

**EI-778**

**PERLER**

**BIRTHDATE: JANUARY 1, 1911**

**INTERVIEW DATE: AUGUST 13, 1996**

**AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 85**

**RUNNING TIME: 58:36, 54:50**

**INTERVIEWER: PAUL SIGRIST**

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**TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE**

**TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:**

**RUSSIA, 1921**

**10**

**SHIP: THE *ROTTERDAM***

**PORT:**

**RESIDENCES:**

SIGRIST: Good morning, this is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Tuesday, August 13<sup>th</sup>, 1996. I'm in Springfield, Massachusetts with Mrs. Ida Perler. Mrs. Perler came from Russia in 1921. She was ten years old at that time, and she was detained for a couple of weeks at Ellis Island when they came in 1921. Present also is Myrna Robbins, who is the daughter of a good friend of Mrs. Perler's, and Myrna's son, Craig. And Robbins is spelled R-O-B-B-I-N-S. For the sake of the tape, you may hear a clock that's on the wall and a refrigerator that's not far away.

Anyway, with all that said, Mrs. Perler, can you begin by giving me your birth date?

PERLER: January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1911.

SIGRIST: And can you give me your full name as it was in Russia?

PERLER: Ida Goldart. Well, I got a middle name, too.

SIGRIST: Yes, I'd like to hear that.

PERLER: Edith they call me here, but Osna. My name, my Jewish name was Osna Chaya Goldart.

SIGRIST: Can you spell all of that for me?

PERLER: I don't know how to spell—I don't know how to spell Ausna.

SIGRIST: Well, how do you spell Chaya, start with that?

PERLER: I wonder if I have it on my—

SIGRIST: Don't move.

PERLER: Don't move. Give me the bible over there.

SIGRIST: We'll look it up after the interview.

PERLER: Yeah, okay. It might be in there.

SIGRIST: And your maiden name you said was Goldart.

PERLER: Goldart, A-R-T.

SIGRIST: And you mentioned before we started that there's a story about that last name. Could you tell me that story again?

PERLER: My father came here in 1913 before the First World War and my mother's family was here. She had a mother, sisters and brothers and one brother came to pick him up in New York and take him to Springfield and they had to register, who, what, when and he says to him, "Don't say Goldart. Say Gold. In America everything is shortened." And that's how we are, we're Gold.

SIGRIST: I see, so your father shortened his name here in the United States.

PERLER: Did I tell you that he had a brother that didn't want to do it?

SIGRIST: Hmm?

PERLER: Shall I tell you that a brother of his came and he didn't want to cut it? Or that isn't part of the story.

SIGRIST: Tell me anything you'd like to tell me that is important.

PERLER: Well, a few years after that, my uncle came here and he said, "I'm not cutting the name. My name is Goldart." So there were two brothers, one name was Gold and the other one was Goldart.

SIGRIST: Well, that's interesting in itself. Goldart would be G-O-L-D.

PERLER: A-R-T.

SIGRIST: A-R-T, okay. Great. Mrs. Perler, do you know anything about the circumstances of your birth? Did anyone ever tell you any stories about the day you were born?

PERLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Would you like to tell us on tape?

PERLER: Yeah. I was born the first of January. People that came from Russia at the time we came, didn't bring any papers. They didn't have any birth certificates. Everything was burned down, house and everything. My mother always used to tell me, "Your birth I know for sure. You were born—when you were born, it was New Year's. The church bells were ringing." That's why I knew that I was born January 1<sup>st</sup>, because the church bells were ringing, bringing in the New Year. So that's what I know about my birth.

SIGRIST: That's a great story. Did you live in the same town for the ten years that you were in Russia?

PERLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes. Can you describe for me your memories as a child of what the town looked like? What kinds of buildings there were, how they were arranged, what you remember about the town itself.

PERLER: The church was right in the middle of the little town. Right in the middle and it was a nice little town. Very small. Very small. The joke of the town was if you drive in with a wagon one way, you're out already the other way. Very small, but very nice. It was a nice, clean town mostly Jews around us. But my mother—my mother really lived out of town. Her family—her father took care—in Russia the forests were belonged to rich people. They owned the forest and my grandfather took care of it, and he lived at a little house in the forest, just a little ways out of—my town's name was Payter, P-A-Y-T-E-R.

SIGRIST: What part of Russia is that in?

PERLER: Ukraine.

SIGRIST: It's in the Ukraine.

PERLER: So she comes from, was really born there, but I was born in Russia and that's how she met my father. My father came there to teach the children. He was a teacher. He used to teach them a little bit of Russian, but mostly Hebrew and taught the children, but had an eye on my mother. And they fell in love and they got married, and then they moved to Payter and that's where were born, until my father left for America in 1913 because he would have to go to the Russian army and didn't want to.

SIGRIST: Let's go back to the town itself. You said that the Jewish population lived mostly in town.

PERLER: Around, yeah.

SIGRIST: Where did the gentile population live, or was there a gentile population?

PERLER: Yeah, in a little bit of different—well, here and there there were gentiles between these, but mostly the Jews like on one side, the gentiles on the other side.

SIGRIST: So for the most part the communities were separate.

PERLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes.

PERLER: And the church was right in the center. I can just see it, but the synagogue was down a little hill, down. One synagogue we had in Payter.

SIGRIST: One synagogue there. Can you describe for me the businesses in town? What kind of stores and businesses were there in this town? That you remember as a child?

PERLER: A little bit of everything. Dry goods. In fact, the aunt that we lived in after my father left for America, she had a store and she sold—I can see the bags of flour and sugar and lima beans and things like that. There were all kind of business. There were, you know, a few rich people, but I don't even know what they did. We were—we were poor. My father left my mother with four children.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me the house or the structure that you lived in? What it was made out of, what it looked like.

PERLER: As I said, we lived with my aunt, and she had a beautiful house. Really a beautiful house. She had two bedrooms. She had a kitchen and like a little living room and that's how we lived with her. She only had one daughter and her husband was in America, too, and so we had one bedroom. My mother, at that time we only had three—she only had three children because my little brother died, and then she had another bedroom with her daughter. But it was a very nice house. I can picture the house. It had a little porch, and that porch with the two benches was something that saved our life. Later on, maybe you'll ask me and I'll tell you.

SIGRIST: Yes. What was the house made out of?

PERLER: Wood.

SIGRIST: It was a wooden house.

PERLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What kind of a roof did the house have on it, do you remember?

PERLER: Hmm. No, not really, but it looked like a house here.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh, you may never have looked up, actually, as a child.  
[Laughs]

PERLER: No, I don't think so. I don't think so. I was what? Four, five, six years old when I lived there. We lived with them a few years.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how the house was heated? How did you heat the house?

PERLER: Um, let me see now. Do you know anything about Russia? Were they—oh, there was a little stove, anyway, but then I don't even know how to explain what this was. It—I can't explain. I don't know what to call it. I don't even remember what to say how they're called in Europe. You don't know anything about it. No, of course not. You had to put in logs in it and it was, you know, it burned and it was like in the middle of the house and the heat went on both sides. The bedrooms was on this side, the kitchen was on this side and it was always nice and warm.

SIGRIST: How tall was that? Was it tall?

PERLER: Yeah, it was tall because it was made in the back. As children, there was a little ladder there and as children we used to climb up and sit up there, right on the heat. So that I remember, but I can't remember what they call it. In fact, my mother—are you Jewish?

SIGRIST: No, I'm not.

PERLER: No, I just wanted to ask you, but on Saturday my mother didn't cook, so whatever she made on Friday, cooked on Friday, she could put right into this heating place and warm it up. Well, what is it called? Oh, I can't remember. See, I never thought of that to think about it and mark it down, because I did mark down a few things.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how you lit the inside of the house? What did you use for light?

PERLER: Lamps.

SIGRIST: What kind of lamps?

PERLER: Like a lamp with, you know, a bulb and whatever.

SIGRIST: Electricity?

PERLER: Candle.

SIGRIST: You had electricity?

PERLER: Oh, no. No, no, no. Not electricity.

SIGRIST: Oh, well, then—

PERLER: Kerosene. Oh, yeah, that was what, how many years ago? Seventy?

SIGRIST: Long time ago.

PERLER: A long time ago. A lifetime.

SIGRIST: Is there a piece of furniture that was in that house that sticks out in your memory?

PERLER: Yeah, we had like what you would call here a china closet with the best of what my mother owned. Silver, wine goblets I remember. I

remember those things because during the pogrommes, all these things were hidden. The house had floors made out of wood, but in the back there was like a storage room and that the floor was not wood. It was earth and during the pogrommes, my mother and my aunt dug a hole, a great big hole there and put a barrel in there and everything that was in that beautiful china closet, my mother's and my aunt's, were put in there and covered up and they stayed there. For all I know, maybe it's still there.

I remember bringing out—they dug. I didn't help with digging up, put the barrel. Then I remember taking things out of this beautiful china closet and handing it to them, and they put it in the barrel and then they covered it up and that's how we left it there. We never took anything from there.

