so there was rumors or something. And a cousin of mine from Plainfield, New Jersey sent them papers and brought over first their three daughters and then the, the couple, the husband and wife with their son.

LEVINE: And what were...

WEINBERGER: Their son. All right, the -- she and -- and he are both dead already. Their son became a doctor and he lives in Florida. And the,

one daughter lives in Florida also. She was married and she had children. And two daughters live in New York. My cousin's daughters.

LEVINE: What were the rumors that they heard that lead them to leave? Do you know?

WEINBERGER: I, I don't know the details but there was rumors, you know, that it's safe, it's better to get out of there. It went, I suppose they heard rumors that Russia was going to take over, Castro, what or when. And they escaped about a year or so ago.

LEVINE: Okay. Let's go back again to Poland. Tell me your mother's name and her maiden name.

WEINBERGER: Sure. My mother's name was Nekha Keller. K-...

LEVINE: How...

WEINBERGER: K-E-L-L-E-R.

LEVINE: And how do you spell her first name?

WEINBERGER: Necha, N-E-C-H-A. Her family came from Bialystok-Litovsk.

LEVINE: Oh, boy. Can you spell that one?

WEINBERGER: Huh?

LEVINE: Could you spell that?

WEINBERGER: I'll try it. B-I-A-L-I-T-O-V-S-K, Litovsk. Maybe it's not good but a lot of people came from Bialys-- Bialystok. So I'm sure the people will know. And she...

LEVINE: And...

WEINBERGER: ...she came and she married my father who lived in Kaminetz and naturally they settled there and they raised their family there.

LEVINE: Did you have grandparents in Poland?

WEINBERGER: Yes. My father's father was (pause) I, my brother was named after my grandfather, my father's father. And I was named after my father's mother. So I don't remember my father's parents, you know. I didn't have any grandparents from my father's side. The only grandparents, when we came here, my mother's parents. But in Europe my, my father's parents died before either my brother or I were born.

LEVINE: And your, so your brother's name was Khayam?

WEINBERGER: Khayam. C-H-A- (she pauses)...

LEVINE: I-A-M?

WEINBERGER: I-A, I-A-M. Something like that. Khayam. That's a Jewish name.

LEVINE: Yeah. And your and what was your father's first name?

WEINBERGER: Shmuel. Samuels. Samuel.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh.

WEINBERGER: I have some memorial that I gave money in memory of my parents and I-- on those memorials -- I say, "Nelli and Samuel Gurinsky." You know. Because that's what it would be if they were here.

LEVINE: Yes.

WEINBERGER: My mother assumed Nelli. Her papers or whatever and that's, that's the way...

LEVINE: Can, are there any experiences that you remember as a little girl in Poland with your mother and your father or with one of them, that, that when you think back to your childhood, that's something that you recall.

WEINBERGER: No. No. My father was somewhat more distant from me. I suppose because he was in the business more. He spent more time. And then also he wasn't too strong a man. He suffered mildly from his stomach in the earlier years and then more severely later. My mother, like every good Jewish mother. What can I say? I don't think she was an exception but she was a good, devoted mother. My brother was not a good eater. You know, he didn't like to eat food as well as me. (Levine laughs) Yeah. He was a poor eater. And I used to kibitz my mother, "For him you make all kinds of delicacy and not for me." She would say, "Well, thank God you can eat everything. He's very choosy. That's why I have to cater to him a little bit. But I love you just the same." You know, she would say to me because sometime I would kibitz with her. I'd say, "Oh, I don't think you love me as much as you love Khayam. You make this and that and everything." She says, "Believe me. I love you just the same. But you're a good eater." I was chubby. I...

LEVINE: Yeah. Tell me what you looked like and what you acted like as a little girl.

WEINBERGER: Oh. They had pictures when I was a little girl in the day care, with my mother and I stood up on the chair. They, I gave them the pictures in there.

END SIDE ONE BEGIN SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Well tell me how, if you were, if you were to, were to be with you as a little girl, what kind of a little girl were you?

