

**EI-532**

**LOLA GRUENTHAL**

**BIRTHDATE: NOVEMBER 24, 1914**

**INTERVIEW DATE: AUGUST 19, 1994**

**AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 79**

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

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**GERMANY, VIA CUBA, 1937**

**AGE: 22**

**SHIP: Normandie**

**PORT:**

**RESIDENCES:**

- **GERMANY: BERLIN**
- **THE US:**

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service; I'm here today at the Ellis Island Studio with Lola Gruenthal. Mrs. Gruenthal came from Germany in 1937 when she was 22 years of age. Today is the 19<sup>th</sup> of August 1994, so that would mean that you are, at this time Mrs. Gruenthal, how old?

GRUENTHAL: Almost 80, but not quite yet!

LEVINE: Well, I'm looking forward to hearing what you have to say about your experience of immigrating to this country, and why don't we start at the

very beginning, if you would say your birth date and where in Germany you were born.

GRUENTHAL: I was born on November 24, 1914, in Berlin. And this is a complicated story, but I'll make it brief, because by American law, I was -- I later immigrated under the German quota. In Germany I was never German, because my parents came from Russia. And we all had **Romanian** citizenship, because that part of the country went back and forth between Russia, Soviet Russia, and Romania. So that made everything more complicated. And of course, as a child, it was so. As a young person, it was very difficult for me because I wanted very much to be like everybody else. So on. [Laughs] But I was very much aware of my foreignness. In Germany, I was made aware of it, before the Nazis, even. But --

LEVINE: I see.

GRUENTHAL: ---- German was my first language.

LEVINE: OK, well, I know you have brought something with you, that you translated from German, and I think it would be good to begin with your reading that, which you did translate for this occasion, and then we'll go on from there.

GRUENTHAL: OK. This was written on June 28, 1937, the day I arrived on Ellis Island. And I wrote this for Max Grünthal, who later became my husband. But at that time he was still married to s-- he had a different family. But we were all, I mean this was very important, and we were always keeping contact through writing whenever we were separated. And this, I wrote, I think when I knew already that he was coming to 'bail me out'. [Laughs] And so. And I'm not sure, but I don't know what I --- you

know, I – I expected. Yeah. Because I had received a telephone call from him, that he was getting the money together, which was difficult. Because, it's a different story. So I read [Laughs] this now. 'Is this' --- this is the translation of the German:

'Is this now the great adventure? Partly I see it as literary material, as though I was standing outside of myself. Then, again, I think that this may be the end of all sequels. Well, anyhow, let's enjoy it. (The last sentence was in English in the original --- in the original!). I am sitting in a large tiled room, divided into many smaller rooms by wooden benches. On it's upper level; there is a gallery, that I was not yet allowed to inspect. I have no idea what may be lurking behind it. Two large American flags hang from the ceiling. At least I know that I an in America, the land of liberty, even though I can no longer see the Lady Liberty.

The silhouettes of the skyscrapers stand out against an invisible sky, behind the artfully barred windows. My fellow inmates sit around in the corners and at tables --- some waiting apathetically with their hand baggage next to them, like people at a railway station before a departure. Others read newspapers, which are available in many different languages, even in Hebrew. It is a humane jail. Imagine it has even a few rubber trees, as well as a pathetic palm. A longhaired girl, accompanied by a Negro, and a white man, is using the space for a mar-- marathon walk. Back and forth, back and forth -- reminding me of the promenade deck on the Normandie. Opposite me sits a young flaxen blond Swedish girl, her eyes glazed and red from crying. She knows only her mother tongue, and has nobody here to talk to. A while ago I tried to comfort her a little, as well as I could.'

(And then there's just a short note of [Not understood] written on the next page, 129): 'I shared a room with the Swedish girl and a mentally retarded German woman who had already been sent to the hospital because of "nervousness", as she told me, grimacing uncontrollably. Everyone here knows everyone's story.'

So it's – it's a sort of, I mean [Laughs], attempt to give a sort of detached account. Actually, I felt very desperate and very scared, and I tried to keep it somehow under control.

LEVINE: Well thank you very much, that was a welcome addition to the interview, I'm happy that you translated it, yeah. Well let's go back now, you were saying that you, felt a foreignness in Germany, all of those years before you came to this country. Do you remember where you lived in Germany, in Berlin?

GRUENTHAL: Yes, well we lived in a very elegant residential area. And actually, my parents -- my father had a dental practice, and we were -- we lived very comfortably. And had -- it was a very large apartment, and with many a -- with a big staff really, because my father also had his practice in the apartment. And there were maids, and cooks, and *kinderfraüleins* [nannies], and --- and ---. So this -- it was a really, a -- well -- very upper bourgeois environment.

LEVINE: How long had your family been in Germany before you were born?

