

EI-501  
DORA COHEN GATS  
BIRTH DATE: MARCH 4, 1897  
INTERVIEW DATE: JULY 14, 1994  
RUNNING TIME: 1:00:04  
INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.  
RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME  
INTERVIEW LOCATION: TANNERSVILLE, NEW YORK  
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 11/1998  
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: IRV SILBERG

POLAND: 1906  
AGE 9

SHIP: "THE CARONIA"  
PORT: LIVERPOOL  
RESIDENCES  
POLAND: RU?, LODZ  
ENGLAND: LIVERPOOL  
US: NEW YORK, TANNERSVILLE, NY

HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mrs. Gats' daughter, Pearl Boxer, and granddaughter, Anne Kordi are present.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. It's Thursday morning, July 14, 1994. I'm in Tannersville, New York in the Catskills with Dora Gats. Mrs. Gats was born in Poland, lived in England for a few years prior to coming to the United States in 1906. She was nine years old at that time. Also present in the room are her daughter, Pearl Boxer, B-O-X-E-R, her granddaughter, Anne Kordi, K-O-R-D-I, and the family dog, Dusty. You may also hear some traffic in the background. Mrs. Gats, can we begin with you giving me your birth date, please?

GATS: March 4, uh, what is it?

SIGRIST: 1897.

GATS: 1897.

SIGRIST: And where in Poland were you born?

GATS: In Dishine, a small town in Poland called Dishine.

SIGRIST: Can somebody spell that, please?

GATS: Pearl? Dishine.

BOXER: D-I-S-H-I-N-E.

SIGRIST: T-A-S-H-I-N-E.

BOXER: Right.

GATS: Tashine.

SIGRIST: Tashine. Do you know where in Poland that is?

GATS: They called it; they called it Ru?, Poland, that town. And it was a little town off Lodz, and off Warsaw, a small town, and I was born there.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the town? What can you see in your mind when you think about that town?

GATS: It was a farm, a farm like here. They grew vegetables. It was a small place. And, uh, I was, I was born there by my grandmother was living there, my grandfather, and my mother.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the house that you lived in for me?

GATS: Yes. It's a hou—a small house. We ha—we used to put sand on the floor. My grandmother used to go to the cemetery to buy sa-- get sand, and put it on the floor. We had no oil cloth.

SIGRIST: No oil cloth.

GATS: No oil cloth, just wood, and she used to go to the cemetery to put sand on the floor to make the floor look nice. And I lived there with my grandfather and my grandmother, and my mother had to go to work, to Lodz, and they left me there.

SIGRIST: Can you describe a little more about the house for me? Do you know what it was made out of?

GATS: The - the house was made like here the houses, and it was near a synagogue and - and - mit-- my grandmother used to go and wash on the outside. There was a big, heavy board across the river, and she used to wash clothes there.

SIGRIST: How did your grandmother do the cooking in the house?

GATS: We used to cook by wood. She went out on the farm and got wood, sticks, from the trees, and that's how we cooked, and we used to have vegetables growing outside, all kind of vegetables.

SIGRIST: What kinds of vegetables specifically? Do you remember?

GATS: Peas, peas, string beans, green peas, um, potatoes. We wanted potatoes, my grandmother used to go out and bring fresh potatoes in.

SIGRIST: What was your grandmother's name?

GATS: Pesa[ph], Pesa[ph], Pearl.

SIGRIST: And was she your mother's mother or your father's mother?

GATS: My mother's mother.

SIGRIST: Um, tell me a little bit about your grandmother. What was she like as a person?

GATS: Pearl, bring the picture.

SIGRIST: No, what was her personality like?

GATS: Very good. They took, my grandfather and my grandmother treated me very, very good. My mother had to leave me there, and went back to Lodz to work.

SIGRIST: What was she doing in Lodz? What kind of job did she have?

GATS: She was a, in a house, a servant, in a house. And once in a while she used to come to my grandmother to see me. And I was left there with my grandmother and grandfather.

SIGRIST: Were you the only child, or were there any other children?

GATS: No, I was the only one. My mother only had me. See?

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

GATS: Uh, Mendel.

SIGRIST: Mendel.

GATS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And where is your father during this time?

GATS: My father, before my mother gave birth, my mother married a man with -- how many children? Three or four children. And out of -- in another town. And my-my - that -- that time went around the cholera, they called it. And my father died from it while my mother was pregnant.

SIGRIST: From the cholera that was going around.

GATS: Yeah, yeah. And then my mother went back to my grandmother pregnant with me, see? And I was born in Tashine, because my mo-- my father died, and he had children. He left everybody, and she came back to her mother.

SIGRIST: Do you remember your mother talking about what your father had done for a living?

GATS: Yeah. He had a butcher store, a butcher. My father, my mother always used to talk. And I'm name -- named after my father, see? My mother left where she was. He had children. My mother married a second time. He was a second time married. And he had children. And, (coughs)

my mother used to ta-- talk about them. And then all of a sudden I met them. I met my, I met them all. They lived in Patterson, New Yo-- Jersey.

SIGRIST: Oh, so you met them when you came over here.

GATS: When I was here already, in America, I met them.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about when your mother would come to visit you?

GATS: She would stayed a few days. She visit me, and then sometimes she used to take me with her and leave me by friends, you know, leave me. She was, wanted to take me with, and couldn't, and wanted to leave me. She left me by her friends, by relations. I remember, on a Saturday she used to take me to their friends. I remember that. That was already in Lodz. See, she took me to Lodz.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, as a small girl, going to Lodz, which is a big city, of course.

GATS: Yeah, oh, sure.

SIGRIST: What made an impression on you when you were in the city?

