

EI-381  
LOUIS A. PULDA  
BIRTH DATE: APRIL 14, 1915  
INTERVIEW DATE: AUGUST 13, 1993  
RUNNING TIME: 50:18  
INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.  
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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 2/1996  
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: IRV SILBERG

LITHUANIA, 1922  
AGE 6

SHIP: "THE ESTONIA"  
PORT:  
RESIDENCES:  
? LITHUANIA: ABEL  
? US: WORCESTER, MA; HARTFORD, CT

LEVINE: Okay. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. It's August 13, 1993. I'm here in Worcester, Massachusetts with Mr. Louis Pulda, who came from Lithuania when he was about six, or possibly seven, in 1922 and, uh, settled here in Worcester.

PULDA: Uh-huh. Right.

LEVINE: I must say that I'm looking forward to hearing your story, and I'm happy to be here. And why don't we start with your saying your birth date.

PULDA: My birth date? I was born in 1915.

LEVINE: And the date?

PULDA: April 14, 1915.

LEVINE: And, um . . .

PULDA: In Lithuania, in a small little town, about the size of this room.

LEVINE: Really? ( Mr. Pulda laughs ) What was the name of it? Did it have a name?

PULDA: Yes, it had, the name, was Abel, A-B-E-L, as far as I can remember.

LEVINE: How many families lived there?

PULDA: Oh, not too many because it was a very small town, and most of the, they were itinerant travelers, you know, like farmers or, uh, anything to make a living. And that's how they, uh, survived. I, my wife -- my mother, my sister and myself were the last ones to arrive here from Lithuania.

LEVINE: Um, okay. Uh, so, in other words, your father came earlier?

PULDA: My father and my brothers and my sister. We were the last ones. I come from a very large family originally.

LEVINE: How many?

PULDA: There was about five sisters and four brothers. And, uh, well, my father was married twice in Lithuania, okay. My mother was his second wife, okay. And with, with my mother, he had three children. It was myself, my sister, no, just two children, my sis/`. And, uh, periodically they would send us money to save up for the passage to come to the United States. And that's how we got here. Uh, when we first came here, my family didn't have two nickels to rub together, rub together, okay. And my father was a, uh, sort of a - I don't know if -- you know what a melamed is in Yiddish? You speak Yiddish? No?

LEVINE: No, I don't.

PULDA: Well, it's a Hebrew teacher. And he had a, he was very religious, and he had a beard all the way down to his waist. And that's how he made a living. We came from, uh, New York primarily because we had our family living in Worcester and, uh, that's how we landed here in Worcester, because we had friends and relatives.

LEVINE: I see. Well, let's, um, let's go chronologically. Tell me what you remember of Abel?

PULDA: Crossing?

LEVINE: No, of the little town.

PULDA: I don't remember very, very little of it, yeah.

LEVINE: Very much. And, in other words, were there a lot of little villages?

PULDA: Yes.

LEVINE: All around.

PULDA: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: All small.

PULDA: The biggest one, I think, was Kovno. C, K-O-V-N-O. Yeah.

LEVINE: And did you ever leave your village before you left for America?

PULDA: No. Not that I remember, no. I remained in practically until we came to Worcester on the boat.

LEVINE: I see. Did you have grandparents living in your village?

PULDA: Yes, we did, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember them at all?

PULDA: No, no I don't, no.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

PULDA: They've since perished during the war, probably.

LEVINE: What was your mother's name?

PULDA: My mother's name was Ida Hammer, H-A-M-M-E-R. Hammer, yeah.

LEVINE: That was her maiden name?

PULDA: Yes.

LEVINE: And your, and your father's name?

PULDA: My father's name was, uh, Abraham. Abraham Pulda, yeah.

LEVINE: And your . . .

PULDA: It's a common name in Lithuania, but not here. And so, uh, we had a very hazardous trip. I've got to tell you about that.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, what, leaving the town, it was your mother, your sister and you.

PULDA: Yes.

LEVINE: And do you remember anything your mother packed to take with you, or anything about leaving?

PULDA: We had nothing to pack. We had nothing to pack. Like I said, we didn't have two nickels to rub together. Whatever we took with us was very minute, and, uh, it was a very hazardous trip, if I remember correctly. My mother became sick, I guess, on board ship, and she had an infected toe. It was very, very bad. And we came to New York, Ellis Island, and we had to go through an examination. I was seasick practically all the way. My sister weathered the storms without any problem. But me, I was sick, and my mother was sick.

LEVINE: What were the accommodations on the Estonia?