GRUENTHAL: My father, my parents --- I'm not quite sure, it must have been ---- I'm not sure about the dates. My father came to Berlin earlier, and at the beginning of the century. And he, he was a dentist, and at that time he was assistant dentist --oh, what do you? --- the assistant to the court dentist of Wilhelm *der* ----I don't know which Wilhelm. They had *der*

*zweite* [the second], I think, well, the Kaiser. You know, at that time. But the -- this is an interesting part of the story. When he -- he was—he had a very good position, but he was not satisfied with it. And he was very independent. And that was where it must have been before 1910, that he decided he would come to this country. And he wanted to study American dentistry, which was at the --- which was recognized in Germany. Whereas his background training would not have been sufficient for him to practice on his own. So he came -- is this worthwhile?

LEVINE: Yes, absolutely.

GRUENTHAL: He came here then, I mean before -- that must have been before 1910, or around this time. And went (laughs) straight to -- well, yes -- to Boston, to Harvard, and said he wanted to learn more American methods of dentistry. But (laughs), it was -- apparently; it was not too difficult to get in, except that his language was very inadequate. (laughs), And so he was told he would have to learn more English first. And he did -- in a very short time, and then he ---- well, he didn't really have to—he's -- he got -- he got his American dental diploma at Harvard in a relatively short time because they gave him credit for his background.

And but then he -- he thought (laughs) it would be nicer to --- he liked it in Berlin. And he could have stayed here, but he went back to Berlin, and he was actually, he was, there were only two American dentists in Berlin, and he was one of them. So it -- he had a very good practice, and---. But he never— this is also strange—was he did not make at that time -- he never made any effort to obtain the German citizenship, which he could have done at that time. But my parents were, I mean they lived in their own foreign circle, but yeah my mother --- well, my

mother came into the picture later. (she laughs) She— (laughs) so it was -- there are too many stories involved. But anyway this is part of the background. And I was -- were—

LEVINE: You said he was an American dentist, did he become an American citizen when he was...

GRUENTHAL: No, no, no. He just got his American diploma, dental diploma.

LEVINE: I see, I see uh-- Well, getting back to your early childhood, did you have grandparents on either side that you saw with any frequency?

GRUENTHAL: No, because the grandparents, my parent's families, were both in, — well, at that time, when I was a child -- well, some were in Soviet Russia then, I guess. Yes, and my parents came from the same area. But, how was that? The grandparents --- yeah, I met my mother's parents, but very briefly. I mean there was --- and -- and they were allowed actually to travel at the time, and, but there was very little family connection when I was a child. And I miss that here.

LEVINE: How about, you said your parents were really within the circle of their own friends...

GRUENTHAL: Yes

LEVINE: What was the circle like? And what was

GRUENTHAL: It was crazy,

LEVINE: -- it like for you, as a child?

GRUENTHAL: it was very funny, because there were mostly -- when I was a child, there were mostly white Russians . Immi— were people who had— fled around the revolution, and there, there was a large Russian – White Russian community – in -- in Berlin, especially. My parents spoke mostly Russian. Not --- they did not speak Yiddish. Or really, I don't really remember hearing them speak Yiddish, and most of their friends were White Russian immigrants. And they, they were also, well living quite comfortably. The people, they, they apparently had been able to bring money with them, or possessions. So. And they, they were— business people.

And – I remember vaguely – but it was a --- it was a very --- . It was strange for someone who ---- when I went to school, later (I mean --- I went to school quite late actually, because before, I had sort of private tutoring, or it was just a few other girls.) But later when I went to a regular school, I felt also uncomfortable about this different background which was really, I mean, very different from anybody else's and I tried to keep that apart. And -- and I -- then I had – I -- I had only German friends, and I wanted very much to be German, of course!

LEVINE: Can you say anything else about the, the cultural life, or the social life that, that your family and the other, the white Russians who were in Berlin at that time?

GRUENTHAL: They gave big parties, and, they lived it up somehow. I mean, that was all in the twenties, when I was a child, and ---. No it was, it was very strange really, looking back now. And then (laughing) it's difficult even to describe because there were actually, there were two different worlds. But. hmm—. Well, we were --- my parents went out a lot also and they ---- they went to the opera. They went, they had a, they had a,

a very active social life but ---. And the children were left to the, to the kinderfraüleins, you know, to the governesses and.

LEVINE: Did you have brothers and sisters?

GRUENTHAL: I have a brother yeah.

LEVINE: And what is his name?

GRUENTHAL: (Sigh) His name is (laughing) Ilya. Which is a Russian name, or a Russian Jewish, or it's -- I think comes from —it occurred to me the other day, it may be with -- connected with Elijah, yeah, but it's also—. Yeah, Ilya. It's also a Russian name, and, but I know very little about my brother now. I haven't, I haven't had any contact with him for quite a long time. But there's so many, many stories (laughing) there. But —

LEVINE: Well maybe you can tell me your, your mother's maiden name, her name and her maiden name, and you father's name.

GRUENTHAL: Well they were, her Russian name was Marussia, which is a very lovely name Marussia, but then it was, in her passport or in Germany --- it was changed, I think, to Marian, Maria ---- Marian. And her last name, or...

LEVINE: Her maiden name.

GRUENTHAL: Her maiden name was Flimann, which is a Jewish Flimann

LEVINE: F...

