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MARY GRADMAN TANZMAN
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POLAND/RUSSIA, 1920
AGE 5

SHIP: "THE ROTTERDAM"
PORT: ROTTERDAM
RESIDENCES:
POLAND: GONITZ, KOROSCHIN
US: NEW YORK, NY; CHICAGO, IL

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. I'm here today on May 9th, 1994, with Mary Tanzman, who came in 1920 when she was five years old from what was then probably Russia, although the place where you were born was probably Polish at the time.

TANZMAN: That's what it seems. There was lots of confusion, and as I mentioned in our discussion, invading armies. So were no-- not always sure which country we belonged.

LEVINE: Okay. Let's start with your giving your birth date and your name that you were born with.

TANZMAN: I was born Miriam Grejensky. And I was born on the second day of Rosh Hashanah on the Jewish calendar, which the first year I was in this country turned out to be September 29th. So since then that's been my

legal birth date. September 29th, 1915.

LEVINE: Now, it was in 1915 that your father, who came first to this country, left Europe and came to America. Can you tell the, the story about your father and the background as to how he happened to come to America?

TANZMAN: My father was one: the oldest son in a family of six children. And at the time he was eligible for military service. Under the Russian and I also believe the Polish government, a person could buy out his military service. If he could contribute something like three hundred and fifty or four hundred rubles to the government, he would be excused from military service. My grandmother -- my grandparents were poor, hard working people with four sons of military age, so there was no way they could buy out their son's military service. So my grandmother who was a feisty little lady protected her sons and kept them hidden as much as she could.

My father was actually the only one who was ever caught by the military. The others managed to stay away until they finally emigrated to the United States after we did. But my dad was walking on the road late one night, and he was picked up a Russian patrol and inducted into the military service. Jews particularly were very frightened of military service because there was so much anti-Semitism in the military that Jewish soldiers were often killed by their fellow Russian soldiers. So the first chance my father had, he escaped from his military service and, we believe, although it's not been definitely ascertained, that he wound up in Finland, probably somewhere near Helsinki.

There was a Jewish underground there that helped Jewish military escapees get out of the country. At that time World War One was on, and ships were being torpedoed. And they, the ship owners had a very hard time finding stevedores who were willing to risk the crossing. However

these Jewish escapees from the Russian army, I guess they felt they didn't have much to lose. So my father got himself a job as a stevedore on a boat. He was about five feet six inches tall, never weighed over a hundred and forty-five pounds in his life, but he loaded cargo onto the ship. And during the passage, which he said took almost a month because they were trying to sail around areas where they might be bombed or torpedoed.

And he finally arrived in the port of New York. And since there were no immigration laws to speak of, he walked off the ship and landed in New York City. He went for a walk into the garment district. He had been a, trained as a tailor in Europe and found himself a job working in a small tailoring establishment of some kind, where he felt very fortunate to be paid three dollars a week and a place to sleep in a cot -- on a cot in back of the business.

LEVINE: Well, do you remember anything about either the Russian Revolution or the war, or the first world war, personally that you remember experiencing when you were in Europe?

TANZMAN: I had one frightening personal experience and also a family story. The little town or *shtetl* as it was known, where I -- my mother and I lived and I have to add here that the day my father arrived in Europe -- in the United States, I was born in Europe. He left a pregnant wife. And he knew that. And so I did not know my father until I was five years old. In our *shtetl* in contrast to our experience here in the United States, we were very poor. And children had no toys to speak of except the ones they made for themselves. Toys, games, that kind of thing. And so the children played on a hill right near where we lived. And it was a lot of fun to walk up the hill, lay down and roll down. That was our playground.

Well, late one afternoon, I must have been four, I went up the hill to roll down and there was a line of children. And when you're four years old and the smallest in the bunch, you go to the end of the line for a long time because the other children would push you back. At sundown a Polish soldier came out of the city hall which was on top of the little hill, and he shooed the children home. Jewish children had a curfew and they could not be out after dark. But I had been standing in line a long time and according to my mother and my aunts, I was a pretty stubborn little kid, and I had a mind of my own, and I was not going to lose my turn after having stood in line for about an hour to try to get my turn to roll down the hill.