PULDA: We didn't go ( he clears his throat ) exactly steerage, but we didn't go first class either. You follow me? So, uh, the accommodations, what could I remember when I was six years old? The food, I guess, we ate, and we slept wherever we could, and finally when we got to New York, and they took us through Ellis Island for an examination, okay. Uh, when they saw my mother and the infected toes that she had, they in turn decided they were going to send her back. Yeah, and she started to cry, and plead, and everything. And finally, I guess, the guard or the inspector that was inspecting us had a decent heart, you know, and he, uh, decided he would let us go and stamped the passport, and we left.

LEVINE: Can you actually remember that?

PULDA: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

PULDA: Yeah.

LEVINE: And what was it, was there lots of people?

PULDA: Oh, Ellis Island at that time, there were thousands. You know, we all used to line up in a queue, sort of, and go accordingly. And we waited, I know, for hours. I don't remember exactly how long it took us to get out of Ellis Island, and our family was waiting for us.

LEVINE: Were you let out in one day?

PULDA: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: During the day?

PULDA: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: Do you remember any examinations that you personally had?

PULDA: I was healthy. I don't think I had any, uh, ailments or anything, except for being seasick. And after I got off of the boat I was fine.

LEVINE: Do you remember how you felt, I mean, what you went through, thinking that your mother . . .

PULDA: Well, we were all apprehensive and worried that we would be sent back to, you know, from our destination, back to Europe. And, uh, when the guard let us through, it was quite a relief. And, uh, we were very thankful that we did. And our family met us at the boat, at the port, and we got on the, I think we got on the bus, I don't remember, that was going to Worcester. And our relatives lived in Worcester. That's how we settled here.

LEVINE: Had your father become a citizen?

PULDA: No. My father became a citizen, oh, much, much later. He couldn't read or write, okay. He just knew his name. Because he was a Hebrew scholar, so he never wanted to, uh, learn English, evidently, because he had no time for it. See, my father was, like I said before, he was a Hebrew teacher, and that's how he made a living.

LEVINE: Here, too?

PULDA: Here. Yeah, yeah. By that I mean he would get students that would come to the house periodically, maybe once or twice a week or so on. And for fifty cents a week, ( he laughs ) that's how much they paid to learn. So, but, uh, that's how we survived.

LEVINE: And how about your religious training? What do you remember?

PULDA: My religious training, I was a student with my father. My father was a very taskmaster, okay? And he and I evidently didn't get along very well, and there was such a period of time that I couldn't stand him and he couldn't stand me because he wanted me to be the top scholar, and I couldn't do it. So my mother took me out of his classes and sent me to a Hebrew school.

LEVINE: Here in Worcester?

PULDA: In Worcester, yeah. Which is not too far from here. Well, it's a little far from here, but it was, uh, on Waverly Street. And we had -- and that's how we learned.

LEVINE: Is it still there?

PULDA: No, no, it's gone down.

LEVINE: But at that time were there a lot of Jewish people?

PULDA: Yeah, we lived in all the Jewish neighborhood, which is on Coro [ph] Street, Harrison Street, Providence Street, all up there. I don't know if you know the area.

LEVINE: No, but I'm interested to have it on the tape, what . . .

PULDA: Yeah, but if you had time I would take you up there and show you the area. You know where St. Vincent's Hospital is?

LEVINE: Yes.

PULDA: That's the area. That was all Jewish up there. It was like a ghetto.

LEVINE: Really. From lots of different countries?

PULDA: Primarily Jewish people, yeah. From all over the countries, yeah. Poland, Czechoslovakia, Lithuania and, uh, Germany. They came, all came and settled up in that area. It was very predominantly Jewish.

Until now, you know, the Jews have moved up the west side, so to speak. And, uh, the other people moved in.

LEVINE: Did you start school soon after you came?

PULDA: Yes, I did. I went to Providence Street School.

LEVINE: And what was that like, not knowing English?

PULDA: No, It was okay. Uh, then I got to tell you about, okay. My mother lived till she was about forty-two years old. She was very sick, and she passed away shortly afterwards. And our house broke up. You know, my father remarried to his third wife, and he moved to Springfield. From Worcester he moved to Springfield. And, uh, she and I did not get along. He wanted me to live with her in Springfield, and I said no. And my brothers and my sisters couldn't take care of me. Consequently, I wound up in the home.

LEVINE: Now, how old were you when your mother died and your father remarried?

PULDA: Oh, I was eight, nine, ten years old. Yeah, uh-huh.

LEVINE: Now, living with you in Worcester, then . . .

PULDA: Was my sister . . .

LEVINE: And your mother.

PULDA: No, my mother passed away.

LEVINE: Yeah, before that.

PULDA: Right, okay. My brothers.