GATS: See, my mother had a sister, and that sister got married while I was a little girl, and they had no children, and they took me. Their name was Cohen.

SIGRIST: And that was your maiden name, right?

GATS: Yes.

SIGRIST: C-O-H-E-N, Cohen.

GATS: And they took me, and my aunt and uncle kept me in Lodz, and I was with them in Lodz all the years.

SIGRIST: You were kind of passed around.

GATS: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: By your relatives.

GATS: That's right. Knocked around plenty. And my aunt and uncle got married. You know, years ago the older sister had to get married before the younger, the younger sister. And the younger sister, when, after my mother got married, the younger sister got married, and they had no children. They took me. And I went with them to live in Lodz.

SIGRIST: So how long did you live with your grandmother before you went to Lodz?

GATS: Oh, not very long, not very long, because they got married, and they took me, see?

SIGRIST: Well, let's, before we get you to Lodz, I want to find out what else you remember about living with your grandmother. Can you tell me where you slept in her house.

GATS: Oh, I had a bed. They treated me very good. My grandfather, we have the pictures of my grandfather and grandmother. Pearl --.

SIGRIST: We'll look at them after.

GATS: And, you know, they, they were very, very good to me. See, while I was, I must tell you that. While I was born, at that time, they had midwives when I was born, in the house, by my grandmother, and the midwife took, at that time they rolled you around in bands, belly button bands, and the midwife made me very tight, and all of a sudden they didn't hear me cry. And so they run over and they saw the midwife made me to cry. "The kid has no father, she don't need to live," the midwife said. My grandfather took the woman and threw her right out, the midwife, threw her right out the house, never came in again. I remember them telling me, talking about that. And they - well -- grandmother and grandfather was very, very good for me. I was only sorry when I left Tashine with my mother to come to England. They were older already, and they were crying and we said goodbye to them. I'll never forget that. I hurted them, and I hated myself. I let them stand back of ca-- and we went away. And we went to England, to my, to England I went.

SIGRIST: When you were living with your grandparents in Tashine, did they have animals?

GATS: Oh, we had plenty animals on the outside.

SIGRIST: But what, did they have farm animals that they kept.

GATS: Farm animals, sure.

SIGRIST: Yeah. What kinds of animals did they have?

GATS: I suppose, all kind of animals.

SIGRIST: What about, like, did they have a cow?

GATS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the cow?

GATS: We didn't have a cow. That time on the ground it was already great. We used to buy milk, from the cow. They used to milk the cow, and take a jug. My grandmother went there. My grandmother used to go to the cemetery to bring sand to put on the floor.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of the furniture in your grandparents' house, something that sticks out in your mind?

GATS: They had a table and chairs and a dresser, and my grandfather was a very religious man. He went to synagogue every morning. And, and he, and the washing, I remember, the washing was like a bridge, and under the bridge was water, and that's how my grandmother used to wash.

SIGRIST: Now, were there lots of Jewish people in that town?

GATS: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: How did they get along with the Gentiles in the town?

GATS: Very good, very good. We had a synagogue right there. Very good. There was no difference.

SIGRIST: How did you practice your religion at home?

GATS: My grandfather used to read a whole lot Jewish, and my - my grandmother was religious, and my grandfather. We knew from Kosher and not Kosher.

SIGRIST: Can you explain for us on tape how one keeps Kosher, what one has to do?

GATS: Oh, sure. When you keep Kosher, you got to have separate dishes, separate pots. When you use meat, one you have for meat and one you have for dairy, and you don't mix them up. And you know how we washed the dishes at that time? We had to take the dishes out underneath the little water that used to run and wash the dishes.

SIGRIST: The same place your grandmother washed the clothes in.

GATS: Yeah, the same place, on the ground. We didn't have no sinks or bathrooms or so, as we have now. But they had a bathhouse where people used to take showers, baths.

SIGRIST: How often would you take a bath?

GATS: Well, my, nearly every day my grandmother gave me a bath, every day. They had those round bowls, you know, and kept them in the house, and I used to sit in the water.

SIGRIST: How did you light the house?

GATS: Oh, I liked it very much. That was my home.

SIGRIST: How did you light, light the house? Did you have candles, or lamps?

GATS: I think we had candles - candles and matches. See. Candles and matches, we had. Friday night my grandmother used to light the candles. And my uncle brought a lot of food in from Lodz for my grandp—for my grandmother and I. Every week he used to bring the chicken and

everything, that we should have enough. And then they took me. My aunt and my uncle took me, and I lived with them all my life.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, when you were a little girl with your grandparents, do you remember the kinds of clothes that you wore?

GATS: They got me, they got me, I don't qui—I don't remember, but I wore clothes.

SIGRIST: Well, what about your grandmother, do you remember a dress that your grandmother had?

GATS: Yes. She, most of the time my aunt bought some clothes from Lodz and brought it over. They took good care of, my mother and my aunt took good care of my grandpeople, very good care. And they used to bring them clothes from the city, from Lodz.

SIGRIST: So they were kind of nicely dressed for . . .

GATS: Oh, yeah, oh, yes. And my grandfather's name was Avrum Khil[ph].

SIGRIST: Avrum?

GATS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: A-V-R-U-M. Pearl?

BOXER: Abraham.

SIGRIST: Abraham.

GATS: Yeah. Khil[ph].

SIGRIST: Ceil[ph].

GATS: It wasn't, yeah. And my mother's, and my grandmother's name was Pesa[ph], Pearl. She's named after her.

SIGRIST: Which, which did you like better, your grandmother or your grandfather?

GATS: I liked them both. They were very good to me. I was their baby.  
( she laughs )

SIGRIST: Do you remember, um, doing something that you shouldn't have done? Do you remember an instance where one of them punished you for some reason?

