

**EI-523**

**MANYA KLEIN**

**BIRTHDATE: JULY 10, 1911**

**INTERVIEW DATE: AUGUST 6, 1994**

**RUNNING TIME: 42:44**

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

**RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME**

**INTERVIEW LOCATION: ROCKVILLE CENTER, NEW YORK**

**ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: KIMBERLY MAIER**

**TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: JANET LEVINE**

**POLAND, 1929**

**AGE 17**

**PASSAGE ON THE "ROCHAMBEAU"**

**RESIDENCE: BIALYSTOCK**

**US RESIDENCE: BRONX, NY**

**PORT OF EMBARKATION: LE HAVRE**

LEVINE: This is Jane Levine for the National Parks Service. It's August 6, 1994. I'm here in Rockville Center, New York, with Manya Klein, who came from Poland in 1929 when she was 17 years old. I'm very happy to be here and I'm looking forward to hearing your story of coming to this country. Let's start with your giving your birthdate.

KLEIN: July 10, 1911.

LEVINE: Okay. And where were you born in Poland?

KLEIN: Bailystock.

LEVINE: Can you spell it?

KLEIN: B-I-A-L-Y-S-T-O-C-K. Bialystock, Poland.

LEVINE: Okay. Did you live in Bialystock up until the time you left for the United States?

KLEIN: Yes. But in the interim, I lived other places.

LEVINE: Oh, you did. Well, okay, well let's see. After you were born, how long did you live in Bialystock?

KLEIN: Until I was about ten, eleven years old. And then the civil war broke out between Poland and Russia and we were forced to leave Bialystock and go and stay with my grandmother and grandfather in a little tiny village called Colonia Isaaca.

LEVINE: Could you spell that one?

KLEIN: Colonia, it's just..

LEVINE: C-O-L-...

KLEIN: ...O-N-I-A. I-S-A-A-C-A.

LEVINE: Okay.

KLEIN: It was a village with one street.

LEVINE: Oh, well good. Let's talk about life in Bialystock first, and then we'll talk about after you had to move to your grandparents. So what was, what do you remember? You were up 'til you were eleven or twelve? What do you remember about Bialystock?

KLEIN: Just normal growing up. Being poor. Not having the advantages of other children. But healthy and happy.

LEVINE: Was Bialystock a big city?

KLEIN: Very big city, very cultural. Very big city.

LEVINE: And what was your father's name?

KLEIN: Naftoli. N-A-F-T-O-L--I.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And your mother?

KLEIN: Rajzl. R-A-J-Z-L.

LEVINE: And do you remember your mother's maiden name?

KLEIN: Asch. A-S-C-H.

LEVINE: Okay. And you had how many brothers and sisters.

KLEIN: I had two brothers and one sister.

LEVINE: And what were their names, and the order?

KLEIN: The oldest brother was Max, and my sister's name is Eva, and my youngest brother, David.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So ah, you were after Eva and before David.

KLEIN: Yes. Right. I was the third one. Not very (snaps), I wouldn't choose it.

LEVINE: Not very good order. (they laugh)

KLEIN: (laughing) It's not, you know, there. But I was loved.

LEVINE: Do you remember the house you lived in? Could you describe the house you lived in Bialystock?

KLEIN: The last one I remember is in Zamojska 10. That's the address.

LEVINE: Zamojska?

KLEIN: Yeah. Z-A-M-O-J-S-K-A. Number 10. It was just but a (pew) one and a half room and we all stayed together in the same room (she laughs).

LEVINE: Do you remember like what your mother cooked on or...?

KLEIN: Cooked. We didn't have a regular stove, I know that. But ah, she cooked on something, whatever she cooked, you know.

LEVINE: How about like water? Running water, electricity, that kind of thing? Was that...

KLEIN: No. We had oil lamps. And then later on, much later electricity came out.

LEVINE: And were you a religious family?

KLEIN: In Bialystock (p-r-r-t) well, whatever little religion my father brought in to the home. But I don't remember going much to temple there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KLEIN: You know, like just holidays. Just during the holidays.

LEVINE: I see. What did your father do for a living?

KLEIN: He used to work in a place where they used to make silk. You know, from thread. He was like a, what would you call it here? I don't know what you would call here.

LEVINE: He...

KLEIN: A weaver.

LEVINE: Oh, a weaver.