LEVINE: How many brothers?

PULDA: I had three brothers and two sisters. And some of them lived, moved out to New York, some of the part of the family. And that's, that's how . . .

PULDA: And what were your brothers' names?

PULDA: My oldest brother's name was Isaac. He was in the barrel business. He was partners with a man by the name of Boyer, Boyer and Pulda. They were very, very well-known in the city of Worcester, and it was a very lucrative business. It became very prosperous. Shortly, you know, how long can you live? He died in 1965. That's over thirty years, almost thirty years ago, right? Yeah, okay. And then his, then I had my, my next brother was Barney, okay, and then I had another brother, he lives in Florida right now, his name is Benjamin. And I have another brother by the name of Louie. Confusing, isn't it?

LEVINE: Yeah.

PULDA: At one time we lived together on June Street. We both owned a home collectively, two Louies living in one house. ( he laughs ) The reason for that is we come from different mothers, okay. So according to our religion, in Yiddish we are not Louies. We go by Yiddish name, okay. That's how they named us. So that's why we have two Louies in one family. Our Yiddish, our Hebrew name is not the same.

LEVINE: Oh. What is your Hebrew name?

PULDA: My Hebrew name is Eliezer, okay. And my brother's name is Lebka, eh? So that's the difference. But they made it Louie because, I guess they ran out of names. I don't know what it was.

LEVINE: Did they both maybe translate to Louie?

PULDA: Yes.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

PULDA: They translate, so, that's what it, and we lived together, like I said, on June Street, not too far from here, in one house, and we would get each others' mail ( he laughs ) and bills. ( he laughs )

LEVINE: Okay. So after your father remarried, did you go to Springfield for (?)

PULDA: I stayed a little while with them, okay, a short little while. And then, uh, from there, uh, I didn't want to stay with him any longer, so they put me into the home.

LEVINE: Where was that?

PULDA: On Coro Street. I'll show you. As a matter of fact, I'll show you, I will digress a little bit. Two weeks ago we had a reunion of the former members of the Jewish home, over sixty years. I'll show you a piece that was in the paper, that you read about it. And, uh, we got people from all over the country. From California, from Arizona, from New York, New Jersey, Florida, and all came here. And we had a reunion at the home, the new Jewish home, that is on Salisbury Street. We had some time. They made a fabulous luncheon for us, and we had it on videotape, and everything else. It came out beautiful.

LEVINE: Is this the Probus that . . .

PULDA: No, no, no. The Probus is, the Probus club is a club of professional businessmen, altogether different. Also a charitable organization.

LEVINE: But they support a home, but it's not that one.

PULDA: No. They support a home for crippled kids, you know, and displaced kids, you know, who are not, not able to take care of themselves. They lived there.

LEVINE: What was your, what was your life like in the Jewish home?

PULDA: In the home? I thought it was pretty good.

LEVINE: How was it run? Do you remember?

PULDA: Yes, a superintendent there, who was in charge of all us kids, okay?

LEVINE: Many children? How many were you?

PULDA: There was about fifty-five children, and about maybe a dozen or so old people, yeah. And the name of it at that time was the Jewish Home for Aged and Orphans. We were not orphans. We came from broken homes. Consequently, they had no place for them to stay, so they put them in there temporarily. Follow me? And after a while, uh, their family would take them back. Mary? ( voice off mike ) Excuse me. Cut it down a little. I entered the home, I was ten years old, and I was there, I would say, for about four, five years. As a matter of fact, I was confirmed there. You know what a bar mitzvah is? Okay. That's what I was there. And that's at thirteen years old.

After that I came, I went to live with one of my brothers, my oldest brothers, and at that time he was Barney, and he was in the, uh, fruit and vegetable business, okay. And he had a store on Harrison Street, a store, it was a pretty good-sized store. Originally my father tried to go into the fruit and vegetable business. My father was not a businessman. My father was a scholar, and he couldn't add two and two together. Consequently, my brother took it over and made it into a very lucrative business, took on fish and became a fish and fruit. It was a small store. By the same token, my, is that all right to tell you about it?

LEVINE: Oh, definitely.

PULDA: My nephew and myself, my nephew was in the army, he married, they had one daughter, my brother had one daughter, Roslyn. And my nephew, Mel Fox, married Roslyn, and after they came out of the army, we both became involved in this fish and fruit business.

LEVINE: That Barney still had?

PULDA: Barney still had, yes. It was small. And he was a small business. He says, "Fellows, I would like to have you two boys come into business with us, with me." With him, meaning him. And he said, "Whatever you make, we'll split it up three ways." Consequently, we did, and we increased that business, oh, several hundredfold. We became one of the largest seafood establishments in New England, really.