GATS: I don't know. I don't think they ever pu-- punished me.

SIGRIST: You were a little girl.

GATS: When I was a little girl already, I used to go out with my grandmother to pull schav, what do you call schav [sourgrass]

BOXER: Beets.

GATS: You cook it, green stuff. I used to go on the farm with them to buy -- to take out beets.

SIGRIST: What would your grandmother do with the beets?

GATS: Cook them, and make borscht.

SIGRIST: How do you make borscht?

GATS: You cook the beets, and then you let it get cold, and you put eggs in.

SIGRIST: And did you eat a lot of that?

GATS: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah. We only had meat once a week, that my uncle brought. It was too expensive. But my uncle brought it from Lodz. Every Thursday he used to bring chicken and meat for us. And only once a week we get meat, for Saturday.

SIGRIST: Now, when your, your mother brought you to Lodz to live with your aunt and your uncle?

GATS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And that was very sad for you to leave your grandparents.

GATS: Yeah. Well, I saw them often. We came to -- we went to visit them, they came here. The only sad place was I -- when I left them to go to England. It was very, very sad.

SIGRIST: Because you knew that would be sort of a permanent thing.

GATS: I'm sorry till this day. ( she laughs ) I'll never forget. We went on the cart, we went away, and they stood there crying terrible. And I was sitting on the wagon saying goodbye to them. When I went to England and left them, I was very sad about it.

SIGRIST: How long did you stay in Lodz before you went to England?

GATS: Oh, qu-- quite a few years.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about living in Lodz? Can you describe your aunt's house?

GATS: I remember very well what that time, that time, Stalin. Stalin?

BOXER: Yah.

GATS: --- was in, and we had terrible pogroms. They came, the - the communists came, that time, I remember that very well. And they went to this, blocked up all the streets, and all the ends of the streets, and

they blocked up and they went to the saloons and threw out all the money, the communists did that. And threw out all the money in the street, blocked up the street that you shouldn't be able to ride through, and we people in the house had to lay behind the windows because they were shooting up in the windows. And we all laid behind there. It was a terrible, terrible thing. And then early in the morning we just peeped out through the window. We saw bodies were laying, and they were picking them up and throwing them on wagons. That's when Stalin came there.

SIGRIST: Was it just Jewish people that they were shooting at?

GATS: At everybody, on everybody. See? That was . . .

SIGRIST: Just kind of violence everywhere.

GATS: That's right. They blocked both sides of the street that you shouldn't be able to ride in and out, went in the saloons, threw out all the money, and the liquor, and shooting. All they did is shooting. In the morning we peeped out. We laid behind the windowsills that should -- we shouldn't get hurt. In the morning we peeked out.

SIGRIST: In the little town where your grandparents lived, did they ever experience anything like that?

GATS: No, no, no.

SIGRIST: You said they had a, there was a good relationship between everyone.

GATS: Yeah. No, they had, it was good.

SIGRIST: But it was different in the city.

GATS: Oh, sure. Lodz.

SIGRIST: Now, what else do you remember about living in the city? Did you go to school when you were in the city?

GATS: No, no.

SIGRIST: You were too young?

GATS: I was too young.

SIGRIST: Um, what do you remember about living with your uncle and aunt? What were they like as people?

GATS: They kept me just like their own. They wanted to adopt me, and my mother wouldn't let me. My mother wouldn't let them. My mother was all the time with me when she could, and I -- they brought me up. But then they decided to go to, to, uh, England, and they left me with my mother again. My mother wouldn't give me - give me to them, you know? And they left me, and I had a very, very hard time in Russia. I had, my mother

had to go to work, and she left me all over by people, by cousins, by aunts.

SIGRIST: Wherever she could put you while she went to work.

GATS: That's right, while she went to work. Because she, she was afraid. If my aunt and uncle take me with, to England, you know, that she will never see me, and they won't send for her. My mother thought of that. So my mother wouldn't let me, and I stayed with my mother. I had such a hard time, so did my mother.

SIGRIST: Did you want to go to England with your uncle and aunt?

GATS: Well, I don't think I had to say, you know, I was too young. I was too young to say yes or no.

SIGRIST: You just had to do whatever you were told to do.

GATS: That's right. My mother wouldn't let me go. They wanted to take me to England. And we were in Russia quite a long time, and then my aunt and uncle decided to send for my mother and me, and we, they did send for me and my mother, to England.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the journey from Lodz to England? Do you remember how you got to England?

GATS: Oh, yes, yes. I remember how I got - I got -to England. It was very hard. At that time you had to have somebody to take you across the border, to say you lived in Police. First you lived in Police, there was a town named Police. We got a man that lives there, and he's supposed to know me and my mother, and we're supposed to live there. And he took us over the border from Russia, you know, to England, over the border. And my mother paid him, and they gave -- gave us a different name that we lived there, in Police. And we lived there, and then when my mother was called into the border, I was sitting on the wagon, and the man told me not to talk to anybody, because at that time I was still Polish.

Today I don't, I understood Polish. I was a little girl. And I sat on the wagon, and the soldiers were walking back and forth, back and forth, with the guns. And I didn't say nothing. I, they told me not to say nothing, and my mother was in, in the office there being questioned who we are, and where we live, and what, we live with the man. And then when they got through my mother came out, and we got on the wagon, we went to some hotel there. We slept there for quite a few days. My aunt and uncle sent money for us to come over again. And then we got the boat, and we went to England.

SIGRIST: Do you have any recollections of what it was like on the boat to go to England?

GATS: It was -- oh, I was, yes. It was, see, it was terrible, just terrible. And I just told him last night, when they put the food on the table and the boat, and the boat went, all the food went on the floor. We went a whole week, a whole week it took us to go to England.

