

EI-067

MOLLY PINSKER STOLLER

BIRTH DATE: MARCH 26, 1904

INTERVIEW DATE: 8/23/1991

RUNNING TIME: 1:03:01

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME

INTERVIEW LOCATION: WEST PALM BEACH, FLORIDA

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 12/1993

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 2/1994

**POLAND, 1922
AGE 19**

**RESIDENCES: POLAND: PINSK
US: BROOKLYN, NY BEDFORD AV.**

PORT: CHERBOURG

Oral Historian's Note: There is a low mechanical drone on the recording of this interview. Mrs. Stoller frequently clears her throat throughout the duration of the recording. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of the Oral History Project, 2/23/1994.

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. I am] at the home of Molly Stoller, who came through Ellis Island from Poland in 1922 at the age of nineteen. Today is August 23, 1991 and it's about eleven o'clock in the morning, and we'll begin here. Okay, Molly, maybe we can start with where you were born.

STOLLER: I was born in Pinsk.

LEVINE: Okay. And, uh, Pinsk, Poland.

STOLLER: Right.

LEVINE: Okay. And what kind of a town was Pinsk?

STOLLER: Pinsk was a very nice town, a big town.

LEVINE: A big town.

STOLLER: Yes. And I went to school until about the war broke out.

LEVINE: Okay. About what year was that?

STOLLER: That was 1914.

LEVINE: Okay. And, so when the war broke out, you must have been about . . .

STOLLER: Ten years old.

LEVINE: Ten years old. Okay. And, now, what, were you living in Pinsk with your mother and father?

STOLLER: Yes.

LEVINE: Wow. And what were their names?

STOLLER: My father's name was Michael, and my mother was Rose.

LEVINE: And what was your maiden name?

STOLLER: Pinsker.

LEVINE: Pinscale?

STOLLER: Pinsker. P-I-N-S-K-E-R.

LEVINE: Oh, Pinsker.

STOLLER: Right.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And did you have brothers and sisters?

STOLLER: Oh, yes. I was the oldest one. And I had two brothers and I had five sisters.

LEVINE: And what were their names?

STOLLER: Their names? My one sister was Hannah. Is it important?

LEVINE: Well, just so we have the whole family on record.

STOLLER: Okay. Yetta, and my brother's name was Joseph, and Bernard, and Yetta, and Bernice and Dora and Libby.

LEVINE: Now, did you live in a house, in an apartment?

STOLLER: No, a house. There was no apartments there, yes.

LEVINE: And were you in the country?

STOLLER: No. We lived in the city, yeah.

LEVINE: And could you describe the house, or where you lived, what you remember?

STOLLER: Yeah. It was, it wasn't a lavish house. It was an old house, only three rooms, and we lived there until the war broke out. And then when the war broke out they evacuated us, you know, to a different town because it was very dangerous to stay there, because the Russians went away, and then the Germans came in. And they were fighting there, and being we were a big family they didn't want us to stay in the city. So they put us somewhere in a very small town.

LEVINE: Can you remember any of that? Can you remember what was happening before you went to this other small town?

STOLLER: Well, I remember they were shooting in the streets, you know. And they made fires. They burned the big buildings down and the Russian people, they tried to grab everything, you know. And it was like a revolution. They were fighting. And then, then the war was going on, that's how much I remember.

LEVINE: Now, what was your father doing for work when you were in . . .

STOLLER: He was a carpenter.

LEVINE: A carpenter. Uh-huh. And your mother? Was she working, or she was a housewife?

STOLLER: No, she had enough work. (they laugh)

LEVINE: With the children, right. So then do you remember the name of the small town where you then went?

STOLLER: Yeah. The small town was called Yanov.

LEVINE: Y-A-N-O-V?

STOLLER: Yes. It's about forty miles from Pinsk.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And then how long did you stay there?

STOLLER: Uh, we stayed there, you see, when the Germans left, 1918 was it? And there was typhoid fever, and my father died. And I was fourteen. I was fourteen years old.

LEVINE: And you were living in Yanov then?

STOLLER: Yeah. And my sister, the youngest was one year old.

LEVINE: So then you then went back?

STOLLER: No. We never went back to Pinsk, no, no.

LEVINE: What was it like where you were living in Yanov? What was, where did you live, and could you describe it a little?

STOLLER: We lived in a very, very bad old house. The windows was broken and we had no hot water, no cold water, no water at all. We had to bring water in the house from a pump. And let's

see. We had no heat.

LEVINE: Was it cold?

STOLLER: Oh, yeah. It was very cold. It was very cold.

LEVINE: I see. So then what did you do, then, when your father died, and here's your mother with you and all your brothers and sisters. What happened then?

STOLLER: Oh, what happened. My mother had to, she used to buy eggs and other things, and she would go and sell it on the market, you know. And I stayed home and I took care of the kids.

LEVINE: So that's when you stopped going to school, you said?

STOLLER: Yeah. I didn't go to school.

