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CORNELIUS PETER BREURE

BIRTHDATE: AUGUST 16, 1920

INTERVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 25, 1995

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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The Netherlands, 1928

Age 8

SHIP: *Statendam*

PORT:

RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: Today is September 25, 1995 and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. I'm here today in the Ellis Island Oral History Studio with Mr. Cornelius Peter Breure.

BREURE: Breure.

LEVINE: Breure. Yeah.

BREURE: Breure

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LEVINE: (laughs) Okay. And Mr. Breure came here from the Netherlands in 1928 when he was eight years of age.

BREURE: Correct.

LEVINE: Wow I'm delighted to see you and I – happy that you fought the traffic to be here today.

BREURE: Good. Yeah.

LEVINE: Let's start at the beginning Mr. Breue. If you would say your birth date for the tape. Your birth date again.

BREURE: August 16, 1920–

LEVINE: [interposed] And–

BREURE: –I was born

LEVINE: Okay and where in the Netherlands were you born?

BREURE: In Skeer Zee. And that is S-K-E-E-R. Skeer Zee. The second one is Z-E-E.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did you live in Skeer Zee up until you left at eight years of age?

BREURE: We were on a farm there yes.

LEVINE: Okay.

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BREURE: And the farm burnt down on account of being hay that was wet and stored in the barn. And internal combustion. And the house was attached to the barn in those countries and the whole business went up.

LEVINE: How old were you when that happened?

BREURE: That happened to me when I was about three – three four years old.

LEVINE: So you probably – do you have any memory of that house and barn?

BREURE: No, no. I don't have much memory of that at all. No. My oldest sister has told us about it because she was the oldest at the time and explained it more or less to us. You know, but we all were able to get out of the house.

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

BREURE: Matthew.

LEVINE: Matthew and your mother's name?

BREURE: Cornelia.

LEVINE: Cornelia. And was – do you remember your mother's maiden name.

BREURE: Yes. Her name was Cornelia Boudeling.

LEVINE: How do you spell–

BREURE: [interposed] That's B-O-U-D-E-L-I-N-G.

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LEVINE: Okay. And do you remember your grandmother or grandfathers?

BREURE: I remember my mother's parents on a visit on the – with the train. And going with her – which was about an hours ride I would say – and visiting her also on a farm. And having the experience of having lunch there after we got off and in their home. And visiting the barn and the cows, what they had, and the horses. And also enjoying a good homemade meal there. You know. Of course she made homemade bread and then she used to slice that and butter it for you and everything else and hand you a piece. Yeah that's always was in my memory, you know.

LEVINE: Was this a single trip or did you visit more than once?

BREURE: That – once I was there and I remember going into a town – a Middleburg [ph] – which was like an average city – maybe of forty, fifty thousand people, something like that and seeing the sights of the town itself, you know. Which you don't do as a boy on a farm that you get into the city once in awhile and see what else – how all the other people live.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BREURE: Yeah.

LEVINE: So now, you were – you had – one older sister. Did you have any brothers and sisters.

BREURE: Yeah we had altogether six boys and one girl. My sister was the oldest.

LEVINE: I see and where did you fall in line as far as the boys.

BREURE: I fall in line about the fourth one down.

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LEVINE: (laughs) I see so you were in the like in the middle.

BREURE: My mother didn't have no more girls. She was gonna call her— if I was born Cornelia like her so she ended up calling me Cornelius. And that was that. And then there was still two boys after that. And one was the stowaway. We call him the stowaway the youngest one. He was born six weeks after we landed here. So we always call him the stowaway son.

LEVINE: (laughs) I see, I see.

BREURE: And—

LEVINE: [interposed] Okay—

BREURE: —he's still livin'.

LEVINE: Oh.

BREURE: Yep.

LEVINE: Well, that was your grand—

BREURE: Parents.

LEVINE: Parents. You're mother's parents rather. How about your father's parents?

BREURE: Never knew them.

LEVINE: Never knew them.

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BREURE: Never knew them. No. No.

LEVINE: Okay. Well what was life like on a farm in Holland when you were a little boy?

BREURE: Farm life I very – don't remember too much of. Being that I was only five when we did leave or maybe less, I was four maybe. When the farm burnt down. So by the time we got out of the farm, I remember visiting farms in the area because that's all there was there you know, farms.

LEVINE: What do you remember about them?

BREURE: Not really m– I can remember riding on the hay wagon. And getting the cows in for milking something like that. But as far as actually working on a farm, not so. You know, 'cause I was only young anyway. Yeah.

LEVINE: So what did your family do after the farm burned?

BREURE: After the farm burnt my father went and moved to a town of St. Lauren's. S-A-T L-A-U-R-E-N-'-S. That's how it's written. And my father became a motorcycle dispatcher. In other words he took mail from different towns on his motorbike.

LEVINE: Oh.

BREURE: And I guess we stayed there until I was about eight and then they must have decided in the meantime to put their money together and make passage for America.