LEVINE: So what did you do? Where did you sell to? What . . .

PULDA: All over. We sold all of New England, Massachusetts, New England, and New York.

LEVINE: You had trucks, then?

PULDA: Sure. We operated twenty trucks, and we had eighty employees. From nothing, really.

LEVINE: And you were based here in Worcester?

PULDA: Yeah.

LEVINE: And what was the name of it?

PULDA: Quality Seafood. Yeah. We lived, yeah. Well, when I first got married . . . ( he laughs ) I've got to tell you this.

LEVINE: I want to hear the story of that, too.

PULDA: Okay. When we first got married, I was living in Worcester. And, uh, well, I, like I said, I worked with my brother. And my brother and I were always at odds and ends, you know, odds. I never got along with him very much. He was too domineering for me. And I, and I left. Uh, and I went to live with my sister, who had previously moved to Hartford, Connecticut. Okay. This is the story about how I met my charming and beautiful wife. We have six beautiful children. As you saw, that's my oldest son. On the wall, if you go into the dining room, you see the rest of them, all on there, all different stages of ages. So one day I was living in Hartford and working in Hartford.

LEVINE: What were you doing there?

PULDA: I was an upholsterer.

LEVINE: Wow. How did you learn that?

PULDA: Uh, I learned it in Hartford. At that time the upholstering business was very good, and they needed, they needed apprentices, so, you know, I was young, and I started as an apprentice. And you see this here, this, uh, sofa? Well, in those days, each person had a section to make. somebody would make the cushions, the seats and the back and everything else, and they took me in to teach me how to make upholstery. So one day I decided I'm going to visit my father in Springfield that I hadn't seen for quite a while. So I did, and I stayed there for a short while. And on the way home, we don't, we didn't have the supermarket, the superhighways that we have now. And I was driving home, on the old road from Springfield to Hartford.

And as I was driving home, uh, I saw a fellow hitchhiking. Today you don't pick up anybody, but this fellow I picked up. Why, I don't know. Maybe it was, maybe it was meant to be, you know. Like in Yiddish they say beshert [fated]. Follow? So, anyway, I picked him up. And I said, you know, I started talking to him. And he said, I asked him where he lived, and he was living right near my sister in Hartford. So he said to me, "What are you doing tonight?" I said, "You know, nothing particular." I had just moved from, from Worcester to Springfield, to

Hartford, my sister, and that's also a story, how they moved to Hartford from Worcester. So, he said, "Well, you know," he said, "I got a date tonight. Would you care to go? I haven't got a car. I'll pick -- you pick me up, and we'll go."

So I says, "Okay." So I picked him up, and we went out to Newington, Connecticut, where he introduced me to my wife's friends. Okay, and it was strange, you know. Nothing materialized for meeting this person. So this other woman said to me, "You know, I don't think you like my sister, but I have another, a girlfriend of mine. We go to college together." My wife was a former schoolteacher. She graduated from New Britain Teacher's College of Connecticut. So I said, "Sure. What have I got to lose?" So he introduced me to her. That's how we started going around, and that's how we got married.

LEVINE: Oh. So tell me the story about moving from Worcester to Hartford.

PULDA: Well, I'll tell you the story about, yeah. I was going to school, to high school, at that time. And my brother-in-law, he was a very hard worker. He had - he was a mattress-maker. And evidently he had an argument with his boss, and, uh, I, you know, the car was sitting, I was living with my sister at that time. And he took my car, it was a rumble seat. Yeah, it was a convertible, with the top down and everything else, and some, it was beautiful. And I saved up a lot of money for that car, to buy that car. I think that car cost me three hundred dollars, in 1933, '34, something like that, yeah. And he took the car, he went looking for a job. So he finally landed in Hartford, Connecticut, okay. And they gave him a job right away. They saw what he could do. He's a professional mattress-maker, and they got a job. So they moved to Hartford. I was nowhere. I was living not here, not there. And my sister said, "Why don't you come and live with me?" So I went from Worcester, I lived with my sister in Hartford, and that's how I got to Hartford. So . . .

LEVINE: So were you married when you were living in Hartford?

PULDA: No. I met my wife in New Britain, Connecticut, and I told her my life story, okay. So she said, "You know, you're not here nor there. Your best bet is to go back to your brother." I says, "No, I don't want to go back to my brother." In the interim, I was working in Springfield in the seafood business. They had a big seafood business. And I was working there as a worker. So she said, "You know, you're working in this seafood business, why don't you go back to your brother?" I says, "I don't get along with my brother. We always argue and fight." And she said, "Well, I see the future for your future is back in Worcester." So, foolishly, I listened to my wife, and I went back to work for my brother. I worked my behind off, really. I put in a lot of, lot of hours, and I wanted a partnership. So, the partnership he wouldn't give me.