All the other children apparently understood what the soldier was saying and they ran home. And I was the littlest one in the bunch. So I walked up to the top of the hill, and as I laid down he unsheathed his bayonet and pointed it at my head. And, of course, I ran screaming home. And my mother told me that for months afterward I had nightmares and I would wake up crying because I was afraid the soldiers would get me. The family story that my mother told was that there were soldiers and armies marching through all the time. And once in the middle of the night there was a loud knocking on the door. And my mother -- person on the other side said that he was a, he spoke German which my mother understood. And he said that he was a German soldier, apparently retreating. That he was tired and he wanted to come in the house. I

t was bitter cold outside. And my mother said, "I can't let you in. I'm here alone with a small child." And he said, "If you don't let me in I will break the door down. I am tired, I am freezing, I am hungry." So my mother -- and he said, "I will not hurt you." My mother opened the door. She said, "I saw his face. He looked like a sixteen, seventeen year old kid." And he threw a coat or something on the floor. She gave him some bread and

some milk. And he slept on the floor in front of a little fire she had going. He did not harm her. When she got up in the morning he was gone. (she is moved)

LEVINE: You said you had grandparents in Europe?

TANZMAN: Yes.

LEVINE: Where, what were their names, do you remember?

TANZMAN: Yes. (she pauses) My grandmother was Hasha Grejensky [PH]. And my grandfather was, let's see if I can remember. Yeshia Grejensky [PH]. My grandfather was a locally renowned scholar of Jewish law. And when a German army came through there probably in 1914 he, he had never done hard physical labor in his life, and he was put to work digging trenches. He was in his fifties. He keeled over and died.

LEVINE: Do you remember any experiences with him as a young child?

TANZMAN: No, I do not. I never knew him. I do remember my grandmother who we left behind when we went, when my mother and I came. That was my father's mother. My mother's parents were, my maternal grandfather was -- had died before I was born. My maternal grandmother died when I was about four.

LEVINE: Do you remember her at all?

TANZMAN: Hardly. Hardly. Interesting situation. I in my younger days used to enjoy knitting. And the knitting shop that I went to, there was a very experienced knitting teacher there, sort of an interesting character. And she was watching me knitting one day, and she said, "Where in the world

did you learn to knit? You're the funniest knitter I ever saw." And I said, "Gee, I don't know. I've always known how to knit. I don't remember where I learned." I asked my mother one day, because she didn't knit, "Where did I learn to knit?" She said, "You used to sit on my mother's lap, and she would take the needles and work your hands." And that's how I knit. That's my legacy from my maternal grandmother.

LEVINE: Oh. How about your paternal grandmother? Do you remember any experiences with her?

TANZMAN: Hardly. I remember vaguely her being in tears when we left. That -- it had been my father's intention and his brothers who came subsequently, to bring their mother over. As it happened she had that famous eye disease, which at that time was presumed to be contagious. Trachoma? And, of course, subsequently developed that it wasn't. And there's kind of a sad story connected with that because my youngest aunt, my father's youngest sister, refused to leave Europe and leave her mother behind. So she stayed and she married and she had three children. My grandmother subsequently died, but before we could bring them, they were caught in the Holocaust and the family was exterminated. We found no trace of the children. We were told by some townspeople that when the Nazi armies marched into Poland in 1939 that most of the Jewish townspeople were taken out and shot.

LEVINE: What was the name of the *shtetl* where your family was living?

TANZMAN: Well, there are two. My, my, my father's *shtetl* was Gonidz. G-O-N-I-D-Z is the way it's spelled. My mother's was Koroschin, and they are kind of adjoining about three or four miles apart, or were at that time. I don't know what's there now, of course.

LEVINE: How do you spell Koroschin?

TANZMAN: K-O-R-O-S-C-H-I-N, I think. "Koh-roh-tchin" is the way they pronounced.

LEVINE: Koroschin. Now, do you, did you ever here the story of how your mother and father met or married or how that was decided?