LEVINE: So you were like the mother when she went out and worked.

STOLLER: Right, right. Yeah. I had to take care of the kids.

LEVINE: Were you closest to any particular one in the family?

STOLLER: No. I took care of every one of them. And then I came here. My uncles sent for me.

LEVINE: I see. So did you come first, just you came, or other people in the family came too?

STOLLER: I was the first one.

LEVINE: Oh, I see. So now your uncle, was that your mother's brother or your father's brother?

STOLLER: No. That was my father's brother.

LEVINE: And he sent you the money, then, to come?

STOLLER: Yeah.

LEVINE: How was it decided that you would come to America?

STOLLER: Well, because it was very bad in Poland. It was Poland then, you know. And I was growing up, and we didn't have anything, you know. So he sent papers for me and I got the visa and I came.

LEVINE: Now, before we talk beyond Poland, did you, were you a religious family at all?

STOLLER: Yeah, in a way we were religious, yes.

LEVINE: To what extent? I mean, did you observe holidays?

STOLLER: Yes. We observed the holidays, and my mother used the

(?), you know, put the candles, and go to temple, schul. And, of course, kept kosher in the kitchen and all.

LEVINE: It must have been very difficult, just because probably everything was scarce.

STOLLER: Well, there was all Jewish people in that town.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

STOLLER: There was all Jewish people. Yeah, yeah. The house was very cold because they, the Russian people, it was a new house, but they broke the windows purposely when they left, you know, with the Russians. (exterior noise) So we had no choice. We moved in when my father was still alive, and he was a carpenter, so he fixed it all up. But, you know, he couldn't fix it up long enough. He died. He was only thirty-eight.

LEVINE: Can you remember anything about Poland, like any little stories or things that happened that stick in your mind even today that you remember from either of the two towns where you were living?

STOLLER: Well, I remember how the (she coughs) Polish people and the Russian soldiers, they were fighting just across from our street. And they were shooting and the bullets were flying, you know. And they broke in our house, and I also had typhus,

typhoid. And I was laying in bed, and my mother had a basket of eggs, like to go and sell in the market. And she put it behind my pillow, you know.

LEVINE: She hid it from them.

STOLLER: She hid it, right. And they walked in, and like they put it there, you know? I'll never forget. I can just see, I was laying, you know. And they walked over and they just took away the basket of eggs. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Huh. It's as though they knew where it was.

STOLLER: Yeah, like they put it there. Here I was sick. I had, you know, a towel over my head because I remember I was just burning with fever, you know. It's a terrible sickness. They had to shave my hair off. And all I was screaming was that they should give me water. I was thirsty all the time. Is that important?

LEVINE: Yes, all of this is important. It's interesting, yeah.

STOLLER: And I would tell my sister she should bring water in a pail, not in a, a bucket of water, you know, because I was so thirsty. (break in tape)

LEVINE: So in other words it was the Jewish people that were all taken to this little town that you were in.

STOLLER: Yeah. Because the Russians, they went with the Russian soldiers. They went with them, you know, to deep in Russia. But the Jewish people, they remained. They didn't want to go. They wouldn't even take them, I don't think. I don't remember, you know. Then I came here.

LEVINE: So let's see. Your uncle sent you the passport and papers.

STOLLER: No, not a passport. (exterior noise) He sent affidavit, an affidavit.

LEVINE: An affidavit.

STOLLER: And I had to go and make a passport and . . .

LEVINE: Where did you have to go for that?

STOLLER: I had to go in a different town.

LEVINE: Was it far away?

STOLLER: No, not too far. About ten miles, yeah. And I had my passport and everything ready.

LEVINE: Did it take a long time for you to get everything in

order for you to go?

STOLLER: Oh, yeah. It took more than a year. It took more than a year, because first children went to their parents. And I went to an uncle, so I didn't come first. I had to come, wait for my next, for my quota.

LEVINE: I see. So were you able to wait in Yanov, living there, while you were waiting for your quota?

STOLLER: Yeah. Well, I stayed with my mother, you know. I stayed with my family, sure.

LEVINE: And then when you were leaving, how did your mother feel about you going?

STOLLER: Well, of course she felt, in a way she felt good because she knew that I'll come here and I'll try to provide and bring them all over. So I came here, and I came with two dollars.

LEVINE: Let's see, first, also, what did you take with you besides the two dollars?

STOLLER: Very little, very little.

LEVINE: Did you pack, do you remember if you had, like, a suitcase, or a?

STOLLER: Yeah, I had a small suitcase.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything that you either took, or anything that you left behind that you wished you had taken, or . . .

STOLLER: I had a couple dresses and a sweater and only the shoes I wore.

LEVINE: And do you remember what you knew about America, or what you expected before you left Poland? What was your idea about what you were going to?

STOLLER: Uh-huh. Well, I knew when I come I have to go to work and sent for my mother and my sisters and brothers.

LEVINE: Well, were you excited about coming to this new country, or it was more that you had a mission, that you had an obligation?