SIGRIST: How did you know that you needed to do that? What kind of warning did you have before there was a pogromme?

PERLER: Sometimes no warning. Sometimes no warning. I remember one day I had—I was a redhead. My father was a redhead and so was I. My mother said I had beautiful long hair and she was washing my hair and like here in the kitchen where she was washing there was a window and an alley where you run down. The river was there and so was the man's—where the men used to go for their bath, the Jewish men.

SIGRIST: A bathhouse of some sort.

PERLER: Yeah, like a—that's why I asked you about Jewish, whether you know anything about it. It's called a mekva.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

PERLER: M-E-K-V-A, mekva.

SIGRIST: Mekva.

PERLER: Yeah, that's what, you know, was for the men, and while my mother was doing my hair, which took a long time—I had long hair—all of a sudden we saw people running down and we heard the shooting. That was—we didn't know what happened. This came right out of the clear of the sky because we didn't know anything about it, and so with the wet hair and all, we ran with everybody else. And everybody was running into, opened up the door, into the—this was terrible. Oh, I remember it so, and they were—they were piled in there. They didn't even want to let us in and then my mother yelled, "Please, please, let us in. I got three small children." So they open up the

door, whoever got there first, and let us in and closed the door. We were packed in like sardines. I couldn't take—ever since I was a little girl, including today, I don't like to be in. I think that's why I don't like to be in tight quarters and too warm, and I said to my mother, "I'm going to faint." I felt that I was going to faint. I didn't even have any room to fall on the floor. So she started to yell, "Open the door. If my child is going to die, I'll take her." The minute we came out and the air hit me, I felt better, but they wouldn't open up the door for us anymore to let us in. Besides, I don't think my mother would go in because I would only get sick again there. But still want to live, because you could see these young guys on the horses. You know, to kill the Jews, you didn't need to give a warning. If you were old enough to ride a horse and have a gun, you had a permit to kill a Jew. That's the way it was in Russia during the time I lived there, and we could see these young guys on the horses.

Around the corner there was another door and my mother swore to her guy there, there was a big lock on that door. And it was locked. The man that takes care of the mekva swore that that lock was locked and she ran over and she started to go like this back and forth and the lock opened. Now, whether the lock was not opened or whether it gives you the strength, I don't know how, and we went into a beautiful big room. It was nice and airy there, and we stayed there until it got quiet and then we went home.

SIGRIST: Who were the people—you talk about these young men. Who are these young men?

PERLER: Cossacks. Bolsheviks. Could be a neighbor. Could be somebody that we probably knew because all they—like later one, when I can give you a name who had—he really had the whole gang that he used to travel with from city to city, and they were well known. They were butchers, but otherwise, they could be anybody. Anybody, like I said, anybody that a horse, that had a gun was fine to have a little fun, to kill a few Jews or to rob their houses or burn them.

SIGRIST: So am I to understand there were actually two different kinds of pogroms going on. There's the sort of random immediate kind.

PERLER: Absolutely.

SIGRIST: But there's also a faction that's been organized about this.

PERLER: Absolutely. I'm reading Golda Meyer. You know who she was?

SIGRIST: Yes.

PERLER: And she mentions that she comes from Pinsk, which at that time was Russia, but not Ukraine. Not where I was, and she mentions—this is how she spells them, Petlyris murderous mobs.

SIGRIST: That's P-E-T-L-Y-R-S.

PERLER: Yeah. That's how she spells it. Now, the minute I came to that, I saw the picture what we went through because of him. He used to go from little town to little town with a gang, ten, twelve and the sister used to travel with him, and wherever he came into a town, that town didn't have too many Jews left, if any, when he got through with them. [Sighs] This was on a Saturday and he was supposed to be in our town. You know, people were talking that he was going to be in a little town on this side, a little town and we were in the middle. Well, what he used to do is send his sister on ahead of him to the town where he was going to be, and what she was looking for, I don't know, but she was like on the lookout. And a few of the Jewish rich people treated her with kid gloves. They did everything. They invited her to the house and they treated her right, and then she went back to the other town where her brother was with the mob and Saturday morning he was supposed to be in our town and he just went by on the outskirts. Never came into our. My mother was left with three children in the house. My aunt and cousin went away to another house, and we were—we didn't know whether we were going to live by the time the day was over. But he never came in. Just on the outskirts and went to the next town and just wiped them up there, but never came into our town. But I remember his name. The minute I saw it, I marked it down because I could see everything in front of my eyes.

SIGRIST: You mentioned burying in that back storeroom the family valuables. Were there any other ways that you prepared for these pogroms?

PERLER: Oh, sure, we always had, especially me. My brother was older than I, but because I was a girl, I knew these things more and my mother had to go out to make a little money somehow. You know, how were we going to live? We didn't hear from my father for eight years, and so I always had a bag ready with bread and maybe, you know, things that don't perish, in case we ran away to grab something with us. You know, something to eat or a jacket, if we need it or whatever. But otherwise, we didn't have any warning. Lots of times we didn't have any warning.

SIGRIST: Were there any occasions where you actually had to leave the town? As opposed to just hiding somewhere, did you ever have to leave the actual town for any period of time?

PERLER: [Sighs] We would have had to leave the town a lot. Like I said, my mother was born in the forest and she knew a lot of Christian people. Everybody around her knew her. This is how she used to make money. She used to go from farm to farm and teach the girls, the children a little bit and then maybe do a little work for them, maybe a little sewing, maybe a little something and always come home with a lot of food that the farmers would give her. Everybody knew her.

SIGRIST: These were gentile farms?

PERLER: Yeah, all gentiles, and on Monday we used to have a fair in our town and all these farmers from around used to come to our town and usually there was a pogromme. Everybody hated and was afraid but how we were saved is because my mother knew all these people. They used to come and sit. I just said the little porch with—it had a little porch and it had a bench just like on both sides and a few steps. They used to come and sit on the steps and always said to my mother, “You stay in the back. Don’t come out. We’re going to stay here until it gets quiet in the house. Nobody’s going to touch you,” and that’s how we were saved a lot of times. That’s why we didn’t have to really go away from the house because she knew all these people and they all liked her and that’s what they used to do.

One day while we were in the back of the door and all these people, we saw all men from different that we knew. In fact, one of them was an uncle of mine, my father’s brother, they were all going by our house and we knew that they were going to the synagogue. I mean, little by little you know already how things are being done when there is going to be a pogromme. And they got all the men in the synagogue and they threw in a bomb, but not too many people got killed. They hid under the benches. You know, the synagogue had different benches all around. They hid under the benches. My uncle wasn’t killed then. He was killed during one of the pogrommes later on, but he wasn’t killed then.

One day I do remember we had to go away because everybody said we were going to have a big pogromme in our city. So we went to a Christian family that we knew and she asked us to come there. She hid us. But otherwise, we stayed there until the city was really burning from one end to the other and we couldn’t take out anything. We just left it there, you know, and we went to another city.

SIGRIST: It seems to me listening to you that the pogrommes are being performed by people who don’t live in the city.

PERLER: Coming in.

SIGRIST: It seems like that the gentile-Jewish relationship was pretty good in your town, is that correct?

PERLER: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Would you talk a little bit about the relationship between the two groups in your town?

PERLER: Well, I didn't—I couldn't even speak Russian. I was too young, but my mother knew everybody and everybody knew her. Like I said, when we had a fair, there wasn't anybody that didn't know my mother and there wasn't anybody that didn't leave my mother different fruits and vegetables and things.

SIGRIST: So at these fairs, were the Jews and the gentiles all participating together?

PERLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Could you describe one of these fairs for me, what it was like?

PERLER: Yeah, they would come in with a horse and wagon and park wherever, you know, right near one another and the Jewish would go out and buy from them.

SIGRIST: So the gentiles were the farmers for the most part.

PERLER: Yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah, right. Right. In fact, one farmer gave my mother—I can see the big black cherries, a pail full of big black cherries and that night she said to me, "I'm going to wash the cherries and you'll help me to take the pit out." Now, I went over—since you came, I went over in my mind, how was it done? After you wash them, you take off the stem and they were big, black. Now inside there was a pit, as you know a cherry would have. There was somehow you went like this to the pit, whether the cherries were different, you know, when you—I don't know, and the pit came out. The pit came out when you did that.

SIGRIST: Just flicking your fingers.

PERLER: Yeah, like this and then—and my mother, after a long time she said to me, "You're not a help. One cherry goes in the pail, the other one goes in your mouth." I remember to this day that that's what she said to me because I ate a lot of them, they were so big and so beautiful and that's what she said. One pit goes—one cherry goes in the pail and one goes in your mouth, and then she would use the cherries to

make different things. She made wine out of it. She made jelly out of it.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me how your mother made wine? What do you remember of that process?

PERLER: Put it in a barrel.

SIGRIST: But put what in the barrel? What?