SIGRIST: Where did you go to when you got to England? Where did your uncle and aunt live?

GATS: In Liverpool.

SIGRIST: And, um, tell me a little bit about what it was like for, you know, a young Jewish Polish girl to go to Liverpool, England. What stuck out in your mind?

GATS: Well, I also had an uncle there. My mother's, my mother's brother, my aunt's brother was living in England. He went there before.

SIGRIST: So there were relatives there.

GATS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What did Liverpool look like at that time?

GATS: Oh, Liverpool was very, very nice. It's very nice. In fact, my uncle started a business, and he started to make these tables. And it was all, -- we live-- I even remembered the number of Liverpool, 29 Great Orford Street we lived in.

SIGRIST: What was it? 29 . . .

GATS: Yeah, Great Olford[ph] Street.

SIGRIST: Great Olford[ph] Street.

GATS: They said, they even heard about it. And we lived there, we were very happy.

SIGRIST: What did the house look like? Describe the house for me.

GATS: My, my uncle had a private house, a ver-- three floor house, and one, one floor he used to make the tables, worked there and the other floor we lived in, and we were very happy till they decided, till they decided to go, my uncle had, uh, a sister in America, and all of a sudden they decided to go to America.

SIGRIST: Do you remember if your mother got a job while you were in Liverpool?

GATS: Oh, my mother was working all the time, see?

SIGRIST: Were you put into school when you went to Liverpool?

GATS: No, no, no.

SIGRIST: So what did you do all day with yourself.

GATS: I don't know, I don't know. Let me think about it. ( she laughs )  
No. I had, I had an uncle living down the street, and he had more  
children, cousins, and we all lived together.

SIGRIST: Do you remember games that you played as a child?

GATS: I remember one thing, when we left, that my uncle had a great, big  
crib. He had five or six kids, and we all got left together in the crib  
and rocked together. ( she laughs ) And I was, and I was with my aunt  
and uncle. We were very happy in Liverpool.

SIGRIST: Did you learn how to speak English while you lived in  
Liverpool?

GATS: Oh, yeah, sure. We spoke very good English, sure. In England they  
talk a lot of English. They don't talk very much Hebrew or Jewish or  
any-- so we learned to talk English right away.

SIGRIST: Was that difficult for you to do, do you remember?

GATS: No, no. With the kids, I played with kids. In fact, I had a very  
good friend in England, and they also came to America later on.

SIGRIST: Did you live in a Jewish neighborhood in Liverpool?

GATS: Yeah, yeah. We were, it didn't make any difference. Everybody was  
nice in Liverpool. I lived in 25 Great Olford[ph] Street. They laugh  
when I say it, there isn't such a number, but there is.

SIGRIST: Um, did your mother learn how to speak English in England?

GATS: Very little. When we came to England my uncle was, I told you, I  
had an uncle there, he had brother, had a boyfriend for my mother, and  
my mother got married in England.

SIGRIST: What was the man's name?

GATS: Harry, Harra.

SIGRIST: And what was his last name?

GATS: My Uncle Harra, what was . . .

BOXER: It was Lasofsky. L-A-S-O-F-S-K-Y.

SIGRIST: Lasofsky.

BOXER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah. How did you feel about your mother getting married?

GATS: I remember, I remember I was sitting on the stairs when my mother  
got married. I was to the wedding. I didn't know any different, because  
I didn't stay with my mother. I stayed with my aunt and uncle.

SIGRIST: Was your mother, was your mother kind of, um, how shall I say this? Were you closer to your aunt and your uncle than you were to your mother?

GATS: That's right.

SIGRIST: And certainly closer to your grandparents than you were with your mother.

GATS: Sure. I was more closer to my aunt and uncle. And when my mother decided to come to America, I didn't go no more with her to America. I went with my aunt and uncle, and I left my mother in England, and I came with my, because I remember I had such a bad time without my aunt and uncle in Europe, so I wouldn't, I understood already, and I went with my mother, my aunt and uncle to America. And we moved down, when we came to America we lived in 101st Street.

SIGRIST: So your aunt and your uncle came before your mother came.

GATS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

GATS: With me.

SIGRIST: With you. Do you remember when you were a little girl what you knew about America before you got here?

GATS: Well, I didn't know nothing about America. I came with them. You know when I came to America? When the triangle, I don't know, the triangle had a big, fat, a big, trouble, the fire was.

SIGRIST: The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory.

GATS: That's right. We were in, we were in America about a week or so when that happened. I lived on the East Side, in Harlem, in 101st Street, we lived. My uncle had a sister, and they were Danzigar, and he went to her. Then we got an apartment in 100th Street, 101st Street, and we lived there.

SIGRIST: All right. Let's get you to America before we find out about America. So your mother got re-married.

GATS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And you remember watching the wedding and all of that.

GATS: Yeah, that's right.

SIGRIST: Was it soon after that that your uncle and aunt came to the United States? Not really?

GATS: Let me see. My mother got married in England. Yeah. My mother got married in England. Where'd she get married? In England, yeah. And, yeah, then my mother, then my aunt sent for my mother and her husband.

SIGRIST: Well, that was after they got here, though.

GATS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did your aunt and uncle have relatives in the United States?

GATS: My uncle had a sister by the name Danziger, and she lived in 101st Street.

SIGRIST: Oh, I see. So, so that's the connection.

GATS: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: So you had that connection.

GATS: Yeah, we went to them. And that time was the Triangle . . .

SIGRIST: Right. Do you remember in Liverpool what you packed to take with you to America? What did you take with you from England to America?