KLEIN: Yeah. Yeah. But he was a highly intellectual. To him, just, that was a means of living, to earn the money. But most of his time he spent reading and watching concerts and music and things like that. So. Yeah.

LEVINE: I see. Uh-huh. And ah, do you remember any incidents that happened in Bialystock, when you think back to your early life. Are there any memories that come to you about your early years there?

KLEIN: You mean as far as being treated by the government or things like that?

LEVINE: Well...

KLEIN: Well, Jewish people weren't very welcome there, you know that. I couldn't go to the choice school that I wanted. I had to take second best. And but, I don't remember abusing me in any way. You know.

LEVINE: Did you have friends who were gentiles?

KLEIN: My school, no, you weren't permitted to be together with gentiles. It was just a strictly Jewish school. Only Jewish children. But I did have gentile friends outside, you know.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you and your friends did for fun, played, or what have you?

KLEIN: I was too young. It's not like seventeen now, they're going wild. They're seventeen all the way down, you know. Really not very much socially after I came home, I used to do my homework. And that was it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And ah...

KLEIN: My first romance I had on the boat coming over here. (She laughs.)

LEVINE: Oh, good. We'll get to that. Tell me now, the circumstances under which, what your experience was, that led the family to move to your grandparents.

KLEIN: Yeah. Oh, to my grandparents? Well, we had nothing to eat. That was early. We were young children. So, my grandparents had a farm and my mother used to go on the farm and pick up whatever she wanted. Potatoes and string beans and green peas or whatever. And she fed us this way.

LEVINE: Now, whose parents was this? Your mother's?

KLEIN: My mother's parents, yeah.

LEVINE: Did you know them? I mean did you spend time with them?

KLEIN: Yeah, well, we stayed there a couple years. And then when everything quieted down, we moved back to Bialystock.

LEVINE: I see. So um, what was life like on the farm? How was it different for you than it had been up 'til then?

KLEIN: Well, I was walking around barefoot. I had no shoes. My mother bought me a pair of shoes and I thought, I didn't want to spoil it so when I went to visit my

grandfather or grandmother, you know, I carried the shoes and I put them on just before I went into the house. That was stupid, because my feet got to be bad. (she laughs).

LEVINE: That must have been during warm weather, right?

KLEIN: (laughing) I wouldn't walk on the street when it's cold, snow, you know.

LEVINE: What was your grandmother like? How do you remember her?

KLEIN: Not too good advantage. She was a nice lady, but a little selfish. My grandfather, he's the one who welcomed us with open arms. And he used to go and get milk from the cow and sneak it into me in the morning with a piece of bread, and grandmother didn't like it very much. She, she didn't want us because she sold her farm things, you know, like butter and milk and cheese and that's where she, the farm thrived on that money. And he didn't care because his first allegiance was to his children. And she didn't feel this way. So they had a little friction. And then we moved out after that. My father came from Bialystock and took us back.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, you mentioned it was when Poland and Russia were fighting, was when you, when you... Did you see anything of that?

KLEIN: Yeah. Yeah. I was only five years old. And they used to take me to the trenches with them and I'd watch them shoot. I had no fear. I didn't know what it was all about.

LEVINE: Really. Who would take you?

KLEIN: I'd walk with them.

LEVINE: With the soldiers?

KLEIN: Yeah. I remember once I was picking berries with a neighbor in, in forest. And I heard whistling. I said, what's going on? I came home and my mother's house was locked. She let me in, she said, don't say a word, come right in. There was a lot of fighting going on. And we were locked in the house. And a neighbor, they came in, the Polish people came in and they says, are there any Jews in this town and they said, there's one Jewish family. They says, we want them. So they put us all out. They were gonna shoot us. So this Polish woman, god bless her soul, wherever she is, she took us in and she hid us in her basement for two months. We stayed there. And then, then war was over and we went back to Bialystock.

LEVINE: So how old were you? You were about five years old then?

KLEIN: About then. Yeah. Very little, because if I had more brains, if I was older I wouldn't go to watch them shoot. You know?

LEVINE: Well, do you recall those two months when you were being hidden?

KLEIN: Yeah. I remember that. I remember. And my sister was, had light hair and my ah, little brother had light hair so they look like Aryans. So they were walking around. Just my mother and I were hidden.

LEVINE: Wow. And then who brought you food? The woman whose...?

