

EI-818

KAZMIERA ELIZABETH ZIELONKA GURKA

BIRTHDATE: AUGUST 22, 1914

INTERVIEW DATE: OCTOBER 10, 1996

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 82

RUNNING TIME: 1:28:12

INTERVIEWER: PAUL SIGRIST

RECORDING ENGINEER: PAUL SIGRIST

INTERVIEW LOCATION: CHICOPEE, MASS

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:

POLAND, 1915 & 1926

AGE: 1, 12

SHIP: THE MAJESTIC

PORT:

RESIDENCES:

[NOTE: Brother and sister talk over each other continually, and interrupt the interviewer making this difficult to transcribe verbatim.]

SIGRIST: Good afternoon, this is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Thursday, October 10th, 1996. I'm in Chicopee, Massachusetts. Chicopee is spelled C-H-I, wait, Chico—C-O-P-E-E. C-H-I-P-O-P-E-E [sic]. Chicopee, Massachusetts and I'm here with Kazmiera Elizabeth Zielonka Gurka. Mrs. Gurka came from Poland in 1926. She was twelve when she came.

GURKA: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Age twelve, and she is the sister of Jerry Zielonka, Z-I-E-L-O-N-K-A, whom I interviewed just recently and Mr. Zielonka will probably be joining us soon in the interview and may actually contribute, also.

GURKA: Oh, he didn't give you his [unclear].

SIGRIST: Well, he did. He did and it's all in his interview.

GURKA: Oh, I see.

SIGRIST: Can we begin, Mrs. Gurka, by you telling me your birth date, please.

GURKA: August 22nd, 1914.

SIGRIST: 1914, and can you just say your name for me, as it was when you were born in Poland?

GURKA: Kazmiera Zielonka.

SIGRIST: And the Z is—in Kazmiera is like a GE sound?

GURKA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Ka-ge-mira.

GURKA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And was it spelled any differently then?

GURKA: No, no, the same way only you had a C instead of a K.

SIGRIST: I see. Were you named after anybody?

GURKA: Well, the second name only. Well, no, in Poland they usually had different names like, you know, and even now here they—they don't know what to call me. For short they call me Kazzie, see. But it was Kazmiera and then after my mother, Eliziebeta. So that's Elizabeth. [beeping sound] What's that?

??: That's your alarm?

SIGRIST: That is. Oh, we're going to pause just for a moment.

??: Sorry. [tape off/on]

SIGRIST: Okay, we're now resuming. Mrs. Gurka, can you tell me where in Poland you were born?

GURKA: I was born in Glinikurny Gogolow.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

GURKA: Ewww.

SIGRIST: Or Mr. Zielonka, can you spell it?

GURKA: I can if--, G-L-I—

ZIELONKA: G-L—

SIGRIST: Here, do you want a pad and paper?

GURKA: Just write it?

SIGRIST: Yes.

GURKA: They got those oomph.

SIGRIST: Okay, just—no, just spell it out loud for me.

GURKA: Glinikgurny Gogolow.

SIGRIST: All right, now just spell it.

GURKA: G-L-I-N-I-K-G-U-R-N-Y, Gurney, Gogolow, G-O-G-O-L-O-WA.
Gogolow.

SIGRIST: Okay, and where in Poland is that?

GURKA: That's near Krakow.

SIGRIST: Near Krakow, uh-huh. Do you know anything about the day you were born? Any story about—that your mother may have told you about what happened the day you were born?

GURKA: Well, that's when the war broke out in Poland and they wouldn't let us come here on account of the war broke out so we had to stay there a year because she only went to visit. And when the war broke out, we had to stay.

SIGRIST: So your mother had gone to Poland to visit.

GURKA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Was—was she pregnant when she went back to Poland?

GURKA: Yes. Yeah, she was expecting me. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh, and they ended up staying. Do you know anything about what happened that day? A story about when you were born?