GATS: I didn't take anything with. I was so glad to go away, to go with my aunt and uncle, because I had such a hard time being with my mo-- that I wouldn't, my mother was so afraid for me to go. She thought she'll never see me. But I didn't want to stay. I went with my aunt and uncle.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: Do you remember going to the ship in Liverpool before you came to the United States? Do you remember going and getting on the ship?

GATS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the ship?

GATS: Caronia.

SIGRIST: And, um, tell me what you remember when you, when you saw the ship. What do you remember about The Caronia?

GATS: Well, I, my aunt and I was all right. My uncle was laying sick all week. It took a week, also, from -- to come to America. But the Caronia was it? I remember it very well on the boat. My aunt and I, we had a good time on the boat. My uncle was sick all the way over.

SIGRIST: Where did you sleep on the ship?

GATS: Oh, we had, uh, bunks. We had bunks, yeah. And when the -- and then we got, when we got to Ellis Island, we saw around the boat, what we

saw, the Statue of Liberty, from the boat, we saw the Statue of Liberty. Then we got off that boat, and we got onto a little boat, and we went to Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: And what do you remember about what happened at Ellis Island?

GATS: When we got to Ellis Island, they examined us. See, we went, we could talk already English, and we didn't go with the people that came - that can't -- with the foreigners. We came like English people, already. And my uncle had a little money, and they looked through his passport, and they looked through me, and then my uncle's sister came to get us from Ellis Island, and everything was fine. We had no trouble coming in this country. ( a beeping noise is heard in the background on the tape )

SIGRIST: ( referring to the noise ) Anne, could you shut that door, please?

GATS: But when I got to this country . . .

SIGRIST: No, that's all right. For the sake of whoever's listening to the tape, there's a garbage truck going by the house right now. I want to ask you a couple more questions about being on the Coronica.

GATS: Yeah, sure.

SIGRIST: Um, where did you eat on the ship?

GATS: Well, I tell you, we had, with all the American, was all the English people. We didn't eat with the people from Russia that can't -- couldn't talk. We talked, we spoke English already.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what they fed you on the ship?

GATS: What they what?

SIGRIST: What they fed you. What did you eat when you were on the Caronia?

GATS: I don't remember. ( she laughs ) I ate. I don't know what. We ate. And I had a good time. We used to go on top of the, on the boat, and my poor uncle was sick all the way over.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things did you and your aunt do while you were on the ship? What, you said that you had fun with your aunt. What did you do?

GATS: Well, we did, they had dancing, they had music, they had entertainment that time on the boat. And we went with the American, with the English people, because we could talk English and be understood, till we got to Ellis Island. Ellis Island we went over to the, saw the Statue of Liberty, the first thing. And they took us to . . .

SIGRIST: Did you know what that was?

GATS: Yeah, yeah. And they took us over to Ellis Island on a small boat, and they took us in that Ellis Island. I remember through, going through the gates. We had to go through the gates to be examined. And the main thing they examined you was your eyes. At that time was, I don't know why, everything was the eyes. And we passed. We passed everything, because being, first of all, my uncle had a little money. We didn't come poor. And we got to, and when we got out of Ellis Island we went, as soon as I -- we got out from the boat, we went over, there's a park, there near Ellis Island, there was a park. I don't know what they call that park. It's still there.

SIGRIST: Battery Park.

GATS: Yeah, Battery Park. And I saw clothes hanging. We never saw clothes hanging. That was so surprise to me. And, that's all.

SIGRIST: What other impressions did New York City make on you as a little girl? Because Liverpool is a city, but New York is a bigger city.

GATS: Well . . .

SIGRIST: What were things, did you see things in New York that you had never seen before?

GATS: Well, we lived on 101st Street. There was the food market there. My -- we got an apartment there, and we lived there. I was surprised to see all, you know what? That time they were selling fish, men were selling fish in baskets in the street. That was surprising. And the Triangle was surprising. We lived right near there.

SIGRIST: Tell me about, um, what job did your uncle get in the United States?

GATS: He had no job. He had money. We were sorry he came to the United State, very sorry that we all came together. My aunt, I and my uncle. If we - we wouldn't have come together, he said he would have gone right back to England.

SIGRIST: So he didn't like it in the United States.

GATS: He had nothing to do. He didn't know what to do. Over there in England they made these tables. Here he didn't know what to do. But by and by he bought a candy store in 126th Street, in Harlem. That, I remember that very well. He had, he bought a candy store, and we moved there.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the inside of the candy store for me?

GATS: Yeah, yeah. He had counters, little tables. One side of the street was all colored people. It was right near Morningside Avenue. And, uh, we lived there quite a long time.

SIGRIST: But that was the second place you lived, right?

GATS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: The first place, can you describe the first apartment that you lived in, that was 104th Street?

GATS: 101st Street.

SIGRIST: 101st Street.

GATS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: 101st Street.

GATS: It was, we had, I think, three bedrooms and a bath. At that time, it was nice, the way you make it. That's how nice it was.

SIGRIST: Did, um, do you remember, um, do you remember if, how, how that apartment was lit? Did it have lamps, or gas light? What, how did . . .

GATS: We had gas lights with mantles. Do you know what a mantle is?

SIGRIST: How did that work?

GATS: The mantles you have to light every time. We didn't have a gas, or electric, that time. We had gas, yes. Gas, we had. And we l—we lit them by mantles.

SIGRIST: Was that dangerous?

GATS: I don't know. I don't remember. ( they laugh )

SIGRIST: Did your aunt get a job?

GATS: My aunt, no. No, a woman wouldn't get work at that time. They didn't believe in women to work that time. And we had the candy store, and then from the candy store already, I even have my, and from the candy store I met my husband.

