

EI-741

ALEXANDRA GRUSZAS

BIRTHDATE: MAY 26, 1895

INTERVIEW DATE: APRIL 23, 1996

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 100

RUNNING TIME: 50:09

INTERVIEWER: PAUL SIGRIST

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TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:

LITHUANIA, 1913

AGE: 18

SHIP: ROTTERDAM [PH]

PORT:

RESIDENCES:

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service.
Today is Tuesday, April 23rd, 1996.

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: I'm at the South Windsor Nursing Center with Alexandra Gruzas.

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes. Mrs. Gruzas came from Lithuania—

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —in 1913.

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: She was 18 years old at that time. And we have just ascertained that she was born on May 26th—

GRUSZAS: [unclear]

SIGRIST: —1895.

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Good. Let me just shut the door for a second. Okay.

GRUSZAS: All right.

SIGRIST: And Mrs. Gruzas, where in Lithuania were you born?

GRUSZAS: Do—Doblina [PH].

SIGRIST: Doblina.

GRUSZAS: Doblina.

SIGRIST: That's a city?

GRUSZAS: I don't know. You know, I never met anybody that—that—I didn't see that much of that country. But after I grow, I grow like [several words unclear]. I lived—oh, that year, you know, I pass by every Sunday, go church there.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me the house that you lived in when you were a child? What did the house look like that you lived in?

GRUSZAS: What house looks—

SIGRIST: When—when you were growing up—

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —what did it look like where you lived?

GRUSZAS: Looks like we had a straw top roof, and then wooden walls—walls. And then a round—had some kind of like round, like, seems to me, some—[chuckles] I can't explain to you too much. They have—put something to—they keep house warm. Yeah, and then keep house warm. You know, with nighttime, they didn't have fire. That's all day have fire and then they have those charcoals that are put into [unclear] and stay till morning. Well, morning time again, you know, make fire.

And—and the fire built like [unclear]—like big [unclear], like make breads and anything—big things. And then we sit about on that fire like—like eat [several words unclear]. And just sit, everybody, children, you know, sit on—on [laughter]—and then they get—no children don't go with the people—with big people. They don't go, children. Children got to eat by—by the stove some days. [laughs] Sometime—and we steal sometimes potatoes. We didn't have enough potatoes. We steal those potatoes, you know, from yesterday. And those potatoes—we got to steal a little bit. The didn't—they—big people want to see [unclear] no potatoes. They go around, take back. [laughs] It was poor, you know. Yeah, but [unclear].

SIGRIST: Do—do you remember any furniture in your house?

GRUSZAS: Furniture.

SIGRIST: What kind of furniture did you have in the house?

GRUSZAS: We have wooden chairs, wooden big table. Big table. You know they have big fam—we—I grow with a big family.

SIGRIST: How many?

GRUSZAS: Twelve.

SIGRIST: Twelve?

GRUSZAS: Twelve. You know, they have children, about six or some. And they have—you know, they have—my father rented big farms. You have to have animals—have to have manure. You know, they—that's why they lived like that. You get—you rented farms. Rented from one place to another place. You have to have manure. You have to have, you know, something growing. [chuckles] Kind of hard to explain to you.

SIGRIST: So—so your father—your family rented—

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —the farm that you lived on.

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you have animals on the farm?

GRUSZAS: Oh, sure.

SIGRIST: What—what animals?

GRUSZAS: Cows, horses, pigs, geese, ducks. I guess that's all, maybe.

SIGRIST: What did you do with the cows?

GRUSZAS: With the cows? Well, you have feed [unclear] for—for winter. You know, have to have—feed them and having manure, you know. Have to save manure to put on the farm [unclear] the building. You got to grow something. Without the manure, they don't grow nothing. You know, and—and [unclear].

SIGRIST: Did you eat the cows?

GRUSZAS: Eat?

SIGRIST: Eat. Did you—did—did you—

GRUSZAS: No, we didn't kill the big cows for eating, just having calves in there sometimes. Six weeks or bigger or small—three weeks or something. Calves [unclear] in the—in the spring, most. Yeah, and then we [unclear] and salt—salt—maybe a little bit. You know. [chuckles] [unclear].

SIGRIST: Did you milk the cows?

GRUSZAS: Milk, yeah.

SIGRIST: Whose job was it to milk the cows?

GRUSZAS: Whose job? I—I milk the cow.

SIGRIST: How do you milk a cow.

GRUSZAS: You know, some cow—you know, they easy give milk. You go like this and it just milks. And then go—go—some cow give—give good [unclear] that easy. Or some, like, I guess, all of them sometimes—

SIGRIST: You have to tug harder.

GRUSZAS: Yeah. Yeah, yeah. Just four—four—four nipples. Chh-chh-chh.