GURKA: Hmmm. Well, she never said that, no, I don't remember. Only I know is that's where I was born. It wasn't a hospital or anything, it's just, you know, in a house. And then after she started saying, well, then the war broke out and that was really something for her because when we lived there, when all the soldiers, you know, people ran to the woods because they were so scared. And she was talking about all the soldiers, how they came there and how they took everything. Started burning places and things and what was that? Austria, wasn't it? Austria was it then or what was it in 1914, the war?

ZIELONKA: I--it was between Austria—Austro-Hungarians, Germans on the one side and Russians on the other, if remember.

GURKA: Yeah, Russians and, yeah, something like that.

ZIELONKA: I think we were in southern Poland then and that was back and forth all the time. One factor take over the village and then the next one have a push. And I recounted that in my tape.

GURKA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Right, we talked actually quite a bit about that.

GURKA: Yeah, but see, then when they did come there, my mother stayed right there. She didn't—she didn't run anywhere. All the people were crying and going and she just stayed there and she said that they—the—I don't know, he was a head one of the soldiers or something because he came, the captain on a horse and he said them not to, you know, bother my mother because she's from America. So they just, you know—so they didn't, but she used to tell us about, you know, all the different things about the wars there and—

SIGRIST: Do you, because you would have been four roughly when the war was just beginning to end.

GURKA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you have any recollections yourself of—of experiences in your earliest childhood, which would have been the end of World War I?

GURKA: No, not—not then because I guess I was too small then. The—the only thing I remember was already when I was like more five, five years old, but then we already came here. My brother, older brother

was a year old and I was just born and then when we came back, so that's when we lived here. Well, I remember that house.

SIGRIST: You were—wait, you were five years old when your mother went back to America?

GURKA: Oh, no, one. One.

SIGRIST: You were one year old.

GURKA: But I was seven when we went back.

SIGRIST: I see, when the war broke out, they wouldn't let her go and she had to wait a year.

GURKA: A year, yeah.

SIGRIST: So you were one year old.

GURKA: When I came back to America.

SIGRIST: So that's what, roughly 1915?

GURKA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Or so. The family—it's just your mother, right? Your father stayed in America?

GURKA: Oh, my father worked in the Fiske—Uniroyal. Used to be a Fiskes, but he always—because he never had any health, so she used to go there to them for a visit. She just went for a visit, but just as the war broke out. Well, naturally she got to stay.

SIGRIST: I see. I see.

ZIELONKA: My father went back to America, so left her there with—

GURKA: Well, that's after, yeah.

SIGRIST: Um—

ZIELONKA: And then he came back after her.

SIGRIST: We covered a little bit of this in your brother's interview, but let me just ask you some of the same questions. First of all, what was your father's name?

ZIELONKA: Frank. Franzeshak. [PH]

SIGRIST: Franzeshak, which you spelled I think for us Mr. Zielonka.

GURKA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And—and your mother's name?

GURKA: My mother's name was Stanizlava.

SIGRIST: Yes.

GURKA: Stella. Yeah.

SIGRIST: And you said that your memory kicks in when you get back to America at some point?

GURKA: Well, yeah, seven.

ZIELONKA: First time.

GURKA: First time. Seven years old I was when we—

ZIELONKA: She was back again after.

GURKA: Yeah, at seven. When I was seven.

SIGRIST: I see—so—so you were born in Poland. You came back to the United States at age one.

GURKA: Uh-hmm.

SIGRIST: Then you went back to Poland.

GURKA: Seven, when I was seven.

SIGRIST: At age seven. So what year was that?

GURKA: Yes. Well—

ZIELONKA: '21. 1921.

GURKA: Yeah, because we came back five years later.

SIGRIST: Yes, 1921. Tell me what you remember about your earliest memories. What are your earliest memories? The earliest thing you can remember in your life.

GURKA: You mean in Poland?

SIGRIST: Just anywhere. Just what—what is the earliest you remember?