STOLLER: No. I was happy to leave Poland, you know, because, as I said, it was very bad. There is no future there. (she clears her throat) And the main thing that I worried about my family, you know. There was five girls and two boys. (she clears her throat) And the boys were grown up and, do I have to talk? And they were going to take them in the army. So I

send money right away, you know, I went to work. And they wouldn't let my brothers in. And they went to Cuba. And shall I talk?

LEVINE: Let me, let's come to that a little bit later on. But first let's just say, when you got your papers in order, what did you do? How did you start on your trip? Where did you leave from?

STOLLER: Oh, I left from Yanov.

LEVINE: And then where did you go from there?

STOLLER: From there I went to Cherbourg.

LEVINE: Oh, Cherbourg. Now, how did you get there?

STOLLER: Well, with trains. First I went to Warsaw to get the visa.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. So, now, were you traveling by yourself?

STOLLER: Yeah. All by myself.

LEVINE: Were you afraid?

STOLLER: No.

LEVINE: You must have been very courageous, I mean, to take

off on your own not knowing these places.

STOLLER: No.

LEVINE: You didn't feel?

STOLLER: No, I wasn't afraid.

LEVINE: So you took a train. Did you take a train to Warsaw,
or . . .

STOLLER: Yeah. First to Warsaw.

LEVINE: And then how long did you, were you there?

STOLLER: In Warsaw I stayed about ten days.

LEVINE: Now, where did you stay when you?

STOLLER: I had a cousin there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. I see. So you had written letters, or they
knew you were coming, or?

STOLLER: Yeah, yeah. She was a very dear cousin of the same
name, and I stayed in her house until I got the visa. And then
when I got the visa I went home and I packed.

LEVINE: You went back to Yanov.

STOLLER: Yeah.

LEVINE: And then did, when you left was there any, can you remember your farewells, or your leaving?

STOLLER: Yes, I remember very well. It was a very cold day. It was in November. And my mother took me to the train. And the kids were small, most of them. And we said goodbye. And two of my sisters went to London. My mother had, should I say it? (she clears her throat) My mother's family was in England. My mother had a sister and a brother. And they sent for the two little girls. One was ten and one was twelve. So they took the two kids. And then I left.

LEVINE: Now, did the two kids leave when you did?

STOLLER: No. They left after.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. What was your mother's maiden name?

STOLLER: Uh, her second name?

LEVINE: Her name before she married your father.

STOLLER: (she clears her throat) Whitman.

LEVINE: Could you spell it?

STOLLER: It's probably W-H-I-T-M-A-N, probably.

LEVINE: Was she English originally?

STOLLER: No, no, no. But years ago, you know, it was very bad in Russia, too. So my mother said, her brother had to go to the army, and they didn't want to go to the army. So he went to England. It was easier to go to England, but maybe, this is maybe ninety years ago or more. (she clears her throat) And then his sister, my aunt, my mother's sister came there, too. I'll take a little water. (break in tape) The train, you know, and they arrested you and all. I was never afraid.

LEVINE: Well, maybe you're not afraid now because you'd been through much worse than this.

STOLLER: I don't know. This is the way I am. I'm not afraid. What can I tell you, so.

LEVINE: Now, tell me, apparently it was very usual for people to want to avoid going into the army.

STOLLER: Was unusual?

LEVINE: It was usual. A lot of people left to avoid going in the army. Do you have any experience or know firsthand anything about what it was like for a young man to be in the army at that time?

STOLLER: Well, I was here already, because I'm older than my brother, but not much older than him, fifteen months. And when I heard that he has to go in the army he was eighteen. And I knew it was very bad. They were throwing the boys off the trains. And, through the windows. And the man that had a beard, they were pulling the beards off, you know. That the Polish people would do that.

LEVINE: They were throwing them off the trains when they would be signed up to go into the army?

STOLLER: No, no. I mean, usual, anybody, not those that they went to the army, but they didn't want to go to serve the Polish government, put it that way.

LEVINE: Okay.

STOLLER: So, and there was no purpose of going in for four years. What would he get out of it? So my mother wrote a letter. You want to hear that? I should send three hundred dollars for him to go to Cuba. And I didn't have three hundred dollars, because (she clears her throat) whatever I earned I sent my mother, you know. So I borrowed where I worked. And I sent them three hundred dollars, and he went to Cuba.

LEVINE: Well, let's talk about when you were in Warsaw staying

with your cousin. And then you stayed there ten days. And then you went back and packed, and then you left on a train to Cherbourg?

STOLLER: Back to Warsaw. And from there they had a lot of people, you know. And then they sent us to Cherbourg.

LEVINE: Now, when you were in Cherbourg, did you stay there very long?

STOLLER: I can't remember exactly. At least ten days. I had to wait for the boat.

LEVINE: And then where did you stay then?

STOLLER: There was like a big barrack, like in Ellis Island, you know. A lot of people were there from all over.

LEVINE: And this was provided by the steamship company?