SIGRIST: And then—and then what did the milk go into? What—what did you catch the milk in?

GRUSZAS: What—carry bucket. Bucket. But it was [unclear] and sometimes you have a seat. But you just stood up and put the—the bucket in the—like, between legs. Sometimes [several words unclear] kill—kill them, knock 'em—kick 'em.

SIGRIST: Did you ever get kicked by a cow?

GRUSZAS: Oh, yeah. [laughs] Oh, yeah, yeah. Sometimes cow nice. You got a nice and if she's a nice, pat 'em. They come easy milk. Otherwise, if they're the one, they—they—they don't give milk so much here.

SIGRIST: Now, what about the pigs? What did you do with pigs on the farm?

GRUSZAS: Pigs? You know, pigs—we have a—like, for winter they—big ones—big ones. They have, like, six or seven of them and then—and then after having those pigs—small pigs, babies—those babies grow and sometimes kill them about six, seven weeks or sometimes they grow bigger. Yeah, and—anytime you need something like that.

SIGRIST: Did you—did you kill the pigs?

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: How did you—how did you slaughter a pig back then?

GRUSZAS: Oh, kill him—they—you catch them. You just go—these. I used to hide myself, how those pigs [unclear]. You know, you feel so sorry. They—they put a knife, like, in the—in the throat and kill them. My father used to kill the pigs.

SIGRIST: And then what did they do after that?

GRUSZAS: After that, they sometimes [unclear] them a little bit but, otherwise, put hot water. Stick in hot water, boiling water and they take them off with [unclear].

SIGRIST: So they would take the dead pig and put it into boiling water?

GRUSZAS: Yeah, yeah. And then—then, you know, they get pig hair and after they cut them [unclear].

SIGRIST: Cut them down the front.

GRUSZAS: Yeah. They [unclear] a little bit, you know, with something, make it a little bit brown, the meat look nice. And then [unclear] cut all—you know, my mother knows what to do. And man's—not much know to do

with it. The man knows how to kill them and everything but a woman do all kind of job, cut them a little bit, this piece or this [unclear]. You make bologna, called kielbasa. And then they—they—from the blood—they keep the blood too. Have to kill them. They save the blood. From the blood, you know, make, like, stuffing those—the casings. You wash those casings where, you know, [unclear]. And then they have to stuff with it this, you know, some—something.

SIGRIST: It's messy work.

GRUSZAS: Messy work. Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: [laughs]

GRUSZAS: Messy work.

SIGRIST: Let's keep talking about food. What other kinds of food did you eat in Lithuania when you were growing up before you came to this country?

GRUSZAS: Yeah, you know, like, they cook—like, someone to cook one meal. Somebody cook, like, two meals in the morning. Make, like, beet soup or cabbage soup. And—and—and—

SIGRIST: You said beet? Beet soup?

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Beet? Like red beets?

GRUSZAS: Yes. And—and then—that cook—make bali [PH], like—like dessert. We eat, like, beets or cabbage, you know, soup. Those eat and then bread. And—and they gave that, like, dessert, bali. Yeah. And that bali make out of, I think, rye. No, not rye. Rye make bread. From rye, make bread. But bali, make, like, what do you call? [unclear].

SIGRIST: A pudding with the barley—

GRUSZAS: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: —or something? Uh-huh. Wh—what time did you eat breakfast in the morning?

GRUSZAS: Well, to—till seven o'clock, six o'clock.

SIGRIST: And what was a typical breakfast?

GRUSZAS: Huh?

SIGRIST: What—what would you usually eat for breakfast?

GRUSZAS: Oh, sometimes make little bit like [unclear] cheese, butter. Sometime make butter different, you know, like we call big butter. You know, no—no [unclear]—I—I can't tell [unclear]. And you eat this cheese. You eat—eat a little bit before breakfast, yeah. You eat a little bit before breakfast. And the breakfast, you know, [unclear] say, cabbage soup or—and some—somebody just had one meal—one dish soup, like one—one kind. But with my—my mother, they always had two. Have bali, soup or the milk or something, and beets or cabbage.

SIGRIST: Did you grow the beets and the cabbage?

GRUSZAS: Yeah, everything grow. Everything's [unclear]. We didn't buy nothing.

SIGRIST: Did you sell anything that you grew?

GRUSZAS: Huh?

SIGRIST: Did you sell any of the things that you grew? Did you sell anything for money?

GRUSZAS: N—

SIGRIST: Like the beets. Did you sell some of the beets?

GRUSZAS: Oh, no, no. They're the [unclear] grown—raising—from raising. Yeah, from all grown on the farm.

SIGRIST: I see. So you used everything that you grew?