GURKA: I just remember how we were going on the ship down to Poland and my sister and I because she was two years younger than me. So my mother went with my brother, my sister Francis, with me and my other sister Wanda. There was four of us that went to Poland.

SIGRIST: And this is in 19—in 1921?

GURKA: '21, yeah, and then my father said that he would come later, but he wanted her to go to Posanine [PH] and buy some land there. Not land, but she bought a grocery store. You know, not a—what do you call that with a—

ZIELONKA: Karshma. [PH]

GURKA: Yeah, well karshma, but it was selling liquors and stuff. But people could come and get a drink there.

SIGRIST: Like a—like a—like a tavern or something.

GURKA: Yeah, but it was not far from—all I remember that I used to love flowers and I used to—there was a [unclear] there. It must have been Valta, right near that where we had the place when she bought it, and we had a great big building with twenty-four families living in it and in the middle—it was like a round one and then from there, we came out, there was like a arbor. You know, like what do you call those? We went through that and there was a church.

ZIELONKA: Arch.

GURKA: Arch and there was a church right there and then I always remember when I used to the fields and lay down in the flowers and look at the sky and make all kinds of things from them. That was my favorite spot. That's what I used to do always. And of course—

SIGRIST: Do you have any memories of—of your early childhood in America before going to Poland in 1921?

GURKA: Oh, yeah. Well, that's when we lived on—on—here Grape Street.

SIGRIST: Grape?

GURKA: Grape.

SIGRIST: Like the vegetable? Like the fruit?

GURKA: Yeah, it's that street.

SIGRIST: Here in Chicopee.

GURKA: Yeah, Chicopee. My father worked in the Fiske, but he was also a fireman.

SIGRIST: Well, can you describe the house that you lived in in America in—in the house?

GURKA: It was just a two-family house on Grape Street right near Valentine School and we had a Christmas tree. I remember that good because my sister, my father and my mother bought us the little furniture for dolls and we played with it. Of course, we had candles on the tree. Of course, we started a fire, her and I, with the—playing with the—you know, the tree started going. My father came with—

ZIELONKA: That was the first time [unclear]. Set a fire, I remember when I was born.

GURKA: Yeah, so that's what was on Grape Street.

ZIELONKA: Common occurrence.

GURKA: Yeah, and then from there we moved to—we went to Cinder Street, right near Polish National Home. We lived over there and in there, from when I was seven, that's when we left from there to Poland.

SIGRIST: And why did—was it the whole family that went back to Poland or did your father stay here?

GURKA: That's the time that my father said, "Go, get all the land and then—in Posnina and then we can—I can come and we can stay there."

SIGRIST: I see. So the intention was that mom would go over and get everything established.

GURKA: Yeah, that's right, and—

SIGRIST: I'm going to just move this over because it's going to pick up on the tape.

GURKA: And he—and he did, he went. He came, came to Poland and he stayed a year and he didn't really like—like it there, so he said, "No, that's it. I'm going back to America." So he left.

SIGRIST: What didn't he like about being in Poland?

GURKA: I don't know. He was born there, but he just didn't care for it and he said he's going back and he went back to work where he worked in the Fiske and after he left, he was born.

SIGRIST: Okay, you're pointing. Remember, we're just on audio tape.

GURKA: Oh.

SIGRIST: So you're pointing to your brother, Jerry.

GURKA: My brother, yeah. My brother Jerry was born.

ZIELONKA: Jasloff. [PH]

GURKA: Jasloff and—and—and then—before he told her to sell everything and come back to America. So she, before she started, she sold everything and then after we went back for a couple years to Glinikurny there where I was born, Gogolow and we stayed there in a little hut. There was a little house, but next door was people [unclear] that were used to—

ZIELONKA: Tell—tell—recount why—what happened after she sold the property about the German marks deflating. You don't remember that?

GURKA: No. The what? No.

SIGRIST: I guess I'd like to really concentrate then on those—those five years that you lived in Poland.