PERLER: The cherries. Mostly we made out of cherries in a barrel and sugar, and you have to wait for a couple of weeks until I remember seeing bubbles. I actually don't exactly know how to make it. I was too—but it was good. It was very good, and then she used to make jelly out of it or bake things. But the most I remember is that I had to work with my mother to get it ready, but I can't give you the recipe how to make it.

SIGRIST: Can you talk about other foods that you ate at that time in Russia? What was a typical selection of foods that you would eat on a daily basis at that time?

PERLER: Everything was fresh. Everything was picked and you know.

SIGRIST: But what was everything? What sorts of things?

PERLER: Vegetables.

SIGRIST: What kind?

PERLER: Oranges. I don't remember—I think once I was very sick and there was a rich man who used to get oranges brought in from another big city and they gave my mother a couple of oranges for me because that we never had. But otherwise, you know, like carrots, cabbage, cucumbers, onions, you know. She always had enough food because she used to go onto the farms and they would all—oh, I also remember one farmer said to my mother, it was in the summertime and he was going to cut the wheat and he said to my mother, "If you want to, I could leave—as I cut the wheat, I'll leave some and you can pick it yourself, if you can, and you bring it to the mill," where he goes. Whether the mill was his own, I don't know. That I don't remember, "And we'll mill it for you, make flour," and that's what we did. My brother and I, I remember must have been maybe August because I remember the sun was very hot and we picked by hand, wheat, and then she took it over to the mill and they ground it, made

flour and she had it for a long time to bake bread and whatever else she baked.

SIGRIST: How often would she make bread?

PERLER: Oh, every week. Every Friday. Every Friday she made challah and bread for the week. Oh, yeah, but food we really had. We had food because that's how she had it because she used to go every day to the farms and I had to be home really to take care of the children. My brother was older, but I have a younger sister.

END OF SIDE A, TAPE 1  
BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE 1

SIGRIST: Did you keep kosher in that house?

PERLER: Oh, yeah, definitely.

SIGRIST: Did you eat meat at all at that time?

PERLER: Yeah, it was Jewish.

SIGRIST: What kind of meat did you eat?

PERLER: Kosher meat. Beef, chicken. Chicken the farmers would give her. They would give her fresh—I mean, it couldn't be. The chicken had to be alive and she would take it to the rabbi called a shoyket. [PH]

SIGRIST: Can you spell that? I hate to ask you, but--

PERLER: Let me see. Let me see. Let me see.

SIGRIST: Do you want to write it down? Here. Just write it on the bottom there.

PERLER: I'll write on mine.

SIGRIST: The shoyket is the butcher, chicken killer?

PERLER: The same thing here. He's the one that has to—there's a certain way they say that a Jewish shoyket has a certain way of killing the chicken that's the least painful. I saw them do it here. They hold the head back and they give over here, cut with a knife.

SIGRIST: You're gesturing to your neck.

PERLER: Yeah, and it's—I know reading it here even that that's the least painful to the animal, and that's what we had to do. I mean she couldn't take a chicken from the farm that was already killed. Then we couldn't use it.

SIGRIST: Right, part of the kosher rules was that it had to be killed.

PERLER: Done by the shoyket. Shoyket.

SIGRIST: Spell it?

PERLER: Oh, God.

SIGRIST: Well, do the best you can.

PERLER: What would this be like? What would you say?

SIGRIST: Sheckett.

PERLER: Shoy.

SIGRIST: Shoy. S-H-O-Y-K-E-T. It may be one of those words that just doesn't have one spelling to it, too.

PERLER: It's not a cantor. He's not a rabbi, but he's a shoyket. That's what you call him.

SIGRIST: What are some of the other kosher rules that you remember having to observe as a child in Russia?

PERLER: Yeah, I remember that if you buy—if you buy beef, you have to—in fact, I have one downstairs here. You put the beef in a pail for a half an hour with cold water because you can't eat blood. The Jews are not allowed to eat. And then you take that out and you put it on a tray and the tray was open on this side like if I would put it over there, and you put salt on it, and then it has to drain. That takes all the blood out.

SIGRIST: And your mother did this, also?

PERLER: All the time. All the time. That's part of the way that the meat was made kosher.

SIGRIST: What about like when you were in Russia, how would the family celebrate Passover, for instance? What kinds of foods did you serve at Passover in Russia and what kind of ceremony did you observe, if any, at that time?

PERLER: Well, not too much. We didn't have any men in our house.

SIGRIST: That's right, your uncle's gone and your father's gone.

PERLER: Right, they left when we were small. Oh, I forgot to tell you. My father left in 1913 and we were supposed to come just as soon as he could get enough money and he saved every penny and he had made out papers. They're called visas, and he sent it to us and we were getting ready to come to America. By that, it was the end 1913 into '14 and we even went to one of the towns that was right near us because you had to make sure that you didn't have glaucoma. That was the worst thing that would keep you out of going into America, and we went. We didn't have a doctor. We only had a man that was like a nurse, but not a doctor. So we went there and we had our eyes examined and it was fine and we were getting ready to go, and the First World War broke out. From 1914 to 1921, we never heard from my father. He never heard from us. All these years. So what was the question you asked before that? [Laughs]

SIGRIST: I'm glad you brought all this up, actually, because it brings up another question. We were talking about Passover. [Laughs]

PERLER: So, yeah, going back to Passover. [Laughing] Well, there were no men, so we'd read the bible and we'd have of course matzo. [unclear] bread. There was a place where they made matzo for the whole city. We had the same food as here, but there were no men, you know, so we didn't have too much of a—you know, a big deal going on.

SIGRIST: Why was the absence of men important to the celebration of Passover? Why did it change the celebration?

PERLER: Well, somehow the man is the one that reads the bible and the women sit around and maybe ask a question or maybe just listen to him, and that's the way it is. It is even to this day in America like that.

SIGRIST: Okay, now we'll go back to World War I. You were talking about that whole period of pogrommes and of course that's sort of separate from World War I. That's a separate thing that's going on.

PERLER: That happened after.

SIGRIST: What do you remember, if any, of the war itself? Did you or your family have any experience of World War I?

PERLER: Because that's when—in Russia, that's when the pogrommes started because I think it was, what, '17 when the Czar was killed?

SIGRIST: 1917.

PERLER: I think so. I think that's what it was, and that's when all the pogrommes for the Jews and all the trouble started for the Jews and we had to leave after awhile. I came here when I was ten, but it took at least maybe three years or so to get to where we were going. Little by little we had to get closer. Our goal was to go, you know, try and go to America, but it took a long time.

SIGRIST: Even though you hadn't heard from your father, you were going to get yourself there anyway.

PERLER: Oh, yeah, because my mother—like I said, my mother had a big family here. She was one of fourteen children and my grandmother—my grandfather died in Europe, but my grandmother was here. She had five sons and four daughters here, and that's my father came to Springfield.

SIGRIST: Well, this will be a good time to talk about your mother then. What was your mother's name?

PERLER: Sarah.

SIGRIST: And what was her maiden name?

PERLER: Greenburg.

SIGRIST: Greenburg, and can you tell me a little bit about what your mother's personality was like? What was she like as a person?

PERLER: Wonderful person. She was beautiful. Like I said, my father taught her brothers and sisters, but he had an eye on her. She was a beautiful girl and they got married and they had four children. I was just going to bring out something now and I forgot. Oh, yeah, during the pogrommes one day, we lived in this very nice house and the next house to us was an uncle of mine, but he had a little house, not a great big house. Of course, they always—those boys that wanted to rob the Jews or even kill or rob, always went to the nice houses, thinking, which was not always true, that there would be more things

to take. So this again was on a Saturday. They always tried to do things on a Saturday because they knew that that was a special day for us, and people were home. It wasn't so good in our city and it was getting dark on a Saturday and right next door to us we heard that it was a commotion there and we heard screams. We were in the house and my aunt and her daughter, they went out through the back door. We didn't know where, but my mother said, "Where will I run? How do I know another house is going to be better than here? We'll stay and God will take care of us." But when we heard that they were almost near our door, my mother says, "Let's' run." Everybody wants to live. So we ran out through the back door. There was a little alley and then was this little house belonged to my uncle, and they were on the lookout for us. They were wondering how come, because my aunt and my cousin were there, but we didn't come until later. So they were watching for us, and they opened up the door and we ran in there.

And when we came in there, after a while my cousin was crying. She had a baby that was maybe four weeks old, five weeks old. She didn't pick up the baby. The baby was left home. [having difficulty speaking about this] I can see it right in front of me. And after a while when we thought that our house was quiet, my mother said she's going back for the baby and she did. She went back for the baby and then when she came back with the baby, the baby was sleeping. She walked into the house. The house was a mess. Everything was whatever, and the baby was sleeping in the crib, and she picked up the baby with the blanket and all and brought her there. If that baby had started to cry, they would have killed it. What they used to do to infants, is they used to put it on the spear, you know. That's what they did to infants. But the baby never woke up. It slept right through and she brought the baby to the mother.