GRUSZAS: Yeah, everything. We didn't buy much from store. Sometimes they buy—they—like—like, wintertime sometime, barley, kind of—very—different, a little bit. Different made, yeah.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

GRUSZAS: My father's name, Lawrence.

SIGRIST: Lawrence.

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And tell me a little bit about your father's personality. What was he like as a person?

GRUSZAS: My father was big guy—big guy and he—he kind of know a lot about farms. Yeah, he knows how to raise—how to—animals and everything. He was, like, big man. And he—he used to [unclear] children by—around stove. [chuckles] Breakfast or something. We'd make a big—grownups at a table, eat with a table. But with children [speaking in foreign language]. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: What did he look like? Describe your father in words to me what he looked like.

GRUSZAS: My father looks kind of nice. He had a mustache and he's kind of—was tall guy. And—and—and he was—he was really big—big man there. He had everything he liked [unclear]. He got to send someplace work and do all kind of, like, boss.

SIGRIST: When you were a little girl—

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —did your father teach you to do something?

GRUSZAS: You know, [unclear] little girls. Here, I kind of playing with the dolls and saying, you know, like, geese or pigs or some—you've got to take care. You've got to—he says, "Go watch the pigs. Go watch the geese," or something. "Don't go in—in—in—you know, in—like in—in a—in the—in the garden or something and [unclear] there," you know, anything growing.

SIGRIST: So—so the—so the young girls took care of the geese and the ducks.

GRUSZAS: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: What did you do for fun as a little girl back then? What—what—

GRUSZAS: [unclear] we didn't do too much for fun. You know, always something we have to do, wash the dishes, maybe. [several words unclear] young people. So they—they go a little bit, do something, play. And 12 years or something like that. You know, you—you started work [unclear]—work in the gardens, weed, weed those beets or potatoes or something were weeding. Yeah.

SIGRIST: You mentioned that you had a doll.

GRUSZAS: What?

SIGRIST: You said you had a doll?

GRUSZAS: Doll.

SIGRIST: A doll. Where did the doll come from?

GRUSZAS: They—they—they—they got it in—in—in, like, in the markets or something or some—some kind of big—big—sometimes. They—they—they got—they make, I guess, those dolls like the other ones were—were in making out of rags. [laughs] You making out of rags, you know, where they make them [several words unclear] put the—put the [unclear]. [laughs]

SIGRIST: Were there any other toys that you made at home?

GRUSZAS: What do you mean?

SIGRIST: Well, did you make anything else at home that you played with?

GRUSZAS: Oh, playing with?

SIGRIST: Yeah, what—what did you make that—at home that you could play with? You mentioned the doll.

GRUSZAS: Yeah, that's all we make. And—and—and [unclear], you know, get—they get bigger, you know, kind of in a—in a—like, in a big stores or something, big markets. Come in—they buy all kind of—all kind of dolls that are like here [several words unclear].

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

GRUSZAS: My mother's name, Tachly [PH].

SIGRIST: Tachly?

GRUSZAS: Tachly.

SIGRIST: Tachly, Tachly.

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And do you remember what her name was before she married your father? Her maiden—

GRUSZAS: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Kaslowskis [PH]—Kaslowskis.

SIGRIST: Say it very slowly.

GRUSZAS: Kaslowskis.

SIGRIST: Kaslowskis.

GRUSZAS: Yes.

SIGRIST: Kaslowskis.

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me what your mother's personality was like.

GRUSZAS: Oh, my mother's personality. You know, my mother [unclear] all by herself. You know, what—you didn't have—didn't have a father. Father die very young. There got—there is, like, flu over here, like [unclear] sickness, and our father die very young and my mother raise it by herself [unclear] and didn't have no brother. My mother—and I guess—and after she was, well, 60, 70 years she been married. She got married, like, farmer man. And then it—living, you know. They didn't have their own farm but always rented—rented, you know. And, you know, if you had animals or something [unclear] bigger for farmer rented. And once you have animals you've got to feed the ground, you know, by fertilizing it.

SIGRIST: Do you know how your mother met your father?

GRUSZAS: No, really—really don't know that. She was, I guess—already, my grandma was a widow already. She didn't have husband no more. He died—father—my mother's father die very young. Yeah, like [unclear].

SIGRIST: Do you remember your mother's mother?

GRUSZAS: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember your grandmother?

GRUSZAS: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: What—what do you remember about her?

GRUSZAS: You grow with—with our—most with our grandma.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about your grandma?

GRUSZAS: She was [unclear] do it like [several words unclear] all kind of things, like linen and to make things, make a lot of things they don't make at home. Everything make home.

SIGRIST: Did your grandmother teach you how to do anything?