SIGRIST: That was a little bit later, though.

GATS: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: When you first got here to America, what was, what was something that you really liked about being here, something that was different and you really liked it?

GATS: I liked it because I was with my aunt and uncle. That's, I liked it. I liked everything, because I didn't want to be in Russia or Europe, because I remembered all that was going on.

SIGRIST: Did they put you in school when you got to America?

GATS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me about what it was like to go to school here in America. Was it difficult at first?

GATS: Yeah, very, very difficult.

SIGRIST: Why was it difficult?

GATS: One day I went, one day I didn't went, one day they, I, I don't know. I didn't have a good education at all. I don't know why. I don't know why.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about being in school that first year that you were here, say.

GATS: I really, I don't know. Somehow or other I didn't go steady to school. Some days I went, and some days I didn't went, whether I was too old or too young, I don't know. See? But I didn't have a good education at all.

SIGRIST: Could your uncle and aunt read and write?

GATS: They knew how to sign their name, and that's all. And when they had that candy store, things were very nice, very good.

SIGRIST: It got better for them at that time.

GATS: Oh, yeah. Sure. We had a candy store, we knew a lot of people already. Otherwise, my uncle would have gone back to England if he wouldn't have came together with us. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: Um, what was your relationship like with other children? Did, were you, were you accepted by the other children, or were you made fun of by the other children?

GATS: I don't know. Oh, I - I --- I don't - I can't remember. But there was other children on the block, most of them were colored, I remember. It was a real colored neighborhood, Morningside Avenue, we lived. No.

SIGRIST: Was there a synagogue up in that neighborhood?

GATS: I don't, I don't even know if there was or wasn't. I don't even know.

SIGRIST: Maybe there wasn't, if you don't remember it being.

GATS: No, I don't remember it.

SIGRIST: When you were, when you were a little girl in New York, what would you do for fun?

GATS: I had no fun. ( she laughs ) I had no fun. I only was with big people. We had no fun. I was with big people all the time, people that

came into the candy store. I was friendly, I spoke to them, they spoke to me. I sold them, I knew how to sell things in the candy store.

SIGRIST: What kinds of candy did they sell in the candy store?

GATS: Just like you have candy now. Lollipops, ice cream, I remember that.

SIGRIST: Was, um, was ice cream one of the more popular things that people would want?

GATS: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: What flavors did you serve?

GATS: All kinds, just like they have it now. All kinds.

SIGRIST: Was that the first job you ever got was working in the candy store?

GATS: I wasn't working. I lived there, see?

SIGRIST: I see.

GATS: I wasn't working. And then my uncle sold the candy store, and we moved again.

SIGRIST: Um . . .

GATS: To 125th Street, they moved. At that time it was called 125th Street, but it was called LaSalle Street, and I lived there with them, and from there I got married.

SIGRIST: Tell me about when your uncle and aunt brought your mother to America, did they bring your mother over to America?

GATS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me about what it was like for your mother.

GATS: Well, my mother, my mother and her husband, they, my mother got married in England, you know? And they brought them both over. And they had a nice apartment. And my stepfather, his name was Harry, he had a little girl, too, and my mother brought her up.

SIGRIST: So she was your stepsister.

GATS: That's right.

SIGRIST: They had had the child in, in England.

GATS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Um, tell me, did you, um, when your mother came to America, did you get closer to your mother when she came?

GATS: When she came to America my aunt got about two or three houses away from her. We lived in the same block, on LaSalle Street. And my mother lived there with her husband, with the little girl, and they were very happy. He was a tailor, he worked. But I didn't stay with my mother.

SIGRIST: You stayed, you kept living with your uncle and aunt.

GATS: That's right.

SIGRIST: When your mother came over to this country, did she have to go through Ellis Island?

GATS: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you go . . .

GATS: No.

SIGRIST: Did you go to pick her up?

GATS: No, no, no.

SIGRIST: No?

GATS: No. They came on their own.

SIGRIST: Okay. So, so, um, uh, when your mother came to America, did she look different to you in any way?

GATS: She wore a wig. Then she took off the wig. They all took off the wigs.

SIGRIST: Why did she wear a wig?

GATS: Because that was the religion.

SIGRIST: That was part of the Jewish religion that women wore a wig.

GATS: That's right, that's right.

SIGRIST: Well, then, why did they take the wig off when they came to America?

GATS: Because they came to America. They didn't, it didn't, it wasn't so religious any more. They did what the American people do.

SIGRIST: And the Jewish women in America didn't wear the wigs.

GATS: Some did, some didn't.

SIGRIST: Did your grandmother wear a wig?

GATS: Oh, sure.

SIGRIST: Where did they get the wigs?

GATS: She had a little fancy hat. Where's the picture, Pearl?

SIGRIST: Well . . .

GATS: And my grandmother.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

GATS: We'll see the hat.

BOXER: It's a hat more than a wig.

SIGRIST: I see. I've always wanted to know where the wig . . .

BOXER: Well, there were hair people, people that bought hair and made wigs.

GATS: Where's that picture from my grandmother and grandfather?

SIGRIST: I see. Um, but you didn't wear a wig in America, did you?

GATS: No, no, no.

SIGRIST: Did your aunt wear a wig?

GATS: My aunt?

SIGRIST: Yes.

GATS: No. She took it off, too.

SIGRIST: She took it off.

GATS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Came to America, and off came the wig.

GATS: That's right. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: Um, did your mother get a job when she came to the United States?

GATS: No. Oh, no. He got, he was a tailor. He got a job. He was a very nice man. He had a little girl

SIGRIST: What was the little girl's name?

GATS: Also Dora.

SIGRIST: Dora.