At the next week, my cousin said because we were always afraid of weekends. Like I said, Saturday wasn't a very good day for Jews. So it went into Sunday and across on the other end of the street, of the city, my cousin Shirl—her name was Shirley—was her in-laws who had men. She felt—her husband died and she was left pregnant and she had a little girl, and you feel a little bit safer where there were men, whether that helped or not. But she said she wanted to go there because we were afraid what was going to happen again this weekend. So her mother went with her and we were left in the house again, but we didn't stay in our house. My uncle said we should stay in his house. That night they came into his house and they came in two. One came in like went in the back and we were in the bedroom, my mother—we were always together, my mother and the three children, wherever there was a little corner where she could be with us three children. And we were like in a bedroom and one of them came into the bedroom and said to my

other he wanted money. Said she didn't have any money. She had a wedding ring. She took that off, and he didn't believe her she didn't have any money, but she didn't have, and he put her against the wall. He was going to kill her. And he was called by the other guy. They raped one of the women and that's what saved my mother. He went in the back room and never came and that's how my mother wasn't killed that day.

Then she died when she was fifty-one years old in America from cancer.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit about how your mother felt about not hearing from dad because of the war? I mean, how did she interpret that?

PERLER: We knew that mail didn't go through. Didn't go out. We couldn't—because of Russia, there was no mail that we could send. She wrote, but she never got it back, either, but we knew that my father wanted us there because here we had all the papers and he sent us money. We were ready to go. Wasn't anything that he could do. It was just something that we didn't hear from him until we got to Romania. In Romania there was—I marked it down because all of a sudden I remembered. There was an organization that was called the HIAS.

SIGRIST: Uh-hmm, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society.

PERLER: Right. Oh, good, I'm glad. And because I got it here, "helped to find family in America," and they're the one that got in touch with my father, and he sent us money. But until we got to Romania, would you like to hear when we had to cross the [unclear]. Do you know what that is?

SIGRIST: We will get to that because I'm sure that getting to get out of Europe was a long process for you.

PERLER: Now, from there we went to a big city, real bit city compared to Payter. It was called Oman and my mother had a sister there, and her husband was the manager of like a hotel where you could drive in. I can see the place, and rent a room or something. So we were headed there and we stayed there for a while.

SIGRIST: Before we get onto this, I want to ask you what you remember about leaving the town, the small town.

PERLER: Right.

SIGRIST: What did you take with you?

PERLER: Now, you just reminded me of something. Right. We were leaving the town because the town was burning, and we did not take anything. I mean we never brought—some people that are here from a long time, they have all kind of trinkets. “Oh, this is my grandmother’s. This is what we brought.” We couldn’t bring anything because we ran out of the house when it was burning and the better things were in the ground, anyway. But we were going from town to town trying to get to Oman, and we had to walk from place to place. We just didn’t have any money. So there were other people, too, walking. We weren’t the only ones, and then one day we were all walking and I am not a good walker, to this day. I couldn’t walk. My mother carried my little sister. My brother was fine. Somehow I couldn’t walk and a wagon with some people went by that my mother knew some of the people. So she waved to them and they stopped and they said, “Please, take my little girl. She can’t—she doesn’t feel good,” and they had to go by where they were going. They were going to the same place we were, to Oman. They had to go by an uncle of mine that lived there, my father’s brother, and she said, “I’m sure that he knows what’s going on. That people are trying to get to Oman, and he’ll be on the lookout. Take my little girl and leave her there.” So there was enough room and they said, “Fine.”

So my mother said to me, “This is all the money I have.” It was in a little purse and the purse was in a handkerchief and she took that and she put it over here in the bosom and she said, “You take it with you. We have to walk and who knows what can happen.” So I did, and sure enough my aunt and my uncle were outside and they knew that maybe we’d be coming and they stopped and I jumped off, you know. A man took me off the wagon. I jumped off and I ran and I was only, what, five, six years, maybe seven at that time. Seven, I think, and I started to play with my cousins, and they gave me something to eat. I was hungry and I fell asleep. A while later they woke me up because another wagon went by and they were pretty empty and my mother was tired already carrying my little sister and my brother, so she said to the driver, “I will pay you when we get to my brother-in-law’s house. I don’t have any money, but I will pay you when we get there.” So they got on the wagon and they woke me. Why did they wake me up? Because my mother wanted the money. I didn’t have the money. There was no money. I just didn’t have it. I didn’t know what happened, and then we realized that when I jumped off the wagon, it must have fallen through. What happened, nobody saw. We don’t know anything. We just didn’t have the money. My uncle paid the driver. He gave us some money and we went to Oman.

Now, we knew that all the people on the wagon were going to Oman. Who they were, my mother really didn’t know, but when we

got to Oman there was a rumor who came, who went, what happened, and a man that was on the wagon picked up the money. He got in touch with my mother. You know, he know every—one tells the other there's this woman with three children, she lost some money. Somebody must have picked it up, and he came over and he asked my mother to give him what was in there, how much money, what it looked like, what else she had in there, and it was her money and he gave it to her. Gave her every penny back. Never kept anything.

SIGRIST: He was a good soul. You've got an older brother and a younger brother traveling.

PERLER: No.

SIGRIST: Or younger sister.

PERLER: Sister.

SIGRIST: What's the name of your older brother?

PERLER: Sam Gold.

SIGRIST: Sam, and how much older is he than you?

PERLER: There was another little brother that died, so he must have been three maybe.

SIGRIST: Three years older than you?

PERLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And then the brother that died, was he older than Sam or was he—

PERLER: No, he was after and then I'm the third one.

SIGRIST: And then—

PERLER: My little sister.

SIGRIST: Whose name is?

PERLER: Anna.

SIGRIST: And how—what's the space between you and Anna?

PERLER: I think probably about a year and a half or so. She was a little baby when my father died. She was an infant. I have a picture downstairs of us and she's holding—she's a baby.

SIGRIST: Do you have any recollection of when Anna was born? You would have been quite young yourself, but do you remember anything about that?

PERLER: [Sighs] Not so much of her, as I do with the death of the little brother that died.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about his death?

PERLER: He got sick. He had diphtheria and as soon as he got sick, and like I said, we didn't have a doctor. We only had this nurse, and a man came and he said, he told my mother that that's very contagious. So my aunt—at that time we didn't—we lived—we didn't live with aunt because my father had just left, and my aunt came and took me to her house. So I never got it, and the baby never got it, and my mother used to tell the story. She went to the rabbi to pray and she said to him, "Rabbi, help me. My little boy is very sick," and this is what she told me. He said to her, "Go home and take care of your older boy and your baby." He didn't mention the little boy in the middle and he died. I remember that because my mother always used to say that the Rabbi knew that he was going to die. Now, whether that's what happened or whether that's how she figured it or remember. But I really don't remember the birth of my sister, but I do remember that we were very close until the day she died. She died of multiple sclerosis.

SIGRIST: When she was young?

PERLER: Yeah, she was about forty-one. But she was seventeen years in the hospital on her back and couldn't move. I used to go there every day to see her.

SIGRIST: When you and your mother and your brother Sam, your sister Anna, who's young, are in—what was the name of the time? Oman?

PERLER: Oman.

SIGRIST: How long did you stay in Oman before you went to the next step in the trip?

PERLER: Well, I don't think we would have stayed there as long as we did. We were there maybe months. My mother had the whooping cough there.

SIGRIST: Is Oman in the Ukraine, also?

PERLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: You're still in the Ukraine.

PERLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Okay, so your mother got sick.

PERLER: She got the whooping cough. That's a children disease, but she got it real bad. She used to cough very bad and we had one room, one of the rooms that used to, you know, like rent out. So we stayed there in this one room and my brother and I decided we need money. So what happened, there was a big factory that made candy and a lot of children used to go there and they would pick up a box, a big box of chocolate wholesale and then they'd walk around on the main streets to sell it and make a few. So I was this big. I was short then, I'm short now.

SIGRIST: And you're gesturing, what is that? About three feet tall you're gesturing?

PERLER: Yeah, maybe. I'm four ten as it is. Maybe not even four ten now. We went out to sell the candy. We walked around. I made more than anybody else because people used to pity me. I was just a little girl, and that was after the Czar was just killed and you couldn't use money that was the Czar's. That was called—[pause] It was a different kind of money. Oh, gosh, I think—

SIGRIST: Money that had the Czar's image on it?

PERLER: Yes, like a picture. We couldn't use it because the Bolsheviks took over and while we were walking around, a soldier came over to me and he said to me, "How much is the candy?" and I told him," and he says, "I have a five dollar"—let's say five dollars, rubles. Rubles, the Czars. I said, "Oh, no, we don't take that," because you could be put in jail if you did. "Oh," he said to me, "don't be afraid." I said, "No," I wouldn't take it. He took the five dollars and put it on my box, took a handful of candy and walked away and I ran home. I can see my little legs running and I ran into the room and I said to my mother, "Look what I got. The soldier said to me 'Take it,' and he took some

candy.” That was worth a lot of money, and that’s how we stayed there until my mother got better.