GRUSZAS: Not really. Teach us prayers. [chuckles] You got to get up in the morning, go bu—about you. But [several words unclear] kneel and say prayers loud.

SIGRIST: Do you remember that prayer?

GRUSZAS: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you say it for me in—in Lithuanian?

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Go ahead.

GRUSZAS: [speaking in Lithuanian]. Amen.

SIGRIST: Thank you. [laughter] Do you—do you remember any songs that you sang as a child?

GRUSZAS: Oh, my goodness. I know that [unclear] a lot of songs when I was young. You go in a bunch—big bunch in the senior. They always ask first one. They call me [unclear]. You see [unclear] I was young. But I [unclear] already. They follow me like in a church. Yeah, and I—

SIGRIST: Do you remember that song? Can you—can you sing a little bit for me on tape?

GRUSZAS: I know a few words but [unclear]. This is kind of hard [unclear].

SIGRIST: Okay.

GRUSZAS: [speaking in Lithuanian].

SIGRIST: And what does that mean?

GRUSZAS: [chuckles] That's [unclear] help grow Jim, maple tree. You [several words unclear]. Say don't grow when—don't wake me up—wake me up. Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Now, what religion were you in Lithuania? What religion were you then?

GRUSZAS: Religion?

SIGRIST: Yes, what was your religion at that time?

GRUSZAS: Well, the same thing.

SIGRIST: Which is what?

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What—what are you now?

GRUSZAS: Yeah. Well, no, not much difference.

SIGRIST: But—but—what—what religion is that? What was your religion back then?

GRUSZAS: There—there—they the same thing. Same thing. There—

SIGRIST: Was it Catholic or—were you Catholic?

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Were you Protestant? Which—

GRUSZAS: Oh, no. Different. Both languages—difference. You have a Lithuania language. You have some Polish. Yeah, anybody want—talk Polish, had a better seat in the church. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: What—what language did you speak when you were growing up?

GRUSZAS: Lithuanian.

SIGRIST: You spoke Lithuanian?

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Well, what's the difference between Lithuanian and Polish? How—how are they different, as languages?

GRUSZAS: A big difference. Big difference. I guess Polish more—bigger country or something. They—they talk Polish and a lot of Lithuanian people

talk Polish there. A lot of don't but a lot of talk, like my father would talk. So my father would talk Russian too. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you go to school in Lithuania?

GRUSZAS: No.

SIGRIST: No. Did you go to church in Lithuania?

GRUSZAS: Go church—go—I go house school, like a little bit. And then I cry so much. I don't want to go school. I remember that. [chuckles] And they says, "What are you crying for?" So I don't want to go to that school. And I—and I says, "My mother's sick." [chuckles] That's why I lie—"My mother's sick." That's why [unclear]. I remember that.

SIGRIST: Was your mother really sick?

GRUSZAS: No.

SIGRIST: No? [laughter] What kind of church did you go to?

GRUSZAS: Lithuanian school.

SIGRIST: No, church. What kind of church?

GRUSZAS: Church.

SIGRIST: Church.

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What kind of church did you go to?

GRUSZAS: We go Lithuanian church.

SIGRIST: It was a Lithuanian church.

GRUSZAS: Lithuanian church. With the Polish, had a Polish church. Russian—Russians [unclear]. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Well, what do you remember about going to church back then? What sticks out in your mind about church?

GRUSZAS: I started going in church—it was kind of 10 years or 12 years—kind of big already. And it seems to me they teach, like cate—cate—cate—

SIGRIST: Catechism.

GRUSZAS: Yeah. And I just—then we teach those prayers and everything. And then after—no, [unclear] very, you know, [unclear]. And they go—go—they go to—go communion [several words unclear] communion. But after a year or so, yeah.

SIGRIST: Who was the most religious person in your family?

GRUSZAS: Well, no—maybe [unclear]—Grandma.

SIGRIST: Your grandma.

GRUSZAS: Grandmother. She—she taught prayers—Polish. I used to think when [unclear] was coming, you kind of like to know that prayer. But she was Polish—from Polish. I mean, my mother didn't know Polish prayers. I think my mother was kind of—you know, having 12 children, don't forget. I was thinking to myself, nowadays, you have 12 children and you have to take care of everything, feeding—

SIGRIST: That's a lot.

GRUSZAS: That's a lot.

SIGRIST: That's a lot of children.

GRUSZAS: A lot.

SIGRIST: Do—how—how do you—were you one of the first children or one of the last children, or how do you fall in?

GRUSZAS: I wa—I was—there was already before me two, three—three—three—four children before one of them died.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when one of your brothers and sisters were born?

GRUSZAS: Well, yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about that?