GATS: Lasofsky, yeah.

SIGRIST: And, um, did you play with her or take care of her?

GATS: Oh, she was much younger than me. My mother took care of her. My mother took very good care of her.

SIGRIST: Did you get a job when you, you know, in those early years. When you got a little bit older, did you get a job?

GATS: Yeah, when the war broke out, and I . . .

SIGRIST: This is World War One?

GATS: Yeah. When the war broke out and I got a job, in - in 23rd Street and Broadway, and we used to make collars, and then we turned in to make American flags. And I made American flags. I put the stars. I learned to put the stars, you know, that piece with the stars? And we were working. American flags took everything at that time. They took, whatever you did, you quit, and you made American flags. And I made the stars. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: Do you remember how much you got paid?

GATS: Six dollars a week.

SIGRIST: And what did you do with that six dollars?

GATS: Oh, I gave it to my aunt, and I had to have carfare. I lived, where was that, 23rd Street and Broadway.

SIGRIST: So you had to go all the way downtown to get to work.

GATS: That's right, that square in Broadway. I know, I could see it. That square, and we used to see the parades and everything.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about, about living in New York during the time of World War One? Do other things stick out in your mind about that time period?

GATS: Oh, yeah. We made the American flags. Every week all the girls got together and went to see the shows down Broadway, and we saw all the parades, the war parades was coming, and we saw them, because I worked on 23rd Street and Broadway. I don't know if you know where it is, but I know, where the Flatiron building is.

SIGRIST: Did your uncle have to serve in World War One?

GATS: No.

SIGRIST: Or your stepfather?

GATS: No, no. My uncle didn't, no. They were too old, I think.

SIGRIST: They were just, probably just old enough where they probably didn't have to.

GATS: Yeah. But I worked, and I made American flags.

SIGRIST: I think that's a great story. Do you remember what people wore during World War One? Do you remember an outfit that you had at that time?

GATS: Oh, no, you wore anything you want. If you know, you can wear regular clothes.

SIGRIST: What did dresses look like at the time of World War One? What was the kind of the style of the dress at that time?

GATS: They wore blouses and skirts.

SIGRIST: How did you wear your hair?

GATS: Oh, well, I, I . . . ( she clears her throat ) My hair? Straight, the way I used to wear it. I don't remember. I have curls, long curls I had, and then I got pneumonia, and then they cut my hair.

SIGRIST: Why did they cut your hair because you had pneumonia? Why did they do that?

GATS: I, I was, we had, in our block, during the war, all the people put the flags out. They had block parties during the war. And, so much to talk about. They had block parties, and I used to go to work, too, at that time. And we had to, one side of my street, we lived, lived Jewish people. At the bottom of the street lived colored, and across the street lived Irish. And they, everybody made block parties that time to collect money. And they this -- some girl on my block made a block party and everybody gave money, everybody, and they put up flags. It happened that one girl, some people didn't want the Jewish flag. They didn't want the Jewish flag.

But we all gave money. It didn't matter what kind of flags. The Jewish flag should have been there, and the Irish people came over to that girl that had a, had a hardware store living in a basement in my mother's house, and she did, she was fighting for the Jewish flag, why shouldn't we have the Jewish flag. And they didn't want, and I don't know what happened. All of a sudden, they found the girl dead in her basement, in her place. She was a young girl from about twenty, twenty-two, they found her dead. And all of a sudden I come off the elevator to go home, my mother's standing, and she says to me, "Don't get scared. Something happened. I came to tell you to come home." On Eighth Avenue, that was. And my mother told me that somebody killed that girl, and the, uh, what do you call them? From, uh, to Mount Sinai Hospital, took it right over, and they came and took over the body, they took over to the Mount Sinai Hospital. And it was a terrible, terrible thing.

SIGRIST: How did you feel about that, being Jewish people living in that neighborhood?

GATS: We all felt terrible.

SIGRIST: Like being in Lodz all over again.

GATS: Sure. But the Mount Sinai took us over, took it over, took the body over, and the Mount Sinai Hospital made the funeral. So when they took the body out there, they took it to Mount Sinai Hospital, and I walked, we all walked to Mount Sinai Hospital, and from then I got the pneumonia. That time the epidemic went around. And they, they still have, they're written up on Mount Sinai Hospital, and they sent the body to Israel, and they still have plaques. When we came back from the funeral, the epidemic was there, and I had the pneumonia.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you remember about being sick at that time.

GATS: People were very sick. The epidemic was going around. Especially women, pregnant women. There was no room in the hospitals. And I came home, and I took sick. And my aunt and uncle didn't let me, I couldn't go to the hospital because they had no room in the hospital. They were laying in the halls in the lobbies with that sickness. And I, we got a doctor, and the doctor said I can stay home, because we didn't have any children in our house. I was the only child. And the doctor came twice a day. My uncle made the doctor come.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what medicine they gave you?

GATS: I don't know what medicine. But then my, our doctor said that he's going to bring a professor. So my doctor says it isn't necessary, but he said yes. When I was getting better already, I remembered already, I didn't know nothing. I remembered they brought a professor, and the professor says I got twenty-four hours to live. And the professor went away, and our doctor says to my uncle, "Don't worry, it's not so. She will be all right." Well, I was all right already. And my bed was n the window. I remember that. And I saw, dancing fairies were dancing outside. See, I came to, already. The dancing fairies were dancing outside, and I was getting better and better all the time.

SIGRIST: You were lucky, because a lot of people died during that epidemic.

GATS: My aunt brought thirteen cans of oxygen. At that time they didn't deliver. Oxygen, they gave me. And then when I got better, all my hair fell out. I had no hair. The little bit of hair that I had, we had an icebox with a mirror, and I was sitting up, and my aunt cut my -- the doctor says, "Cut her hair." and they cut it off, and they were both crying. ( she laughs ) Over the hair. And then everything turned out all right.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

GATS: I got better.