KLEIN: The woman, yeah. And she, over there in Poland the oldest son becomes master of the house and he wanted us out. But she says, then you have to kill me first. This, this lovely lady. She saved our lives.

LEVINE: Do you remember her name?

KLEIN: No. No. Wish I did. Yeah. Wish I did. Such a long time. You know, it's over sixty years, you know?

LEVINE: So that was when you were five, and then when you were eleven or twelve, again, there was fighting?

KLEIN: But that, that was, my mother was dressmaker. And she worked. And she supported us. And we didn't have to depend on my grandparents anymore. In fact, moved out to a different village and then my father came and said, that's enough. You're going home and then we all came home. But we took along our cow.

LEVINE: Really? From your grandparents?

KLEIN: Yeah. Yeah. We took along, we had our own cow. We took it Bialystock. That's a big city. We had to find quarters for her. Where to stay...

LEVINE: So where did you put her?

KLEIN: Somebody had a barn they let us keep the cow there. So we had milk for a long time. And I don't know, later on we disposed of her when she got old. But we took our own cow with us.

LEVINE: Was the cow like a pet to you? Or it was mainly just to get the milk?

KLEIN: To get the milk and we loved her. In fact, the Polish people came and they took away the cow. They took it away from us. And then my mother came back and pleaded with them, that she needed to support the children with it, you know, the

milk. So they took her to the field and the cow saw my mother and she says,  
MOO! (laughing) It was fun. The cow recognized my mother!

LEVINE: Did you have a name for this cow?

KLEIN: Must have been. I don't remember. (they're laughing) A lot of things that are  
blank, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah. Did you have to help with any chores around the house?

KLEIN: There wasn't very much to do because we had one room and everybody was in it  
and everybody chipped in a little bit. I do remember my mother baked. She  
baked a lot of bread. So we should have what to eat for the winter. And she hid  
it in the attic among the straw, you know, and nobody should find it. And when  
the soldiers came, not only they took the bread, they brought their horses into our  
room, to store them there. And they took all the bread away.

LEVINE: Was it, what kind of bread was it? Do you remember?

KLEIN: A black bread. Black, yeah. It wasn't very tasty, but it's better than nothing.

LEVINE: Yeah. Right. Do you remember any other dishes that your mother cooked,  
anything that you maybe carry on as a, ah...

KLEIN: In Bialystock yes, when we came back, I remember those dishes. But at the farm I don't. She hardly made anything worthwhile. The only worthwhile meal my grandmother used to make, once in a while she'd to invite us. She didn't want us to stay with her, but she was nice when we came to visit.

LEVINE: I see. Well, what dishes do you remember, that your mother made in Bialystock, or that your grandmother made?

KLEIN: Well, she made geveltefish, everybody knows that. That's a real Jewish stand-out. Ah, stuffed cabbage. Chicken soup. (laughs) Penicillin. My mother was a fairly good cook. No, not extra, but fairly good.

LEVINE: And did your father come to the United States before the rest of the family?

KLEIN: Yes. My father and my oldest brother. Yeah. They came in 1921.

LEVINE: I see. And what do you recall what they said about why your father and brother were leaving? Do you remember their feelings about it?

KLEIN: Well, my mother was the one who instigated that. She says there's no way we can survive in Poland. And one day it's gonna be bad. And she had the premonition, lucky. If we stayed another ten years, Hitler came. So she had a vision that we

should leave. She had two brothers in this country and she wrote to them and begged them to please, get us over there. But, there was a quota. You couldn't come. So first, they brought my father and my brother. My father had to work here for seven years to become a citizen and show the government that when he brings his family he can support them. And then seven years later, we came.

LEVINE: What was your father doing here for those seven years?

KLEIN: My mother, my mother's brothers had a shop that made coats and things like that. So they took him in and he was learning, and helping out.

LEVINE: He was sewing?

KLEIN: Yeah. A little bit. And he was helping out in the shop with all kind of chores.

LEVINE: I see.

KLEIN: He wasn't proud, as long as he can support his family. As long as he can support his family. Yeah.

LEVINE: And what was his temperament like, your father?

KLEIN: My father was a very quiet, gentle soul. He was good. He used to have for lunch a cup of soup and a roll. And the rest of the money he'd send to Federation for Jewish Charities. Give his money away, send money to a nephew in Israel. To him, life was giving, not taking. He was just wonderful, wonderful person. I carry him in my heart always. Whenever I'm in any trouble I know Papa's not gonna let anything happen to me.