TANZMAN: Well, it was very common in those days for, for arranged marriages. And my, my paternal grandmother was rather disappointed that my father had met this girl in another town that he wanted to marry, because he was poor and she was poor. My father was a yeshiva student in the town where my mother lived, where there was a yeshiva, and that's how they met. And my grandmother was, would have much preferred that he married one of the richer, into one of the richer families in town, but it was not to be. My parents were either eighteen or nineteen when they married. I believe eighteen. They were the same age. And my dad was a student in, in the town that my mother lived in.

LEVINE: So, when your father was in Poland -- Russia, he, he was a tailor?

TANZMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: He had apprenticed as a tailor?

TANZMAN: Yes, a tailor. That's right. He had apprenticed as a tailor which was part of their, my grandmother made sure that all of her sons were well educated in Yiddish and in Hebrew and in religion. My father was studying to be a rabbi. And it was part of the way they got their training, was as an apprentice, and who, and they often lived with a prominent family who for their opportunity to study at the yeshiva they were given room and board, and they, they studied and they also worked for the tailor

who was training them both as a tailor and, and also in their religious studies.

LEVINE: And you were the only child...

TANZMAN: Born in Europe.

LEVINE: ...born in Europe.

TANZMAN: Right.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

TANZMAN: Right.

LEVINE: And do you remember, did you have a lot of aunts and uncles in Europe?

TANZMAN: I, yes. The only one that I remember, I knew I had aunts and uncles. I had one uncle who was self appointed, I think, as our protector. He was a year younger than my father. And when our town was burned and destroyed, which happened periodically, he came and got my mother and me. I was, he said, about a year and a half old. And he used to tell the story that he carried me on his back for twenty miles. And he also used to tell me when I was fresh to him, which was occasionally, that he'd wished he'd left me there. (she laughs) And knowing him I knew he didn't mean it.

LEVINE: What was that uncle's name?

TANZMAN: Abraham.

LEVINE: And what was your father's name?

TANZMAN: Jacob.

LEVINE: And your mother's?

TANZMAN: Breina, Bertha's the, Breinka's [PH] the name they called her. I, that was a nick name. I t hink her, her real name was Brokha. B-R-O-C-H-A.

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

TANZMAN: Cohen. C-O-H-E-N.

LEVINE: And, let's see. So, your father came to this country. And then he worked for three dollars a week...

TANZMAN: Hmm-hmm.

LEVINE: ...also sewing.

TANZMAN: Hmm-hmm.

LEVINE: And did you have any communication with him?

TANZMAN: None until the war ended. And, because -- I don't believe, you know, we didn't have any electronic mail service or, or air service. And the very few ships were sailing. They didn't have to because of the bombing and the, the torpedoing of ships. So my mother heard from my father sometime after November, 1918 when, you know, World War One ended. I think she knew he was in the United States. She hoped he was in the United

States, you know, rumor and -- but she didn't know for sure. And then once the war ended, he communicated with her. Meanwhile he had saved his three dollars a week and as soon as it was possible he sent for us.

LEVINE: Wow. How did your mother get along during those years when your father was, was in the United States.

TANZMAN: Well, it was very difficult. She had a couple of sisters there. Her mother died, and they had a little house. They planted food in the, in the garden or whatever it was called. One of, my mother did some sewing. She was a fairly decent seamstress and she would earn some money that way. One of her sisters, who is also a year younger than she, my Aunt Clara, worked in Bialystok, which was about three, five miles away -- for a Polish nobleman. She was the -- she took care of his children. A governess. And very often when she had an evening off, she would walk between where she worked to where my mother lived to bring me a fresh orange, which she was given for breakfast but did not eat, saved it for me. Or some food that she would save and bring. So they scraped, but they managed.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything, anything else about food in Europe. Any foods that you ate or...

TANZMAN: Well, I remember one very unpleasant incident. I was badly burned as a small child in an accident in the house. My mother's younger sister, my Aunt Becky, lived with us. And my mother had gone to work for -- something. They would, sometimes they would take the produce that they grew and take it to the market and sell it, so that they would have some extra money, you know, to buy other things. And I think that's what my mother was doing that day. And my Aunt Becky who was then maybe

seventeen, a teenager, was left to watch me.