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LEVINE: Do you remember any foods that your mother, or grandmother, or anybody else made when you were still there in Holland?

BREURE: Not really. Not really. No. I couldn't say – or I wouldn't say they may – used to make a different salad or something. They used to call it stomput [ph] That was lettuce with bacon, and different varieties of – or I think lettuce and tomatoes or something like that you know. That's about the only thing I remember. Some [unclear] thing. But mostly Dutch people were meat and potato people, you know? And especially in the farm countries. Like cabbage and turnips and all kind of vegetables – beets, carrots, you know, they grow. Everything was grown on a farm and that's what you put in. Whether you jarred it, you know. That I do remember. My mother do one a little bit, you know.

LEVINE: Do you remember market day?

BREURE: Market day I don't recall really to say that my father would take stuff to the market or anything. You know I think his was more on a agriculture, like raising wheat or something or rye for the animals you know. That's about as far as I coul– say about the farm really. Yeah.

LEVINE: How about canals? Did you – were you – were you – any experiences with that?

BREURE: The canals – well we moved from the farm I do remember the dikes and the canals. And we would see the top of the mast of a ship going. And we would run up to the top of the dike to see what kind of a ship it was because it was going through the canal. Cause Holland is low land most of the homes were below the dikes. Subject to flooding if anything ever drastic happened. That's why they had the windmills to always pump the

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water and push it back into the canals and into the ocean to relieve it, you know. That I remember, yeah.

LEVINE: Did you ever see a flood or—?

BREURE: No, I did not see a flood. I only seen a flood when I went back in World War II.

LEVINE: Oh you went back there in World War II?

BREURE: I was in there—

LEVINE: [interposed] Oh good.

BRUERE: —along the southern part of Holland yeah.

LEVINE: Okay well we'll get to that part.

BREURE: Yeah that is later.

LEVINE: Yeah. Right. (both laugh) Um okay how about any holidays or any kinds of festivals or festivities that you remember as a little boy before you came to the United States.

BREURE: Well the only thing they really mostly celebrate in the big town in Holland was what they call *Orangeday*. *Orange* was—

LEVINE: [interposed] How do you spell that?

BREURE: *Orania* is orange and it O-R-A-N-G-E. *Orange*-day. Which is the queens day in Holland. And then everybody dresses up and has fairs in the city

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and picnics like and different kind of good times you know. Dancing in the streets or wagons dressed up in costumes – covered wagons something – some of them were horse drawn carriages. And they're all gala, you know. And really beautiful to see, at that time.

LEVINE: Do you have have any id– any recollection of like what it was like to have a king and a queen in your country?

BREURE: Not so much as a young boy. No. The only thing that I remember is going to a wedding in Holland which was a relation and we went in a wagon which was covered, like a covered wagon, which the American people went west with. And that's how we went to the church – first they went to the city hall. Cause they had to get approved for marriage. And from the city hall they went to the church and finalized the marriage. But it was all done in a covered wagon. And this involved about five, six different covered wagons where all the guests and relation were taken and, you know. And then of course we had the festivities at the home of the farm people wherever that was that time who was getting married, you know? You know.

LEVINE: What church was it? Did you go to church with your family?

BREURE: It was a reformed church. Yeah I think they call it (in Dutch). That's the Dutch word, you know. But it's reformed. That's what the word is – Reformed Church. Yeah. That was my religion of the protestant faith. Yeah.

LEVINE: Did you do any spe– specially – did you do any kinds of religious rituals? Did you – do you remember like confirmation or any other events around the church?

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BREURE: No, no I couldn't say that. No. It's just a question of attending it, maybe twice on Sunday morning and afternoon services they had. And you went, regardless, you know. Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about the home you lived in right before you came here? What it looked like or—?

BREURE: The farm home not so much. The other home I can recall a little bit because beigns that I lived on the farm – not on the farm – in the home itself. But mother was doing and wash on a Monday or washing and sometimes cooking and making in the jars of fruit or vegetables for winter supply or something like that. That I can recall. Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember what kind of stove your mother had for cooking?

BREURE: Yeah the call it *kakle* which is a black cast iron stove of course, like we used to come here in the country too. And then firing it up used to help her bring the fire wood and coal to start up the fire. And the of course she made homemade breads and pies or what have you. You know. And always good Dutch meals cause Dutch people did eat hearty. Well like I said, potatoes and meat people, right?

LEVINE: Yeah. How do you spell *kakle*?

BREURE: *Kakle* I think is K-A-K-L-E. *Kakle*. Yeah.

LEVINE: And that was typical that kind of stove.

BREURE: That was ty– that's what they call it yep. Yeah and then it had an upper parts of it with shelves where you could keep it warm while you prepared the other stuff that had to be done too, you know, for supper or so. Yeah.

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LEVINE: So let's see – there were seven children?

BREURE: Seven children – six –

LEVINE: Well six there.

BREURE: Yes. Six boys and one girl. Yep.

LEVINE: And the place that you lived in, was it big, was it small, do you remem–?