LEVINE: Ah, that's lovely. Do you remember any experiences with your father as a little girl in Poland? Any places you went with him?

KLEIN: No. Not really. Because he was in the war for a while, I didn't see him. And then he was home, he used to work and come home, be tired. No place. And when I came to this country, I was too big already, you know? So, we established a relationship. I always loved him, but then I was seventeen, eighteen, I already was going out with boys, you know. But we came much close together when I got married and had my children. He used to come and baby sit for me and let me and my husband go out to a movie or something. He always did that. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Let's see. So then he, was he sending money to your mother when he was here?

KLEIN: Yes. For seven years. Then we lived well. We had oranges, we had grapes, we had all the good things. Yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And ah, you were back in Bialystock then?

KLEIN: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, were there, as a Jewish girl, were you treated, did you have any anti-Semitic kinds of incidents?

KLEIN: There was, there was in Bialystock, but I personally never suffered any. Except that, as I say, I couldn't go to a certain school that I wanted to go, but otherwise, I was treated pretty, pretty well.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And so were you friendly in general with the Polish people? The gentiles?

KLEIN: Oh, yes. Yes. Yes. No problems.

LEVINE: Okay. Ah, so then ah, how, what happened? Did your father send you a ticket?

KLEIN: No. After seven years, we got tickets. We had to get a visa. Go to Warsaw, and, it's a lot of paperwork. And then the four of us went, yeah, the four of came. And I remember sitting in Ellis Island, on the same bench I just sat a couple of months ago. I found the same spot. And I was sitting there and then I saw this stairway

coming down, and a tall man coming down, says, that's my Papa. And he came down to get us.

LEVINE: Well, tell me first about -- you went to Warsaw, you got the papers. Then, did you go back to Bialystock?

KLEIN: Yes. Yes. Had to stay and wait until they say you're ready to go. And then the trip was horrible. (laughs sharply)

LEVINE: Well, do you remember packing up?

KLEIN: Yeah. We didn't have very much to pack.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything you or your mother took?

KLEIN: Just bare essentials. Nothing that we had, we didn't have any furniture to take, we couldn't take it America. We did have one thing that, that was very pathetic. We had a dog. And we had to leave him behind. And there's no one to take him. And my youngest brother, that was his dog. He cried so much when he left him.

LEVINE: Yeah.

KLEIN: That was it. Couldn't take him along. You weren't allowed to take pets.

LEVINE: Yeah. So when you left Bialystock, what mode of transportation, what did you take to get to the port?

KLEIN: A train to Warsaw. And then from Warsaw we went to a port in France?

LEVINE: Le Havre?

KLEIN: Le Havre. Right. And from Le Havre we went, we took the Rochambeau and that took three weeks to get here. Three weeks. We were in steerage. And I remember being deathly sick the whole voyage. Throwing up all the time.

LEVINE: Why did it take three weeks? That is a long time.

KLEIN: That's how long it took those days, unless you went on a ship that's better ship and better accommodations and all that.

LEVINE: The Rochambeau, would you describe that ship?

KLEIN: Well, I saw very little of it, except that we were down below and it's horrible. And once in a while we'd go up on the deck and I'd see all the ladies dressed up and you know, I was so jealous. But that's about that. We weren't allowed to mingle with them.

LEVINE: So was there any, did people play music or was there any...

KLEIN: Yeah, yeah. For the first and second class, yeah, but not for us. We didn't have anything. But I did meet a young man on the boat. I met him in Warsaw. He came from a town called Drohobych.

LEVINE: Can you spell it?

KLEIN: D-R-O-H-O-B-Y-C-H. And ah, we kind of two families we were talking to each other and he took my address and we corresponded and we decided to go to America at the same time. So we met in Le Havre and there the romance blossomed. (laughs)

LEVINE: Aah.

KLEIN: Yeah. And when I came to this country, I saw him.

LEVINE: So on the ship you spent time together.

KLEIN: With him, all the time. Yeah. And we talked about our future and about our dreams and he sang to me in German songs. And it was nice (laughing). It was a little interlude, you know? And we came to this country and he didn't, I learned

to speak English right away and it took him longer. He just didn't acclimate himself to the American way of life, and one day I walked in the streets to buy something and he was walking with another young man, and he introduced me to him and that was to become my husband later on. So through him I met my husband.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. So when you were on board ship and you were discussing your dreams and aspirations, do you know what they were? What did you, what did you hope for?