Then we were heading towards—now, at that time we already lost track of my aunt and my cousin because they had money and they went to Hadassah, you know, but we had to go wherever we could get cheaper. We were heading for Romania.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how they treated your mother’s whooping cough or did you treat your mother’s whooping cough in any way?

PERLER: No. No, just I don’t think so. I don’t think she ever went to a doctor or anything. Probably my aunt maybe, you know, women talk, “This is good.” I really don’t think she ever went to a doctor or treated it. All I could remember, how bad she coughed. Real bad. She was real sick, and then when she got better, we headed further and then we had another bad time.

SIGRIST: How long—let’s see, because I’m not exactly sure. It’s in the Ukraine you said, Oman, and then you went to Romania, you said.

PERLER: That’s where we were heading.

SIGRIST: That’s where you were heading.

PERLER: But we had to cross the Depper. [PH]That was a river between Russia and Romania.

SIGRIST: I think before we get you across the river, I’m going to put another tape in the machine. So this is the end of Tape 1 with Ida Perler and we’re going to get you across the Depper in a minute.

END OF SIDE 2, TAPE 1  
BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 2

SIGRIST: Okay, this is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. We’re now beginning Tape 2 with Ida Perler who came from the Ukraine in 1921, when she was ten. Mrs. Perler, you were just telling us about how you were going to cross the river to get into Romania. So why don’t you tell us how you did that?

PERLER: Yeah. Well, there were two men that people used to talk about that they take over. You know, you have to pay them, of course, and you have to go in the middle of the night, and they tell you when to be there and they take you. Oh, this was December and so we got—we were, oh, let’s say, about fifteen or twenty people in a room, all of us had to go and cross the Depper. And he would take about a family of

five, maybe one more over. We were left the last ones because we probably didn't pay him as much as the others, but one family that went before us, they were five and they could use another one and he said to my mother, "We could use one more person," and he points at me. He says, "I could take the little girl." My mother said, "No," she's not going to let any of her children go by themselves. Whenever she goes, that's when the children are going to go. So he went with the five and we were left just us, my mother and three children. We were the last ones to go over, and then he comes back for us. This was in the middle of the night and as we were walking, he went like this to us with his hand.

SIGRIST: Making the sign to be quiet.

PERLER: Yeah, and my sister was carried and just happened she was a good little girl, she didn't cry. We were walking to get into the boat. It was like, and all of a sudden there was shooting from across and he said we had to run. He didn't talk to us, but he just said, go back, like this, you know, and we had to go back and we never went back to the house. There was a barn there. We ran into the barn and we hid and then he whispered to us, "You stay here until I come back for you. Don't move from here." And we were standing there and we heard this—I heard a noise like [makes snoring sound] and we got, we were so scared, children, and mother said, "I think it's a cow. I think it's a cow," and she said, "But to make sure," she says, "let me go and check it." So she went. She comes back. She says, "Don't be afraid, it's a cow and the cow is sleeping." So we stayed there until the man came back for us.

And we got into the boat and don't forget that this is December and the pieces of ice, although they broke up the ice, pieces of ice every so often would push the boat. We thought sure we were going to drown, but we didn't. We got across on the other side. And then we had to walk for miles and miles. Everybody just walked. My mother carried my sister, and it was so cold out.

SIGRIST: And this is Romania? The other side of the river was Romania.

PERLER: This is Romania, and we didn't know where we were walking and where he was taking us. We walked until it was daylight and I can see like bushes and he told us to go down near the bushes. Just sit there and my sister froze her feet. It was very cold, and a man came out and to this day I think he was Moses. I can just see him, a tall man with a white beard that was dressed in black, you know, and he pointed to my mother and he said, "That woman with the children, come with me." And we went with him and his house wasn't too far from where we were. Evidently, that was the place what the man

knew that he was doing, you know, good for the immigrants that were brought, but he picked us. I don't know where the others went, but he was the one that picked us, and he lived not too far. You know, just and we went into the house and right away they start working on my sister's feet. They were not frozen, but you know, they had to do something to it, and they gave us food and we rested there.

SIGRIST: Was he a Jew or a gentile?

PERLER: Yeah. Oh, yeah, a Jewish man. Somehow, some place I think I have a picture. I can see him. Like I said, it looked like Moses.

SIGRIST: Were there other people in the house, other families?

PERLER: Oh, yeah. Yeah, he had a wife and children. Oh, yeah, but we were the only ones from the group that we came. Now, what happened to the others probably other people took care of them. I'm sure that the man that brought them there knew that that's the reason he stopped there with them, because must have happened before, too. So we stayed there a couple of days until my sister was fine and we got in touch with HIAS, you know, and we gave them the history, who, what and when. We knew that my father was in Springfield, and they got in touch with my father.

SIGRIST: You know, one thing that strikes me, listening to your story, is the fact that your mother has to put a tremendous amount of faith and trust in stranger upon stranger upon stranger, who could have just as easily been doing you harm, as doing you good.

PERLER: Well, at that time people did trust more than now. Now you don't. I didn't trust you.

SIGRIST: Yes, I know.

PERLER: That's my best friends, and when they said they would come, I said, "Oh." I said, "He sounded so nice, but how do I know? How do I know?" I even told you, "How will I know you? I don't like to open my door to strangers." I'm told a million times, do not open any doors.

SIGRIST: As well you shouldn't, you know.

PERLER: Right.

SIGRIST: Absolutely.

PERLER: But years ago it wasn't really like that. Years ago you did trust people, but of course a lot of people, I'm sure, like the man that had found the money. He didn't have to give it back. We didn't know who picked it up. So you had to trust. You had to and that was the only way she could get where she was going. It wasn't easy for her.

SIGRIST: It reflects a little bit how the world has changed in seventy years or so.

PERLER: Oh, yeah, it certainly did.

SIGRIST: Tell me what happened after the HIAS located your dad.

PERLER: Then he wrote to us, sent us money and I think the first town that we stopped was called Keshinov [PH] and then we went to Bucharest and from there we went to get the boat.

SIGRIST: Was this before or after you got the money that you started?

PERLER: Oh, we got—

SIGRIST: You had the money.

PERLER: Yeah, through the HIAS.

SIGRIST: Where did you stay? Where did you stay prior to your father contacting you? Were you still living with the man with the beard?

PERLER: Yeah, for a few days until they knew. I think after that, they gave us a place where to stay after they knew already, because there are other people that he was going to help. But he was—oh, he was so nice to us and he sure saved my sister's—you know, whatever they did. They weren't that bad that she didn't have any damage or anything, but they were stiff. She couldn't even move them.

SIGRIST: Well, it's scary for a little girl to go through that.

PERLER: And it was cold. And it was cold. We walked for hours until we got to where we were going. [Coughs]

SIGRIST: What sticks out in your mind about getting to Bucharest?

PERLER: The crossing of the Depper.

SIGRIST: But I mean after that. After, you know, when it had all sort of come through and you were then on your way to Bucharest?

PERLER: Well, after that, things were not too bad for us. After we got the money, and after we knew that my father knows that we're alive and that he would, you know, do his best to looking forward to bringing us to America. It wasn't too bad there.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever tell you in later years how she felt when she first made that contact with your dad, when he first wrote back and she actually heard from him? Did she ever say anything to you later on about that?

PERLER: I don't think so because that was one thing that it wasn't that we—there wasn't one minute that we thought my father isn't going to be— isn't going to bring us to where he is, that she didn't trust him.

SIGRIST: But he could be dead, for all you know. You haven't heard from him.

PERLER: Oh, yeah, but I mean after we heard him from, I mean. Oh, yeah, of course he could have. We didn't hear and as far as he was concerned, we could have been killed because he knew what was going on in Russia and he never heard from us. So then I don't know how long it took. It took a few months until red tape, you know, until we got to Amsterdam and that's where we took the boat.

SIGRIST: Did you travel on a train at all in any part of Europe getting to Amsterdam, that you remember?

PERLER: No, I don't remember that. I really don't remember that. I remember getting on the boat.

SIGRIST: When you were in Amsterdam, did you have to undergo any examinations prior to getting on the ship?

PERLER: No. No, because we had all the—we had papers from the doctor that we were supposed to go. Let me see, what? By then it probably was—really maybe a couple of years, but we did have the papers because those papers were not left in the house. No, we didn't have to have—and like I said, the most things that they could tell whether you were feeling all right, except for the glaucoma. You had to show a paper that your eyes were examined and you didn't have glaucoma.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the name of the ship?

PERLER: The Amsterdam. That's the name of it.

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SIGRIST: You wrote that on your oral history form and then when I spoke to you on the phone, you thought that it was the Rotterdam.

PERLER: Oh, oh, maybe—oh, yeah. Yeah. Let me see. What did I write? What did I—

SIGRIST: Well, that's all right.

PERLER: I don't know.

SIGRIST: It's on the back of the page.

PERLER: Oh, here.

SIGRIST: Right here.