GRUENTHAL: F-L-I-M-A-N-N or NN. And my father's name was -- my father's name was Schulim, which is like's ---well, it's --- Schulim is a version of Solomon, I think, a but he used only the "s" on his,

LEVINE: Passport?

GRUENTHAL: Well, not on his passport, on his, what's called the — I can't think of

LEVINE: I ...

GRUENTHAL: Und (laughs),

LEVINE: When he had, for his dental practice, he would, the "s"

GRUENTHAL: Yes, "s" Braunstein

LEVINE: OK, now, you were born at the beginning of the First World War, do you have any first hand, recollections, remembrances, associated with World War One?

GRUENTHAL: Only of turnips (laughs). I remember that was after the end of the war, because there was really, (sigh) there were severe food shortages, and everything. I mean, even while ---- although my parents did probably buy food at black market prices, but I think that I really remember that the horror of turnips ---- because everything, I mean, was turnips from morning to night for all meals. And otherwise, no I don't really have any memories of these early years in connection with the war. We lived --- we lived in a, ah yes, we lived in another apartment before my brother was born. My brother was five and a half years younger than I and we, it was not such a fancy neighborhood and, And then I think, yeah, I

remembered the year before my brother was born, but that was in this, West -- what was it? --- Wilmersdorf, where we had our big apartment

LEVINE: So, so you changed residences because of the war? Was that why?

GRUENTHAL: Well. Well, because, hah, yeah, there was I guess in connection with the war. Or because it took also --- well, when my father's practice was really beginning to grow, and he could afford this very large apartment. But I don't, I don't remember the earlier one, but it was not in such a good neighborhood, as my parents would have said.

LEVINE: Uh- Uh-.

GRUENTHAL: The earlier one.

LEVINE: OK, were you a religious family?

GRUENTHAL: We were, not really. I mean. My parents were religious only on big holidays. Otherwise, the -- well, my father talked about religion but it, it did not, it did not mean much to me. And I felt that it was not really genuine, and I resented that. I mean that on holidays, well, it -- it was -- -it was not a real tradition. It probably had been a tradition in his family, and also in my mother's family, and they tried to keep it alive. But it was not, not really meaningful anymore, at least, I mean, for the children, it was not congruent --- it was not, convincing and so.

LEVINE: So, do you have memories of your school life, in Berlin?

GRUENTHAL: Well, there were different kinds of schooling that I had, and because I, -- I'm sorry -- (laughs). [pause] Well, at first --- well, because my parents always felt that they—they --- they --- they tried or they wanted to be so

very special. And nothing was good enough for them, so we weren't sent to regular school at first. That would have been public school, so that would not, I mean, that would not have been good enough for them. So we had this private -- private instruction first. And, well, different kinds of private instructions. And I went to a regular school. Well, that was ---- would have been corresponding to junior high school, here. That was when I was twelve. That was the first time when I went to a real school, and that was also a very strange experience because it was like a totally different world.

LEVINE: Describe what that was like for you.

GRUENTHAL: Well, the way it usually is when a new child comes into a class, and everybody -- people, the other children -- tease the newcomers. Oh there was a lot of teasing. But I mean, I looked very German. I didn't look strange, or exotic. My parents --- my mother looked much more exotic in her way of dressing. So, at first I felt --- yeah, I felt uncomfortable. And, but, I very soon became part of the group there. And at first I was too good. Really, I was really well behaved. And that made me, also, too different really. And after a while, I became really, a 'rebel' (laughs) in class

LEVINE: In school.

GRUENTHAL: In school yeah. And so that I became very, a successful rebel.

LEVINE: What were you, what would be one of your causes as a rebel?

GRUENTHAL: I don't know, just -- mostly silly things. I mean silly tricks. No I mean, I was not --not politically oriented, and, that's ---- this was all that was all still in the twenties. But, I became sort of, well I was pushed into a sort

of leadership position, but just doing very silly tricks or sticking my neck out. And -- and, I don't know, I mean very silly things. But I, I got punished (laughs) for whatever, I mean, whatever happened. So, well, but I was very popular in school, and I liked it. It was, it was OK.

LEVINE: Could you describe yourself as a fourteen years old, just prior to leaving Germany?

GRUENTHAL: Oh, as a fourteen year old, there was again a different situation. Because then, I was sent into my first exile (laughs). That was in Switzerland, and I was removed from the school where I liked it very much. [Aside (I will be very long – this whole thing)] And I was for a reason that I did not know about, I was sent to a boarding school --- also very fancy boarding school, in Switzerland, near Saint Moritz --- and for almost a year. And. I don't think my parents ever exp --- explained the reason to me. And I really felt that I had been -- yes, that they'd wanted to get rid of me. And later I found out that I ---. Well, they were concerned. Or that I might get TB. Or that I had a -- there were some indications. Or I had a spot on my lung. That I found out much later. But I really couldn't understand why they did this to me. These were things that were not talked about. And this, this Swiss boarding school, that really did some (laughs) pretty awful things to me. Because that was ---- it was led by two Calvinist ladies, and we were brought up with an extremely rigid Calvinist spirit. And that was supposed to be good for our character (laughs). And.