STOLLER: Right, right. And they gave us food, you know. And we went out in town.

LEVINE: What was it like there?

STOLLER: It was very nice.

LEVINE: It was.

STOLLER: It was a summer resort. But most of the houses was like shadows, you know, that they were closed for the winter already. But it was very nice.

LEVINE: So the steamship company provided you with accommodations, and it wasn't unpleasant.

STOLLER: No, no. It wasn't unpleasant. I'll tell you, everything was pleasant to me to run away from Poland.

LEVINE: And then did the steamship company like give you a physical exam and all that while you were still in Cherbourg?

STOLLER: Yes. They took us in a room and examined us in our eyes and ears and whatever, you know. And then we went on the boat. First on a small boat and then on a big boat.

LEVINE: What was the name of the ship that you actually came on?

STOLLER: I think it was the Cunard Line, and it was . . .

LEVINE: The Majestic?

STOLLER: Majestic, right. The Majestic, yeah.

LEVINE: Now, what was that like, that ship?

STOLLER: It was a very big ship at that time. (an airplane

passes overhead loudly) It was equipped with everything. And I was very sick on the ship, you know.

LEVINE: Were you in the steerage or were you in a cabin when you were on the ship?

STOLLER: Uh, in a cabin.

LEVINE: And how big a cabin? How many people were there?

STOLLER: I think it was another girl with me, I remember. I can't remember any more. There was another girl with me, yeah.

LEVINE: And what can you remember about that trip?

STOLLER: I remember about that trip that I was sick all the time. I didn't go to eat for five days. (she clears her throat) I was throwing up. Then when I came to Ellis Island they put a sign on me that I'm sick. I came on a Wednesday. And you want me to talk? (she clears her throat) And they told me that I can't, my uncle came to take me off the ship, and they wouldn't let me off.

LEVINE: Now, when you got to Ellis Island did you go off the ship and stay at Ellis Island?

STOLLER: Yeah. I got off the ship, yes. No, they didn't keep me on the ship. They put me like in a room where there was a

lot of people. And in a few days I got better because I was able to eat.

LEVINE: Did they mark with chalk on your clothes? Is that how they indicated that you were sick?

STOLLER: No. Just a little sign. It said, "Sick." S-I-C-K. and they gave us food.

LEVINE: What did you, what was Ellis Island like when you stayed there?

STOLLER: Well, it was a big, big, big building. I can't remember too much, because I was still, like, dizzy, you know, five days.

LEVINE: It took five days, the voyage?

STOLLER: That's all.

LEVINE: That's fast.

STOLLER: Yeah, it was a very good, one of the best boats at that time.

LEVINE: Now, do you remember the food at Ellis Island?

STOLLER: Well, they gave soup, sandwiches and chicken, you know. They gave good food.

LEVINE: And were you able to speak any English when you came?

STOLLER: No, not a word. Not a word. Nothing.

LEVINE: So, but you could communicate. There were people there that you could . . .

STOLLER: Well, yeah. People speak Jewish, you know, and some Russian, you know. But they spoke Jewish.

LEVINE: So you could make yourself understood.

STOLLER: Yeah, of course. That's my language, you know. So I was able to speak it to them.

LEVINE: You said before you had two dollars when you came.
(she clears her throat)

STOLLER: Yes. My mother gave me two dollars. That's all she had. But I didn't spend a penny, you know. So when I came I still had the two dollars, and like the next day, or two days later I wrote a letter my mother and I put the two dollars in the letter.

LEVINE: Now, when you, do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when you first came into the harbor?

STOLLER: No.

LEVINE: No. Then what? Your uncle met you?

STOLLER: Yes. My uncle came.

LEVINE: To Ellis Island?

STOLLER: Yes.

LEVINE: And do you remember your meeting? Did you know him?
Had you known him?

STOLLER: Well, when I was about five years old he came to our
house before he left to America. So I remembered him. He
looked like my father, so I remembered him.

LEVINE: Do you remember the meeting with him? Can you
describe when you met him at Ellis Island?

STOLLER: Yeah. It was very painful, you know. And he was
crying and I was crying. (she is moved)

LEVINE: In a way it was a happy meeting. You were able to get
away from Poland.

STOLLER: Yeah. (she is moved)

LEVINE: Do you remember where you went with him when you left
Ellis Island?

STOLLER: Yeah. He took me to his house.

LEVINE: Where was he living?

STOLLER: Bedford Avenue, 568.

LEVINE: In Brooklyn.

STOLLER: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And did he, was he married?

STOLLER: Oh, yeah. He was the oldest one. My father was almost the youngest.

LEVINE: I see. So he had children, also?

STOLLER: Oh, yeah. He had already married children. He was a man about maybe sixty or fifty-five, something like that, you know. He was the oldest in the family. And they treated me nice.

LEVINE: How long did you stay living in his house?

STOLLER: I stayed there until I got married, I want you to know.

LEVINE: Wow. So when you were like nineteen when you arrived.