GRUSZAS: I remember that, you know, anytime baby coming they don't tell nothing—children—says, like, Garnice [PH]—Garnice bring the—the stars—you know, the stars bring the babies. You know, they start aah, aah, aah, aah! You know. You got to say something. And then for [unclear] you cut the chicken and it makes [unclear]. Yes. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Things have changed, huh? [chuckles]

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me a little bit about why you wanted to come to the United States.

GRUSZAS: Why I want to come?

SIGRIST: Yeah, why did you want to come to America?

GRUSZAS: I want to come because, you know, in Europe you—you have to work hard. You're—you know, you're like girls [unclear] like from home, money or something. They can get married. Nobody wants married that's poor. They always look for a poor girl—rich girl to marry. Yeah, that's why every one of—want come into this country, America.

SIGRIST: Did you know anybody who was already here in America?

GRUSZAS: Yeah, I had a boyfriend. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Oh. [laughs] Would you like to tell me about that?

GRUSZAS: Yeah, I had a boyfriend. But that boyfriend didn't—don't ask me if I going to marry, but I don't like that boyfriend.

SIGRIST: How did you meet that boyfriend?

GRUSZAS: Oh, in—like, we live in the country, see each other, well, really, once a week. And then he go in this country, how—you go—go—he come. I guess I remember [unclear] maybe the father give money or something. And then he sent me a ticket.

SIGRIST: The boyfriend sent you—

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —a ticket.

GRUSZAS: Yeah, ticket. And then I was thinking in my mind, 'I don't like that boyfriend.' If he asks me, [unclear] know I think I may be gonna be guilty—if he asks me, "Are you marry me after coming to this"—he didn't ask me. He just sent me ticket and everything. He treated me so good that I got [unclear]. You know, you [chuckles]—named John—I says, "You're—John, you're—I'm not going to marry you." Right away, I tell him that day that—and he says—he cry. If I don't marry

him, he says, "My fingers was bleeding and everything. I work so hard to send you a ticket and you don't marry me." "I can't help it," I says. "I don't—[unclear] to marry you. That's all [several words unclear]." And after, I meeted my husband.

SIGRIST: Well, be—before you—before you came to America, when you were still in Lithuania, what did you know about America—

GRUSZAS: You know—

SIGRIST: —beforehand?

GRUSZAS: You know, they—they say everybody's so good. Work and good [unclear] working, make money. Work, you know. They was, I guess, saying richer country, you know. Lithuania a poor country.

SIGRIST: How did your parents feel about your going to America?

GRUSZAS: My mother was dead already. My father was [unclear]—my father—you see somebody, [unclear] somebody says, "You know, today my—my mother, you know, dies. My wife died and my daughter goes to America." And I says, "I ain't got much to—to work—to take care of all, you know, like houses and food and everything." I was—I was already take care of everything. I was young but I can take care of everything. I was kind of different from rest. Yeah.

SIGRIST: So—so—but how did he feel about your leaving? I mean, did he—how did he feel about your going to America?

GRUSZAS: [unclear]—I—I don't—I feel good to go but I was thinking, 'I don't want to marry that man that sent me ticket.' And my brother-in-law—it was before in this country—he knows everything more about this country. Says, "Don't worry about—man can marry the woman but woman can marry man—and marry the one [unclear] married." That's all. But, yeah.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

SIGRIST: How old were you when your mother died?

GRUSZAS: I guess 18, 19.

SIGRIST: So it was right before you came to this country.

GRUSZAS: Yeah, before I came.

SIGRIST: What did she die of?

GRUSZAS: What kind of sickness?

SIGRIST: Yeah.

GRUSZAS: She kind of [unclear] tuberculosis.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about her being sick?

GRUSZAS: I remember, you know, my mother die. I was—take Mother's place a little bit in—the mother—I used to comb her hair. After she die, I comb her hair. I do—dress [unclear] clothes. I had my clothes made coming to this country. And I put on Mama—my mother's—I didn't have the clothes. I make [unclear] to come here. [unclear] I come and throw those clothes. I got to buy new ones.

SIGRIST: Oh, I see. The clothes that you had made to come to this country, you got rid of because your mother was sick—

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —in the house. Is that what you're saying?

GRUSZAS: She wasn't sick. [unclear] left my mother die.

SIGRIST: Oh, after you left?

GRUSZAS: Yeah, I—I didn't leave my mother. I wait till my mother [unclear] die. My mother die. Then in three weeks I come.

SIGRIST: I see. So she died right before you left.

GRUSZAS: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Do you remember what you packed to take to America? What did you take with you to America?

GRUSZAS: What I take?

SIGRIST: Yeah.