LEVINE: I think maybe we'll pause here, to turn the tape over, and then we'll continue with this.

END TAPE ONE, SIDE A      BEGIN TAPE ONE, SIDE B

LEVINE: OK, we're about to begin side B now, and we were talking about your Calvinist training in school, in Switzerland. Is there anything else that you would say about that...?

GRUENTHAL: Oh in this connection. It was very -- prêt—terrible. Because well they were --- this was girls' school. And there were girls from twelve, I think, to eighteen, and they had a very rigid discipline. And it was all supposed to be character building, but what they did was --- well, it was as bad as the turnips we [not understood] (laughs). Because they told you several time a day, or on whatever occasion ---- suitable or unsuitable --- that nothing good was ever going to become of you. And that one sh—one should not --. Well, these are horrible things to remember, after all these years.

But it was at a time where, when, kids are very impressionable. And, and it left a lasting impression to be told, "Don't imagine that you are special, "Don't imagine that you are intelligent; "Don't imagine that you are pretty," and ---and "Don't imagine that this or that." And, and there - -- I don't know -- I mean they -- well, it, it was really--- very, very damaging, I think. And not ---- I mean I was not the only one who suffered from that. Because I w--, I remember that people were -- because the girls were never, or one was never allowed to -- be, alone actually, or alone with just one other person. We always had to do things in groups, and, and, and any personal contact was discouraged.

So all sorts of, well, other undesirable things happened then. And that -- well I don't know -- we got together secretly, and formed secret suicide societies at night you know and other things like that. That's a whole -- also, it is a very -- was a very strange experience. There -- actually, one of the girls there was a daughter of Nijinsky, you know the --.

Yeah, there were two daughter, no one -- what was it? --- Kyra, Kyra Nijinsky. And she was, well she was a very bad girl.

And then, well if somebody was bad, then they were put, what is that? – there is an expression for this in English. Or, ‘in Coventry’, you know, that’s an English expression. So whoever had -- well they were really ostracized then. Nobody was allowed to talk to her. It was pretty awful. So anyway. And that lasted --- that lasted no--not quite a year. And --- but, we became then, also very indoctrinated with Swiss values --- also. The Calvinist, and Swiss, and Swiss history, and Swiss geography, and, and Swiss literature as much – ya, well there is some Swiss literature,

But actually, I mean what happened then when I -- when I came back to my original school, I found out that I had wasted a whole year. Because I had --- well, it was such a different method of teaching also. And that I had missed a lot that I had to catch up with in order to get back to my -- or to continue with my original class.

LEVINE: Uh-

GRUENTHAL: So but then was quite happy to be back, but...

LEVINE: Is there anything that you would want to mention about your life in Berlin, the, before you and your family came to this country?

GRUENTHAL: In Berlin? Well, that was; now I have to think about the perio--, period, the dates. Well, the Nazis started, the Nazi regime--.

LEVINE: Well you must have finished school, and then, were you working before you came here?

GRUENTHAL: Well, when I finished school I did all kinds of other things. And I started – old -- yeah well then first I, I spent quite some time outside of Germany also. Because when I was eighteen, I went to London where I studied English, or where I was supposed to ---. Well, my parents really were not -- thought it also, thought that it was a waste of time and money for me to get a real education, because the best thing that could happen to me would be to get married quickly. But they sent me to London to study English at a special language school, where I got a diploma. And there I didn't – I did not feel very happy, because there I didn't know a soul. And -- and anyway it was, I felt very isolated, and that was when I was eighteen.

And then before I came here, I also (late in 'thirty s--, 'thirty-six, the end of 'thirty six -- on November 'thirty-six to March, I think, 'thirty-seven) I was in -- in Paris, where I also studied French at the Alliance Française. And, but the -- these were, I mean the studies were more or less pretext for me. But, and, but I did all right. But at this was – this was a wonderful experience in Paris. And I was ver-- always very happy then to get away from home. Because I – well, as – as I got older I, I liked it less an less being tied up, or tied up in the family, because there were all kinds of problems, so ---

LEVINE: When did you return from Paris to Berlin then?

GRUENTHAL: That was, that was in, in ' thirty-seven, in the spring of 'thirty-seven, March I think of, yeah, I think March or February. Oh, February I think.

LEVINE: So you were in Berlin approximately three months before --

GRUENTHAL: Before I left. And that was all very unexpected really. But there I got a lot of help from a friend whom I'd -- or, a woman whom I hadn't known

before. And whom I met through Max Grünthal, who was not --- I mean he was not in Berlin at that time. He had (coughs) he had immigrated. He had gotten his immigration visa from the then Governor of New York, Herbert Lehman. And he had come here or, well, immigrated around Christmas of '37 and then he went back to – not to Berlin. He--- he went to Holland where some members of his family had settled. They thought they were safe there. And now what---now what would it, what – what did I start I start with? Yeah. Oh, how I happened to come here.

LEVINE: And also those three months or so before you left. What was happening in Berlin and what did you experience as a build up of the Second--- towards the Second World War?