And my mother had left a pot of cabbage boiling on a -- it was called a *Dreifuss,* a tripod kind of stove. It had a fire underneath and the pot hung from a hook over the fire. And I was running around. I was about a year and a half old. And I tripped over that pot of boiling cabbage. And I was badly burned from the waist down. There were no doctors, there were no medicines. And most of the townspeople had decided that I was going to die. My mother began looking for remedies. And she was told by the town *Felsher*; i.e. veterinarian, who, you know, only knew folk medicine, to get some dog bones, dry them out and grind them into a powder.

The story I was told was that it was bitter cold, and there were lots of dead German police dogs around because there had been fighting in, in our -- a lot of, of war activity in our area. And my mother found a dead police dog. And she got the bones. And then she had to find a mill, you know, something to grind. Again, no electronics. There was an elderly lady in our town who had a, a mill in which she ground coffee. She was a wealthy lady in town. And my mother sneaked into the house while she was gone, because she would not have permitted my mother to use the mill. It would have -- you know, she was kosher, and dog bones don't exactly meet all the legitimate requirements. And my mother was Orthodox. This went against her belief system also. And she sprinkled my body with this powder, which, of course, was calcium. And I recovered.

LEVINE: How long did it take for you to recover?

TANZMAN: A long time. Months. But she kept sprinkling calcium, finding dog bones, grinding them and sprinkling me with calcium. And I healed. To this day, when I go swimming or I take a shower, you can see on the top of my

body that it's wet. From the waist down, it's filmy. (she laughs) You can still tell the effects of it.

LEVINE: Are there any other remembrances you have of Europe that we haven't talked about?

TANZMAN: Oh, not off hand

LEVINE: How did, how do you think that those first five years living under the conditions that you lived under, how do you think they effected the rest of your life?

TANZMAN: Well, I think they had a tremendous effect. I think in part they led to what eventually became my profession. I'm – I'm a clinical social worker. And it was always my, from the time I was very young, that I was put here for a good reason, and one of -- for some good reasons - and one of them was that I was to help people. And I have been practicing now for almost fifty years. And also I think we have a value system and a morality system about concern for other people, a feeling of community, that you're sort of your brother's keeper, not just on, in a religious sense, but in a sense of responsibility and concern for your fellow man. I think it's had a tremendous effect on me from that point of view. Our house, we, we, had immigrants coming through our house almost, you know, they would come for a week, for two weeks, for a month, until they could find a place to live and get a job. We had, we had a couch. (she chuckles) We had featherbeds all over the...

LEVINE: That was in this country.

TANZMAN: Yeah. Sure.

LEVINE: Yeah. Uh-huh.

TANZMAN: Sure.

LEVINE: What about attitudes? Do you remember, speaking about community and, your mother? Do you remember attitudes that she tried to instill in you as a child?

TANZMAN: Yes. If you ever had a nickel that you couldn't account for, you were in big trouble. (she laughs) And if, I had a little playmate who once had a few nickels, and she gave me one. And I came home with the nickel. And my, both of my parents said, "Where did you get it?" And I said, "Gretchen gave it to me." (she laughs) And, "Why would Gretchen give you a nickel?" They went over to make sure that Gretchen had given me the nickel. And her parents had given her some nickels and told her to be good to her friends. So, you know.

Yes, there was a very strong emphasis on honesty, on truthfulness, on respect for people, on tolerance. Yes, we were one family, and there was a very strong commitment to family, to this day. If members of the family didn't have enough food or couldn't pay the rent, we pitched up and helped out, even though, you know, we didn't have much ourselves. If there was a holiday, various family members made sure that the other family members had the wherewithal to celebrate the holidays and things like that. That was very strongly entrenched in our family. Yeah. And...

LEVINE: Okay. Why don't we pause here so we can turn the tape over, and then we'll continue.