So I decided I'm gonna go work, start my own seafood business establishment, in Clinton, Mass, which is about fifteen, twenty miles from here. I bought a truck, I rented a store, and I was going to go

into business for myself. So my brother heard about it, and he says, "What are you doing?" I says, "Well, you don't want me. I'll go into business for myself." Hi, Julie. ( he laughs ) So he said, "No, you come back." And my sister-in-law, my brother's wife, was an angel. She was a beautiful woman. And she said, you know, "You stay with Barney, and I'll make sure that he takes you into the business." So I did. I listened to her. Eventually I became a partner. When my nephew came out of the army, we both came into the business. For my partnership, I had to pay, okay. The way we worked it was every year that we made a profit instead of giving it to me it reverted back into the business. Eventually I paid off my partnership dues, okay, and that's how we became involved in the business. And that was fifty years of it.

LEVINE: So did you get along with your brother, then?

PULDA: No. He was very domineering and, uh, we fought, and we argued. But, by the same token, we st-- stayed together. And eventually he, well, he just passed away about three years, a year ago. And he was over ninety. So, uh, I stayed into the business and bought, and I took my two sons in it, and I gave them the business, but they didn't like it. So that's what happened.

LEVINE: So, uh, you made a success of a . . .

PULDA: I think we did. Yeah, well, I'll tell you, we made such a success, I've got six children, okay? I've got four daughters, and two sons. Each and every child of mine went to college, graduated college. All paid for their tuition by working in the seafood business. And each and every one, at one time or another, worked in the business. Some were clerks, some were cashiers, some were bookkeepers and so on, but they all did it. Yeah.

LEVINE: Where did you buy the, uh, it was seafood?

PULDA: Yes.

LEVINE: You were buying it from the Boston area?

PULDA: We were buying from all over. We imported fish from foreign countries, from, uh, from Chile, from Canada, from Newfoundland, from New Bedford, from Japan. I can tell you stories about that, too. Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, first tell me your wife's name.

PULDA: My wife's name is Ma-- I call her Mary. Actually her name is Mabel K. Krepshan, K-R-E-P-S-H-O-N. Mabel Krepshan. She was a schoolteacher in New Britain, Connecticut and graduated college, and that's how, uh, we got involved, you know.

LEVINE: And how about your children, their names.

PULDA: My oldest daughter, I have a daughter that's fifty-two years old. She's a nutritionist by profession. I have a son-in-law . . .

LEVINE: What's her name?

PULDA: His name. His name is Fred Blonder. Her name is Marge, Marjorie, and his name is Fred. And he's an exceptional schoolteacher, real, really good. He's a graduate of Worcester Polytech, electrical engineering. At one time he worked for the space missile, you know, when they started going up in the air. They moved from Worcester to Florida, and he was living in Fort Lauderdale, and he got a job with NASA. He was chief engineer for about thirty-five, forty engineers. He was very, very good. And they lived there. They have two children. As a matter of fact, that cabinet that I'm making outside there is going to my son-in-law. ( he laughs ) I make, see, I make, this is the only thing that I kept in my house that I make, yeah. And I make things for the kids. I make cedar chests, toy chests, bookcases, knickknack shelves, and I give it to them. They give me an order, and I take it, and I make it whenever I have time. I don't give them any specified time or when it's gonna be finished, and when I get sick and tired of working at it, I drop it and go play golf. That's my diversion.

LEVINE: Tell me your other children's names.

PULDA: Okay. I told you about Marge. My second daughter is Elizabeth, Elizabeth Tapper, T-A-P-P-E-R. She married, and she has two beautiful, grown daughters. Gorgeous, not married. And they're in the process of, you know, going around with two nice boys. And then my third one is Arnold. Okay, Arnold Pulda. He's married and has two children, a son, Sam, and a daughter, Molly, a brain. She doesn't get A's. She gets A-plusses. Honest to God, she's terrific. Honest, fantastic. And then I have, I have my son, I have a daughter. Right now she's pregnant, and she's been sick ever since. She's six-and-a-half months pregnant, and hasn't had a decent day. But thank God the baby's okay. She just came from the doctor yesterday. We spoke to her. But she's been sick as hell, terrible, honest. Every day. And I pray for her, okay. But she's a lawyer.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: What's her name?