STOLLER: Right.

LEVINE: And then how long, what did you do? Did you work?

STOLLER: I went to work, of course.

LEVINE: Where did you work?

STOLLER: I worked on children's coats.

LEVINE: In Brooklyn or in Manhattan?

STOLLER: No, in New York, yeah. I lived in New York.

LEVINE: Now, was your uncle working in the garment industry?

STOLLER: No, no. My uncle was also a carpenter, you know. And he used to take jobs and rebuild stores and fix houses and in that line, you know.

LEVINE: So how did you come to go to New York to work in the garment industry. How did you know about that and how did you get there?

STOLLER: You know landsman?

LEVINE: Yeah.

STOLLER: His daughter was a poor lady making children's coats. So my uncle knew her father, so my uncle asked, he knew that his daughter is a poor lady, because they belonged in one

society, you know. You know, years ago people belonged in a society where they came from the city, you know. Like for the cemetery and all that, you know.

LEVINE: So this person came from your city?

STOLLER: He was a landsman. He came from our city. My uncle knew him and he knew that his daughter is a poor lady buying children's coats. So he said that his niece came from Europe and I would like to have a job. (she clears her throat)
So . . .

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

STOLLER: The Seventh Avenue. You want to know the name of it?

LEVINE: Yeah.

STOLLER: Silverman and Fox.

LEVINE: Silverman and Fox?

STOLLER: Fox, fox.

LEVINE: F-O-X?

STOLLER: Yeah.

LEVINE: And did you like your work? What was it like working there?

STOLLER: I learned to work on the machine, and I was a very good seamstress. And I worked and whatever I earned I sent my mother. And then I brought my mother here.

LEVINE: Now, how long did it take you to save up enough to . . .

STOLLER: Well, ah, I didn't save up. I always borrowed. I always borrowed money, and I sent home, and my mother came.

LEVINE: Now, how much did it take to bring her over? How much money did it take?

STOLLER: Well, I think about three hundred dollars, yeah.

LEVINE: So you brought your mother over first, or . . .

STOLLER: Yeah. My mother had to come first because they wouldn't let, sisters to sisters. But when I brought my mother, my mother was able to bring the children.

LEVINE: I see. So then did all of your brothers and sisters eventually come?

STOLLER: Well, yes. They all came, but it took a long time,

you know. It took a long time.

LEVINE: So when your mother came then, did she also stay with your uncle?

STOLLER: She did. No, no. I was married (she coughs) at that time. I was married in June, and my mother came in November.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. So you worked seven years, you say?

STOLLER: Seven years, like.

LEVINE: And then you got married.

STOLLER: Yes.

LEVINE: Now, who did you marry?

STOLLER: I married a fellow from Roumania.

LEVINE: And he had also come from Roumania?

STOLLER: Well, he came from Roumania to Israel, and from Israel he came here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And so you married, how did you happen to meet him? Do you remember how you met him?

STOLLER: Well, in a club.

LEVINE: This was a club for . . .

STOLLER: You know, single boys and girls would come and get together, you know.

LEVINE: Could you describe anything about, like, what it was like in the club, what the club was like?

STOLLER: Well, it was a club, like I said, for young boys and girls. We would get together and discuss things and sometimes we would have a dance and sit and talk, you know. That's about all.

LEVINE: Was that kind of the focus of your social life?

STOLLER: Social life, yes. It was social life.

LEVINE: And were there a lot, were there people from Poland, from all different countries that came to the clubs?

STOLLER: Yes, most of them from Russia. Most of them was from Russia. A few others, you know, from other countries.

LEVINE: Was this club in Brooklyn?

STOLLER: Yes. In Brooklyn, on Marcy Avenue.

LEVINE: Marcy?

STOLLER: Marcy, yeah. Marcy and South Ninth Street, something like that.

LEVINE: Did it have a name, the club? Do you remember the name of it?

STOLLER: The name of the club was Dr. Hertzal.

LEVINE: (she laughs) Dr. Hertzal?

STOLLER: Hmm.

LEVINE: How did it get that name? What did that mean?

STOLLER: Well, you heard of Dr. Hertzal. He was organizer for Israel, you know. Yeah.

LEVINE: I see. So it was mostly Jewish people in the club.

STOLLER: Yeah. All Jewish boys and girls that came from Europe.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, was the neighborhood where your uncle lived, was it a Jewish neighborhood?

STOLLER: Uh, yes, a Jewish neighborhood. Are you acquainted with Brooklyn?

LEVINE: A little bit.

STOLLER: Yeah.

LEVINE: So you met your husband at the club.

STOLLER: Right, mmm.

LEVINE: Did you have a courtship? I mean . . .

STOLLER: What do you mean by that?

LEVINE: I mean, uh, like, after you met him, did you start seeing him right away and did you . . .