KLEIN: Well, I, America opens up new world, new dreams, falling in love, and you know? Having a good time, and you know at seventeen you have all kind of dreams. You know?

LEVINE: And do you remember your feelings about coming here? How you felt?

KLEIN: Very excited. When I saw the Statue of Liberty I burst out into tears. Yeah.

LEVINE: You had heard about it, so you knew.

KLEIN: Oh, sure. Sure.

LEVINE: What were other people doing?

KLEIN: They, everybody was applauding and elated. Of course they, they gave us a hard time, you know? They feel that people coming out of Poland aren't as clean as America wants you to be. So every place we stopped, they quarantined us. They had to wash your hair all the time, and take baths and showers and they treated you like cattle.

LEVINE: What, you mean where you stopped on route?

KLEIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Oh, so you had several stops before you got to New York?

KLEIN: Yeah. Right. They used to stop, just to clean people, clean them off. Then of course you had to be in perfect health to get in here. There were doctors.

LEVINE: Tell me about Ellis Island and what that was like for you.

KLEIN: Doctors, over there. Doctors, you know, every part of you was gone over. You had to, your eyes and your head and your body. You had to be, god forbid if you weren't well, they'd send you back. So. That's something to pray for. Then they keep you there for couple days and make sure that everything's all right and then they'll let your relatives know that you're here and they come and bail you out.

LEVINE: Was your mother or your brother or sister, was there any possibility that there was something wrong with them?

KLEIN: No, We were worried about my mother that maybe she wouldn't pass, you know, but she was, you know, a little bit sickly. But she was all right. Basically, she was all right. She wasn't too strong, but she was all right.

LEVINE: I actually meant to ask you a question about sickness and illness in Poland. Do you remember any sickness or illness in your family or friends and how it was treated when you were a girl in Poland?

KLEIN: I don't remember being sick. Really, I don't remember. My little brother, I remember, David, he ah, he had water in his lungs and I remember Papa taking him to the doctor and carrying him back. With no transportation. No taxis or anything. And I remember my little brother crying, if you love me, why do you let 'em do it to me. They didn't even have anesthesia or anything. They just stuck a needle to get the water out. And he was very sick. I remember that. And so I was jealous that he was sick and he had oranges and grapefruits and grapes and I couldn't have any (laughs) because I was well. That I remember.

LEVINE: Were there regular doctors there? Or was it more like a folk medicine or some other kind of treatment?

KLEIN: I honestly don't remember doing to a doctor ever. I don't remember. I guess I was well. Didn't have to. Don't look for trouble if there's no trouble there.  
(laughs)

LEVINE: So when your brother had the water in his lungs, did he go to a hospital?

KLEIN: I think it was a private doctor. I don't remember being in the hospital. But thank god he was all right.

LEVINE: This is the brother that had the dog?

KLEIN: Yeah. That was my youngest brother. Since he's gone. I lost him.

LEVINE: Oh. Do you remember the dog's name?

KLEIN: Mucyk.

LEVINE: Mucyk.

KLEIN: M-U-C-Y-K.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KLEIN: He was a lovely dog. A white dog with brown spots.

LEVINE: Okay. Well let's now talk about when you first saw Ellis Island, what did it look like? Can you describe what it looked like?

KLEIN: Well, it was, I remember benches and benches. That's all I remember, and it was glum looking. It wasn't like it's now. But to me, it was paradise.

LEVINE: Do you remember then, the reunion with your father. Would you describe that?

KLEIN: Well, as I say, I saw him coming down the steps and we all started crying and Papa didn't recognize... Seven years is a big difference. Like my little brother was, he left him was six and he was thirteen. So of course, kissing and hugging and he was delighted to have his family back.

LEVINE: What was your mother's attitude about, about, she wanted to come.

KLEIN: Well, she's the one who want to come. My father didn't want to come. She made him. She says, if you don't go, I'll go. And you stay with the children. But he didn't want that. So he went.

LEVINE: And how did your father like it, once he was here?