PULDA: Ruth. Ruth Pulda Rifkin. She kept her name. And she's a labor lawyer. You know, when I was in the business and I had eighty employees, I said, "Ruthie, keep away from me. I don't want any union." ( he laughs ) She said, "Okay." But she argues labor law with the governor of Connecticut. She's done cases for him. And this is the former, the governor now, his name is Weicher, and the former governor of Connecticut is O'Neill. Also she was involved with him. And my son-in-law, also a doctor, a lawyer, he teaches law at the University of Connecticut. Very good. They both, and they have one little boy. He's two-and-a-half years old, and kind of precocious right now, going through the stages, but a lovable child. He was adopted from Columbia. And now she's gonna have another boy, that the doctor said she's gonna have a little boy, and I'm hoping and praying that everything will be fine for them. And my youngest one, he was here before, his name is Robert. He has these two little ones, that are here now. Their names are Dana and

Julie, terrific little girls. And that's it. Altogether I have fourteen-and-a-half grandchildren. ( he laughs ) Not bad, huh?

LEVINE: Pretty good.

PULDA: Fourteen-and-a-half.

LEVINE: What do you, do you think the fact that you were born in Lithuania and you started your life there and then came here and really lived it out, uh, do you think having come here as an immigrant affected you in some way, or . . .

PULDA: Well, I have a lot to thank for my wife, really. When we first started having children we lived in a two-bedroom flat on the other side of the city, which was, I guess, Jewish-oriented. And, uh, due to the fact that I had children, I was inducted, going to be inducted into the army. And, you know, I didn't go into the army because I had two children at that time, and I got, I was deferred consequently, because otherwise it would have been a hardship for my wife. And, uh, as a matter of fact, when I came back from an induction I said to my wife, I was 1-A, I was in excellent health at that time, and uh, I said, "Mayb," I call her Mayb, "You'd better start packing, because I think I'm gonna go in the army. You better start packing and go back to New Britain, Connecticut." That's where her father lived. Her mother had passed away. And I says, "It looks like I'm gonna be stuck to go into the army, and nothing I can do about it." But evidently they deferred me because I, and on top of that, the seafood industry became essential to the government, really. It did.

LEVINE: How so?

PULDA: They declared it to be essential, because it was feeding the public, you know. And we were diversified in the seafood business, like I said. I imported fish from Japan. And, uh, from, uh, all the foreign countries. Norway, Denmark, Sweden, because we were big. We controlled the seafood industry, oh, we were the largest in New England. We were the largest in New England at that time, and we did between fifteen and twenty million dollars a year business, really. Fabulous. From nothing, honestly. My nephew and my son started to go on the road ( he slaps his hands together ) it took off. I have to admit, we were kind of personable at that time, you know.

And I would, ( he laughs ) I can recall I would go into a supermarket, and they would say to me, "Fish? Who the heck wants fish?" Yeah. And today you go into the supermarkets. Where is it? You go into Shaw's over here, which is five minutes, they have a display counter that must be about thirty feet long, all with fish, all kinds of varieties of fish. And it has taken up, and the reason why its people are health-conscious, you know, they don't want to eat fish. It's not fattening, and it's healthy for you. So that's how it took off. Now they don't throw us out. ( he laughs ) I used to go into a store. As a matter of fact, I knew him very well. He has since passed away. And I would, "Lou," he said, "what are you selling fish? I don't want that stinking stuff that you're gonna sell me. Get out of here!" But he said, "Come

back. I'll buy it from you." ( he laughs ) And that was funny as heck, yeah.

LEVINE: Well, uh, what was the Jewish community like here in Worcester early on?

PULDA: The Jewish community is a very well close-knit family. We have between ten and twelve thousand people, Jewish people, in the city of Worcester. We have several synagogues, okay. I belong to three. I'm active in two. I belong to the conservative, okay, which is, oh, within maybe a mile from here. And I belong to also an orthodox synagogue, which is on the other side of the city. That synagogue by, incidentally, is about ninety years old, and it is gorgeous, beautiful. But what happens to it -- is an old people's synagogue now. I think I'm, I'm seventy-seven years old, and I go, I pray in each one at different times. I think I'm the youngest guy in there. What's gonna happen? Eventually all these old guys, including me, are gonna pass away, and they don't have any young ones, see, to carry on the tradition. So that's what's gonna happen. They've all the young ones have moved to this side of the city, okay, and they don't go over there.

LEVINE: Did you remain religious throughout your whole life?

PULDA: Yes, yes. As a matter of fact, we're kosher here.

LEVINE: And, um, do you, can you remember anything that you learned either because they taught it to you, or because you learned it from the way your mother and father were, that got, that kind of got passed along to you from your family?

PULDA: Like what?