WEINBERGER: I had rosy cheeks. My mother had made me the picture that, that they have somewheres. Either Dana or Debbie has it. Some, maybe they could get a hold of it. (microphone noise)

LEVINE: Wait. Watch the mike.

WEINBERGER: Oh. I stood on the chair because I was little. Maybe I was this high, you know. And so it was to be up to my mother's height. And my mother had made that little dress for me. My mother said I was a very cute little girl. So she used to make the dresses for me with a false pocket inside and in that false pocket she would put in some salt, so that the evil eye would not catch me. Yeah.

LEVINE: She really believed in that.

WEINBERGER: Yeah. My mother believed in it. And she said I was a very good looking child. And another thing. Because the first born that I had -- the first born that she gave birth to was also a nice big boy and he died at the day of, you know, circumcision.

LEVINE: Oh.

WEINBERGER: A woman, a neighbor of hers came in and looked at the child and said, "Oh, a za sheyne boytshikel." you know. "Such a nice little boy." After she went out, he started to cry and he died within an hour's time. So my mother was very conscious of that evil eye. She believed that that woman caused his death. And therefore she was very worried about me catching an evil eye. So all my little dresses used to have false pockets inside and have salt in it so the evil eye would not catch me.

LEVINE: Can you think of other things that your mother believed that, you know, are not so common beliefs here?

WEINBERGER: Not that I, not that I can think of.

LEVINE: Were there certain things your mother taught you, attitudes or beliefs?

WEINBERGER: She didn't say it in the formal, you know. 'It's good for you to do this or it's good for you to do that.' But as a small kid, naturally you see your mother doing so you, you more or less follow her instruction. As for -- she was a good sewer. She could sew very good. But she never taught me how to sew. After she passed away -- my mother died in 1940 here in the United States. We were here already from 1921 till 1940. And I wasn't married yet. I didn't know anything about housekeeping or sewing or what or when. I learned it the hard way. After she died I had to try and learn it. And I learned how to use the machine. She had a sewing machine. And I learned how to do a little cooking. And I got married six months after my, after my mother by, died.

And, you know, the oddity, how things sometimes just don't work out right. The man that I married six months later -- a neighbor of ours

told my mother and me that he knows of a nice man working with him together in Wrights. And he's single and he looks like a refined Jewish man. And I think I'm going to introduce him to your daughter Helen, me. And somehow or rather, he never followed it up and he never introduced us. Six months later another neighbor said, "Helen, you have to meet so-and-so." And so I met so-and-so and that's the man I married. Six months after my died -- my mother died. My mother would have given her right eye to see me married before she died. (tears)

LEVINE: Yeah. Was this the same man...

WEINBERGER: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...that the other person was supposed to introduce you to?

WEINBERGER: No.

LEVINE: No. It's another man.

WEINBERGER: The man that the neighbor was suppose to introduce me to, that was the same man that the lady introduced me to. And that's the man that I married. And we had a happy life together until he died in 1985.

LEVINE: Oh.

WEINBERGER: We, we had a very good, harmonious life. He wasn't a demanding kind. I had freedom. I could do anything and everything. I tried to cater to him as much as I could. And we -- in, in 1980 he became sick. He became a patient in the Daughters of Miriam and I used to come here every day and be with him until in 1985 he died. (tears)

LEVINE: Was he also from Poland. Did he come from Poland?

WEINBERGER: Yeah. He came from, not from Poland, he came from, oh...

LEVINE: Austria?

WEINBERGER: Yeah. That's it. Austria. Yeah.

LEVINE: Well...

WEINBERGER: He was re-- very religious. He was very good natured.

LEVINE: When you first came to this country, do you remember some things about it that struck you as very different from Poland?

WEINBERGER: After we were here about a week or so I started school. I started school. I was brought into 2B because my cousin's daughter was in 2B. So they figured she'll be able to translate to me whatever, you know, I wouldn't understand. I was in 2B maybe three or four months or something like that and I was advance to a higher class because I had a little education from Europe and I was already twelve years age. So and, you know, not that I was very smart 'aleck' but I, I knew a little bit more than my cousin and so on. I learned pretty quickly the English.