END OF SIDE ONE **BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO**

LEVINE: Okay, this is side B now. I'm talking with Mary Tanzman. And we were talking about family values. And, well, I, I'm sure there's carry over from the old country to this country.

TANZMAN: Right.

LEVINE: Why don't we talk now about when you finally did have a communication with your father after World War One, and how it got arranged that you would actually leave.

TANZMAN: Well, this day I remember almost vividly, is -- word went out that there was mail. And I don't remember where the mail was kept. Probably somewhere in the city hall area of the little town. And my mother went, and there was a -- ship's tickets for my mother and I to come. And my father had also sent some American money in addition to -- for other, you know, transportation and passage and whatever. And the local authorities had converted the American money to German marks which at that time were worthless.

And so I really don't know how my mother managed it, but she raised a big fuss of some kind, and they converted enough of it back into either Polish or Russian money, so that we had enough money to leave, although my father subsequently sent additional money, because she wrote and told him what had happened to the money that was sent. Because I think she must have gotten twenty percent of what it was worth even when it was converted back to Polish or Russian money.

LEVINE: How would he have sent the money? He sent it like in a letter?

TANZMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

TANZMAN: Hmm-hmm. Sent it in a letter. And then the, you know, the plans began about leaving. My mother had two sisters living there. My father had two brothers. My mother assured her sisters and my father -- his brothers by letter that as soon as they could they would send for them, which they did. By then my father had located an aunt of his who lived in Detroit, and also another brother of his had come over. And they literally saved every nickel for the purpose of bringing over the rest of the family. And they brought everyone except the aunt who died in the Holocaust and my grandmother who predeceased her in death. My grandmother sent away four sons and a daughter. She only saw one of them again. One of my uncles who became quite well-to-do was able to go back to Europe and visit her once. None of the rest of the family were ever able to do it.

LEVINE: And it was the younger, your aunt who felt she didn't want to leave your grandmother?

TANZMAN: That's right. And she remained and married there and had three children. And we kept in touch with her. And the arrangements were that after my grandmother died she would, and her family would be willing to come. And all arrangements were made to bring them. I think my grandmother must have died two or three months before Hitler invaded Poland. And they just did not get out in time.

LEVINE: So, do you remember packing up to leave?

TANZMAN: Hardly. I remember there was tremendous excitement. That I remember. And, you know, all the, you know, there was no public transportation, and

we had to get to Danzig. Oh. We got caught in a storm crossing, must have been the Danube, from Poland to Danzig, which was then a port of entry, port of departure, port of entry. And the ship was sinking. And I, that I remember vividly. I got separated from my mother. First, there was tremendous commotion and people were crying and frightened. The ship was sinking. And praying. And they, they took the women off first apparently into -- they transferred us, they had another ship along side, and they transferred us over, I guess, to the other ship.

I don't know how I got separated from my mother, but I did. And I came off, my mother tells it, told it, on the shoulders of one of the sailors. And it was a frightening experience. Then when we got to Danzig, and I don't remember this, this is a family story. It appeared that we were not in the proper port for our, the way our passage was arranged. So we went from Danzig to Rotterdam. And we, and I think that was by train.

LEVINE: Do you remember things that you saw en route that you'd never seen before?

TANZMAN: No. No, I don't.

LEVINE: And then the name of the ship that you actually sailed on?

TANZMAN: Was the S.S. Rotterdam. And at that time it was considered the fastest ship afloat. It was a new ship, and it was a ten day crossing. And we, of course, were in steerage. And I only remembered this when I, when I made my first visit to this Ellis Island Museum. As I walked along the sea wall, I remembered how hungry I was aboard ship. And I couldn't quite figure it out. And then I remembered why. My mother was orthodox. She did not eat the ship's food, because she would not, I don't know whether it was supposed to be kosher, I can't be sure, but she would not eat it

anyway, nor would she let me eat it. And so we lived on bread and water for ten days. And when I walked along the sea wall, that all came flooding back to me, and I started to cry. And I'm choking up now. (she is moved)

LEVINE: Wow. And it's, you had another memory, too...

TANZMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...when you saw the sea wall for the first time.

TANZMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember that...

TANZMAN: I don't know which one you're...

LEVINE: ...of seeing your, seeing your mother and father?

TANZMAN: Yeah. As young people when they first met. Hmm-hmm. They hadn't seen each other for five years. And my father was along side. He, he, they, they rented row boats, I guess, and he came along side the ship to, to greet us. First, first view I ever had of my father. But aboard ship there was a funny experience. My mother was bringing my father two bottles of Polish cognac. Word went through the ship, because of – it -- I don't know whether the prohibition was already in force at that time or not, I'm not sure. But word went through the ship that the, when we land, we would land at Ellis Island, that there would be a search for, quotes, contraband. And whiskey or liquor was considered contraband.

Well, my mother was terrified as were all of the immigrants, that if the American officials found something wrong, whatever it would be, they

would not be admitted to this country and would be sent back to their country of origin. So she was terrified. And she was travelling with her eldest sister and her, my aunt's two children who were much older than I. They were teenagers. So the decision was made that the two bottles of liquor were sewed into, packed into a feather bed, called a *perene*. And that if a child was sent down to the storage room to find something she would not be suspect like an adult who was down there. So I was sent down to the storage room where their baggage was kept and instructed on how to retrieve those two bottles and pitch them overboard. So I have two very good bottles of Polish cognac sitting in New York Harbor. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Okay. So, was there anything else about the ship experience? The accommodations, the...

TANZMAN: Well, they were, they were pretty poor. And I just remember crowding, and people just sleeping wherever they could find a place to sleep on their featherbeds, or whatever they had. I don't rem--, I don't believe there were any sleeping accommodations, except on the floor of the ship.

LEVINE: Were you in the hold a lot of the time...

TANZMAN: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...or were you on deck?

TANZMAN: Mostly we were in steerage. We would walk on deck. There were all sorts of regulations about, you know, where you could walk and the, the well-paying passengers, you know, who were travelling first class, of course, had all of the amenities of the ship. We, I remember vaguely walking around outdoors, but exactly in what area of the ship it was I don't

know.

LEVINE: Do you remember when the ship came into New York Harbor?

TANZMAN: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. That was very vivid. The Statue of Liberty, and the, all the excitement aboard ship, and children were given American flags to carry. I had one. And it was a, it just seemed, it was sunny and bright. Whether it really was or not, I'm not sure but it felt that way.

LEVINE: And what were people doing?

TANZMAN: Well, there were, I think there were two major emotional climates on the ship. One was great fear, great anxiety. What if they find something wrong with your papers, what if you have contraband, stuff you shouldn't have like my two bottles of cognac? What if your papers aren't in order? All sorts of fears and concerns. The major one I think was health. All of the people aboard ship were terrified that if something was found in their health examination, that they would be returned to Europe, and everyone was terrified of that.

And then there was tremendous anticipatory excitement about how it was going to be, and how the streets were paved with gold, and how people were going to be free, and they weren't going to be afraid of somebody knocking on their door and dragging them off to the army, or to dig trenches for somebody, and things like that. So there were two, jubilation and fear, I think were the major, you know, as I look back at it as an adult. Although I ex-, I remember the excitement. And I didn't have much fear. My mother was frightened. But I, you know, I wasn't frightened. And, you know, somehow I had some sense that my mother was a basically healthy person, she'd never been sick, and I was a healthy person. You know, it was a child's assessment of reality, but that's the way it felt to me. I

wasn't that scared. I was mostly excited. The adults were very scared.

LEVINE: Do you remember your feelings about seeing your father for the first time?

TANZMAN: Well, you know, there had been talk about, you know. (she laughs) And I didn't, not ever, had ever even seen a picture of him. And what was so funny was I looked just like him. And there was a family joke. My dad would sometimes say to me, "You know, if you don't listen," or, "If you don't behave yourself," whatever, you know, things fathers say, "I think I'll deny paternity." And I used to say to him, "Okay, Pop, just look in the mirror and deny it." (she laughs) It was a standard family joke about his denying paternity. And I'm the child that looked the most like him. It was really funny. But my dad happened to have been a very special person. And...