BREURE: Well I would imagine it had about two – three bedrooms. Kitchen. Parlor. And then after in the back of the house was like a shed where they kept stuff, supplies, my father used to park his motorbike in there and the attic was like a storage for your vegetables and what have you, like pears and apples you kept on the floor of the room so they would not spoil, you know. And once in awhile we'd help ourself to an apple or pear if it was ripe enough and eat it, you know. That I remember.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about your father's mailman motorcycle job?

BREURE: Once in awhile he used to take me on the backseat and give me a ride from nearby little village just where I was a drop off and just coming back or so. I do remember once in awhile having a ride, yeah.

LEVINE: Was that like a real treat for you?

BREURE: Yeah that was a treat because we always fought to – who'd be the one to get the ride, you know. Cause he would only take one at a time on that motorcycle, yep.

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LEVINE: Can you remember any other things that were like a treat when you were little?

BREURE: Not necessarily so, no.

LEVINE: Were you closest to any particular brother or your sister?

BREURE: No – I was mostly close I guess to my second youngest brother cause we were only three years apart. And we used to always do things together more or less, you know.

LEVINE: What were the kinds of activities do you remember?

BREURE: You know like playing, different games or riding on a bike or something or going up the street or so and visiting a farm or something and playing with their children over there. I do recall that. Going to school when I was five years old in wooden *klumpen*. And then going into the school you would automatically take off your jacket if – or coat – and your *klumpen* and you would park them under your coat in the hallway. And you socks had leather bottoms so you would walk into your class room in your socks with leather bottoms and that's how you got into the class room and sat down. When you came home you'd pick them up – your shoes and your jacket – and went back home.

LEVINE: Were the *klumpen* taken off because they were noisy? Or was it for cleanliness in the school room?

BREURE: I guess more so kind of noise if you would be in the classroom and you were up and down and moving around I would think so yeah. But that was the customs that's as far as I remember, you know.

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LEVINE: What do you remember about wearing wooden shoes?

BREURE: Wooden shoes I remember as far as wintertime we would slide on the canals. And the wooden shoes would very much make a very slippery slide in time and then we enjoyed it. Especially going down the dike in snow and then up in the canal which was frozen and seeing how far we could go with the shoes in sliding. And then once I remember breaking my wooden shoes in half and my dad had to take wire and tie them because we couldn't afford to buy another pair of shoes.

LEVINE: Do you remember how your broke 'em?

BREURE: By hitting the ice the wrong way you know sliding on the ice and I guess I must have hit something hard, a stone or something and they split right down the middle. Then my dad said now what do we do. The solution was to tie them with wire. And wear 'em. (he laughs) Absolutely yeah. That I recall. Yeah. Yeah and that was school.

LEVINE: Do you remember getting in trouble in any ways when you were little?

BREURE: Trouble? The only trouble I remember is getting ready for school one morning and my mother was putting the big bucket of water on the stove to heat and Dad picked it and dropped it down and I was combing my hair on the cabinet which I jumped up on to get by the mirror to get ready for school. And automatically I jumped off with my right foot in that bucket of hot water and the skin was scalded on my right leg and I can remember sitting by the front window, wrapped up and the kids going to school and I was waving and saying "Hey I can play hooky today." Right?

LEVINE: You just got one day out of it?

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BREURE: No I got more than one day out of it. I think because—

LEVINE: [interposed] It was bad.

BREURE: —the burn was more of less second or third degree. That I remember, yep. That was one of my experiences as far as with my foot.

LEVINE: Do you remember the social life of like your mother and father? Did they get together with other people? Or what did they do?

BREURE: They did more or less in the neighborhood I would say, with church and different people of the church you know. They would have like coffeeklatz [ph], where they would call it, you know, coffee times together. I remember that a little bit?

LEVINE: Do you remember any singing or dancing?

BREURE: Singing in church I remember. Dancing no. But singing in the church and attending church, you know. Walking to the church and back. But — festivities I only remember as far as the wedding was. That's about the only thing that sticks in my mind you know. You know.

LEVINE: Do you know what prompted your mother and father to make the decision and plan to come to this country.

BREURE: Well with the farm burning down, I would think that was the biggest decision. It took awhile I imagine for them to make the preparations as far as the costs and so forth to have ship — board passes, you know. And that was about it.

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LEVINE: Did they ever talk about America or did you have any idea of what you were coming to?

BREURE: No, no, no, no. I had no knowledge. Being five years old I think at that time I didn't have no idea. Even later on which was when I was near eight when we did make the break, you know, I imagine my parents saved somewhat to make the decision to come. And then being sponsored – we were sponsored by our Reformed Church here in America.

LEVINE: Oh, where was that?

BREURE: That's – that's – in Passaic. The Reformed Church was next to our town in Clifton where I live. In Passaic they sponsored families – Dutch families – to come across you know. And then they helped us after we got here. Put us up in a place, a house, get us settled more or less, you know.

LEVINE: I see, well do you remember your mother and father's preparations? Do you remember for example what happened to where you lived? Did they sell it or were they renting it or–?