GURKA: Yeah. Yeah, well, that's what—but we had—oh, we loved it there, my sister, and we went to Polish school. It was just a little ways. We felt sorry for the children because they had no shoes, so we took our shoes off, put them behind the house and we walked barefoot school. So my mother found out and she gave us a licking after for that because she said, "You have shoes." I said, "Well, we feel sorry for the others," and so then we—

SIGRIST: Why did you have shoes?

GURKA: Because we were well off and the other people didn't, you know.

SIGRIST: Were there other ways that you felt different when you went back to Poland, because you had been in America all that time?

GURKA: Yeah, well, we figured that we were—we had always went on a ship with the First Class and everything there. We had my mother used to sew for us dresses, the same kind for the two of us, my sister and me, and the church was not far away. That's the church I was born in. I mean, went for [stutters] Communion and everything, and we used to have—so when the priest was going by, we had to kneel down, you know, and all that and then he used to talk on the—when he was in church that “those people from Poland,” about us, you know, how nice we were and dressed and everything. Because, like I said, my father was making good money. He used to send it to Poland, so that we were dressed better and everything, see. So that's what it was, but my mother used to go always to the—what was that village there? Frishtok. [PH]They used to have like a bizarre, but it was in Polish. It was a jarmak.

ZIELONKA: Market.

GURKA: Yeah, market so it's a earmark. So they used to sell everything there, you know.

SIGRIST: Can you spell the name of the time Frishka?

GURKA: Gogolow. No, not Gogolow. Um, what did I just say?

SIGRIST: Frishka, wasn't it?

GURKA: No.

SIGRIST: The village.

GURKA: No, the one that she went to, that was—

ZIELONKA: Femish?

GURKA: I just mentioned it where the jarmak was.

ZIELONKA: I can't recount.

GURKA: Cripes.

SIGRIST: Well, that's okay.

GURKA: Just went right out of my mind all of a sudden then.

SIGRIST: Was your mother—was she making money any other way or was it just your father sending money to her?

GURKA: Oh, no, my father was sending money. No, she was sewing for us, like for my sister and me clothes and she used to make everything over. From our old coat, she'd make a new coat and—

SIGRIST: Do you remember a dress that she made for you that—that you can describe for me?

GURKA: Oh, yeah. I just loved one of them. I used to love it. It was cocoa color and it had—

SIGRIST: Cocoa color.

GURKA: Cocoa, yeah, and it had—all around the neck it had that aqua color and then on the sleeves and on here and it was all pleated. I used to love that dress. I always used to like it. The colors were very pretty together, too. Oh, Frishtok. That's where she went to the—Frishtok to the jarmat. F-R-S—

SIGRIST: Here we'll just spell it. I'll just leave this over here. You can spell it.

GURKA: We type all these interviews up. As Mr. Zielonka remembers well, I was making him spell everything.

ZIELONKA: [unclear, two people speaking at once]

GURKA: Oh, I see. Frysztok, see. Oh, Frysztok, that's where the jar—

SIGRIST: F-R—

GURKA: R-Y-S-Z because they always used to have that Z, T-O-K.

SIGRIST: K, and that's the name of the village?

GURKA: Frysztok, yeah.

SIGRIST: And then you said—what is the name of the market in Polish?

ZIELONKA: Yarmart.

GURKA: Jarmak.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that out loud, please?

GURKA: J-A-M—no, R. J-A-R-M-A-K.

SIGRIST: Jarmak.

GURKA: Jarmak. Yeah, she used to go there and get a lot of stuff. She got us things for Christmas tree, which we used to make things for the Christmas. Everything we made in school, it was from paper. All kinds of things that we made was all home made.

SIGRIST: And what did you make to put on the Christmas tree?