LEVINE: What was he like?

TANZMAN: Oh, you're going to make me cry. I've never stopped mourning for my father. He was a very cultured man. He, he was very well educated in Yiddish and Hebrew. He had, he could have, if he had remained in Europe he could have been a practicing rabbi. But he didn't particularly want to do that in this country. He worked in the tailoring business for a couple of years. And then, when he tracked down his aunt in Detroit, there was a little grocery store that was available for sale. A member of the family, an older member of the, my aunt's husband's family had become ill and could no longer manage the business. So they made an arrangement for my father to take it over. He didn't have any money to buy it. But out of his earnings from the store he would pay them "X" number of dollars a month until he paid for it. And so, most of his, all of his adult life my father had a grocery business. He eventually brought his two brothers over, and they all came into the business. And those three

brothers worked together un-, pretty much till the end of their lives or they retired. They always supported each other, worked together. And their children all did very well, you know.

LEVINE: How was your father in relation to you when you were a little girl?

TANZMAN: Oh. He was quite, my father was enormously devoted to his children. That's what he did. He worked, and anytime we did anything he was involved in it. There were three more children born in this country. I have a sister who was born in here in 1924. And I have two brothers. And we made our parents a fiftieth wedding anniversary. And someone asked my dad what was his greatest accomplishment. And he said, "I walked off the boat with six dollars and nineteen cents in my pocket for what I earned loading cargo." And he said, "I put four children through college. That was my greatest accomplishment."

LEVINE: Wow. And how about your greatest accomplishment? What would you say that is?

TANZMAN: Oh. Well, I think I've been a very contributing person to my family, to my country, and to the people I've known and worked with. (she chuckles) I have two graduate degrees from universities. I have a, a master's degree in social work from the University of Chicago. And I have worked all of my life as a clinical social worker. I helped resettle the immigrants from the concentration camps. And I've worked with families and with people to try to better their life. I consider that an important accomplishment. I married. I have two children.

LEVINE: What's your husband's name?

TANZMAN: Jack. He's also a clinical social worker, and we've worked together and

separately. We have two children. We have a daughter who lives in San Francisco, who...

LEVINE: And her name?

TANZMAN: Elaine is a librarian and a student. My son is a lawyer. His name is Edward. He's married. He has two sons. And at the moment as we're taping this he is in Europe, either Vienna or The Hague. He is a legal specialist in, let's, it's not nuclear. Let me see if I can get it, chemical weapons law. And the United States and about a hundred other countries are negotiating a chemical weapons treaties [sic], and he is part of that program. And is in Europe right now doing that. I have two grandsons, age twelve and ten. Wonderful kids. And that's the rest of my accomplishments. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Well, tell me, since you've worked with immigrants, what was it like for you as a, as five year old, and an immigrant to this country. What kinds of experiences stand out in your mind relevant to that?

TANZMAN: Well, I, I remember going to school, and not being able to speak a word of English, and going to A-- Americanization classes. Feeling strange and different. And although playing on the streets on New York's East Side I certainly was not alone as an immigrant child. But when I got into the larger environment of the school, I felt very strange -- not accepted well by other children, because I talked funny and I looked funny, and I didn't have American type of clothing, and I wasn't familiar with American ways. You know, when children said "candy store" I didn't know what they were talking about. And things like that. So an immigrant child has a great deal to learn about adaptation. That was one of the things that I think the immigrant position helped me to do was -- you have to learn how to adapt and, and accommodate and compromise and be flexible about yourself

and other people.

LEVINE: What were the Americanization classes like, and how often did you go to them?

TANZMAN: Well, it was usually the first hour in the morning that we, they, they taught English, you know. English conversation. And, you know, they'd hold up objects, cup, glass, bag, coat, you know, simple things that a child going to school needed to know.

LEVINE: How, you work with immigrants now?

TANZMAN: No.

LEVINE: No.

TANZMAN: No. I did in the, I did in the, I'm just trying to remember. I think it was in the late forties, in '48, that the United States admitted four hundred thousand refugees from the concentration camps and I worked for the family agency in Chicago that helped resettle those people.