GRUSZAS: You know, you can take a lot of cheese but that cheese got to be hard. Dried the cheese and some—some things. You know, maybe some

kind of—little bit—I mean, bologna or something. I—I—I didn't remember too much. Some kind of, like, make out of bread or something. Make some kind of [unclear]. You can—but I didn't have too much because I have awful time to go to America. You have to wait in a line—very—very hard time to pass that line.

SIGRIST: Why? What—what did they do? Why was it hard to—

GRUSZAS: If they catch—they bring you home, make [several words unclear] or something, you know. [chuckles] They do something. Yeah. Oh, yeah. You know.

SIGRIST: So you took some food with you. What else? Did you take any clothes?

GRUSZAS: Yeah, some. Not much. Not much because, you know, they don't wear them. As soon as they come, they throw that clothes out.

SIGRIST: What kind of clothes did you wear in Lithuania? Could you describe what kind of clothes you wore back then?

GRUSZAS: Well, all the same. Nothing much difference. Skirts and blouses. You know, they was kind of, you know, nice. They make nice clothes. At that time, that was kind of nice.

SIGRIST: How long was the skirt?

GRUSZAS: The same thing, like here.

SIGRIST: Like here. And—and how—how was your hair back then?

GRUSZAS: Hair—hair sometimes comb it in the back but sometimes comb it a little bit in the top. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: What color was your hair back then?

GRUSZAS: My—my color hair was brownish, little bit. Yeah.

SIGRIST: You've got beautiful white hair now.

GRUSZAS: My—my daughter—my daughter steal all my hair after haircut. She—she always likes my hair. She look all the time, get my hair, like, brown a little bit. She keep it.

SIGRIST: Do you remember saying goodbye to your father?

GRUSZAS: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: What—can you describe that for me?

GRUSZAS: I say goodbye. I go on my knees. “Father, bless me. I go now.” He—
he blessed me and I left.

SIGRIST: Where did you go to get on the ship?

GRUSZAS: We go—I can’t tell you. I—

SIGRIST: Well, maybe it’ll come to you. Were you traveling alone?

GRUSZAS: My father.

SIGRIST: No, who was—who was traveling with you to America?

GRUSZAS: Well, my father, who left by himself.

SIGRIST: No, when you left, when you—when you came to America, was
anyone with you?

GRUSZAS: With me?

SIGRIST: Yes.

GRUSZAS: No, just me—I guess [unclear] man, some man [unclear] where I know.
But after—in New York, you separate. Go here. You go [unclear].

SIGRIST: I see.

GRUSZAS: [unclear].

SIGRIST: But there was some man who was with you on the ship coming across.

GRUSZAS: Yeah, the man—yeah.

SIGRIST: Like a chaperone.

GRUSZAS: Some girl—girl. No, no. No chaperone.

SIGRIST: No, not a chaperone.

GRUSZAS: No, just going—I guess they just—just check [unclear] first thing.
[chuckles] And, you know, [unclear] a little bit, maybe.

SIGRIST: Do you remember—do you remember the name of the ship that you came?

GRUSZAS: The Rotterdam.

SIGRIST: You came on the Rotterdam. And tell me what you remember about being on the ship.

GRUSZAS: Nothing I can remember, you know. You know, I was very strong. [unclear] what kind of soup they—what kind of—got to eat everything. And I was very [unclear]. And—and you—they—everybody's sick, throw up and everything, you know. But I never sick. I—from the—up ship bottom, I go on top. Go on top, sit [unclear]. And I see this—fishes was big [chuckles] like pigs. [chuckles] They come after the ship. They get something maybe. I watch them and sit. You know, I was out there. I was very out there.

SIGRIST: Where did you sleep on the ship?

GRUSZAS: Some—some—I guess—I didn't [unclear] made some but—but I guess [unclear] top some—

SIGRIST: Bunk beds.

GRUSZAS: Yeah, bunk—

SIGRIST: And where did they feed you on the ship?

GRUSZAS: They [unclear]. They give meat. The meat kind of lean, long. I told [unclear] order some meat. But you know, you hungry, you eat. You don't [unclear]. [chuckles] It was kind of cheap—cheap, seems to me, but it was good.

SIGRIST: Do you know how much the passage cost?

GRUSZAS: What?

SIGRIST: Do you know how much your boyfriend paid?

GRUSZAS: My ticket, you mean?

SIGRIST: Yeah, how much was the ticket? Do you know?

GRUSZAS: I think [unclear]. I think 300, maybe. Maybe 300. I—I give back, you know, to the fellow sent me. But I got to give every one penny to his—“Don't cry,” I says. “I'm going to give you back everything. [unclear] if

you buy me clothes—I come in this country, you want to buy me a lot of clothes and everything.” I says, “Don’t buy—John.” I says, “Don’t buy too much.” I says, “I’m not going to marry you.”

SIGRIST: How long were you on the ship?

