

**EI-676**

**JOSEPHINE SOKOLOWSKI**

**BIRTHDATE: NOVEMBER 1, 1899**

**INTERVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 29, 1995**

**AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW:**

**RUNNING TIME: 28:37**

**INTERVIEWER: PAUL SIGRIST**

**RECORDING ENGINEER:**

**INTERVIEW LOCATION: TOM'S RIVER, NEW JERSEY**

**TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE**

**TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:**

**POLAND, 1922**

**AGE: 22**

**SHIP:**

**PORT:**

**RESIDENCES:**

[NOTE: Interviewee is VERY difficult to understand]

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Friday, September 29<sup>th</sup>, 1995. I'm in Tom's River, New Jersey, with Josephine Sokolowski. Mrs. Sokolowski came from Poland in 1922 and you were twenty-three when you came?

SOKOLOWSKI: Twenty-two.

SIGRIST: You were twenty-two when you came. You hadn't turned twenty-three yet. Present also with us is her daughter? Daughter-in-law?

BAXTER: Daughter.

SIGRIST: Ann?

SIGIRST: Amy. Amy Baxter. Sorry. And we're in their kitchen doing the interview. Mrs. Sokolowski, can we begin by you giving me your birth date please?

SOKOLOWSKI: First came here?

SIGIRST: When were you born?

SOKOLOWSKI: Poland.

SIGIRST: No, when?

BAXTER: Your birthday. What's your birthday?

SOKOLOWSKI: November 1<sup>st</sup>.

SIGIRST: November 1<sup>st</sup>.

SOKOLOWSKI: I think 1899.

BAXTER: 1899.

SIGIRST: You were born November 1<sup>st</sup>, 1899.

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah, I'm ninety-four years old.

BAXTER: Ninety-five.

SOKOLOWSKI: Ninety-five.

SIGIRST: Almost ninety-six.

AB; Right.

SIGIRST: Where in Poland were you born?

SOKOLOWSKI: Want the place?

SIGIRST: Yes.

SOKOLOWSKI: [unclear] that was like a—born in a farm. That was in a farm place.

SIGIRST: A farm.

SOKOLOWSKI: What city? You go to doctor, [unclear – speaking Polish]

- SIGIRST: What did it look like?
- SOKOLOWSKI: [unclear]?
- SIGIRST: What did the farm look like?
- SOKOLOWSKI: That was nice farm. We grow everything. Wheat, rye, more vegetable, any kind. Horses, but we have six children, and all girls. Then that was too many of them. I always go to some place else. I always like the United States, and [unclear] here, and my [unclear] bring me here. [unclear – speaking Polish]. From Poland, but here her name was [unclear].
- SIGIRST: I want to talk about the farm in Poland. What kinds of vegetables did you grow?
- SOKOLOWSKI: Cabbage, carrot, any kind. Grow vegetable. We don't have half you—no tomatoes that time. I never seen bananas, but there they have cabbage, carrots, all vegetables grow there.
- BAXTER: Potatoes?
- SOKOLOWSKI: Oh, yes. A lot. That's the real thing.
- SIGIRST: What did you do with the vegetables?
- SOKOLOWSKI: Eat them. Cook them.
- SIGIRST: Did you ever sell them?
- SOKOLOWSKI: Sometimes sell them just rye or wheat. But potatoes we sell, too. But the other things, that was—that year I came here, that was we got [unclear]. The Bolshevik. The Bolshevik take away a lot. Just left us just to leave it. [pause] [unclear] they leave everything. They take some to the government and left some here.
- SIGIRST: What do you remember about the Bolsheviks coming into Poland?
- SOKOLOWSKI: Ohhh.
- SIGIRST: Tell me what you remember about that experience.

SOKOLOWSKI: The Bolsheviks, some of the children, fifteen, sixteen, [unclear] shoes, [unclear] socks. And they came to our house, all [unclear] of them, but we sorry for them because they so young, those kids. But the other one, those what they call those? What they call them? Forgot they call. I can't—they want like [speaking Polish].