KLEIN: Well, he worked hard. He liked it. He had, at that time, there was a place called Lewisohn Stadium, where they used to give concerts free, at night. Papa used to be there at every concert and he couldn't afford a seat, but he used to sit on the stone stair they provide for people who couldn't afford. But he was there for every concert. Because to him, music was his life. So that was a big plus in his life in this country. And of course, he took care of my brother. And my brother went to school and became a CPA.

LEVINE: This is your older brother?

KLEIN: Yeah, the elder, Max, yeah, he's gone too. And that was it.

LEVINE: Now, where did you settle in New York?

KLEIN: We were on Vise Avenue in the Bronx. I went there many years ago because I wanted, when I came here as a young girl, I became a citizen, a naturalized citizen on my father's papers. But later on in life I want to have my own citizenship papers. So I went to the Bronx. I hardly found the house because Bronx is kaput, completely demolished, you know, the windows are closed. But I found the place where we lived. I think it was 536 Vise Avenue.

LEVINE: V-I--?

KLEIN: V-I-S-E, Vise Avenue. It's still there. Still there.

LEVINE: So these concerts that your father went to, were they in the Bronx do you know?

KLEIN: No. No. They were in Manhattan.

LEVINE: Did your father play a musical instrument?

KLEIN: No. But he sang. I know I remember him singing. And he had a beautiful voice, and he didn't give this voice to any of his children. None of us could take pride in that.

LEVINE: What did he, did he sing, what language was he singing in?

KLEIN: Polish and Hebrew, Yiddish.

LEVINE: And ah, were there any attitudes or values, ideas that your mother or father had that they tried to instill in you that you can think of?

KLEIN: My father was the one to instill that you should be good and do a lot of charity work and he used to say to me, you only pass this way but once. Whatever good you do, do it now. I remember that.

LEVINE: Did you know his mother and father at all?

KLEIN: Briefly. Just briefly during the war I remember, maybe mostly through pictures. But I remember his mother, when we were in the farm with my grandparents, these were days when nobody had anything to eat. So she came, she was wandering from one place to the other. And I recognized her. That's our grandmother. She came and wanted that people can help her out, you know, money or something. It was very sad.

LEVINE: So your one set of grandparents helped...?

KLEIN: No. My grandmother didn't even know this one. It's not like here where you're close together. But she came. I think we helped her out a little bit and she went on her way. I don't know where she went. I was a child. I didn't know anything.

LEVINE: Yeah. I wonder where your father got such a strong attitude about charity and giving.

KLEIN: Reading. I remember at his funeral, the man who spoke didn't know my father and he just spoke like anybody else, you know. So one man got up and says, this man does know Naftoli like I do, he says. This man had a big library, he says. Papa used to come every week and take a couple of books, read them and bring

them back. And the man broke down and cried. He says, who's going to read my books now. He went over and spoke about my father. He was well read. He knew every opera. Could sing every opera, every aria. He was quite a man.

END SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

LEVINE: Okay. So you settle on Vise Avenue and then you finished school in this country?

KLEIN: Yes. I finished high school and I went just about two years to college at night.

LEVINE: What was the high school like compared with the gymnasium that you had attended in Poland?

KLEIN: Well, it's different. First of all, it's big. A lot of students. There were the class you know, you can see it. Small classes. It was big. And of course, I didn't participate in everything. I was a foreign girl. When I came in at first, I didn't know what they were talking about. I speak a little French so that got me through. And I was there only for one year. It was Boston high school, Morris High School.

LEVINE: Do you know.. Morris High School. Do you know what, can you think of any incidents in your learning English that either helped you or...

KLEIN: Yeah. Yeah. I used to go to a, they used to call it clinics, to learn English, and they used to cater to foreign students. I picked that up. And ah, I'm a linguist. I like languages. Because I remember when I took my regents exam to pass high school, it was fifty percent for the composition and I got 48 out of 50. For a foreign girl, that was -- the ultimate, you know.

LEVINE: Tell me about the clinics. I hadn't heard that before. When were they held, and how often.

KLEIN: There was private, private places. They used to pluck people who do charity work, or they have nothing to do there so they appoint themselves to be teachers.

LEVINE: Volunteers.

KLEIN: Yeah. And they help out, you know. And ah, whatever little bit I picked up was better than nothing. You know, it helped me.

LEVINE: So it was like having a tutor while you were attending high school. Uh-huh.

KLEIN: Right, right, right. Yeah.