GRUSZAS: On the ship, about, maybe, eight days.

SIGRIST: Eight days.

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And then do you remember when the ship came into New York?

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the ship coming into New York?

GRUSZAS: Coming—I didn’t remember too much those things.

SIGRIST: Did you see the Statue of Liberty?

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you know what that was?

GRUSZAS: You know, I know that [several words unclear] looking over—with the close America, you know, all [unclear], you know. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you have to go to Ellis Island to be examined?

GRUSZAS: Ellis Island?

SIGRIST: Yes. When the ship came into New York—

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —did they examine you?

GRUSZAS: Yeah, I know. I didn’t remember that too much.

SIGRIST: Who met you in New York?

GRUSZAS: To—to—to meet in New York, coming?

SIGRIST: Who—who came to meet you in New York?

GRUSZAS: Nobody, I guess.

SIGRIST: Your boyfriend didn't come?

GRUSZAS: Boyfriend don't come. My boyfriend wasn't home. I come—I come in that house where he live. He's kind of feel bad. You know, I—I come in and it—it was outside, you know. Go place or shopping [unclear]. And I come in.

SIGRIST: And tell me how—how you got a job. Did you get a job when you came?

GRUSZAS: Yeah, I got a job in G.B. Williams Company.

SIGRIST: G.B. Williams.

GRUSZAS: Company.

SIGRIST: Was that the first job you got?

GRUSZAS: Yeah, first job, make salts, soaps, powders—all kind of—yeah, those things, they make, you know, for—

SIGRIST: And what was your job in—in—

GRUSZAS: In this country.

SIGRIST: In—what was—what did you have to do in that factory?

GRUSZAS: You mean, in—go in that factory?

SIGRIST: You said they made—they made powder and stuff. What was your job there to do?

GRUSZAS: I—my—my job was on a press. You—I make boxes. You know, cut those ridges in the box and go—one [chuckles]—one girl cut her fingers already. But I didn't cut my fingers but [several words unclear]. One cut the corner, another corner. You got to make ridges to fold that boxes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how much you got paid?

GRUSZAS: Maybe about six—five dollars week.

SIGRIST: Six—five—five or six dollars a week.

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And how did you learn English?

GRUSZAS: Well, I [chuckles]—I really—my—myself, I was thinking we—we did not talk very good. But we didn't go to school. We didn't know nothing and—but little by little from people, from—from children sometime you got a little—more and more. I work all the time. I was working all the time.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the first word that you learned in English?

GRUSZAS: Yeah. [chuckles] I—I—if I was some job, you know, I got to need something more—job, finish that one. I says, "I—I—I want—I know—I know more—I know more. I want more job. I want more." [several words unclear], you know, [unclear] says, "I want." And I didn't say, "I want." "I know. I know," I said. Yeah. The man [unclear] where I mean it.

SIGRIST: Right. Well, where did you live when you first came to the United States?

GRUSZAS: Lived with the—with the people [several words unclear] husband, a wife and her four children, and having roomers, you know. They have about three roomers and have big family. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: So can you describe where you stayed in their house?

GRUSZAS: In the house?

SIGRIST: In their house where you were living, what did it look like? Your room or—

GRUSZAS: You know, well, same thing. You know, same thing—you know, house. Yeah, they have—you know, have floors, most. Didn't have no rugs, much. They always washed those floors, scrub them and look quite nice.

SIGRIST: What was the hardest thing to get used to here in America? When you first got here, what was the hardest thing for you to—

GRUSZAS: For me.

SIGRIST: For you.

GRUSZAS: Talk. Talk was—out of things—talk, understand, you know, things what they say to you. They was hardest things.

SIGRIST: Did you miss Lithuania?

GRUSZAS: Yeah, I missed very, very much. I always dreams, you know, and I was—dream of Lithuania and I wake up in America. Oh, I always feel bad. Yeah, I left my small three brothers and my father. And you know, they—they kind of need—needed me. They need very bad.

SIGRIST: Did any of them ever come over to America?

GRUSZAS: From my family?

SIGRIST: Your father or your brothers? Did any?

GRUSZAS: No.

SIGRIST: No.

GRUSZAS: Of why they stay longer. Maybe, you know, I—I [unclear] but I can take my brother to something—my sister but I guess it was kind of hard.

SIGRIST: Did you write to your father? Or were you in communication at all with your father?

GRUSZAS: Yeah, yeah. We write—we write.

SIGRIST: But he never wanted to come here?

GRUSZAS: My father. Oh, no.

SIGRIST: No.

GRUSZAS: My father was too old. My father father—there was just couple of times, you know, in this country.

SIGRIST: Your father's father.