GRUENTHAL: Um---nobody suspected at that time. Or, no. Not nobody, but nobody in my environment. Nobody I knew. Actually very few people who were--- who were politically better informed ---- would have expected that at that time. Because--- in '37 ---. Well, I---I was not there. On a – well, I was out of the country several times and it (this was possible because, it was easier, I think, because I had a Romanian passport). So I could – could travel more easily in a way. Although I had to have an re-entry visa and an exit visa and re-entry visa. But I think, I don't – I don't really remember how it was as -- as German Jews could not travel easily at that time. But now, I'm – I'm a little lost where ---.

LEVINE: Um, we were talking about, you were going --- you were saying that your later-to-become husband had immigrated.

GRUENTHAL: Yes. So it seemed at that time, it seemed like a very hopeless situation with regard to our being together in any way. And, uh. . .

LEVINE: Excuse me, but had you met in Berlin? Is that how you knew each other?

GRUENTHAL: In Berlin, yeah, yeah. And, but we had --- we didn't have any real plans. But it really happened then that at -- well, I thought it would be --- I mean, for him the situation was pretty clear because he had his papers and he had friends and he had colleagues and he was going to prepare. Ah, he had to pass regents exams in all subjects --- he was a medical doctor, he was a psychiatrist, and he had to, you know he had to pass exams in all subjects before he could practice. And also he had to study English --- which was not---I mean, he had a Humanist school background (which meant Latin and Greek). So his English was not very good. But, you know it seemed like a totally hopeless situation that we would ever be able to be together again or at all. And, then --. And that my parents would let me go to this country. My parents were --- who knew about my relationship and were certainly not happy about it. Which is understandable (laughs).

But, then this friend who ---well, whom I met only after I came back, she was -- she (this was somebody whom I met though Grünthal and she -- she was from a very famous British family. And she---she [well, I have to explain too much there] *und* they -- she was younger than I. And her husband --- they were both about my age. Her husband was a journalist who was writing for a British paper. And he -- he actually later became the head of the BBC. And that was Sir Hugh Carleton Greene. And he was brother of Graham Greene, so it was an interesting family in that. But and his wife then, Helga was ---she then became a very close friend.) ---- oh, she was a very good friend in a very difficult situation. And she also helped to convince my parents that it would be a good idea to let me go here and she helped also with contacts and

with money and so on. So my parents thought 'all right, let her go' And  
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LEVINE: Well, once you---tell the name of the ship and what it was like coming here for you.

GRUENTHAL: Yes. The ship was the Normandie and that was the most, well, what -- it was beautiful. It was -- it was enormous and it was very elegant and very art--- (it was a -- like a, you know, it had a lot of very modern, at that time, art work in the public areas) and it was I just. As I said in -- on the poem, it was like something that you could hardly imagine. Except, I mean, it was what---what you would imagine, coming out of Hollywood or existing in a Hollywood movie but not in real life. And, so.

LEVINE: Do you remember your thoughts and feelings when you were en route?

GRUENTHAL: Yeah. I was very, on the one hand I was---it seemed, you know it was really like a dream that---a dream come true. It sounds very trite but it was something that I had never imagined would be possible and on the other hand, it seemed that it couldn't work out. Something, well that you would have to wake up from this and (laughs)---also when I came here it seemed like a logical conclusion because it couldn't just -- it couldn't just be that wonderful, you know.

LEVINE: That's your Swiss School ---- (both laugh). So---so then, do you remember the ship coming into the New York Harbor?

GRUENTHAL: Yes. Yes it was---all -- the harbor --Yeah well I didn't really. Yes I remember and I---I remember it's difficult to describe but it all---it was all very well organized and people where -- went through very quickly, went off the boat. It was really I don't know how many -- how many

people this carried. But -- but as soon as we got into a---got to the pier; actually, I among---I and two other people, two young men --- were separated from the rest of the passengers and put under guard and when -- were told to wait for further instructions. And we went, I don't--- I don't remember whether we were that ---yeah, we were told that we were going to be taken to Ellis Island. And well it took several hours I think and that was very strange. So this luxury liner turned into a ghost ship really because there were just these -- the---the poor three (laughs) passengers. And when we didn't --- I mean, you know, we --we got lunch there and the two guys got kosher food also and then somebody was---somebody was standing guard at a distance and --. Well, one -- yeah, one could, I guess, walk around. But (louder) I remember that one couldn't go to the bathroom without a guard. And at that time, yeah, it felt, well I felt that perhaps this was the end. And if they would send me back, then I would really jump overboard. Because I didn't, didn't want to go back home, which was no longer home for me.

LEVINE: So, so you were then taken to Ellis Island?

GRUENTHAL: Well yes, after several hours, I think. Well these, the guys, sat--- separately and we didn't much talk to each other, I think. And I think I thou -- always thought there were three men. I was the only woman. On -- on my ship papers that I have here, (you know, I can show them to you later). George got that, the passenger list. And there are only three mentions there. So anyway, then we were taken by a motor launch to Ellis Island. That went very quickly, and then we came here.

LEVINE: And what were you told, about why you were coming to Ellis Island?