STOLLER: Uh, yes. Well, no. First we would get together in the club and then went out like on, in the summertime, on a boat ride, you know, or hikes and other, what can I tell you? Function, something like that, you know. To a park, to a concert. So we would all get together, sit together, and then he would take me home and then he would start asking me out on his own. And then one day he said he would like to marry me. So I said, "I can't get married until I bring my family here." So he wanted to know what I meant by that. I said, that was before my mother came. I said, "Well, I had a mother and sisters." Because my other brother already went to Cuba, too. So, and the two sisters went to England, so I still had three sisters. I says, "I have a mother and three sisters that I send money." So he didn't say anything, and we kept on going. Then

we decided to get married.

LEVINE: Can you remember what it was you liked about him?

STOLLER: Well, he was a very good man, and then he brought his mother. Both mothers came the same time.

LEVINE: And they both stayed with you?

STOLLER: Both stayed with me, and I lived on the sixth floor apartment, sixth floor, upstairs. (she clears her throat) Walkup. It was hard. I went to work. And, uh . . .

LEVINE: And what was it like having the two mothers when you were just married.

STOLLER: In three rooms.

LEVINE: In three rooms. (they laugh) And did they get along?

STOLLER: Yeah, yeah. They got along, they got along.

LEVINE: And was your mother happy to come?

STOLLER: Yeah, she was happy, but she left the three girls there. So she looked, she was only forty when she came here. And I couldn't afford to keep them all up, so my mother had to go to work.

LEVINE: Now, where did she work?

STOLLER: She worked as a cook.

LEVINE: Oh. Was she a good cook?

STOLLER: Yes, she was a good cook. She worked for a rabbi in Bensonhurst because she needed money to send. I couldn't afford, you know. So she worked as a cook, you know. Then she got married. You want to know all that?

LEVINE: Yeah, sure.

STOLLER: It's not interesting. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Yeah, it is interesting. So who did she marry?

STOLLER: She married a very nice man. He had a grocery store.

LEVINE: I see. So then she was able to bring . . .

STOLLER: Yeah. She brought the three girls over from Poland.

LEVINE: Now, did they come through Ellis Island as well?

STOLLER: No. They came in 1934. There was no more Ellis Island. I don't know. Did they come with a boat, or with an airplane. It's a good question. I don't know.

LEVINE: Well, now, tell me about your two brothers. How was that that they got to go to Cuba? Can you remember anything about that?

STOLLER: Well, as I told you, they didn't want to go serve the army.

LEVINE: Because they were really against the Polish government, and they didn't want to put in four years in the army.

STOLLER: Right. There was no future there.

LEVINE: Yeah. So was it easy or difficult for them to get to Cuba?

STOLLER: No, not too hard, no. They weren't allowed to work there.

LEVINE: So what did they do?

STOLLER: What did they do? They were selling, like, beets. They had a pushcart, and they were selling beets and kerchiefs and socks, stockings, maybe underwear.

LEVINE: In Cuba?

STOLLER: Yeah, Havana.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, did they stay there very long?

STOLLER: (she coughs) They got married there.

LEVINE: They married Cuban . . .

STOLLER: No, there were immigrant girls. And after a while they came here. My mother sent for them, and they came here.

LEVINE: Can you remember when you saw your brothers or sisters when they first came over, what that was like?

STOLLER: Yes. Well, it was very dramatic. And, well, of course, we all cried and were happy to see, yeah. And my sisters from England came here, too, with their families. They got married in England. They were only ten and eleven when they went there. They went to school there, and they got married there.

LEVINE: Can you remember learning English when you, after you came? How did you learn English?

STOLLER: I went to night school.

LEVINE: So you were working in the garment industry and going to night school?

STOLLER: (she coughs) Right.

LEVINE: And did it come easy to you or was it, can you remember?

STOLLER: Well, nothing comes easy, you know.

LEVINE: So let's see. Then, when you got married, where were you living then?

STOLLER: I was living in Williamsburg, not far where I came, you know.

LEVINE: Where you were living before you came.

STOLLER: Before, yeah.

LEVINE: And then you stayed there, pretty much?

STOLLER: When I got married, after a year we moved to Hempstead. My husband got a job in a movie. He was a moving picture operator.

LEVINE: Oh, a projectionist?

STOLLER: Yes. So we moved there. In fact, it's going to be September first it's going to be sixty years that we moved to Hempstead. And I lived there, is that important?

LEVINE: Yeah, sure.

STOLLER: And I lived there until I, my husband, my first husband died. I don't want to talk if you don't want to hear, if you're interesting.

LEVINE: Oh, no. This is interesting, yes.

STOLLER: My first husband died 1962. And I remained, you know, had a house there, and my daughter was married and my son went to college and then in 1975 I married somebody from around I knew, you know.

LEVINE: From Hempstead.

STOLLER: From Hempstead, yeah. And then I came with him here. And he died eight years ago.

LEVINE: Well, are there any ways that you think you have maintained, that you, ways that you learned in Poland that you kind of kept with you throughout your life?

STOLLER: Well, I'll tell you. I didn't see Poland too much, you know. Because, what do you mean by that?