PERLER: It says, I said Rotterdam.

SIGRIST: The Rotterdam. So the ship—so the ship that you came on was the Rotterdam.

PERLER: The Rotterdam.

SIGRIST: Lot's of people came on the Rotterdam. It was one of the big ships.

PERLER: Yeah, and we must have come to Ellis Island in May because I remember coming here about the first week or so in June because I went to school. School stops like about the 21<sup>st</sup> or so. I went to school for two weeks.

SIGRIST: We'll talk about that when we get you to Springfield.

PERLER: I was miserable.

SIGRIST: Let me ask you what you remember about being on the ship. First of all, what did you think when you saw a ship, great big ship? What do you remember about how you felt about getting on that ship?

PERLER: Very excited because I knew that we were—that was the last leg of our journey and we were going to see my father and things would be—but I was very sick on the ship. I don't actually remember being on the ship. I was seasick. I couldn't even look at the water, my stomach would—I was very sick. Very sick on the—and it took—

SIGRIST: Can you describe where you slept on the ship? What it looked like?

EI-778/PERLER

PERLER: Yeah, we had like a little cabin. You know, we were of course all together. We all slept together.

SIGRIST: Were there any other people in the cabin with you?

PERLER: No. No. No, we had like maybe a bed where my mother had the little baby, you know, with her and a couple of cots. No, it wasn't bad. Everything would have been fine. My brother and even my mother said it was good, except me. I was the only one that was sick. I was seasick. I couldn't even go over near the edge to look at the water. I had to be away where the water wasn't. As far I'm concerned, there was no water. I couldn't even look at it, to this day. To this day.

SIGRIST: Did they treat your seasickness in any way that you remember? Treat it medicinally?

PERLER: No, except one would say, "Don't eat because that's worse," and then somebody would tell me, "Oh, you have to eat. You can't—on an empty stomach it isn't good." So whether one was any better than the other, I don't know, but I was sick. I was good and sick.

SIGRIST: How long did the ship take to get to New York?

PERLER: Close to three weeks.

SIGRIST: And what do you remember about when you started feeling better and the ship coming into New Harbor, what sticks out in your mind about that?

PERLER: Very exciting. You know, the buildings and looking for my father.

SIGRIST: Did you see the Statue of Liberty?

PERLER: Yeah, I guess so. I must have, but you know, I saw a building, a lot of buildings. I remember being very excited about eating a banana. That was the first time I ever saw a banana, and we had that on the ship. Maybe that stayed in my stomach, too, you know. So I liked the banana. Then my father was there, and I remember we were on—

SIGRIST: How did you get from the ship to Ellis Island?

PERLER: That, somebody just brought us. Somebody just took care of us. My father paid for us until the day he picked us up. So we were paid to

be in Ellis Island where he could come and sign a paper that we're there and he was taking over responsibility.

SIGRIST: And you said that you were detained there for two weeks. Why were you detained at Ellis Island?

PERLER: Now, that's where I remember being on one side, my father on the other side and there was like a barrier between us. He couldn't come. A little boy had the measles and was in the hospital and got better and they discharged him and that day he died, and they said that whatever happened that his body turned black. And so we were quarantined.

SIGRIST: Was he someone on the ship with you from that?

PERLER: No, no, he was there from before. Somebody that was in the hospital, they had the measles and that day he died. So everybody that came on the ship that day, and my father was already there. He was there to take us home, but we couldn't go. We were quarantined. We were sent to Ellis Island for two or three weeks, something like that.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about being on Ellis Island? What sticks out in your mind about being there for those two weeks?

PERLER: The long tables, long benches, and sitting there. One thing was funny. We had a very old lady from our town that was the mother of my uncle in Connecticut. She was going to him, but she would be with us all the time because we knew her from Europe, and we were sitting. The first day, I remember sitting at this long table and they brought us baked beans with meat, and I don't remember what I said about it, but I remember this little old lady said—oh, the word she used was "mahia." [PH]Now, that means even better than delicious. Even better. Well, that night we found out that was beans with pork, and that woman, if she knew I think she would have died. To the day she died, we never told her. We never mentioned it to her, but we never ate beans again because that we knew already was pork, but she said it was so good, she enjoyed it so much and I can just hear, "Da mahia." And that's how she died, not knowing that she ate beans with pork. She was a very old lady at that time. She died a long time ago.

SIGRIST: Was that a problem at Ellis Island because you were kosher?

PERLER: Yes, it was a problem. They didn't give us any, but we knew already what to eat or what not to eat. You know, we found out. They didn't

make any special meals for us, but we were careful. We knew what to look for or what had meat or whatever.

SIGRIST: Do you remember some of the other food that you ate while you were there that was new to you maybe?

PERLER: Not especially. We had bananas there. We had fruit. We had vegetables. Different things that was all right to eat, but not anything. I don't think we eat again, not knowing what kind of meat that was. To this day I don't eat pork, ham. I eat chicken or beef. The house, the kitchen is kosher. My daughter said that one time when she was a little girl—my daughter lives—oh, she's missing this. She would have loved to have been here. She was here for the weekend, but she had to go back. She works. She'll call me tonight to get the—at one time my daughter said I was a hypocrite. She said, "You have a kosher kitchen, but you eat out things that are not kosher." So I told her, I says, "My stomach is my own. I do with it as I please." My kitchen, I had friends that are real kosher. I used to belong to a gin club and there was one woman, very religious and she said whenever she came to my house, she was so happy because she knew everything I served there was kosher.

SIGRIST: What kind of a club?

PERLER: A gin.

SIGRIST: Oh, gin club. Getting back to Ellis Island, can you describe for me where you slept on Ellis Island? Or if you any stories or recollections about the area where you slept.

PERLER: No, I really don't remember. I remember that big—as I came into Ellis Island, the last time I was there three years ago.

SIGRIST: Right, went through the museum.

PERLER: Everything was new except the one place that we went in and the tile is broken. I said, "Oh, now I know that this is Ellis Island." So evidently this is what Ellis Island looked like, the tiles, you know, broken tiles and the long tables and benches, and that's about all I can really remember.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing unusual people or anything like that that stuck out in your mind as a ten year old girl? People that looked different than you had ever seen before?

PERLER: No, because—because we were there. Everybody that was on the ship. We weren't the only ones there. Everybody, and we stayed more or less with the same people. So it was nothing new to me. I had already seen those people on the ship.

SIGRIST: Did they examine you at all during that time while you were there.

PERLER: No, no. It wasn't our fault. It's just that I don't know why we had to be quarantined. There was a lot going on and my father said he asked a lot of questions why they kept us there, but they said that that was the rule. They had to be quarantined because of this little boy.

SIGRIST: When was the first time you saw your father?

PERLER: The day when he was on the other side. The day we were supposed to—

SIGRIST: That was the first day you landed.

PERLER: That was the first time.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you thought when you saw him?

PERLER: I had a picture of him. I knew about what he—I didn't remember him when he left, but we had a picture and the picture was, you know, he was short, like you said. He was a redhead and I looked like him. So I knew what to expect. I knew, you know, like my husband always used to say people used to say his father lived—they lived in Hartford. He comes from Poland and I met him in Hartford, and they always used to say, my husband was the baby and "It's a good thing you look like your father, otherwise he would say that you weren't his or whatever." They were just—and I looked like my father. My sister looked just like my mother, but I looked like my father. So the picture of him was similar to the picture.

SIGRIST: So you recognized who this man was.

PERLER: Yeah, it wasn't that much of a surprise what he looked like. He had a little beard, was a redhead, was short.

SIGRIST: So you had spent most of your first ten years without a father, really. I mean, he was in America, but he wasn't there.

PERLER: Yeah, right.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how you thought about this man being your father all of a sudden, never having had a father all those years?

PERLER: But he was so real to us. We always talked about him and we always knew that we—we hoped, not that we knew, that we would be with him, and I don't think I thought it was different, you know, all of a sudden, that he was there. I knew I had a father. We talked about him all the time. My mother made sure that we did, and we all did.

SIGRIST: I don't think I ever asked you what your father's name was.

PERLER: Max.

SIGRIST: Max, and was that his name in Europe or was that an American name?

PERLER: Well, in Europe he was Mottle.

SIGRIST: Mottle. How do you spell Mottle?

PERLER: M-O double T-E-L.

SIGRIST: I see, and he Americanized that to Max?

PERLER: Yeah, it was called—when they cut the Goldart and from Mottle, it meant Max Gold. So he came in as an American, you know, Max Gold.

SIGRIST: Where did your father take you when the family was released from Ellis Island?

PERLER: He took us the first time to my grandmother's house.

SIGRIST: Which was where?

PERLER: In Springfield. They all lived in Springfield.

SIGRIST: How did you get from New York to Springfield?

PERLER: I guess by train.

SIGRIST: Do you remember anything about that, from being in New York City?

PERLER: Oh, New York City, except what I saw coming down from the ship and Ellis Island, I never saw. You know, I never saw New York until I was big enough to go there. Had a boyfriend there.