GRUENTHAL: Yeah. This is strange. Well, I don't remember really. Is -- was it usually people were usually told why? Or that there was some, I mean, what

the reasons were? Why they---I don't know. Maybe I have repressed it but I don't remember being told.

LEVINE: Well I've heard other stories where people were not, uh-huh.

GRUENTHAL: I don't think, no, because I would have told Grünthal then later. No. Something was not right and then, you know, I have the story that I, this little anecdote. I think I was, I don't know whether---whether they observed certain people on the ship or people who, well, did not have the right. Well, I mean, people who didn't ---- must have been suspected of one thing or another or of becoming undesirable aliens. And probably not – I mean, these were not people who had family here. Or not people who had regular immigration papers, but mostly people who came with tourist visa, as I did. And I didn't – I didn't have-- have any family.

And I had this Mr. So and So Lee (I have his name there on this manifest there) who was a friend of---his family was --- well, they were friends of my English friend in Berlin. And she had asked them to pick me up and to---I don't know, I mean, it was not well enough prepared. What was wrong, actually? At that time, es ---well, especially with people who did not have family, or it was for a young woman traveling alone (this is what I was told later) it was absolutely essential to have somebody, and preferably ---- I mean, either a family or a woman to be there to pick her up and also vouch for her character.

LEVINE: So how long were you detained there at Ellis Island?

GRUENTHAL: Over night. Until the next morning.

LEVINE: And what happened the next morning?

GRUENTHAL: The next morning I had this hearing. But by then I knew already that Grünthal had --- I mean yeah, he had been able to call---call me the night – the day before in the afternoon. And that he was getting the money to ---for the bond and that he was coming with somebody to pick me up. So I felt greatly relieved and--. And then I had this hearing and -- and there --. Well, it was somehow pretty obvious that they (laughs) had a preconceived idea of my intentions or what or that I—well, that I didn't really belong here or that they didn't want anybody, I mean, who didn't have family or didn't have any good reason to be here. And so you want me to tell a -- a story (laughs)?

Well. It started, actually with something else. And this official, I don't know, I mean, what, the official who---the official interrogator, asked me how---what means of support I had. And what I was under ---what money I would have to live on here. And I said, very naively, that I had a--- well, yeah I said a friend in Germany who had arranged for me to have money sent to me from England. And who was that friend and, (I mean, it was all very stupid of me) but I said it was somebody who was interested in my poetry and who had seen my poetry and who ---.

Actually, but -- I didn't explain that very convincingly. It was true really, that was somebody who was, ah --- he was a sort of patron of the arts and somebody who made a particular --- who went out of his way to help young artists. And but that was, I don't know, I don't remember. Because it was somebody whom I didn't know very well and some--- somehow, and I --- maybe I was too cocky. Or I didn't respond very -- I mean I didn't --- certainly did not make a very good impression on this official. And then came the question, you know, I don't know how this started. Well, that somebody was going to come to bring or to pay the

bond, the--- what is it called, to um--- bring -- somebody was bringing money, the five hundred dollar bond for me.

LEVINE: Okay. We'll have to pause here because we're at the end of the tape but we'll pick up there.

GRUENTHAL: Oh. . .

END TAPE ONE, SIDE B

BEGIN TAPE TWO, SIDE A

LEVINE: This is tape two of an interview with Lola Gruenthal, who came from Germany in 1937 when she was 22 years of age. We were talking about Ellis Island, and we were talking about the hearing that you had here, having been detained overnight. Why don't you continue with whatever significant happened at that hearing.

GRUENTHAL: Well, at that time then I felt quite confident that Grünthal was going to come and that I would get out of here and that I would really be admitted to the country, (laughs) outside of Ellis Island. So, I told, I don't know, I told the interrogator -- I don't know whether in response to a question or spontaneously -- that --- well, that I expected Dr. Gruenthal to come with the \$500 bond to pick me up. And the official then asked, who is Dr. Gruenthal? And I said, he's a friend. And then he asked, how long have you known him? And this ah, conversation took place in English because I said I did not want, did not need a translator. So when he asked how long have you known him I said, for three years. And then he said (well, in a really, he sounded very shocked) and said, "You expect a man whom you have known for three weeks to pay \$500 dollars for you?" And then it was my turn to be

shocked. (laughs) And I corrected him, and this misunderstanding. But then I got an idea or so, what he thought of me. Because somehow I must have made the impression of being a loose woman, or intending to make a profession of that, something like that. Okay. That's the story.

LEVINE: So then did Dr. Gruenthal arrive at Ellis Island? Talk about that, seeing him there and meeting him.

GRUENTHAL: Then he came with the wife of the manager of the Marcy Hotel, whom --- I don't know, I mean, if she was certainly not a close friend. But he must have made many phone calls, and he had been -- I found out later -- he was actually more desperate or as desperate as I was and it was not so easy to get the \$500 together. But he did, and he was told also that he had to come with a woman to officially get me out. And so then we -- then everything was easier and we went to the Marcy Hotel where we stayed for two nights, I think. And then we moved on to more affordable quarters. (laughs)

LEVINE: Do you remember your first few days in this country? Do you remember anything about it? Any things that you saw that struck you as...? Of course you were a cosmopolitan young woman, but was there anything new in this country that you hadn't seen before.