And instead of going seven or eight years to public school, I made it in four years. I graduated in four years.

And I went to business school and (pause) learned, you know, do some clerical work or something and got a job because after all it was my mother, my brother and I. I couldn't think about going to higher, you know, and those years the government did not assist you with loans and with other things. You had to do everything on your own. Alright, my mother's brothers assisted us the first year or so. We lived with my grandparents, my mother's parents. And after about a year my brother was able to earn enough money and we moved out and we lived on our own, you know. We rented an apartment and we lived on our own. And that's, that's about it.

LEVINE: What were your grandparent's names?

WEINBERGER: What?

LEVINE: What were the names of your grandparents you lived with?

WEINBERGER: Oh. Keller was their name. But the, they were known in Yiddish, hard to spell it for me. My, my grandmo-- it was Mr. and Mrs. Keller. My grandfather was a ultra, ultra Orthodox Jewish man. He used to go every day to schul. Even though bad weather or whatever. Nothing kept him away. My grandmother was also very religious but she was also a little bit modern. She belonged to organizations, malve sherumim [PH] and other organization, where she used to help people that used to come to her from New York and from elsewhere. And the donation money she used to give them to have a day or what or when and so on. It was, it was ordinary, good Jewish family life. Much different than what it is today. There was no such a thing, going to school with a knife or with a gun. My God, you had the highest respect to a teacher. You looked up to them. You admired them. Now, this, this world is altogether different.

LEVINE: What did your brother do for work here?

WEINBERGER: My brother learned, he became a warper. That's to operate a certain machine in a silk mill. My, one of my uncles had a silk mill. A silk factory, a silk, you know. And he taught him how to operate a certain machine. And after he learned how to operate it, he went and he worked for somebody else. Because he felt it's better. Instead of, you know, for your relative -- maybe he'll demand more of me or maybe I'll demand more of him. So after some time he, he worked out and he went to somebody else. And he worked -- my brother, he was a very earnest, very good union man. He was very devoted in helping people. People that know of him will rave about him. He was always concerned of trying to better the living conditions of the elderly.

My brother suffered from a heart condition when he was still a young man. And he had to give up working. And he just lived on whatever money that was accumulated, you know, that we saved up and from the Social Security money that went into effect. So because he had a lot of leisure time and -- people tell me and I, I must admit, he was extra clever. He was above average clever. He had ambitions to be a lawyer

and people always used to mentioned to me, he would have made a good lawyer if he had followed through. But that wasn't to be. So when he had to give up working and he had a lot of leisure time on his hand, he devoted all his time to better the elderly.

He used to go to Trenton and speak with the, with the doers, with the makhers in Trenton. He used to go many a times to Washington and speak to the senators or congressmen in, in the New Jersey, you know. And talk with them about certain points and certain this and try and do this. And the kosher nutrition program that was established in the Temple Emmanuel -- nutrition program -- it was absolutely, positively established because of him. Because he went to the mayor of the Patterson and other people and spoke to them they should have a kosher nutrition program. A

and the mayor and that, those times said, we can't do it. There is enough of them. They can go here, they can go there and so on. He explained to them that the elderly Jewish people will go hungry a day or two and they will not eat not kosher food. And they have, they have to give in to them or because it's impossible for them. And after many a, a month, many a gatherings with the people he was influential in establishing this kosher kitchen program. Another thing that my brother was very influential in establishing was the pharmaceutical program. This is a program where if people below a certain income can get their, their...

LEVINE: Medicines.

WEINBERGER: Medical, Medi-- Medicare prescription filled for – originally, it was one dollar. Then it was changed to two dollars. And now it's five dollars. People that have less than sixteen thousand and some odd dollars, even now, even today, get their prescriptions filled at any prescrip-- any pharmacy they want for five dollars. I, who still have a little more money, I have more than the sixteen thousand dollars, you have to pay the regular price. Sometimes a prescription cost twenty dollars, sometimes forty dollars and so on and so forth. But as long as I have above the amount, that's what I have to pay. And I pay it gladly because that's the way it should be. Those that have more money, that can afford it, they should pay the price. The people that have less money, they should be helped.