LEVINE: Any kind of values? Any kind of, uh, you know . . .

PULDA: Well, we lived by the golden rule, primarily. That's what Jewishness is, you know. Love thy neighbor as thyself. Really. You read the ten commandments, what are they? The ten commandments are still applicable now. You know, all the laws and regulations that they, that they devised for the ten commandments thousands of years ago are still valid now. Honestly. So, uh, that's what we li-- try to live by.

LEVINE: Did you, did you lose contact with your father at some point?

PULDA: No, no. ( he laughs ) Well, my father was a very hard taskmaster, very, very tough. As a matter of fact, before we got married, okay, I introduced my wife to my father, and he took a look at her, he said, "She's a nice lady, but I don't want you to marry her." I says, "Why?" "She hasn't got any money." ( he laughs ) A dowry, he meant, you know. You know what it is, in the old country when a hu--when a man was going to get married or a daughter was going to get married, they picked out the bride. Today you pick your own. Tradition is altogether different. And my father, you know, and the woman had to have a dowry in the old country. A horse, a cow or something, you know, something that, that was, uh, could be used and applicable at that time.

No money. Nobody had any money. It was very unusual if anybody came from the old country with money, but, uh, it was impossible.

LEVINE: Do you remember hearing what, the dowry your mother had?

PULDA: Heck, no. ( he laughs ) My mother didn't have two nickels to rub together. Nothing, I don't think, evidently. And my mother and my father were relatives. They were sort of inter-related, like cousins or something else. And, you know, and law is in the Yiddishkeit, in the Jewish law, if a man, if a woman dies, a relative, okay, that man has to marry his relative, yeah, to perpetuate the name.

LEVINE: So is that true?

PULDA: Yes, it's applicable now even.

LEVINE: I see.

PULDA: I don't know how many do it but, you know, by the same token, if you were living in the old country and somebody's mother died, and you were a widower and so on, you had to marry the lady's, that lady, that cousin of yours.

LEVINE: Was your mother the . . .

PULDA: She was a cousin of my father's.

LEVINE: Was she related to your father's first wife?

PULDA: No. No, no.

LEVINE: No.

PULDA: No, no, no, no. Uh-huh. That's how it is.

LEVINE: Um, let's see. Is there anything else that, uh, how about learning the language? Were there any experiences . . .

PULDA: Well, I went to school, you know. Yeah, I went to school when I was six, seven years old, you know. And I went to this, ( he snaps his fingers ) just like that, when you're a kid, you pick up the language very easily, okay. Now, I'll tell you something. My, I have a daughter and five grandchildren living in Israel. As a matter of fact, she was a Hebrew teacher, and she learned, went to school here and became very knowledgeable about Hebrew, and she married a fellow from Long Island. And they made alia which means they became citizens, of Israel. And they'd been living there for about fifteen, sixteen years.

LEVINE: Which daughter is this?

PULDA: That's my daughter Harriet.

LEVINE: Oh, Harriet.

PULDA: Yeah. She's the one that's in between, uh, Arnold and Ruthie. So that makes four daughters and two sons, right? And she lives in Israel. And they live on a moshav. You know the difference?

LEVINE: Oh, well, say.

PULDA: A moshav is a, is a, uh, it's a community. They're independent, okay. They, like they, they can lease land from the government, the Israeli government, and they pay for it, okay. And they can do whatever they want with it, to a certain extent. They build houses, they can farm it, they can do anything that they want on it, okay. The difference is, a kibbutz is just the opposite. Hello! That's my daughter-in-law. ( he laughs ) Kathy, say hello . . . ( a telephone rings )

LEVINE: We'll stop here for a minute.

PULDA: Okay. ( break in tape)

LEVINE: Okay. We're resuming now. I want to ask you what you are most proud of in your lifetime, that you've done.

PULDA: I'm most proud of my beautiful, gorgeous family, and the accomplishments they have achieved. Each and every one is an individual. And, uh, they've achieved an awful lot, due to the influence of my, primarily, I would say, my wife's influence. She's a great, has been a great influence on their lives on their character. What else can I tell you?

LEVINE: Yeah. Um, what changes have you seen in the town of Worcester since you've been here?

PULDA: I've been living in Worcester for a long, long time. At one time this was a very, uh, vital city, an affluent city. A lot of changes have become very apparent in the city of Worcester. A lot of the industry has moved out due to the fact that labor has, uh, chased them out, unions, you know. They were very influential at that time, and they, I could understand that they went to other areas where the labor is much cheaper. For instance, the American Steel and Wire was a big, big company here and had a lot of influence on the city of Worcester. And they employed thousands of help. Suddenly the unions chased them out because they were demanding too much money.