BAXTER: Oh, the—

SOKOLOWSKI: Not people, but—

BAXTER: You mean in the army? Generals.

SOKOLOWSKI: But they killed them.

BAXTER: Generals or the captain?

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah, something like that.

SIGIRST: The soldiers.

BAXTER: The Russian soldiers, I think that's what she meant.

SOKOLOWSKI: And after they chase them, the Polish chase them from Russia again. I can't remember all those things until possible.

SIGIRST: Can you remember the house that you lived in in Poland?

SOKOLOWSKI: We got three—big house. Three rooms, a big one. People like three rooms. That was it. From beginning, that was a nice place to live there.

SIGIRST: What was the house made out of? What was the house made out of?

SOKOLOWSKI: Wood.

BAXTER: Wood. What kind of—

SOKOLOWSKI: I don't know. Wood.

BAXTER: Wood floors? What kind of floors did you have?

SOKOLOWSKI: What?

BAXTER: Floor.

SOKOLOWSKI: Floor, we have a floor—wood floor.

BAXTER: Wood floor, too?

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah.

SIGIRST: What kind of a roof did the house have on it?

SOKOLOWSKI: Roof roof? [Laughs]

SIGIRST: A roof roof. [Laughter] How did you heat the house?

SOKOLOWSKI: Stove. We got stove. We put what they call it, wood.

SIGIRST: And where did you get the wood?

SOKOLOWSKI: We have wood.

SIGIRST: On your farm?

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah.

BAXTER: They chopped the trees down, is that what you did?

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah, like [unclear] the [unclear] wood and they prepare for the winter. [unclear] the big pieces. That I know.

SIGIRST: Did you have running water in the house?

SOKOLOWSKI: No, we got just like tub. Like this one here, big one. Like here sometimes you see [unclear].

SIGIRST: Where did the water come from?

SOKOLOWSKI: From water. [Laughs]

BAXTER: No, where did you get the water? From the well? Did you have a well?

SOKOLOWSKI: A big well.

SIGIRST: Whose job was it to get the water out?

SOKOLOWSKI: We got what they call? Pail. Big pails, everybody take the water from that well. All year long, but we have like a river, where the summertime we could go for that river.

BAXTER: Was that your job to get the water?

SOKOLOWSKI: No. Every—

BAXTER: Everybody went and got the water themselves?

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah. Yeah.

SIGIRST: How did you light your house? How did you have light in your house?

BAXTER: You know, you didn't have electricity.

SOKOLOWSKI: [unclear]

BAXTER: No, did you have electricity then?

SOKOLOWSKI: No, not then. No.

BAXTER: Well, how did you light the house?

SOKOLOWSKI: With gas.

BAXTER: Oh, with gas? Gas light?

SOKOLOWSKI: They called [unclear].

BAXTER: Oh, okay.

SOKOLOWSKI: They got lit, and they got like a big loop. They got lamp like something like this, but in the kitchen got small lamp.

BAXTER: Uh-hmm.

SIGIRST: Let me just pause for a second. [tape off/on] Resume now. What kind of food did you eat in Poland?

SOKOLOWSKI: My mother cook for us. That's all. I don't know what kind of food. I can't explain that. It's impossible.

SIGIRST: Was your mother a good cook?

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah.

SIGIRST: What was your favorite food as a child?

SOKOLOWSKI: I like potatoes. [Laughs]

SIGIRST: How did your mother prepare the potatoes?

SOKOLOWSKI: Potatoes, cabbage, turnips we have what they call? Red beets [unclear]. Got red beets [unclear].

BAXTER: Yeah, but he wants to do know how did your mother cook the potatoes? [Polish]

SOKOLOWSKI: [Polish]

BAXTER: Did she make anything different with them than we do here?

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah, mashed potatoes or all potatoes. Any kind.

SIGIRST: What were some of your mother's responsibilities in the house? What did she have to do around the house?

SOKOLOWSKI: Everything.

SIGIRST: Like what?