LEVINE: Well, let me, we're getting short on time now. So let me, let me say, tell me more in detail about leaving your town and the voyage over here.

WEINBERGER: How much more can I tell you, my friend?

LEVINE: Tell me...

WEINBERGER: I think I've told you all that I can remember.

LEVINE: Let me ask you this. What -- do you remember anything that your mother packed and brought with you or that you yourself brought?

WEINBERGER: Well, I didn't do the packing. My mother, my mother and brother did all the packing. I remember that perenes -- you know what that is? Feather, feather quilts. My mother brought a couple of them with, with us. And my mother also brought big, beautiful shawls for my aunts. They were out of the ordinary. They were rather expensive. They were big, they were long. They were...

LEVINE: What were they made out of?

WEINBERGER: Lacy or something.

LEVINE: Were they woolen or...

WEINBERGER: No. Like, beautiful lacy things with different designs. Shawls. Black shawls. Lacy shawls. You could to, to a ball or something and have it on. You know what I mean? Like, like a gow-- on the top of a gown. And you held it over your shoulders and, you know, she brought those as gifts to my aunts. And that's about all that I can remember.

LEVINE: And when you left, you left from Holland. Do you remember going from Poland to Amsterdam?

WEINBERGER: Oh, yeah. Sure.

LEVINE: How did...

WEINBERGER: It was a long trip. It was about twelve, fifteen days because of our turning back, you know, after the, the mishap. We had to turn back, so it was a long voyage. We came here and then my uncle greeted us and that's it.

LEVINE: Do you remember coming into the New York Harbor?

WEINBERGER: Oh, somewhat. Somewhat.

LEVINE: The Statue...

WEINBERGER: I remember when my mother said to me, she says, "You see? Over there. There's your Uncle Ike." You know, over there. And all right. And it wasn't too long. We went through the check up, you know, the...

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you remember any details of that, of, of the examinations or the process...

WEINBERGER: Well, we went to a certain corner, to a certain place and over there they -- they checked whether you had lice. They checked in your eyes, you know, whether you could see well or not. The clothing that you brought, they put it in some kind of steam to disinfect it. So if there was anything, so it would be killed --I shouldn't, shouldn't bring in any, any, you know what I mean. That's it.

LEVINE: Do you remember the clothing you wore when you, when you were in Poland and when you came here? Do you remember what you were wearing?

WEINBERGER: I don't remember the clothing. I know I had long braids and they were cut after I was here. Yeah. I had long braids. I don't remember exactly, you know, the style of the dress or what or when. I...

LEVINE: Do you...

WEINBERGER: I think I gave you a long, big...

LEVINE: Oh, you've given me...

WEINBERGER: ...big...

LEVINE: You given, wonderful, wonderful information.

WEINBERGER: Yeah, I mean...

LEVINE: I'm just trying, it's so good. I want to get as much as I can, that's all.

WEINBERGER: I'm willing but I don't know what else I can say.

LEVINE: How about learning English. Do you remember how...

WEINBERGER: I didn't have, I didn't have a hard time. I caught it, I caught on to it rather quickly. I learned English rather quickly.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about how you learned it? In other words, what it was that helped you or...

WEINBERGER: How, how can I describe? I mean, in the beginning I sat in rooms and I listened and I heard and before long I was able to understand and, you know, to progress. And like I said, the -- the teachers skipped grades for me because I was older and I had a little learning from before, you know. I wasn't a six year old child. I was twelve years old. So I knew already certain things. And that's it.

LEVINE: Did your mother carry on any customs from the old country when she got here that you remember.