BREURE: Yeah they were renting at the time I believe. Yeah. They did not own it.

LEVINE: And do you remember what they packed to take with them?

BREURE: Not really much, no. It didn't inscribe in my mind, you know. It's just that you were that young and you didn't realize what preparations were.

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you remember actually the departure?

BREURE: Departure I can recall because we were inoculated, we had about five needles into our arms for different diseases, which we were prone to get,

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you know. Fortunately nothing happened, we stayed healthy, and then we got here in Hoboken.

LEVINE: Well do you remember leaving the town, Skeer Zee—

BREURE: Rotterdam.

LEVINE: Oh, you went to Rotterdam?

BREURE: Went to Rotterdam and then—

LEVINE: How did you get to Rotterdam, do you remember?

BREURE: They took us I think by car, if I'm not mistaken. Yeah.

LEVINE: And do you remember like saying goodbye to anybody?

BREURE: Yeah I remember being on board the ship and waving goodbye to relation. Yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: And what ship was it?

BREURE: The Statendam.

LEVINE: Statendam. And do you remember anything of that voyage?

BREURE: The voyage I remember. We crossed the channel and went to South Hampton, England, where we picked up more passengers and cross the ocean, which was rough at the time. And my mother never left her bed, except to go to the bathroom, because she was carrying the youngest brother and she was seasick. Plus being pregnant sick. So my oldest

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sister, and only sister, always helped my mother on the whole journey which lasted about fourteen days that time. We did stop in Halifax, Nova Scotia, which was a first stop. We had snow on board. When we got on the deck, me and my younger brother made a snowball and all the dignitaries are on the dock there. And I know throwing a snowball and I knock the guys top hat off and I can still see him waving his cane at me as if to say, "I'll get you." And we laughed and of course ran back down to our cabin cause we wanted to get away from being caught. Then we left there and moved into New York harbor and Hoboken.

LEVINE: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

BREURE: Remember seeing the Statue of Liberty coming up the narrows, when we came before the Verrazano Bridge was bought – built and approaching the Statue of Liberty we were all on deck, yeah.

LEVINE: What were people doing, can you remember?

BREURE: Laughin' and clappin' and singin' of joy. Yeah. Yeah. That was a very anxious moment for all the people, you know? Yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: And did you and your family know about Ellis Island before? Did you expect anything?

BREURE: I don't think – I don't think so at the time no. We did know that my parents would go to Hoboken and be met by people that sponsored us from the church. But of course it wasn't to be because my second oldest brother had to come down with the mumps. So they took the whole family and quarantined us. Put us on the ferry boat from Hoboken, took us here to Ellis Island, and I was in this building here, where we are now, and sleeping up on the second floor in one of them rooms and going down for

meals in the long tables of soups and whatever that was made that day. And we spent a good four days to a week before we were allowed to be picked up again and taken home?

LEVINE: Was it discovered aboard the ship that your second oldest brother had the mumps?

BREURE: I imagine it was discovered on the ship after it docked on board, I think they checked you before you were allowed to go off, you know, as a group of family.

LEVINE: So you would have gone off in Hoboken, but when they checked him they discovered the mumps.

BREURE: [interposed] They checked him yup.

LEVINE: So that – when you were in the dormitory room here in this main building at Ellis Island was your whole family in the same room?

BREURE: I recall the men were on one side and the women on one other side.

LEVINE: On the other side of the balcony?

BREURE: That's right yeah. Yeah. Yep.

LEVINE: But you were allowed to go down where the other people were for meals?

BREURE: You were allowed to go down where the tables were all set up I guess for eating and also they had side rooms where they had playrooms. I remember playing with Buddy L trucks and different toys, so I do remember playing with toys there, you know, that I remember. Yeah.

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LEVINE: Do you remember anything specific about the food they served you here?

BREURE: Not really no. I knew it was soup, potatoes, and maybe a stew meat of some kind. But mostly I think if I remember anything it was soup.

LEVINE: Now was it only the one brother that came down with the mumps?

BREURE: It was only the one brother.

LEVINE: Now where was he during the time the rest the family was in the dorm?

BREURE: He was in the hospital part of the Ellis Island and my mother and father were allowed to visit you know. I don't know when it was, everyday or so, but I know they were allowed to visit. Yeah.

LEVINE: How do you – when you think about those – those four, five days that you spent here, how do you think of it? I mean, what are your – what is your feeling about that–?

BREURE: I think it was just a natural thing that had to be done with the circumstances that involved at that time. Where it's they were very careful of because there were certain people that when they were checked out they were sent back even to the countries where they came from, you know. And they were just I guess a precautionary measure of not bringing any foreign disease into the country of anything, you know. And once they analyzed it as just being a normal sickness, which was–

LEVINE: [interposed] Mumps.

BREURE: –not serious. And we were released. About four or five days.

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LEVINE: Were you – as far as the guards or anybody who worked here – were you treated well?