LEVINE: I mean, like, you know, maybe traditions . . .

STOLLER: About the government?

LEVINE: . . . that you, uh, that you had, or ways you did

things, or ideas that stem from when you were in Poland that you still . . .

STOLLER: No, nothing.

LEVINE: That still influence you, let's say.

STOLLER: No, not a thing. I love this country and Poland I forgot a long time ago. I don't even want to remember. And the four years since my father died, I was four years in Poland. So I had a very hard life, because the government was fighting with each other, with Russians and other groups, and we were afraid to go out most of the time, and my mother was away and I had to take care of the kids, so I really don't know much about Poland. All I know that it was very, very hard. That's all I can say.

LEVINE: Now, because you were Jewish, did that make it harder?

STOLLER: Well, let's put it that way, it didn't make it easier. (she clears her throat) It didn't make it easier, so.

LEVINE: Well, is there anything else that you can think of about either being in Poland or the trip here or your life getting settled here that you can think of? Any incidents? Any experiences that you particularly remembered? Have you ever met anybody who you knew in Poland after you came here, I mean, besides your family?

STOLLER: Uh, I don't think so. No, because I moved away from New York to Hempstead, so I didn't meet, you know, in Hempstead there was, most of them, Gentile people, and I haven't met anybody, you know. I had a big family. They all used to come to me. My sisters, they got married. And then my two brothers came from Cuba, you know, and my sisters from England, and they all came to visit me in Hempstead, you know.

LEVINE: Well, it sounds like you were the front runner in the family to come first and . . .

STOLLER: Oh, yes, yes. They all came to me. They still do, you know. Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, is there anything else you can think of that might be . . .

STOLLER: Well, I can't make up no stories. (she laughs)

LEVINE: No, I don't want you to do that.

STOLLER: (she coughs) I wish I could make up something. I know that Poland was a very hard life. I know when I left all the windows was broken in the house and the children were crying, you know.

LEVINE: And then was your life hard here, as well, when you

got to the United States?

STOLLER: You mean how I was treated? (she clears herthroat)

LEVINE: Yeah. How you were treated, and I guess your living conditions.

STOLLER: Yes. Well, I told you my uncle, my aunt, they had a nice house. And I always had to help them in the house, wash the dishes and do other chores, you know, to try to be like one in the family, you know. And I got along with everybody. And I worked, I always sent everything, try to bring my mother. That's all I had on my mind. Yeah.

LEVINE: So did you have fun when you, I mean, were there any enjoyable kinds of things that you did?

STOLLER: Well, I couldn't afford. (she coughs) I remember one time our club went out to see a show on Broadway. I still remember. It was "Molly Pickin," and it was two dollars to go in to see the show. And when I saw by the ticket office, I thought maybe it was a quarter or fifty cents. (she laughs) And I saw it was two dollars, I don't remember who I stayed next to. I said, "Oh, I got such a headache." And I went home. I didn't want to spend two dollars. I couldn't afford. I

couldn't afford to spend any money, because I used to borrow a hundred dollars all the time from my boss, and he would take it off on the wages, you know. And I worked overtime, so I couldn't afford even to go in a movie.

LEVINE: So did things get easier then after a while when you were out in Hempstead?

STOLLER: Well, in Hempstead was much easier then, and my mother was here already. And she took off more or less the burden. And then she got married, and then they were older, you know. But the two brothers made a living in Cuba more or less, and the two sisters they, in England, one stayed by an uncle, another one by an aunt, so they took care of them. So I had less responsibility. Let's put it that way, you know.

LEVINE: So it sounds like you're glad that you came.

STOLLER: Oh, yes, yes, yes. I would never want to go back, never. It never came to my mind, yes.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, if that's, I think that's a good stopping point, and thank you very much.

STOLLER: You're welcome. (she laughs)

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service on

June 23rd. (sound of an airplane is heard) I'm in West Palm Beach, Florida, with Molly Stoller. (break in tape)

LEVINE: Say it again.

STOLLER: The landlord was throwing us out, so we were moving whatever. We didn't have much, but whatever we had. So we hired a horse and wagon with a Gentile man, you know. And I was at that time about, my father died already. I was fourteen years old. So when we came to the destination to take off everything, so we had a rope, you know, that tied the furniture and all. So he wanted the rope, that man, the driver. And I didn't want to give it to him, because we needed that rope. We needed it to hang out clothes outside, you know. So he took out a hatchet, and he said, "(Polish)" "I'll kill you." And I wasn't scared. And I pulled out the hatchet from his hand, and I pulled out the rope, and I ran away with it. I didn't let him take it.

LEVINE: Wow.

STOLLER: I didn't let him take it. We were used to it, to fight, to fight for everything, for a little rope. It meant nothing. He could have killed me, but I wouldn't let him. I wouldn't let him get away with it. I took the rope.