SIGRIST: Now, had you ever met your grandmother before? She'd been in America all that time.

PERLER: Oh, yeah, I never saw my grandmother.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about your grandmother and your impressions of your grandmother when you first met her.

PERLER: Oh, one in a million. To the day she died, she was a lovely woman. Very, very smart and beautiful and we all loved her. She was here, like I said, she had fourteen children and I always say my grandfather died very young. He was forty-five. She might have had fourteen more, for all I know. It was a beautiful family.

SIGRIST: So your father lived with her in Springfield?

PERLER: No. No, he had a room. Years ago, you know, like you were a boarder. Somebody that lived and had an extra room or they made sure they had an extra room and they would rent it out. He had his meals there and he paid for room and board. He stayed there until we came, and then we stayed with my grandmother for a day or two, but he had an apartment. Our first apartment when we first came here was on Chestnut Street on the third floor. He had an apartment ready.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the number on Chestnut Street?

PERLER: No.

SIGRIST: You have a good memory. I just thought I'd try.

PERLER: Oh, I know, somehow it stays with me like seven something. Let's make it 716 Chestnut Street. I know it was on the third floor.

SIGRIST: Third floor.

PERLER: And we had two bedrooms and it was a nice apartment. He got some furniture or whatever.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how you spent—you say you stayed with your grandmother for the first couple days. Do you remember specifically how you spent the first night in America? I mean, was there some kind of a gathering?

PERLER: Oh, yes, very, very—everybody came to my grandmother and I remember she served—we were a lot there for supper that day and everybody was excited, and one uncle who the aunt just died, they wanted to get married and my grandmother said to them, “You have to wait until we come.” Sorah, that was her, you know, Jewish name. We came in June and they got married in December. So it was a lot going on. Also, my mother had a brother who was in the war and when we came, we didn’t know that he was killed, but that week that we came, he was sent home. His name was Nathan. Nathan Greenburg.

SIGRIST: And he had been killed in World War I.

PERLER: Yeah.

END OF SIDE A, TAPE 2  
BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE 2

SIGRIST: Do you remember—when you went to the new apartment, when your father took you to the apartment, you said it had two bedrooms and everything. Do you remember what the neighborhood was like in terms of its ethnic makeup.

PERLER: Next door to us were people named Macklers, who we were friendly for years and years.

SIGRIST: And were they a Jewish family, also?

PERLER: A Jewish family, Macklers, and there were boys there. My brother was very friends, oh, for years with them, and they had three daughters and I was friendly with them. And we were actually the only two Jewish neighbors there, but everybody was—you know, we were all friendly.

SIGRIST: Do you remember some of the nationalities of the other families?

PERLER: Polish I know because—

SIGRIST: Polish Catholics?

PERLER: I guess.

SIGRIST: Or Polish Jews?

PERLER: No, no.

SIGRIST: No, Catholics.

PERLER: Yeah. My Jewish name—my Jewish name is Chayka. My mother used to call me Chayka and there was this Polish family had a boy and not many people can say the H, can you?

SIGRIST: The 'cheh' sound?

PERLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: "Cheh" like Cheihia.

PERLER: Yeah, right, that's my name. My name was Chaya but my mother used to call me Chayka and so whenever I would see him, he would say, "Hi, Kikie." Not because—I didn't take it as an insult because he didn't mean as an insult, but he couldn't say Hykie, so he always used to say Kikie, which was fine with me. I mean, years ago it wasn't like now. It wasn't like now. It's a different world.

SIGRIST: You started telling me earlier about your two weeks in school, when they put you in school.

PERLER: That was horrible.

SIGRIST: Can you talk about that please?

PERLER: That was in Jefferson—let me see. Lincoln School and I was ten years old and I don't know what grade they put me in, but couldn't understand a word. I didn't understand. I didn't know anything.

SIGRIST: What language did you speak at that time?

PERLER: Just Jewish.

SIGRIST: Yiddish. You didn't speak any Russian?

PERLER: Very—I understood Russian, but I really couldn't—because I didn't go to school. In Europe the boys had to go to school. Now, my brother went to Hadah [PH], what's it's called in Jewish and in fact my uncle, my father's brother, was a teacher. So he used to go to his, but girls didn't have to go to school, but my mother was a very learned—she learned a lot from my father when he was a teacher. She was learned, so she used to teach me at home. I never went to school.

So, now, again what was the question?

SIGRIST: We were talking about the two weeks of going to school in Springfield.

PERLER: Yeah, so I would—I would—I only knew Yiddish. I didn't know too much and, of course, English I didn't understand at all. Well, by September when school had to start again, there were other girls my age that were friends. Their name was Ward. There was this Jenny Kablotski [PH] who was my lifelong friend until she died. Her mother's—they had a special room in the High School of Commerce for immigrants at that age and that's where we went after, with a teacher that knew what we were speaking, and we learned from her. So I never went to school again until I knew how to speak. But those two weeks, the first two weeks, I shall never forget them because I sat at my desk and I didn't know what anybody said to me. They didn't know what I said to them.

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

PERLER: Do I? Hmm. Probably thank you. Most likely.

SIGRIST: And what about your parents, did they speak English?

PERLER: My father did good. My mother, ah, in the house we always spoke Yiddish, but she never went to school. But we had a store on Dwight Street. My father was a very religious man. He would get up in the morning. The store had to be opened at six and it closed between ten and ten thirty. So when he got up in the morning, he had to pray, and he was very particular what he wore. He had to get dressed just right, so my mother always opened the store. He used to close it. He had the whole day after that, after and she opened. We had a bakery store and maybe a few canned goods. We had a window and there were different breads and rolls, you know.

A man came in one day and he said to her, "I like this bread." She says, "I like you, too," you know, which was all right. I mean, she meant that he said something nice to her, but she knew that like was a good word. But she learned towards the end, you know. She was doing fine. She was never a citizen. We became citizens through my father because we were underage, but she had to go through by herself. I don't know what the reason was, why she never went to school and become a citizen, but she wasn't a citizen.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit about your parents and their social interaction with their friends? Did they belong to organizations or did they—how did they socialized, I guess is what I'm asking.

PERLER: Yeah, we belonged to this day we have the name of our synagogue is—well, we don't have it right now. Sons of Israel and we were very active. She was, you know.

SIGRIST: Did that exist back then, the Sons of Israel?

PERLER: Oh, yes, we used to go there and my father was—he used to read the Torah. You know, he was a very religious man and not only just religious, but he knew what he was reading. So he used to read the Torah and my mother was like in the ladies auxiliary. They didn't call it then. And children, you know, I remember after she—and years ago you bought a seat and now you pay at the temple according to what, but first come, you sit wherever you sit. But years ago in our synagogue, you bought a seat. If you had more money, you bought the seats right near the bema, called, where the Torahs were and all that. My mother's seat was like over here facing and we loved that because sitting over here, you could see everybody downstairs and upstairs, and everybody was so friendly.

I remember after my mother died and I came in one day and somebody was sitting on her seat, and I wasn't ashamed. I went over and I said, "This seat belonged to my mother." I said, "Do you mind if I—it means a lot to me if I sit in her seat." "Oh, yes, yes, yes, of course," and she moved over and I sat in her seat. I kind of felt like my mother was there, you know.

SIGRIST: Like being a child again, in a way.

PERLER: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: When your parents got together with their friends, what did they do? How did they socialize together? What kinds of entertainments did they have at that time?

PERLER: Talk. That's when we used to talk. That's when we used to. You know, now everybody's busy with the TV and—

SIGRIST: What kinds of things did they like to talk about with their peers that you remember?

PERLER: Whatever went on. Whatever happened in town, whatever. Whatever happened in the synagogue. Whatever went on in the family, you know. It was always talking with everybody, whatever happened that time.

SIGRIST: Did they ever speak about Europe, that you remember?

PERLER: As far as speaking about Russia, we never were anxious to do it because we went through too much. We really did. I had a bad time, a real bad time.

SIGRIST: I was just wondering how they perceived the life that they had left and if it was something that they wanted to talk about how awful it had been or if they just simply wanted to forget it.

PERLER: Well, I suppose we talked about it every so often, but we probably told my father a few things that what we went through, but it wasn't anything that anybody wanted to talk about. It wasn't a good time. My father left us, not because he wanted to. Well, he didn't want to go into the Russian army, so he left us and it wasn't easy for him to go and leave my mother with four small children. And then after we went through the pogromme, there wasn't anything that we missed. I know to this day I would say some people go back to Russia. I have a nephew that just graduated law and he has something to do with Russian law and he was in Russia twice. I gave him—I had some money. I knew I had some money. I remember coins. I gave it to him the first time he went to Russia.

SIGRIST: Money that you had brought from Russia in 1921.