BREURE: Yeah I don't remember being treated harshly or anything like that. No way, no, no I don't remember that. No.

LEVINE: So–

BREURE: Course there's other children that I remember playing with. Downstairs or wherever it was in the playrooms where they had the toys. You know we just did our normal thing. Like children, you know?

LEVINE: Now did you – you didn't know any English when you first came?

BREURE: At the time no. No.

LEVINE: No. Did anyone in the family?

BREURE: I think my father had a little English knowledge of talking, you know. Yes and no and understanding somewhat some words. Yeah.

LEVINE: So do you remember the moment when you were told you could go and what happened?

BREURE: From?

LEVINE: From Ellis Island.

BREURE: No I couldn't say I remember that as a child no. Just that I got told by the parents that we were ready to leave, and we left you know.

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LEVINE: And where did you go?

BREURE: We went to Clifton, New Jersey here. Yeah they took us with it was like a wagon truck, you know. What they call a pick up truck today. I remember the stuff going on there, the luggage, which was always brought here from there. So that was on board. And there were a couple other cars that took us as the family and brought us to the home that they had prepared for us from the church. Yep.

LEVINE: So the church had provided you with a home in Clifton.

BREURE: A home in Clifton.

LEVINE: Okay we're gonna pause here and turn over the tape and then we'll continue.

BREURE: Okay.

END SIDE A, TAPE ONE

BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE ONE

LEVINE: Okay we're continuing now with your first remembrances of life here in this country. So do you remember the house that the church provided for your family?

BREURE: Oh yeah. Yeah. I passed it once in awhile going through Clifton in my runs. And it's still standing. Fixed up some of course with aluminum siding, what have you. And I'm sure the interior was made different too.

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LEVINE: Do you remember how it was different from the place you had been living in before you came here when you first got here?

BREURE: Different in the sense maybe that it had more rooms with bedrooms upstairs, which we never experienced over there really, you know. But it still had the, what we call a *kakle*, the black iron stove in those days, which a lot of people had and where mom did her cooking on you know.

LEVINE: Now was there a large Dutch community—

BREURE: [interposed] Very much

LEVINE: —around—

BREURE: [interposed] Yeah.

LEVINE: —where you were living?

BREURE: The section where we lived was called Dutch Hill. So the whole area was mostly Dutch, German, maybe some Polish. But mostly it was called Dutch Hill because most of the people were Dutch in the area.

LEVINE: Do you remember your mother and father's attitude, like did they want you and the whole family to become Americanized quickly or did they want to hold on to their — to their ways from Holland.

BREURE: Well I — the language was Dutch spoken of course and naturally when we had to go to school we had to learn. So first word I learned was yes and no. And from there on you had — you picked up your friends at school and you learn the language slowly on, you know. Plus what your teachers

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taught you. But it was rough at first because what we learned we had explained to mom and pop and they learned off us what we got in school. And finally I mean, you did manage to help yourself, plus the school was a Christian school and the teachers and the principle I recall could also speak Dutch so if you were stuck with something in class he would explain it in Dutch and help you understand it to the fact that it was the beginning of learning English really, you know. But we managed.

LEVINE: Did you go to a Christian school in Holland as well, or was that a public school?

BREURE: Yeah. No in Holland I think it was also a Christian school – Dutch Christian school yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember how the school here was different in any ways from the school that you had been in?

BREURE: Not that I can say really. No. No. Not that I could recall and say “Well that was so much different.”

LEVINE: Yeah. Were there a lot of children who had immigrated in your school here?

BREURE: Not really that I could say “Well he came from Holland or so.” No. No.

LEVINE: So when you first came most of the children were actually speaking English when you were learning?

BREURE: Most of them were speaking English and I was what they call a greenhorn.

LEVINE: Oh do you remember any – any way your were–

BREURE: [interposed] And they did call you greenhorn.

LEVINE: They did?

BREURE: Yeah and did call you greenhorn. But maybe couple little scraps once in awhile and that was straightened out and we moved on from there and did our learning of English, you know. You know.

LEVINE: Let's see. What else – do you remember any impressions of things that were new and different to you when you first came?

BREURE: That I didn't wear klumpen anymore and that I had leather shoes and I kept them on all day. And going in and out of class of course was normal like you do in any school room – hang your jacket up on the hook in the outside hallway and you went into class but you had your leather shoes on in that time. No more wooden klumpen. Yeah.

LEVINE: And what kind of work did your father find in this country?

BREURE: My father started off working in a dairy farm. And my two oldest brother also.

LEVINE: Did they start work when they first arrived?

BREURE: Yeah. They got help through the church and person that owned the farm was of Dutch extraction. So they were asked to work on the farm. My dad worked with the horses – they had about forty horses I remember. Cause I used to visit the farm after school sometimes. And my brothers would help milk the cows. And they had quite a few cows at that time in Holland.

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And then they did their own pasteurizing too. And delivery of milk, you know. That I remember. Yeah.

LEVINE: And what about your oldest sister? What was she doing?