SOKOLOWSKI: What your mother do in the house? [Getting agitated]

SIGIRST: Well, my mother and your mother are different. What did your mother do?

SOKOLOWSKI: Not much different.

SIGIRST: Did your mother clean the house?

SOKOLOWSKI: We cleaned the house when we grown up.

SIGIRST: The children did.

SOKOLOWSKI: We helped. Yeah, we helped.

SIGIRST: You were six girls?

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah.

SIGIRST: Yes? And what was your job? What was your job in the house?

SOKOLOWSKI: [Laughs] What told me to do, then I do. [unclear] [Laughs]

SIGIRST: You did anything they told you?

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah.

SIGIRST: It was a long time ago.

SOKOLOWSKI: That's right. I can't remember those things. I'm so many years here, don't forget that.

SIGIRST: Do you remember how your family celebrated Christmas?

SOKOLOWSKI: Oh, yeah, very good. We got big celebration at Christmas, before Christmas, New Year's. They have New Year's party. After, but from beginning those parties, you're not supposed to have them because if they find out we got the Polish together, they not supposed to do. [unclear] give you trouble.

SIGIRST: And that's what you—

SOKOLOWSKI: But after the stop Poland, like, then we got just like here. Christmas tree, everything.

SIGIRST: What was your father's name?

SOKOLOWSKI: Joseph.

SIGIRST: And what did he do for a living?

SOKOLOWSKI: On the farm, everything.

SIGIRST: He was a farmer.

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah.

SIGIRST: Yeah. What was your father's personality like?

SOKOLOWSKI: Very good.

SIGIRST: What were some of the things he liked to do? What did he enjoy in life?

SOKOLOWSKI: [unclear] enjoy anything. You [unclear] used to that. I can't explain. I tell you this much. Got the big story, talk like that for so many years.

SIGIRST: Why did you want to come to America?

SOKOLOWSKI: Because I like—I like to see United States.

SIGIRST: What did you know about America before you got here?

SOKOLOWSKI: Nothing. Nothing much. I have no idea, but a lot of people go there.

SIGIRST: Did anyone in your family go to America before you did?

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah, my father was here.

SIGIRST: What did he do in America?

SOKOLOWSKI: Something do, I don't know. Before I born, my father was here. Not me.

SIGIRST: So he was here for a while then?

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah.

SIGIRST: Yeah. Did he go back and forth from America to Poland?

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah. Yeah.

SIGIRST: Did he ever bring you anything from America?

SOKOLOWSKI: I can't remember any more. That was—I don't born that time. Before I born. Before my father was married, something like that.

SIGIRST: I see. I see. You said you wanted to come to America because you wanted to see what America was like.

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah. Not—I tell you this much, not much different.

SIGIRST: It wasn't much different than Poland?

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah. Different situation, but life's the same thing.

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SIGIRST: Do you remember what you packed to take with you to America?

SOKOLOWSKI: [Laughs] What I supposed to get, that's all. What they give it to me.

SIGIRST: What did they give to you?

SOKOLOWSKI: No money, that's for sure. I got clothes.

SIGIRST: Did you take any food with you to America?

SOKOLOWSKI: Never.

SIGIRST: Was it difficult for you to say goodbye to your family?

SOKOLOWSKI: If you go from place, you are goodbye to your father and mother, that's the same thing I do. [Laughs]

BAXTER: Yeah, but—

SIGIRST: Did they want you to go to America?

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah, my father take me to the station.

SIGIRST: And then where did you go to get the ship?

SOKOLOWSKI: Gdansk.

SIGIRST: You went to Gdansk. Were you traveling alone?

SOKOLOWSKI: No, with my cousin and my girlfriend. Three of us come from Poland same time. Some [unclear] but not the same state, from [unclear]. But we four of us and one car, one room in the ship.

SIGIRST: How long did you stay in Gdansk before you actually got on the ship?

SOKOLOWSKI: Gdansk, we go on a big ship, just—I can't talk anymore. I can't talk.

BAXTER: Do you want some water?

SIGIRST: Do you want some water?

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah.