LEVINE: Were there a lot of immigrant children in your high school class?

KLEIN: Not too many, no. There were a lot of adults learning to English. You know, adult people.

LEVINE: In the high school?

KLEIN: No, no. In the clinics.

LEVINE: In the clinics. Uh-huh. I see. And how about your mother and father? Did they take to learning English at that point?

KLEIN: Ah, they spoke English but, Papa a little bit better than my mother because he was here longer, but my mother spoke a broken English, but it helped her. Helped her through.

LEVINE: Was the attitude of your mother and father to become Americanized or did they try to hold on to customs or ways from the old country?

KLEIN: They, they, they were pretty good. They Americanized pretty fast. My mother was, liked to live and go out places and my father didn't so that was a little bit of a block in their marriage, you know. To him, going out was to come and stay with my children so I can go out. My mother would rather that, that I get somebody

else to stay with children and she'd like to come along with us, with my father and all. You know, she was a, she liked to live.

LEVINE: Did she go to concerts too?

KLEIN: No. That was not her forte.

LEVINE: That was not something that she was interested in.

KLEIN: No. No.

LEVINE: Did you remember ah, when you first came to this country do you remember any things that struck you particularly as new and different and, probably everything did. But is there anything that sticks out in your mind.

KLEIN: Well, I wanted to go shopping, and get myself nicely dressed. And go out. And then shortly after I fell in love with this young man who I met through my friend from the boat.

LEVINE: So you were just walking down the street and you saw the man you had met on the boat with a friend.

KLEIN: Right. And he introduced me and next day the other fellow called me. And it was really funny. And I went out with him for six years. Because he was in college and I was still in high school. And I had to wait until he's graduate. And he became a CPA later one. I became an accountant. And after six years we got married.

LEVINE: Do you remember, I think, did I ask you this? Do you remember the name of the person you met on the boat?

KLEIN: Morris.

LEVINE: Morris. And how about your husband's name?

KLEIN: His name was Adolph.

LEVINE: Adolph Klein.

KLEIN: Adolph Haas. No. Adolph Haas.

LEVINE: Haas.

KLEIN: I was married twice.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. H-A-A-S?

KLEIN: Right.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what was it that you like about Adolph Haas?

KLEIN: Well, he was, first for all, very good looking. Charming. A good lover. Knew how to treat a girl. And I just liked everything about him. I knew there was no future right away, but I waited.

LEVINE: And were you working then, at that time?

KLEIN: I was working. I had decided that I'm not gonna finish college because I got a wonderful position in a bank. Sterling National Bank. 1410 Broadway and I worked there until I got married. And two years after I got married. I became pregnant and I stopped.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And ah, now was, was your husband um, was he born here?

KLEIN: No, no. He was also from, that's why he knew the other fellow. Also from Poland. Came practically the same time to this country.

LEVINE: Oh! So where was he from in Poland?

KLEIN: Bzedgany.

LEVINE: Can you spell it?

KLEIN: (laughs) I'll try. Bzedgany. B-Z-E-D-G-A-N-Y. Bzedgany. It's near Drohobych, near the one that the other man came from. And young man. And they knew each other from Poland.

LEVINE: Oh?

KLEIN: So that was luck. They met here again.

LEVINE: So then, how many children did you have?

KLEIN: Three.

LEVINE: And their names?

KLEIN: Mel, Melvin, he's, now he's a doctor. He's practicing in Georgia. Next one is Sandy, daughter. She's by profession a teacher and she's raising her family. She's a grandmother now. She's a very young grandmother. And she has two

grandchildren. And my youngest one is David. He's a Federal bank examiner for the FDIC. And David just got married a little while ago. So...

LEVINE: What is Sandy's married name?

KLEIN: Silverstein.

LEVINE: Okay. Um so, you have grandchildren?

KLEIN: I have five grandchildren and two great grandchildren.

LEVINE: Wonderful. Okay. Looking back at starting out in Poland and coming here when you were seventeen, what effect do you think it had on your whole life here? The fact that you had started out in another country and...

KLEIN: In a way it gave me a little upper hand on girls who were born here. Because I could speak several languages. That enhanced my life a little bit. And ah, something cultural that you bring back with you. You know, from abroad, when you come here . . .].

LEVINE: Mm, hm. Yeah. Is there anything that you, well, what would you say that you were most proud of having done?