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

GRUSZAS: And then another brothers come to this country. They tell me, you know—says I like to go in America but I says afraid that he make me

marry that fellow. You see, [unclear] he says—he says, “Don’t worry about. Girl can make man marry—I mean, marry boy. You—you want to marry some boy, you can marry. But man can marry [unclear] wants.” You know, sometimes have babies and think [unclear] marry.

SIGRIST: Well, and you said that the—the man who brought you over to America was very upset because you didn’t want to marry him.

GRUSZAS: Well, yeah. He was upset, very upset.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Tell me how you met your husband.

GRUSZAS: I met, you know, because my husband’s brother was—married my sister in Europe. I know very well about everything. That’s why he told me. He says he’s not afraid to—to get—you going to marry you. You—you [unclear] girl don’t want to marry something he going to marry me.

SIGRIST: Well, what was it about your husband to be that you were attracted to? What did you like about the man that you were going to marry?

GRUSZAS: Well, [unclear] that man—you mean my husband?

SIGRIST: The—the man who would become your husband, what was it about him that you liked?

GRUSZAS: You know, he was kind of—very mad. But he can’t do no—he says he can’t trust you. He can’t do this. The can’t do that. But my husband don’t—don’t [unclear] nothing. [chuckles] He just get—he—my husband lived in New Britain. I lived in Glastonbury.

SIGRIST: Oh, you lived in Glastonbury?

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: I see. And he lived in New Britain. Was he from Lithuania also?

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes. Did he speak Lithuanian or Polish or—what—what language did your husband speak?

GRUSZAS: He—he speak American little bit [unclear] and the Lithuanian language. I don’t think—maybe, you know, he was in a Lithuanian school. Like Russian school, they learn Russian and Lithuanian. Then maybe he knows a little bit more language.

SIGRIST: Was he older than you?

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

GRUSZAS: Was three years.

SIGRIST: Three years older. Do you remember what year you got married?

GRUSZAS: I guess '13—'13.

SIGRIST: You—you came in 1913.

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: You got married the same year?

GRUSZAS: Yes.

SIGRIST: Oh, you got married fast then.

GRUSZAS: Marry quick.

SIGRIST: Yeah. [chuckles] I guess you did. What did your husband do for a living? When you—when you first married, what was he doing for a living?

GRUSZAS: My husband? He work in a factory. He was polisher. They work on all—big—the rods polishing the rods and make it shine. That's all job, a long time.

SIGRIST: He was a polisher?

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Did you ever want to go back to Lithuania?

GRUSZAS: If I want to back?

SIGRIST: Did you ever go back to Lithuania?

GRUSZAS: Yeah, I want to go back. They wanted—that boy—my boyfriend when I come—he wants to give me money, go in—in Lithuania and learn

dressmaking and dress sewing. I was thinking if I go and [several words unclear]. No. I says, "No, I'm going to stay here."

SIGRIST: Did you ever go back to visit?

GRUSZAS: No.

SIGRIST: No?

GRUSZAS: Didn't have a chance.

SIGRIST: Did you become a citizen? A U.S. citizen?

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes? What—how old were you when you became a U.S. citizen?

GRUSZAS: Not very—I can say very, very old, maybe. I got children, everything. It's kind of—kind of—I can't tell what age but—

SIGRIST: But you did become a citizen—

GRUSZAS: Yes.

SIGRIST: —at some point, yeah.

GRUSZAS: Yeah, I want to come a [unclear]. You know, they always have a—you have to have a—report yourself, this and that. You know.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

GRUSZAS: Have to—

SIGRIST: When you look back on your life—because you're 100 now. Right?

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: You're going to be 101 in May. When you look back on your life, what—what are you the most proud of?

GRUSZAS: Huh?

SIGRIST: What—what brings you the most pride in your life?

GRUSZAS: I can't tell about that.

SIGRIST: No?

GRUSZAS: About [unclear].

SIGRIST: What made you the happiest in your life?

GRUSZAS: In the—making me laugh, made nice and other thing. Make me laugh—I had a nice husband and I have three children.

SIGRIST: What are their names?

GRUSZAS: My children—Sophie, Alec and Julie. [chuckles] Baby—my baby, Julie.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

GRUSZAS: Yeah, and then I—I get along very well with my husband.

SIGRIST: Well, Mrs. Gruzas, thank you very much—

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —for letting me ask you all these questions about—

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —a long time ago. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Alexandra Gruzas—

GRUSZAS: Yes.

SIGRIST: —sometimes known as Alice—

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —on Tuesday, April 23rd, 1996—

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —here in the South Windsor Nursing Center.

GRUSZAS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Thank you.

GRUSZAS: Yeah, thank you.

EI-741/GRUSZAS

[END OF INTERVIEW]