GURKA: Well, we made like combs from a—you know, we—the paper was all colors. It was the shiny paper like squares and we used to take it and we used to cut it and we make little baskets out of it and we used to make combs and we'd put cookies in there or something or zuckerki. That's what they used to call cookies, and we used to put them in there and hang them on the—on the tree. Then she went to Frysztok to buy the jaselka they used to call it. That's the balls to hang on the tree.

SIGRIST: Well, can you spell it? That's a great one for us to know.

GURKA: Jaselka.

SIGRIST: You can write out over here, too, if you want.

GURKA: Jaselka.

SIGRIST: Can you spell it out loud?

GURKA: J-A-S-E-L, that's L with the thing like, K-A.

SIGRIST: And that's a—that's a tree ornament?

GURKA: Yeah, jaselka they used to be the ornaments and then they're—

ZIELONKA: The round tiny Christmas—

SIGRIST: The Christmas balls.

GURKA: Balls.

ZIELONKA: Ornaments.

GURKA: Yeah, and she—she'd get all kinds of shape. Of course, we were happy because we had that in America, but we didn't have it there. So then she'd bring it and she'd put it, "Now, don't touch it." She put it on a high on one of those like bureaus and then she said, "Don't touch." So one time her and I got up there and we took it down and we looked at them. Then we tried to put them back, we broke them all. So she says, "What happened?" "We don't know." Of course, we're going to lie about it because we were scared that she was going to be—we broke them all, so we didn't have them anyway. So that's—that was for Christmas, but Christmas—

SIGRIST: Was there a special meal that you ate at Christmas time in Poland?

GURKA: Christmas was very beautiful in Poland because Christmas—

SIGRIST: Meal.

GURKA: It was a [unclear] and they had a—you got your Christmas tree the night of the Christmas Eve. First star that appeared, that's when you decorated your Christmas tree. Not before and it was always candles. It was fresh because it was just brought from the woods and that's when it was decorated. That's when they started singing colinda, that means Christmas carols and—

SIGRIST: Is—is there a Christmas song that you remember that you sang as a child that you could sing right now in Polish?

GURKA: Well, there's so many of them that—

SIGRIST: It's the one that you remember, though, when you were a kid that you sang.

GURKA: Yeah, there was [unclear].

SIGRIST: Can you sing a little bit for us?

GURKA: [sings in Polish] [Mr. Zielonka joins in]

SIGRIST: Thank you very much.

GURKA: Uh-hmm.

SIGRIST: We have a chorus.

ZIELONKA: Duet.

SIGRIST: Great and in fact if we—if you—there are other things you can think of singing and if you both know them [unclear].

GURKA: Yeah, well, my father, what did he used to like?

ZIELONKA: What did he sing when he used to come through the door?

GURKA: Remember once—no, no, one song he used to always love [Polish], Something on a hill there.

ZIELONKA: I know [unclear].

GURKA: [sings in Polish] That's the one he used to sing always.

SIGRIST: Is that like a Polish folk song?

GURKA: That's—well, no. That's a corinda. That's a Christmas carol, too.

ZIELONKA: Christmas carol.

SIGRIST: Christmas carol, okay.

GURKA: Yeah, uh-hmm, and then for supper we used to have Polish pieroga that I mean with cheese and potato. Then we'd have a borscht and that was made no meat because that was a fast day. The night before.

SIGRIST: Can you describe how your mother made the borscht at that time?

GURKA: Well, the one that they used to make it was like they used to put—I don't know. They put bread and I think it's oatmeal—

ZIELONKA: Oatmeal and let it ferment.

GURKA: And they let it go for three days and they make it sour and—and then after they—they cook it with—I don't know, with water or what. I don't know. I never liked that borscht because the one we make now I like it better because we still go with—with all the way we used to, you know, cabbage and all that.

ZIELONKA: And a bake fish. Remember a baked fish.

GURKA: Fish. There had to be a whole baked fish because you couldn't have meat. So they had—oh, they had about twelve different things. They had that kasha. What is that kasha called, that [unclear]?