BREURE: She became a maid for that farm where my parents worked.

LEVINE: Oh.

BREURE: Yeah. She was a housemaid and helped wash and iron clothes, and then of course came home and helped Mom with the housework there also. Cause she was seventeen, eighteen years old at that time, you know. So that's what she did.

LEVINE: So except for the three oldest, all the other children were starting school–

BREURE: –age. Were in school age. Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BREURE: We went to school, yeah.

LEVINE: And as far as the church was concerned, were the services in Dutch or in English?

BREURE: Both. English in the morning and Dutch in the afternoon. And we attended both. That was a ritual. Sometimes I didn't like it, but that was the normalcy, you know. You went to church on Sunday in the morning and in the afternoon. Yeah.

LEVINE: And what was the social like – life like in this country?

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BREURE: The Dutch would get together – the Dutch congregation people of course from the church. They would invite you over for coffee and what have you, you know. I do remember going to different people's homes, and they became friends of the family later on of course. Course we stay there for quite forty, fifty years that I know of. And I'm still there to this day you know, and that's going over sixty some years. Yep.

LEVINE: Yeah.

BREURE: We often talk about selling and moving out and going to North Carolina or something or somewhere South where it's more temperate climates so, but haven't gotten that far yet. (laughs)

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. So what did you do after you finished school? What did you do?

BREURE: School I went to high school I think about two years I think. And then we had the war break out of course. First the Depression.

LEVINE: Do you remember the Depression?

BREURE: Depression in 1939 – my dad was out of work and my two older brother still worked on the farm. My dad had in the meantime moved out of the farm and went to work for the Manhattan Rubber Mill and he worked on the dock, loading and unloading different supplies, I do remember that.

LEVINE: In Manhattan or in Jersey?

BREURE: In Manhattan. In Manhattan Rubber Mill in Passaic, New Jersey.

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LEVINE: And then he was laid off in the Depression?

BREURE: And then he was laid off for about three years and then he went back to the farm again and worked on the farm. And my sister stayed there as nursemaid to the people that owned the farm. And—

LEVINE: Do you remember any like – anythings that were rough particularly on your family during that Depression period?

BREURE: Well I remember renting our home, which we did. We paid a certain amount of rent, how much it was I don't recall. But times were tough because not much in work – with the fortunateness of the two older brothers working and helping to make food on the table and so forth, you know, during the Depression. And uh, times were tough.

LEVINE: You were still a student at that time?

BREURE: Still a student at that time, yeah, yeah. And like you say there were times when I recall you would go to the city and if you had a ticket you would get a pair of shoes or something. That how bad times were. Or groceries, different parts of groceries or so, to help out, you know. Or you would have to have certain stamps I think from the town proving you were a resident of that town, you know, so you'd collect food supplies and shoes. Yep. And then you didn't always get the shoes that fit you properly either. My wife can tell you about that – she's got corns from today. Yeah.

LEVINE: And so what happened, how did it come about that you went into the service?

BREURE: Well when the draft started under Franklin Delanor Roosevelt – pulling the numbers and I think I was something like number 8 on his pull, that we

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were drafted in February of '42. And yeah. It was in February of '42 that I was called into service. Yeah. I was already working part time then already. And got called. Then I got – had been married – only about nine months and I was told to break up house and leave for service which I did. Went to Fort Dix of '42 in February in the cold, sleeping in canvas tents which were hard to heat. Then eight to a tent. And then stayed there about a month. I managed to come home maybe twice I think with a pass and then after that we were shipped by train to Camp Crow [ph], South Carolina, where we did basic training. After basic training I came up to Fort Meade, Maryland. I was picked for military police duty there of Fort Meade and I stayed about a year and then was called to active duty cause they needed more troops overseas. So we came from Fort Meade to Camp Kilmer. Stayed. Processed. Got our gear. Got put on a train. Came right back here to the Jersey Central Railroad. Hoped on the ferry. Take it across. Boarded the Normandy with eight thousand seven hundred troops we pull out of New York Harbor and made for Liverpool, England at twenty two knots, which was very good for not being hit by submarines. Cause I saw a big oil tanker get put down by a U-Boat right outside in Liverpool. Burst into flames then sunk. So beings we were able to do twenty two knots I think saved our skin with eight thousand, seven hundred troops–

LEVINE: What was it like being on a ship with eight thousand, seven hundred–

BREURE: Terrible. Terrible. We had Chini [ph] cooks aboard that cooked mutton and tea. And Monday out of New York harbor all the troops got mad, threw the teapots overboard and demanded different food. And I think ut of Boston they came with supplies, kay [ph] rations and what not and stocked up the boat.

LEVINE: What was the feeling of – of – of – of all these men going to – to war.

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BREURE: To war, to war. Well you were put down below decks in a hammock. A swinging hammock that was your bed, which most of the guys stayed in because of the rough weather at that time, you know. There was a lot of – people were sick. And you can imagine being sick and being down in the lower decks and–

LEVINE: Rather like the immigration experience.