SIGIRST: All right, we're going to just pause for a second. [tape off/on]

SOKOLOWSKI: --[unclear] '39 or 1949 something—

SIGIRST: 1914.

SOKOLOWSKI: No, 1939.

SIGIRST: The First World War started in 1914.

BAXTER: Yeah, that started before she came to America.

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah. Yeah.

SIGIRST: That was before you came to America.

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah.

BAXTER: Oh. Yeah, but he wanted to know why did you want to come to America?

SOKOLOWSKI: I told him.

BAXTER: You didn't answer that. You didn't say why.

SOKOLOWSKI: Why? Because I like to come to America.

BAXTER: Yeah, but that wasn't the reason.

SOKOLOWSKI: That was the reason. [Laugh]

BAXTER: Because she had to work on the farm. That's why she wanted to come.

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah.

SIGIRST: You didn't like doing farm work?

BAXTER: Yeah.

SOKOLOWSKI: Nobody like farm. Everybody run all the way from here, but [unclear] the same life.

SIGIRST: Were you alone on the ship?

SOKOLOWSKI: Alone?

SIGIRST: You said you were traveling with your cousin and a girlfriend?

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah.

SIGIRST: Were you all together on the ship?

SOKOLOWSKI: All together in one room.

SIGIRST: In one room on the ship. And tell me what you remember about being on the ship?

SOKOLOWSKI: There was a—breakfast, dinner. We got pretty good. They give you pretty good food and [unclear] I remember like fish, herring. Those things like everybody eat, yeah.

SIGIRST: Did you get seasick?

SOKOLOWSKI: No, but my cousin and my girlfriend, they got sick. But not me. I was walking all around.

SIGIRST: Did you see anything on the ship that you had never seen before?

SOKOLOWSKI: [unclear] For while we see in Gdansk those big houses, big factory, but after Gdansk we go on a ship, another big ship, you don't see nothing. Just water.

SIGIRST: When you went to Gdansk to get on the ship, was that the first time you had ever been in a large city?

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah.

SIGIRST: Yes, so—

SOKOLOWSKI: Oh, no. Yeah, I was in Warsaw few times.

SIGIRST: How long did the ship take to get to America?

SOKOLOWSKI: I think almost two weeks.

SIGIRST: Almost two weeks. And do you remember what time of the year this is that you're traveling on the ship? Do you remember, you know, what month it was when you left?

SOKOLOWSKI: Remember October 29, then from October 29 we go to Gdansk. From Gdansk that was almost November. We wait in Gdansk for awhile. From Gdansk we go to like the big ship. From the big ship we have two weeks.

SIGIRST: Two weeks.

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah.

SIGIRST: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when the ship came into New York Harbor?

SOKOLOWSKI: I saw that, but I don't know what the statue, that's all. I don't know what that mean. [Laughs]

SIGIRST: Do you remember what class you were traveling on the ship?

SOKOLOWSKI: What that?

SIGIRST: What class? Do you remember what—what—what—

SOKOLOWSKI: Class?

SIGIRST: Yes, what class? What ship ticket you had? If it was first class or second class or third class.

SOKOLOWSKI: First class and second class for rich people. But the third class, the poor people there. [Laughs]

BAXTER: I take it, it was third class.

SOKOLOWSKI: Like people over, first time, but we thought we travel back and forth, get the first class. I saw that.

SIGIRST: So do you remember when the ship came into New York? Did you have to go to Ellis Island?

SOKOLOWSKI: I have to. We would not get put off.

SIGIRST: What did they do at Ellis Island?

SOKOLOWSKI: We stayed there for one day just only. They got big, big house. Everybody was there. But nobody sleep there. That was no sleeping, just my aunt come over, take me home from New York. And that's it.

SIGIRST: And where did she live in New York?

SOKOLOWSKI: Brooklyn.

SIGIRST: In Brooklyn.

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah.

SIGIRST: And then did you get a job?

SOKOLOWSKI: Yes.

SIGIRST: What was the first job you got when you came to New York?