GRUENTHAL: I remember that I said the skyscrapers aren't as large as (laughs) I thought they would be. But they didn't --- they didn't have the --. It was, actually it was a nicer skyline then. It was not so, where it was all so uneven. But, there weren't ---it was somehow, I wasn't really overwhelmed. But, well, everything was wonderful then. It was just wonderful being, being there and being part of -- of this. Being allowed to be free. Really.

LEVINE: Now, you mentioned that you had written some poetry. Was that something you continued with? What happened to you? You were on a --? I'm asking too many questions at the same time. You were on a visitor's visa. And that was for a period of six months. Then, what happened?

GRUENTHAL: Well, then, what did I do? At first, well, I met a lot of people, and I --. Actually, on the visitor's visa I was not allowed to work. But I, in the beginning, I don't know, I just ----very beginning, I, I don't really know. I did, later -- I mean the visa was later extended and I was -- I was trying to get a sponsor for the affidavit which I didn't get. Which was not possible in the first six months. But then later, yea, well, I did all kinds of odd jobs. In the beginning. And I did some ah, typing and sort of part-time, actually things that I was not supposed to do, but whatever -- whatever came up. But it was, that was, I don't know. People were helpful at that time. I mean people whom I met through Grünthal. I don't really quite remember what I did in this earliest period. But later, I did. At first, but that must have been when I was allowed to work officially. I did secretarial work and that was very good because it's, it helped to supplement the money that I got from -- from England which was very little. I mean was not enough, really, to --

LEVINE: Well, what did you do when the six months were coming to a close?

GRUENTHAL: Well, then I got the, an extension. I got an extension. And I actually, I immigrated finally in -- I think I got an extension -- yeah, I got an extension and I immigrated in '38 of October, under the German quota. Because -- because according to American law, nationality is based on the country of birth. Whereas, you know, in Germany it's the blood law. And here it is the country law. And this is a -- it's a very important

difference actually. In Germany there is a lot of conflict about this, also about their Aryans.

LEVINE: So you were here for six months, and then did you go to Cuba?

GRUENTHAL: And then I went to Cuba a year later. And there were – I mean, then I had the --- then I got this affidavit from people where I had taken care of the children (and people who really could afford). Mostly people who could afford to give affidavits, they were so overburdened – or, I mean - - that they had to have quite substantial resources. And there was such a need at that time. I mean, so. And they were really, it -- it was. It -- as it became more and more critical – the situation in Germany – so people tried to contact. I mean, it was -- there was a limit to what people --- where, not only what they were able to do, but there was -- they had to have. They -- It was not easy. I mean, also for the sponsors. Because they could not give unlimited affidavits. And it was a real responsibility. So anyway...

LEVINE: Could you say, just succinctly, what was it like for you in Cuba during 1938?

GRUENTHAL: In Cuba? Was wonderful. (laughing) That was really wonderful, because that was real adventure. But that was already, I was one of the last people to come in under the German quota because that was overrun already. And there – but – and there I met very peop—very fascinating people. And it was, in a way it was a sort of different from Ellis Island because there one could move around freely. But also, I mean, I met people who had just gotten there at the last moment, or actually, and who were very desperate to make it still. To – to get to this country. And actually I remember that I had, I had my number, my - - they gave out numbers for people to get their papers. And I felt so

confident then that I said, "Well, I have the number," and I gave it to somebody else who had to ---. Yeah. There were difficulties. Who had to leave the country there, at a certain time or there was a deadline and I was pre--- I was sure that I would make it. So I gave him my number. And I was happy to stay there for another day. But there were no complications for me there. Actually I've always been very lucky. In German (laughs) there is a nice saying; you have more luck than brains. (they laugh) And sometimes this is true.

LEVINE: When you came into this country coming from Cuba, did you have to go to Ellis Island again?

GRUENTHAL: No. No. No. Then I was a real citizen. No, that-- I didn't have to go to Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, when did you marry Dr. Gruenthal?

GRUENTHAL: In '46.

LEVINE: In '46.

GRUENTHAL: Yeah. After the war.

LEVINE: And did you have children?

GRUENTHAL: Yes.

LEVINE: And their names?

GRUENTHAL: I have a son, George. George Franklin Gruenthal. He doesn't make any use of the Franklin. Does he make faces? (They laugh.)

LEVINE: An only child? You have one child?

GRUENTHAL: Yes.

LEVINE: And you have a grandchild?

GRUENTHAL: Yes. Matthew.

LEVINE: Now, you did start writing poetry before you came to this country. Did you continue in that way? Did you continue doing secretarial work?

GRUENTHAL: I did, yeah.

LEVINE: What did you do as a career?