BREURE: Just like immigration. Being pack in a boat, right? And like GI used to say, “cattle.” We were stuffed like cattle on a boat. But fortunately safe enough to get where we had to go, right?

LEVINE: Well where did– where were you sent when you got to Europe.

BREURE: We landed in Liverpool, England and undocked and boarded a train directly to Southampton, England where we boarded LSD's and transported to Omaha Beach, which was D plus four for me, four days after the initial landing of D-Day. And we were put into service immediately and did so for a hundred and twenty seven continuous days before we were relieved. We were relieved when we made the breakthrough with General Patton in Leeds, Belgium, where we ran out of gas for tanks and trucks to proceed, and we held our positions until we were relieved, which consisted of about a hundred and twenty seven days. And then we were brought back, reequipped, just in time for the Battle of the Bulge. And we were brought up – I was brought up on the southern part of Alsace-Lorraine, where we protected our southern flank from the Bulge. Winter of '43, '44, in the Vazcoz [ph] Mountains. And we held all our positions there until there were able to push back with new troops – the Germans back to the Rhine.

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LEVINE: When you look back at that time, is there anything you can say about either yourself or human nature, when you're in a situation like that? A fighting situation?

BREURE: Yeah. Life isn't much really, you know when you're in war and you're living in a fox hole if you do live in a fox hole. Cause mostly you did that to dig yourself in to protect yourself from shelling and attack. Cause there was always a – counterattacks by the Germans because they weren't gonna take no defeat no more than we were gonna defeat them. So it was nip and tuck all the time no matter because they were determined people. You know, they thought they fighting for Deutschland. You know.

LEVINE: Well what was the morale like of the fighters?

BREURE: Morale – morale could be rough at time because of the conditions that you lived under – especially winter. GI's getting frozen feet, hands, you know. Not getting food because when you're up holding a line sometimes they couldn't get food to you. I experienced two weeks where I didn't get food. At night we would sneak out into the fields and dig up a sugar beat or something, and eat it rough. Cause you couldn't light, you couldn't make a fire. So you ate raw – chewed on raw sugar beets to exist. Yeah. And then like yosabe [ph] you're always pushing ahead on your fighting, you come back retreat a bit but resupply and then move again. You know. Yep.

LEVINE: No was it during the Second World War that you went back to Holland?

BREURE: In the finish of the Battle of the Bulge we were pulled back, regrouped after a week of R and R, what they call rest and recuperation, resupplied–

LEVINE: Where did you go for R and R?

BREURE: In the fields of France. Outside a relieved area where tents were put up and you were time to readdress yourself and make yourself more or less a human being again, take a shave, take a bath, portable bath or so, be refed, clothed, right? And then we moved from Paut-au-Monsan [ph] in France, which was the area, and moved through Belgium into Holland. And where I did training in the rear area cause we had the British and the French with us in that section. And then we retrained on the Moss [ph] River for the actual crossing of the Rhine. And we lost more people in the Moss River than the actual crossing of the Rhine.

LEVINE: Mm, in the training?

BREURE: In training. On March 23 of 1945 we made the initial crossing of the Rhine in tank boats, boats in tanks which could cross the Rhine, which was very dangerous, cause it flowed north at a very swift rate and instead of landing in the town where we were supposed to we were maybe a mile up the river, a mile and a half, two miles from the current of the Rhine, before we got across at 3:00 in the morning. Then we made land, then we came in through what they call the Rhineland of Germany Proper. And like Eisenhower said, "Battle of Europe would be decided on the western shores of the Rhine," which was so because when we came into the Rhineland it was all confusion, dispersements of people which were lot of slave labor of all different nationalities, even my own Holland people I met. Working in factories and made to work slave labor, whatever you want to call it. The German army was in disarray. Flags, white flags, were hanging out of buildings. Once in awhile we would catch sniper fire, where stubborn Germans would hold resistant pockets. Machine gun fire down on the streets at you, you know? But we would call in artillery or mortar and disperse and then advance that way and finally circumnavigate the whole [unclear] pocket, which we did. And then another point about

four hundred fifty thousand prisoners and displaced people. So from there on we just had one of the biggest jobs of the war. Supply and demand of food for people that was displaced, foreign people of all nationalities, Turkish, Italians, Polish, Swedish, Dutch, Belgium, French, all kinds, you know. Yeah. It was just one big job.

LEVINE: Wow.

BREURE: Biggest job of the war. Yeah.

LEVINE: Well we're getting close to the end of the tape, but let me ask you, what did you do when you got back after the war?

BREURE: After the war, I did occupation duty. They kept me for about six months cause I spoke Dutch and I was used as an interrogator even in the Rhineland pocket where we had all these different nationalities. And then after six months I was brought back to France. I visited Paris for about three, four days. And we were taken to camps which they named by cigarettes, Lucky Stripe, Camels, whatever the name of the cigarette that's what they call the camps. And I was high on points with my service in the military. I had about eighty nine points, so I was slated to go but then they didn't have no navy transport ships ready. So I ended up staying three months longer then what I should've stayed. But finally I was told we were – had a navy transport ship out of Marseilles, France which was on the Mediterranean Sea, and we were transported by trucks to Marseilles, and taken on board by navy transport ships with four thousand three hundred troops. Yeah.