LEVINE: I see. What advice would you have for immigrants today, if any?

TANZMAN: (she chuckles) Well, they need to learn something that's very, again, I think people who have the immigration experience have that capacity much more than natives do. And that is you need to learn to -- how to live and tolerate frustration, and to have patience, and to be adaptable, because the ways you bring with you are useful, but they need to adapt to the way in which Americans live. That produces a tremendous amount of frustration in people. And it's important to learn to tolerate the frustration and surmount it, because then you have opportunities here to make a

good life for yourself. No, the streets were not paved with gold. We worked very hard. All of us. We had a Ma and Pa store, and Ma, Pa and all the kids worked there from sunrise to sunset.

LEVINE: Can you think of any frustrations that you particularly endured early on?

TANZMAN: Well, simple -- I think people who travel in foreign countries experience it. You didn't know how to handle money. You don't know, you, you would take your dime or your six cents to get on the street car or the bus and you didn't know what six cents was. And the conductor would say, "Six cents." Well, it was very strange and very unfamiliar. One of the -- so many people with good intentions, you know, we all tend to be afraid of what we're not familiar with. And people would see us as immigrants, we didn't look like Americans, we didn't act like Americans, and they would shy away and distance themselves, be sort of afraid of us, angry at us.

And I think it was one of the things that kept families; immigrant families so close together, was that they understood each other, and it was familiar, and the language and ways and the mores and the rules and the values and everything else were similar. When you went into the larger society, it, it was not the same. You were not accepted. People didn't understand you. Now, children had a great advantage because they went to school and they were almost forced to mix with other children. But the adults who came, many of them had a very hard time. And they never really did assimilate well.

LEVINE: Do you remember any things that were new to you, that struck you as pleasant, or were...

TANZMAN: Oh, my. Hmm.

LEVINE: ...delighted you.

TANZMAN: Well, my first day in this country, my father had, had found a distant cousin. I don't even know who's distant cousin it was, but he -- my father told him that we were coming, and he offered to pick us up in a car. An Auftomobil [PH] in German. And that was my first ride in a car. Was, you know, at the end of the day when, it took a good part of the day to get processed here at Ellis Island, although we arrived early in the morning. There was this man and my father, and we got into the car. And he was going to take us, my father had an apartment. But before we went to our apartment, we were going to stop at this man's sister's home, and she had prepared a meal for us. And it was, I remember that car. It was a long, old touring car. It would certainly have been a wonderful antique by now.

And on the way we stopped somewhere, and I tasted ice cream for the first time. Ice cream was a luxury where I came from that was only available to very rich children, and I was not one of them. Well, we had dinner at these people's house, I had had my ice cream, and he drove us to our new home, new apartment. And I refused to get out of the car, because I knew that that car was not coming back again. (she laughs) And my dad used to tell the story of how he almost had to, he (my father incidentally never, ever laid a hand on a child, would not hit a child). He said, "I will not humiliate my children." He would not do that. And he tried to get me out of the car. And he said he almost had to give me a good swat, but I finally, he dragged me out of the car, because for sure that car wasn't ever coming back. I remember that car.

LEVINE: Wow.

TANZMAN: And the ice cream. I still love ice cream. (they laugh)

LEVINE: Okay, well, we're near the end of the tape right now. Is there anything you'd like to say before we close with side B of, of your interview?

TANZMAN: Well, I think the United States has benefitted a great deal from the influx of immigrants which we so reluctantly consider admitting these days. I think it would be a terrible loss. If my family is any example, we have all become very contributing members of the society and of the United States, and we've all been good citizens. We have served in the military. We are doctors, lawyers, teachers, social workers, writers, and I think it's important to allow people the opportunity that this country offers to develop themselves and to contribute to society.

LEVINE: Well, thank you very much. I've been speaking with Mary Tanzman.

TANZMAN: My pleasure to be here.

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. This is May 9th, 1994. We're here at the Ellis Island Oral History Studio, and we're signing off.