And now if you go downtown in the city of Worcester, it's a depressed area. Too many stores are empty. It looks, it makes me sick. It's deplorable condition. And nothing is being done about it. I've spoken to some of the council, and I'm very friendly with the Mayor of Worcester. As a matter of fact, his father, former father used to work for me. And he's, he's a nice personal, a nice person, a really nice person. But alone I don't think he can do anything. And . . .

LEVINE: What is his name, the Mayor of Worcester?

PULDA: Jordan Levy. That's right. And he's very influential in the city. As a matter of fact, he's run two or three times, and he's, every

time that he's run is, he's, you know, the people vote for him in such great magnitude and they claim that they like him very much, and he's a nice, nice guy.

LEVINE: Well, did you see Worcester build up, and then come down?

PULDA: And then come down, yes. Yeah. Like I said, they lost a lot of, a lot of industry. And consequently they're not doing anything.

LEVINE: What built it up?

PULDA: Well, like, uh, what built it up, the steel mills, and the, uh, all kinds of shoe factories that were here. There was very, it was a very industrious city at one time. Now it isn't. So they have to do something to re-vitalize the City of Worcester. Otherwise it's gonna be very bad conditions. There's a lot of unemployment here, which is bad. You know, and I can't see where it's gonna improve any unless they, the council and the governing people of Worcester make a big effort to invite the people to come here and, uh, to start several different kinds of industries, and they give them some kind of, an incentive to come here. So far there's nothing being done about it. That's bad. As a matter of fact, I'm glad I'm out of it now. I'm not actually glad I'm out of the business, but I don't have the, uh, the continuous anxiety, you know. But I lived for it. I used to like it very much. I would come into the office, and it was a challenge every day, really a challenge, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you have any regrets?

PULDA: I regret because I gave it up.

LEVINE: Oh, really? You would have preferred to have kept that for a while?

PULDA: Yes, yes. Well, I'm still able to work, and that's the only kind of business that I ever knew, that I was quite adept at.

LEVINE: How old were you when you stopped working at it?

PULDA: I stopped about five years ago.

LEVINE: Well, um, would you have any advice to give to, let's say, a young person coming to this country from someplace else at this period of time?

PULDA: Well, first of all, he's got to learn the language, okay. And to learn as much as he can, and get involved with, uh, some sort of industry, or anything that he's capable of doing, not to just hang around, and try to make the best of it. Because United States is one of the finest countries in the world, and you can make whatever you want of it. It's up to the individual person. Two, you know, make himself as a better person. ( a telephone rings ) Let it ring, because it will take . . . ( break in tape ) Thank you very much for listening to me.

LEVINE: Well, it's been a pleasure. And, um, if there's nothing else, uh, that you want to bring up at this point, we can close.

PULDA: No. First of all, you don't have too much time to, uh, continue. I don't want to keep you any longer. And that's about all.

LEVINE: Okay.

PULDA: I could talk forever, but, by the same token, you know.

LEVINE: How about this phase of your life? Let's just end with that.

PULDA: What's the phase of my life now?

LEVINE: Yeah. How . . .

PULDA: Well, I don't know. Right now I, I'm involved in the, uh, lawsuit. Three years ago I was involved in big accident, and I'll close with that. I had a halo in my head. I don't know if you know anything about it. Steel rods were driven into my head. A big truck backed over me and broke two vertebrae in my neck. I had a broken neck. Inadvertently, I didn't know about the broken neck. I got witnesses and so on to it. And it's been three years since it's been coming to trial. I hope by September, they've been trying to get a judge to hear the case, and nothing has materialized. In September, I hope that we'll finalize it and I'll be happy to get it done with.

LEVINE: Do you have lasting, um . . .

PULDA: Yes, I have, yes. It has aggravated all my ailments. My arthritis, I'm constantly under pain. So, what am I going to do.

LEVINE: Well, you seem to be leading a very active life.

PULDA: Well, I do, yes. Because, as a matter of fact, I was going to go play golf if you didn't show. ( they laugh ) And I was working in the garage for my cabinet that I'm making for my grandson.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I want to thank you very much. It's really been a pleasure, and an interesting story that will be now on file at Ellis Island.

PULDA: Uh-huh. Okay.

LEVINE: And . . .

PULDA: Can I get a tape of it?

LEVINE: Yes. And I'll send you a copy of the tape.

PULDA: Okay, good.

LEVINE: Okay. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. I've been speaking with Louis Pulda, and it's August 13, 1993, and we're at Mr. Pulda's home at Worcester, Massachusetts, and I am signing off.

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