LEVINE: What was the difference in the voyage going back?

BREURE: Very much different.

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LEVINE How so?

BREURE: Although it was ruff rough. We crossed the Mediterranean Sea, got to the Rock of Gibraltar, and they announced the Rock of Gibraltar is on your starboard side, so most of the people went on board to see the Rock of Gibraltar. And after that we came in and we got out into the Atlantic Ocean and ran into one of the worst storms off the Azores. Forty foot waves. And the ship would go up and slam down and then it would grinch and groan coming back up and then it was repeat of the same for about two days that I remember. Which was also the week of Thanksgiving. So they were cooking turkey onboard, but nobody ate turkey. Two days out of Boston where we were heading for, the ocean because as calm as a board, and everybody ate cold turkey. Till we landed in Boston.

LEVINE: Wow.

BREURE: That was our experience coming back home.

LEVINE: Well tell me, what do you consider like the high and the low points of your life?

BREURE: Of my life? (pause) That's hard. Cause there's so many factors, you know.

LEVINE: Well is there anything you can think of that gives you particular satisfaction that you've done or—?

BREURE: Or that I was in the army, that we were able to defeat the Germans, sure. That it would make a better place for us upon this world.

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LEVINE: Do you think that coming here as a little boy, as an immigrant to this country, do you think that affected you later I mean in the kind of person you are, or the person you became?

BREURE: Oh I would think so, I would think so, yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you have any sense of what – what – what that – part that played in your own development?

BREURE: Well, the appreciation of life, and what it – what it has given to you. You know over the years after I came back from the service I had already my wife and two children and I knew I had to get to work and I decided to become a carpenter and to this day I am still a member of the United Brotherhood of Carpenters of America.

LEVINE: Oh, wonderful.

BREURE: Yeah.

LEVINE: What's your wife's name?

BREURE: Anne.

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

BREURE: Was Van Beveren. Van Beveren

LEVINE: B-E-V-

BREURE: -E-R-E-N. Van Beveren. Also a Dutch family, but their parents came before we did. And she was born here.

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LEVINE: Uh-huh, how did you meet her?

BREURE: I met her through her brother. She had a brother I used to go with and she caught my eye. And he was mad cause I went with his sister.

LEVINE: Oh you stopped paling around with him you mean?

BREURE: That broke the friendship, in a sense you know. Today we're not mad at each other anyway, but—

LEVINE: (laughs) Oh good and your children's names?

BREURE: Are oldest was Beverly, Ruthie, and my only son, same as my name Cornelius, daughter Dorothy, and a daughter Karen. The youngest one moved away the furthest, she's in North Carolina. And that's my family. And we just celebrated fifty years of marriage, and my children donated money for me to Alaska, because I always (unclear) Alaska. So (tape fuzzy) do, they said "Dad, Mom, for your fiftieth anniversary you're going to Alaska."

LEVINE: Oh that's beautiful.

BREURE: So that we did. Fifty years married. Now we're married fifty-three years and I'm not going no place. (they laugh)

LEVINE: Well let's see. What would say about the part of you that's Dutch and the part of you that's American? How do you think about that?

BREURE: Well I have my sister to thank cause she always says "Well you talk Yankee Dutch." But my – my two cousins came from Holland this year in

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July they were fluent English speakers, but I felt obligated to talk Dutch, which I did. And when I invited them to visit the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island I says we're gonna talk Dutch, I says, cause that's what we did when came here. And they said to me that they were surprised of all these years I could talk Dutch as fluently as I could. I made a few mistakes by putting English words in, but they knew where I was coming from. (laughs) Yeah.

LEVINE: What's it like for you to visit? I know you've been here a few times before today. But what's it like visiting Ellis Island now at this point in you life?

BREURE: I came here once when this Ellis Island building was in—

LEVINE: Abandoned still.

BREURE: In abandonment, let me put it that way. I looked at the kitchen that time and I said, the pots and pans laying all over the place, the broken benches, the walls, the plaster, the paint, and I looked at the tile and I says, "What of a beautiful job they did here." And I read in the book later on only eight tiles were missing. And I says them Italians did a good job putting that tile up, really. Really to be congratulated on the job, so well done, you know, really. Yeah. And I explained that to the people that I had from Holland there, I says "You take a look at that haring bone [ph] ceiling, how beautiful it looks." I says, "I may have remembered a mess it was, but after joining with Lee (not understood) as a member," I says, "I gotta go back and see it," which I did. And I was very much impressed with the cleanup.

LEVINE: Wow wonderful, and this is where we're gonna end, I want to thank you so much Mr. Breure for a most interview. Today is September 25, 1995, this is Janet Levine, and I'm signing off.