SIGRIST: You were lucky.

GATS: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: You were very lucky.

GATS: Oh, yeah. Because I was alone in the house. They had no room where to put sick people. They made them in the hall all over.

SIGRIST: Did your uncle or aunt get sick at that time?

GATS: No, no.

SIGRIST: But other people in the neighborhood were sick at that time?

GATS: Oh, everybody was sick, every--. People, they die by the minute.

SIGRIST: In our last couple of minutes, tell me about how you met your husband.

GATS: Well, I knew my husband a long time before I got sick, a long, long, long time.

SIGRIST: What was his name?

GATS: Abe, Avrum, in Jewish.

SIGRIST: Abraham, Abraham Gats.

GATS: Yes.

SIGRIST: And how did you meet him? What was the first time you saw him?

GATS: I had a cousin here, and he brought him. I had a cousin living downtown New York, and he brought him around. And I met, I didn't want to go with my husband. I didn't want to go. I was stupid. Do you know why I didn't want to go with him? ( she laughs ) You're going to laugh. He had red hair, and that's what I didn't like. You know how girls are foolish? And, you know, he came after me all the time, and I said to him, "Don't come. When I'll call you and I want you to come, you come. Don't come." Then Saturday afternoon, he knew I'm coming home from work, he was there. I couldn't get rid of him. I didn't know what to do.

And I was so sick, I had no hair. He came around, he asked my mother first would I go with him. So my, my mother says, "I don't know. You'd better ask her." So we met, we met, I remember, on 14th Street, in New York, downtown, at 14th Street. And we met. He lived in Brooklyn, and I lived in New York. And he says to me, "Dora, would you marry me?" I went to the doctor and the doctor put an injection in my thigh and broke it, and I had a big sore. I had to go for treatment. So he went with me for treatment. So he says, "Would you marry me?"

I says, "Abe, what do you mean, aren't you afraid to take a chance with a sick girl?" I couldn't walk. I just was . . . ( she demonstrates labored breathing ) I said, "Look, I can't walk. I'm wearing a hat. I have no hair. How can you say this, take a chance?" I says, "I know you're too good." And I have no money, too. By that time I say, "Look about six hundred dollars when I worked, and I gave it back to my aunt and uncle." Because I said, they're old, I'm young, I could get other money. And I, they paid for the doctor. You had to pay two dollars or three dollars a visit at that time. ( she laughs ) And I said, "I'll let you know. Don't come around." He says, I says, "I have no money." He said to me, "I'm not asking you you have no money. Whatever we have, we'll share." And that's all. I said, "Don't come around, I'll let you know." Oh, my mother knew all about it, I didn't. He came around.

SIGRIST: So you gave in, finally.

GATS: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: What, how old were you when you got married?

GATS: I was twenty-four years old.

SIGRIST: Do you know what, you know, what your anniversary is, the date that you got married?

GATS: I got married on my birthday, when I was twenty-four.

SIGRIST: What year was that?

BOXER: 1920.

SIGRIST: 1920. And how many children did you have?

GATS: Three.

SIGRIST: And what were their names?

GATS: My oldest daughter is Pearl, and I have one called Esther, and my son is in Georgia, Morris. I had my son nine years after the one.

SIGRIST: And, uh, did you have, uh, do you have grandchildren?

GATS: I have, yes, I have, and I have great-grandchildren. You know how many?

SIGRIST: How many?

GATS: About fifteen, how many do I have?

BOXER: . . . fifteen.

GATS: How many?

BOXER: Fifteen.

SIGRIST: Fifteen great-grandchildren.

GATS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Wow.

GATS: And they're all alive, and they're all all right.

SIGRIST: Um, was there something that your grandmother or your aunt told you as a child or taught you that was sort of a way to live, a kind of philosophy of life that has carried you all these years, something that they instilled in you as a child that you've tried to live by your whole life?

GATS: Whatever my aunt told me I did. Whatever my mother told me, I did. See, we had no children, nobody. I was the only one. I lived in Brooklyn for three years, in Williamsburg, after I got married. That time, and we had no electric, that's what I want. We had a chandelier with mantles. We had no electric that time. Um, my husband, and we had no steam. No, we went to Brooklyn, and my husband looked up. He saw, I lived with my mother when I got married, because I had nowhere to live. And I didn't want to live there anymore because I says, "I'm married, why should I?" And they wouldn't let me go to work after I was married. It wasn't allowed. So I was, didn't know what to do. We went to meet my in-laws, and we saw an apartment on the fifth floor, empty. My husband went up from, and we looked at it. The apar-- we had to give the super twenty-five dollars, and twenty-five dollars was the rent.

SIGRIST: And that was your first apartment together.

GATS: Yeah. In Brooklyn, Stagg Street. I even know this-- the name of the street.

SIGRIST: Well, Mrs. Gats, we need to end now, but I want to thank you very much for letting me come out here and ask you questions. You have a great memory, and . . .

GATS: I tell you, there's so much things that happened in my life that little by little I remember, I think about it.

SIGRIST: The more you talk about, it the more you remember. Sure.

GATS: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Dora Gats.

GATS: And I want to tell you, I got married in 110th Street and Madison Avenue on a Saturday, and I had very good in-laws. They loved me, and I loved them.

SIGRIST: Great. And, this is Paul Sigrist signing off on July 14, 1994, with Dora Gats, her daughter, Pearl, her granddaughter, Anne, and the dog, Dusty. Thank you very much.

EI-501/GATS

- 46 -