KLEIN: In life? Well, I'll take you into my den. You'll judge for yourself. I have every award you can want to, dream of getting. I worked for every organization. I was given, couple of years ago I was given a testimonial dinner and I had five hundred people give me a standing ovation. I was chosen the The Woman of the Year. And I'll, you'll go in the den, you'll see all the awards that I got. I really didn't waste my life. I worked for others. I worked for myself. My family comes first. But I, I give of myself.

LEVINE: So this was your father's influence.

KLEIN: Yeah. Right. Right. In fact you can send me a letter, just address it to Manya, without my second name, I'll get it. Because everybody in town knows me.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KLEIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So that must mean that you, so you, when you were first married, where were you settled? Where did you live?

KLEIN: In the Bronx, where I came from, 1311 Grant Avenue. I remember the apartment, on third floor walkup. And ah, we stayed there for few years, and then when I

became pregnant I found an apartment on a lower floor. And ah, I raised my children in the Bronx.

LEVINE: And how is this phase of your life, this time now. You were born in...

KLEIN: I failed to tell you, I didn't raise my children in the Bronx all the, my children were eleven, seven and three, nearly three, I moved right here to this house. I'm in this house since 1950.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. I see. And this is where you did all your charity work.

KLEIN: Right, right, right. When the children are bigger then I knew that I had more time to give and that's what I did.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you must be, what, 80-?

KLEIN: I'm 82.

LEVINE: 82.

KLEIN: I don't look it, do I?

LEVINE: You don't. You don't. Well, how is this phase of your life?

KLEIN: Well, I was married once again. I don't know if I failed to tell you that.

LEVINE: Okay. Yeah. Okay. When was that.

KLEIN: 1970. I lost my husband 1968. He had a heart attack. And I was a widow only for two years and I met this Mr. Klein. And he was a bachelor. He was never married. And he just, the first time in his life he realized that he missed so much and he wanted to get married and have someone close to him and two years later, not two years, what am I talking about? I met him in August and we were married in January. Six months. And I was married to him for close to fourteen years. And then he passed away. So I'm alone now, since, well, he died about eleven years ago. But I may be alone, but I'm not lonely. I live in this beautiful house. My children have a place to come and visit. My grandchildren come to visit. Last Sunday, my grandson came to take me to brunch. He came, he was in New York, he just passed his um, he graduate from law school and he took his bar. So he came to celebrate. And he's the one who has the two children. So, I'm very close to my children and grandchildren. Very close. I mean, we talk to each other every day no matter where we are. I date, and I go out, and I go to dances. In fact, I'm on my way to the beauty parlor. My hair looks a mess. I just, I had an accident with my car, so I don't have a car. I just bought one yesterday. So my neighbor, one neighbor's taking me to the beauty parlor, the other's going to pick me up. So I have a date tonight to go out. We go dancing. And I have a nice life.

LEVINE: Wonderful. Wonderful.

KLEIN: And I don't want to move. Where am I gonna go? Here, I have my roots. Everybody knows me and it's beautiful here. And, wonderful neighbors. They all watch out for me. And I don't want to move anyplace.

LEVINE: Can you think about what, what life might have been like had you not left Poland?

KLEIN: Oh! First of all, I would have been poor to the very day. And then 1939, that would have been the end of it! Hitler came into Poland and that was, that's it. So really, because of my mother's vision, and because of the generosity of my uncles who brought my father and brother, I'm here.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, that may be a good place to stop. Is there anything else you would like to say?

KLEIN: Well, I think it's wonderful that I had a chance to describe everything to you and relive my life. Really, I feel very chosen. Really.

LEVINE: Well, I appreciate you doing it. And it's a pleasure to talk with you. And now your tape will be part of the Ellis Island Oral History collection.

KLEIN: That's wonderful. I'm really proud. So. (laughing) I'm a celebrity!

LEVINE: (laughing) That's right. Okay.

KLEIN: Would you want to have this to put in your annual, or whatever it is, because I have copies of it.

LEVINE: Okay. Let me sign off on the tape. And then we'll talk about that. I've been speaking with Manya Klein who came over here as Manya Wogodski...

KLEIN: Right.

LEVINE: ... in 1929 when she was seventeen years old, and this is Janet Levine for the National Parks Service on August 6, 1994 and I'm signing off.

END INTERVIEW