PERLER: Yeah, a little bit, you know. I had a few coins and things and the first time he went, I gave it to him and he still has it. But I was—I said, God forbid, I never—no matter where I would go, I wasn't a good traveler anyway. I couldn't afford it, and I don't like travel. You said you like traveling. I don't, but I never wanted to go to Russia. There was nothing there. There was nothing there that I wanted to live through again. It was too much pain. Ever since I was a little girl to the day I left, it was nothing but pogrommes and am I going to live the next day?

SIGRIST: When the family was here in Springfield and you had experienced a great deal of prejudice against the Jewish people in Russia in the Ukraine, did you experience any kind of prejudice here in Springfield? That you can remember, either you or your parents?

PERLER: Not really. Not—I don't think so. Not really that I can put my hand and say that this is what happened. I don't think so. No, I really don't. I really don't remember any.

SIGRIST: We just have a few minutes left and I want to bring your husband into the interview. I want you to tell the story about how you met your husband and how old you were at that time.

PERLER: I was—let me see, I was twenty-four when I got married. I have a friend—I had a friend in Hartford and all of a sudden I remembered her name, which I didn't for a long time, and I marked it down. Met Sam at Jean Zubrow's, August 1933. Whatever I could remember, I marked it down.

SIGRIST: What was her name again? Say it slowly.

PERLER: Jean. Jean Zubrow.

SIGRIST: Z-U-B-R-O-W.

PERLER: Yeah. She worked in a Jewish dry goods store and the store was closed on Saturday, so she used to work Sundays, and I had this aunt Ann Gross, who was very, very dear to me and she loved me, and I used to go there a lot to stay with her. Spend the day Saturday with my friend. I'd go there by bus, and one day, one week she said to me, "Make sure you come, because I'm having a few"—this is how we used to get together in the house and play the gramophone or whatever, dance a little bit, sit and talk, have refreshments. She says, "I'm having a few people over." So I came in and Saturday—that was Saturday night. She wasn't working. I came on a Friday, stayed over my aunt, and I was supposed to go home Sunday and I met this boy, and we were friendly and he wanted to know where I come from and I say "I come from Springfield and I'm staying over. I'll go back tomorrow with the bus." And he said, "Oh, I could take you home," but then I thought "I don't know him," you know. So I went into the kitchen and Jean was in the kitchen with her mother. Her mother was there, you know, chaperoning and I said, "Sam said that he would take me home, but I don't know whether I should go," and they boy said, "Oh, yes, he's a very fine boy. We know him. You can go with him." So he drove me home.

Now, come to think of it, the rumor was that I took him away from Jean, but he said that he never was—and there was no commitment there. They were friends. They used to meet, but she once told my aunt that I took away her daughter's—the mother said that I took away her daughter's boyfriend. So I met him in August and then I remember he came Roshashona late in the afternoon, which my father wasn't very happy because he drove in from Hartford, but it was late and he thought it was all right. My father didn't think so. And that's how we met.

SIGRIST: What did you like about him when you met him?

PERLER: I guess everything except that he didn't have any money, but that wasn't nothing to me. I didn't have it. He didn't have it.

SIGRIST: Was he older than you?

PERLER: Yes, he was—he was eighty-four when he died. His birthday—see, his birthday was July 22<sup>nd</sup>, not because he was born in July 22<sup>nd</sup>. I knew exactly when my birthday was. He had—he was born on a Jewish holiday and that Jewish holiday at the time when he came to Hartford was the closest to July 22<sup>nd</sup>, so he took July 22<sup>nd</sup>, and that's how everybody did because nobody came with any birth certificates.

SIGRIST: And he was born in Europe?

PERLER: In Poland.

SIGRIST: He was born in Poland.

PERLER: Three miles from the border of Germany, but he didn't go through any pogromes there.

SIGRIST: And what year did he come to the United States?

PERLER: In '21, in May '21 in Hartford and I met him in August and we got married in February. We were like engaged. Now, for our engagement, he didn't have money to buy me a ring, but he bought me a Lane cedar chest that I still have downstairs.

SIGRIST: Lane is the company. The furniture company.

PERLER: Yeah, right. Yeah, so I could save my trousseau in there.

SIGRIST: February of what year did you marry?

PERLER: '34.

SIGRIST: 1934.

PERLER: That's what this is for.

SIGRIST: Right. Mrs. Perler's referring to a newspaper article that was done about her sixtieth anniversary.

PERLER: When, yeah.

SIGRIST: Great.

PERLER: Because they asked here, and it was such a snowstorm. The day we got married and we had a lot of friends coming in, relatives from Hartford and they thought they were going to be killed. An aunt of mine left one girl to stay here with a cousin and she was going back and she told me, afterwards she told us that she said to her husband, my Uncle Charlie, "At least we'll have one of us living because I know we are going to be killed." It was just like a sheet of ice.

Sam and I went. We were going to New York by bus for a weekend. That was our honeymoon and we got—I forgot now the name, and we went by bus and we couldn't go all the way through to New York because it was just like a sheet of ice, that's how bad it was. It really was and that's what this is about, you know.

SIGRIST: You said he was eighty-four when he died. So what year was he born?

PERLER: 1909.

SIGRIST: Oh, he was born 1909. So he's not that much older than you are.

PERLER: No, no.

SIGRIST: Did you have children?

PERLER: One daughter.

SIGRIST: And her name is?

PERLER: Susan Adler.

SIGRIST: Susan Adler. Yeah, looking at her picture up on the wall. And has—was it a grandson you said had been—

PERLER: A granddaughter. That's the granddaughter over there.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh, and what's the granddaughter's name?

PERLER: Jody.

SIGRIST: Jody.

PERLER: Jody Adler.

SIGRIST: Does your daughter speak Yiddish? Had she ever learned to speak Yiddish? She doesn't speak it, but she understands everything because even, you know, sometimes there's something, a saying in

Jewish that you cannot express yourself in the English language. It's not the same, and I'd say to her, "Susan, do you understand what that means?" She says, "Sure, I understand," but she really doesn't speak it. We never really spoke just Jewish, Yiddish in the house. We wanted to speak the language of our new language.

SIGRIST: Speak English.

PERLER: Yeah, we were very happy here. America was good to us.

SIGRIST: Did your husband speak Yiddish, also, originally?

PERLER: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Did he speak anything else originally, other than Yiddish? Yiddish and something else at that time?

PERLER: No. In fact, his father wanted him to become a rabbi and he told my father-in-law that he is not going to become a rabbi because he doesn't like one boss, he's not going to have a lot of bosses over him telling him what to do. So he wouldn't go for Rabbi.

SIGRIST: I see. Well, I guess my final question for you is you're eighty-five. Had a long, full life and you've been through a lot of different kinds of things. What kind of advice would you give a young person who came to you and said, "You know, how can I live a satisfying, successful life?" What kind of advice would you give them to sort of guide them through their life?

PERLER: You mean marriage and things?

SIGRIST: Just any—just sort of rules to live by in life. What were the rules that you lived by in your life?

PERLER: I love people. I really do. I love people. I love to do things for people, and it came easy to me. For instance, my son-in-law says to my daughter, "You don't treat me like your mother treated your father. You don't take care of me like she did." Came easy to me. It was nothing to me to do things for him. He was a manager of a fruit in a store. He took care of the fruit. He had to go, but towards the end he couldn't do it because he had angina and he couldn't get up early in the morning and go. So he started to work in the post office, and when you first work in the post office, they give you the worst time. He had to be in at three o'clock in the morning. So I would get up at two thirty, before him, and while he was dressing I'd make his coffee and make him lunch and my son always says to my Susan, "You

wouldn't do that for me." But it came easy to me. It meant nothing to me.

SIGRIST: So what would your advice be?

PERLER: Just be good to everybody and they'll be good to you. We got along good. I miss him so much every day. I don't know whether it got any better or not. Maybe it got a little bit better since, but every day I sit up here. This was his seat. Now I eat breakfast there and I look at him and I say, "I wish you were here." [voice is breaking up]

SIGRIST: And there's a nice picture of you on the wall, I'd like to say for the sake of the tape.

PERLER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you have anything else you'd like to record for posterity.

PERLER: Oh, there's—

SIGRIST: Don't get up.

PERLER: Give me that picture that's on the end table, the one that's facing you.

SIGRIST: Oh, I should say for the sake of the tape that Craig Robbins has gone in to get a photograph and we're now looking at a photograph.

PERLER: That's the time when Susan and Jody came to see, because it was my—

SIGRIST: When they were photographed in your paper.

PERLER: Sixtieth. They didn't know that anybody was coming. They just came, but my son-in-law couldn't come, so when she went to take the pictures. So I said to her, "Can you do me a favor and take my, so my family would be in it?" Now, this picture's standing there so she took that. So there's my son-in-law and my daughter and Jody.

SIGRIST: Great. Well, we'll shut the machine off and we'll look at the pictures in a minute. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Ida Perler on Tuesday, August 13<sup>th</sup>, 1996 with Myrna Robbins and her son Craig in attendance also, and we're in Springfield, Massachusetts. Thank you very much, Mrs. Perler.

PERLER: You're welcome.

EI-778/PERLER

END OF INTERVIEW