SOKOLOWSKI: I work with the people. I stay with them.

SIGIRST: And what kind of work were you doing?

SOKOLOWSKI: Housework.

SIGIRST: Like a domestic servant? Yeah. Can you tell me how you learned English?

SOKOLOWSKI: From one thing to another. [Laughs]

SIGIRST: Do you remember your first word that you learned in English?

SOKOLOWSKI: Before I came here, I remember that people say, "Hello, hello, hello." That I remember. [Laughs]

SIGIRST: So you knew one word in English before you came to America?

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah.

SIGIRST: Hello.

SOKOLOWSKI: I say goodbye. That I know.

SIGIRST: Can you tell me a little specifically what your duties were when you were working in this woman's house. You said housework. What kind of housework?

SOKOLOWSKI: The house, big house. Nice people. They Jewish people, but I like the woman. She was not very like rich people, but they not that rich, but not poor. They [unclear]

SIGIRST: What did she teach you to do?

SOKOLOWSKI: Oh, to sweep, do everything. Housework, help cook. Wash clothes. Iron the clothes. That I know myself, before I came here.

SIGIRST: Did you like doing that kind of work?

SOKOLOWSKI: If you come here to different people, different country, and you like to live and you like to eat, you have to do anything.  
[Laughs]

BAXTER: [Laughs] That's enough.

SIGIRST: Your aunt who was already here.

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah.

SIGIRST: Whose sister is she? Your mother's sister or your father's sister?

BAXTER: Mother's sister. [Polish]

SOKOLOWSKI: Oh, my mother's sister.

SIGIRST: Did you know her from back in Poland?

SOKOLOWSKI: Yes.

SIGIRST: And why had she come to America?

SOKOLOWSKI: Just like I am.

SIGIRST: She came to do—to work. Was she married when you—

SOKOLOWSKI: No. No, she not marry. She come to United States, she marry here. She got three children. Peter, Lauren and Ivan. Then we grown up, not so [unclear] from each other.

BAXTER: Was she married when you came to America? No? She wasn't married yet? Yes, she was. Well, you said no.

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SOKOLOWSKI: Who?

BAXTER: Cha Cha.

SOKOLOWSKI: Oh, yeah. No, she was married here in United States.

BAXTER: I know, but she was married when you came to America.

SOKOLOWSKI: Oh, no, no. Here.

BAXTER: When you came to America, not her.

SOKOLOWSKI: I know that. She was married already.

BAXTER: Yeah, well, that's what we're looking for, right?

SOKOLOWSKI: How many times I got to [unclear].

BAXTER: Well, you didn't say that, though.

SIGIRST: Do you remember how much you were paid to be the servant in the woman's house?

SOKOLOWSKI: [Laughs]

BAXTER: How much money did you make?

SOKOLOWSKI: Oh, yeah. Forty-five dollars a month.

SIGIRST: Forty-five dollars a month.

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah.

SIGIRST: And did you live there?

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah.

SIGIRST: Can you describe where you slept?

SOKOLOWSKI: I got—in a bed.

SIGIRST: Yes.

SOKOLOWSKI: [Laughs]

BAXTER: Did you have your own room?

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah, I have my own.

SIGIRST: Did she have other servants?

SOKOLOWSKI: No.

SIGIRST: You were the only one.

SOKOLOWSKI: Because that's—I told you, that's not rich people. They just help, but she do lot of things herself, but I have to do help her. Sure.

SIGIRST: Did you like America when you got here?

SOKOLOWSKI: From beginning, no because I think like people from Poland, they got small houses, they have three rooms. We have three rooms, we got big rooms just like [unclear].

SIGIRST: Did you write to your family back in Poland when you were here? Did you write letters?

SOKOLOWSKI: Oh, yeah. What letters?

SIGIRST: Did you write letters to your family?

SOKOLOWSKI: Oh, yeah.

SIGIRST: In Poland.

BAXTER: Oh, yeah.

SOKOLOWSKI: My father write to me. My sisters. Yeah, a lot of.

SIGIRST: Did you send them any money?