GRUENTHAL: A career. I've had so many different careers. During the war, (sighs) what did I do? During the war, I became a cooking teacher, without being able to cook, for instance. That was at the settlement house. During the war, it was very easy for anybody, anyway for women to get jobs. So I benefited from that. But I worked, I mean, I worked with children. What else? I did secretarial work. Also, I met very unusual people somehow. I mean, were quite well known. I don't know. It just happened. Lots of things just happened. But with the poetry, well, with the poetry, I -- I did that on my own. And I did, well, from early on actually, I did quite a lot of translating and I started writing in English and also translating into English. And ah, into Ger-, yeah, into English and into German. And ah, actually, well, yeah, some things were published. Prose and poetry. More prose actually. There are endless stories.

LEVINE: Yes. I'm sure there are. Maybe you could mention a few of the things that are published that you translated?

GRUENTHAL: Well, for instance, that was during the war, ya. I discovered a prose ah, story, or novella, a long story, an autobiographical story by Rilke. Rainer Maria Rilke. I have to say it with a German 'er' (pronounces guttural R)(laughs). And at that time, I did a lot of Rilke translating and tried to find publishers, or a publisher or tried to place them, the translations, the poetry translations in literary magazines. And I have a very big file of correspondence and where editors told me yes, and they liked my translations. But actually, and Rilke was overdone already. And there was no market for Rilke, which is funny really, because now there is an enormous market for Rilke.

So, but what I found was this story which was not well known and I translated that. I got some editorial help, also, by -- from American friends. And this was published. It's called *Ewald Tragy*. It's a name. And it's a story which he wrote when he was (he has written very little prose actually, aside from letters) but that was one of his earliest works. And that was published, and it's good. It's very unusual. That was published first in England. That's also through this friend Helga, whom I mentioned before. Who in the meantime had gone back to England and become a literary agent there and she -- she helped me. So that was published there.

And also, I mean some poetry translations, German poetry into English. Poetry translations that I did were published in anthologies here. And then --- oh then I (that's again a crazy story). I translated some thing from Polish into English, although I don't know Polish. (laughs) And that was a short play. A one-act play by the Polish writer, [not understood] Mrozek. It's a very difficult name to pronounce. That was

also --that was published and it's called Striptease. And that is the original title. Was published and produced also. Next?

LEVINE: You mentioned you were doing some translating at this point?

GRUENTHAL: Oh, am I? Yes. Well, that is also --- that's almost a lifetime project. Or is a project for the rest of my life, I would think. I started in the---yeah, in the '50's. I discovered Emily Dickinson, and I can't, don't remember how this, how I met her. I don't remember who introduced her, but it was a very meaningful discovery. And since then I have, I have been translating it into verse, but sometimes very intensely, very intensively and intensely. I have been translating her po---well, her poetry -- some of her poetry into German. And ah, and this is now being recognized in Germany, which is nice. And it took a long time. But now there is a real interest and I have done readings in Germany in different places, in cities also. And ah, now there is a, a real interest. There are more, well, there is a whole industry now of Emily Dickinson translators. But I was, I think, well, I was not quite the first, but almost the first.

LEVINE: Uh, huh. I have a question about translating poetry into other languages. What happens to the musicality of the sounds in one language when you translate it over?

GRUENTHAL: It gets lost mostly. Mostly it gets lost. But that is just what interests me, and that is really a labor of love. And this is something that you can't do with a deadline, and you have to do it over and over again, and there has to be a real affinity, and it -- it's torture. It can be torture, but it can be beautiful also.

LEVINE: I want to ask you, looking back on your life, when you started out in one continent and you came to this one, how do you think your early life

affected the rest of your life, essentially most of your life, I guess, that you lived in this country?

GRUENTHAL: Well, in retrospect, sometimes it all seems very meaningful and it just couldn't be otherwise. And also, I don't know, it all makes sense. If you see it in the right perspective. You don't always see it in the right perspective, but actually it was the way it had to be, I think.

LEVINE: What are you most proud of, or grateful for, that you have done in your lifetime?

GRUENTHAL: Well...

LEVINE: Perhaps not the only thing.

GRUENTHAL: Well, the relationship. Ah, the relationship with my husband and having produced a son which is, ya, having had a family. And also the work I have done, I think. Ya, the translating has been very, very meaningful to me. And, it's -- it's -- has been a wonderful experience also. Because this translating -- that has been something like building bridges, you know, and it's also ---- it has -- it has reconnected me to Germany. And that is --- and it, through the translations also, and through my con-- I don't know, the contacts that developed through the translations, I have, ya, I have developed or found new friendships also. So it's -- it's really like a closing of a circle. So that's something very significant for me.

LEVINE: Well, is there anything else? That may be a very nice place to close the circle on the interview. Is there anything else that you'd care to mention before we close?

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GRUENTHAL: I couldn't really, I couldn't think of anything now.

LEVINE: There's so much. To think of one thing is difficult.

GRUENTHAL: Well, I'm very grateful to you for your patience, and I'm glad it came to this. It's a nice --- it's an unexpectedly pleasant coming-back to this place.

LEVINE: Well, I want to thank you very, very much for a most interesting interview. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I've been speaking with Lola Gruenthal, who came from Germany at 22 years of age in 1937, and I'm signing off.

END OF INTERVIEW