WEINBERGER: Not exactly. What, what kind of customs? We were, naturally we observed the Jewish laws, the Jewish regulations. We used to go to schul, you know, whenever, whenever was required of us, whenever was needed. And my mother belonged to a couple of organizations. You know, Malve Sherumim, and some other organizations. Those organizations were mainly to help the poor people. You know. Because my brother was already making a good living, you know. So, we could afford a little charity. And naturally she saved a dollar to a dollar because we were three people, one earning, you know. And the, the wages in those years were not so high. You didn't make a heck of a lot of money but you used it con, sparingly, you know. Not stingy, not greedy. But, you know, comfortable.

We had good food. My mother used to cook and bake. She used to make gefilte fish very often and give to my uncles because my aunts and uncles were more Americanized already. And they didn't bother with a lot of these delicacies. And my mother had time on her hands. She, so she used to do that. And she'd say, "Bring it over to Aunt Tilly." Or, "Bring it over to Aunt Edna." You know. And I used to do that because they were my aunts, they were nice to us and so on. Sometimes -- my Aunt Edna had a girl, a little older, maybe a year or so older than I. And some of the dresses that she discarded she gave to me. They were good, fine dresses and I welcomed them because I wasn't choosy, you know. As long as they were not torn and good, I was appreciative. And occasionally ,my Aunt Tilly would take me if she would go someplace with her younger daughter and so on. It was nice, it was good.

LEVINE: What would you say about the fact that you started out in Poland and were there for twelve years and went through the First World War and came here. How do you think that has affected your life?

WEINBERGER: How do I, how do I what?

LEVINE: How do you think that has affected your life, having come here as, as a twelve year old and and starting out in another country and changing your whole life...

WEINBERGER: Oh. That, that didn't, I didn't dwell on that. I more or less forgot the old country. I more or less parted. What was was. It wasn't pleasant memories to remember. I had lost too much as a child. I remember my father being sick many years. I remember many a times the Christian people had small pogroms against the Jews. I was glad I was away from it and I didn't dwell on it. I tried to forget it. I was glad I was here and I, I made a different life for myself.

LEVINE: So what was your husband's first name?

WEINBERGER: Sam.

LEVINE: Oh, Sam. Okay. And did you and Sam have children?

WEINBERGER: No. We never had children. I married after I was thirty-five years old and difficulties, I had a, a tumor and so on. I was not able, that was one heartache.

LEVINE: Hm-hmm. Well, how is this period of your life?

WEINBERGER: What?

LEVINE: How do you find this period of your life, your old age period?

WEINBERGER: (sighs) I'm eighty-four years old. (tearful) I've lived through a lot. I'm legally blind for about six or seven years. My mental condition is still good. People tell me that I remember a lot about different things. I started coming to day care in 1980. I've gone

through many a days in day care. I still remember a lot of it. I tell Dana or I tell Debbie, I remember, I compare this with now and so on and so forth. [pause] Some of my friends tell me I'm too charitable. I'm giving away more money than I should. (tears)

LEVINE: Well, you seem to come by that naturally.

WEINBERGER: What?

LEVINE: I say you come by that naturally from your grandmother and your mother and your brother.

WEINBERGER: I say, look. I'm not going to live forever. As long as I still have, I might just as well share with other people.

LEVINE: Well...

WEINBERGER: I want to tell you something. I've donated to Israel an ambulance. An ambulance. (crying) I mean, don't, don't talk about it, this, that because it is needed, because I can afford it. It stands to reason I'm not going to live much longer (tearful). I mean, let's face it.

LEVINE: Let me ask you this just before we close. What are you proudest of?

WEINBERGER: What?

LEVINE: What, what makes you feel proud?

WEINBERGER: That I'm sharing my money with other people.

LEVINE: That's beautiful. And I think that's a good place to end. And I want to thank you very much.

WEINBERGER: You're welcome.

LEVINE: This is a delightful tape and I'm very happy to have had the chance to talk with you. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm here with Helen Gurinsky Weinberger at her home in Clifton, New Jersey on March 3rd, 1993 and I'm signing off.

WEINBERGER: Thank you very much.

LEVINE: Thank you very much.