SOKOLOWSKI: Not from beginning. I have to pay my aunt before I—because she paid for my passage.

SIGIRST: She paid for the ship ticket?

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah.

SIGIRST: Oh. Do you remember how much that cost?

SOKOLOWSKI: Two hundred and forty-nine, twenty-nine dollars. Something like that.

SIGIRST: Two hundred and twenty-nine dollars. Something like that. That's about right.

BAXTER: Yeah?

SIGIRST: Do you remember the name of the ship that you came on?

SOKOLOWSKI: Not [unclear]. I always thinking about that. I can't remember. I know that Russian. The [unclear] that worked over there, they were Russian. They spoke Russian. [unclear]

SIGIRST: So it was a Russian boat that you came over on.

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah, yeah.

SIGIRST: How long did you do the domestic work for that woman in Brooklyn?

SOKOLOWSKI: Almost two years before I get married.

SIGIRST: Three years?

SOKOLOWSKI: No, two.

SIGIRST: Two years for the same woman?

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah.

SIGIRST: Yeah, and tell me how you met your husband.

SOKOLOWSKI: Going at the place with the people. [Laughs]

SIGIRST: Was he from Europe?

SOKOLOWSKI: My husband was from Brooklyn. He's Polish, but he came from Brooklyn.

SIGIRST: And what year did you get married?

SOKOLOWSKI: 1924.

SIGIRST: 1924?

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah.

SIGIRST: Yeah, and what was your husband's name?

SOKOLOWSKI: Hipolit.

SIGIRST: Can you spell that please?

BAXTER: H-I-P-O-L-I-T.

SIGIRST: Hipolit Sokolowski.

BAXTER: Right.

SIGIRST: What was your maiden name before you were married?

SOKOLOWSKI: Skolski.

SIGIRST: Can you spell that?

BAXTER: S-K-L-O-S-K-I.

SIGIRST: So it's actually close to—

BAXTER: Very close.

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah, very close to each other.

SIGIRST: Uh-huh, and did you have children?

SOKOLOWSKI: First, and my boy. Two children.

BAXTER: I'm her daughter.

SOKOLOWSKI: That's my child.

BAXTER: And my brother.

SIGIRST: And what is your brother's name?

BAXTER: Edward.

SIGIRST: Edward. Did you ever go back to Poland to visit?

BAXTER: No.

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SIGIRST: Did you ever want to?

SOKOLOWSKI: Well, not really because after awhile, after that war, first German, then Russian, then German, then Russian, then Poland. About fourteen times up and down, up and down.

SIGIRST: Did any of your family ever come to America to live?

SOKOLOWSKI: Yes. I got my niece, she's here. My niece. My two cousins here. Not New Jersey. They're New York.

SIGIRST: Did you help your family members to come to America?

SOKOLOWSKI: [unclear]

BAXTER: One of them. You helped Alizia come to America?

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah.

BAXTER: Yeah.

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah.

SIGIRST: How did you help her to come to America?

BAXTER: Did you pay for her ticket or anything? Yeah.

SOKOLOWSKI: No, I don't pay for her.

BAXTER: Oh, she sponsored her.

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah.

SIGIRST: You were her sponsor.

SOKOLOWSKI: Yeah.

SIGIRST: Did you become an American citizen?

BAXTER: No.

SIGIRST: No.

BAXTER: No, so many time [unclear] I don't know why there was something [unclear], but I like to do that.

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SIGIRST: Did your husband go back to Poland for any reason or go back to Europe ever? No. Do you think of yourself as being Polish or American?

SOKOLOWSKI: American.

SIGIRST: You think of yourself as American. Yeah. How do you think your life would have been different if you had stayed in Poland?

SOKOLOWSKI: That I can't explain. I can't explain. I'm not gunna say that.

SIGIRST: Okay. Well, that's probably a good place for us to end then. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Josephine Sokolowski on September 29<sup>th</sup>, 1995 on Friday in Tom's River with Amy Baxter, her daughter, in attendance. Thank you.

[End of Interview]