LEVINE: Wow. (break in tape)

STOLLER: During the war, when my father was still alive. And at that time, I must have been in the, when we lived in Yanov. I must have been eleven or twelve years old. There was no telephone, and no mail or nothing. In black market went on at that time. So my father had, what do you call that, wheat, wheat, to bake bread, you know. So he wanted to let them know they should come and get it. So they, he sent me. That was about three miles to go over a bridge to let, the buyer, he should come and take it. My father, he hid all this behind a cemetery. So I went there, and it was dark already, because you weren't allowed to, after it got dark you weren't allowed to go out. So I went and I told the man that my father has everything prepared for him, and we should go back in the dark, you know. So I came back with him, I came back. It must have been eleven, twelve o'clock at night, I don't know. And then there was, the patroon. The patroon, patrol, right. Just about a block from our house. So I saw there was light there. (she coughs) I said to him, "You better stay there. Don't go. There must be trouble. Why would the light be there?" So he went back, and I walked the bridge and I came to the house. I walked in the house, and my father was arrested. They caught my father. And I lay down on the floor, you know. And they came in with

searchlights. And they were looking, and they said, "(Polish)" You know, that means, "God damn Jew." You know, that I'm making myself sleep, you know. He knew that I wasn't asleep, but he couldn't prove it. I made myself that I'm asleep. Then the next day my father was arrested, and they were going to send him to jail. But the whole town came out and was crying. They were begging him. And they put him just for a month in jail, and then they let him out. Because they just got my father without the wheat. And he said at that time that he went to the bathroom, because we didn't have no toilet. You had to go behind the, the tree, or whatever. You know, they had no toilet, you know, they had no water. So I remember, just like now, when I was laying on the floor, because I don't know. We only had two rooms there, so we slept on the floor, yeah.

LEVINE: So you came in before they came in with the lights.

STOLLER: Yes.

LEVINE: And they laid down on the floor.

STOLLER: Yes, yeah. Because I saw that there was light, and there was no, there wasn't supposed to be any light, so I told him to go back. So he wasn't caught, the driver that was going to take the, buy the wheat, you know.

LEVINE: Now, was this curfew just for Jewish people?

STOLLER: No, for everybody, yeah. You weren't allowed to have any lights on. Six o'clock, you know, you weren't allowed to have any lights on.

LEVINE: So your father must have been a popular man for everyone to turn out . . .

STOLLER: Yeah. My father was a very smart man. He was a popular man. In fact, they took him to work, you know, for the Germans.

LEVINE: In what way? What did he do?

STOLLER: Well, like to fix up things or make bridges or, you know, fix roads or fix houses or fix windows where they had to live, you know, the soldiers and all. So then when the war ended, as I said, typhus, typhoid fever was all over. I had it. My mother and sisters, we all laid on the floor. There was only one doctor in the whole town.

LEVINE: And no hospital.

STOLLER: No, no hospital.

LEVINE: So a lot of people died . . .

STOLLER: Oh, in every house.

LEVINE: Really.

STOLLER: In every house somebody died. I remember across the street a young boy sixteen years old died, and the father or mother or sister in every house, they died.

LEVINE: Was that usual that the typhoid fever or some sickness like that would come in and . . .

STOLLER: Wipe out? Yeah, because the water was bad, you know, and there was no food, and dirty and everything, you know. And the soldiers, they were full of lice. Great, big lice like that, you know. (she gestures) The soldiers came in our house during the night and they slept, they took off doors and put chairs like that. And in the morning when they got up their clothes was big lice like that.

LEVINE: You mean the soldiers would come and just stay in your house?

STOLLER: Yeah. Where would they go?

LEVINE: And were they mean to you, or how were they?

STOLLER: No, they weren't mean. In some places they killed people in some places. But not in our town, not in our town.

They didn't kill nobody, but we heard, as I said, there was no telephone, no letters or mail. But we heard when people came they ran away from these smaller towns. When they came to our town, Yanov, and they said that there was people killed there.

LEVINE: And these were Russian soldiers?

STOLLER: The Russian soldiers, yes, yes. All the Russian soldiers. (break in tape)

LEVINE: Okay. So you're talking now about your father's father's father.

STOLLER: Yes. At that time, maybe a hundred and thirty, forty years ago, they used to grab Jewish kids and they would send them away to Siberia for a long, long time. They changed their names. Not everybody was a Pinsker. There were four boys. One was Colodney, one was Comma. And I don't know what another one was. I don't know. So Pinsker, I think they took it after the city, they named themself.

LEVINE: I see. You were saying, about a hundred and fifty years ago the Russians . . .

STOLLER: Used to grab little boys eight years old, and they would send them away in the army to serve in the army for a long, long time. When they came back their parents didn't even

know them, and nobody even came back. Most of them didn't come back. Where are they going to come? They didn't know any life. They kidnapped them.

LEVINE: And they stayed in the army for, like, twenty years or something?

STOLLER: Twenty, or twenty-five, yeah. (she pauses) It was a hard life, always, in Russia, yeah. (tape ends)