ZIELONKA: Buckwheat.

GURKA: No, there was—

SIGRIST: But there were—there were a series of things that they traditionally had [unclear – too many people speaking at once]

GURKA: Oh, yeah, you had about twelve different things, yes, and what—

ZIELONKA: Without fail.

GURKA: Yeah, without—

SIGRIST: Without fail.

GURKA: Yeah, everybody had so much, all different things.

SIGRIST: In Poland did you exchange presents at Christmas time? In Poland?

GURKA: Not really, no.

ZIELONKA: [unclear].

GURKA: Well, oplalek that's the bread that you got here, in Poland, too. That's like communion, but they call them a oplalek. Well, of course, before you start, which I—

ZIELONKA: Came from the church.

GURKA: I never—yeah, I never used to like because I used to cry. Every time they used to go, used to go from one person to another and he'd have a piece and I'd have a piece of the oplalek and then we'd say, "I wish you this and I wish you that, the best of everything in the year," and then they wish you back something. And I was—see, I—

ZIELONKA: It's just celebrating.

GURKA: Somehow I never liked it, you know. [crying] Because it made me sad and so that's what it was, and then that's before we ate. But they used to put that, some hay on the table. Then they put that oplalek on it, too, and then covered it with a tablecloth and then they put a dish there, and if that dish stuck to it because, you know, it was warm, the [unclear] got to the—or whatever was under there, and if it stuck, then that's good—good luck we had always after.

SIGRIST: Can we spell oplalek?

GURKA: Oplalek.

ZIELONKA: Yeah.

GURKA: Oop.

SIGRIST: Here you go.

GURKA: Did I close that?

SIGRIST: I—I probably did.

GURKA: I—I write about five, four, six people in Poland, O-P-L-A-L-E-K, but on the second there is that—

SIGRIST: That little squiggle on the L.

GURKA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And that's pronounced opl—

GURKA: Oplalek.

SIGRIST: And that—that's pwa.

ZIELONKA: Pwa.

GURKA: That's a P, oplalek.

SIGRIST: And so that's like the communion wafer that [unclear].

GURKA: The communion, only they bring it—they give it to you now. When they send me letters from Poland, there is a piece in there every time for Christmas. You know, they send it to you.

SIGRIST: Now, did the Catholic priest come into your home at Christmas time [unclear]?

GURKA: Oh—oh, yes. Oh, yeah, they—they come and they bless. They bless all the food, and then at Easter—

ZIELONKA: Write on the door.

- GURKA: Yeah, and then write. That's New Year's, they write K [speaks in Polish]. So that's KMB. That's in Polish some kind of—three kings. That's the three kings. They write that in there on the door for—for good luck on the New Year's.
- SIGRIST: Is—is there a Christmas in Poland that you spent that sticks out in your mind for one reason or another? If something happened or—
- GURKA: Well, I—not really—well, they all were nice, every single one of them. So, see, that's the way they celebrated it and that's—that's the only way that, you know, the same thing. You know, it's always the same, you know, the—
- SIGRIST: Was there another holiday that you remember that was important in Poland?
- ZIELONKA: [unclear] Easter.
- GURKA: [unclear] oh, [speaks Polish] Well, Easter is another one that they—well, then that's different because that one they—the priest comes, too, and they bless all the eggs and they make—from the butter they made a little lamb and they put it on the table and all the different things that for Easter was a borscht again, but it's not with—like for Christmas you had it with—with potatoes. But in Easter you have it with kielbasa and eggs and ham. That's for Easter, and you color your eggs and that's what—what we always did and we had our table all decorated with all the meat and everything and then the priest comes in and he blesses all the food, too.
- SIGRIST: Did—when you had kielbasa in Europe, did your mother make that or did you purchase it?
- GURKA: Well, my mother used to make it. They used—she used to make some, but not all the time.
- SIGRIST: Can you describe for me how the process—
- GURKA: Well, they have those—what do you call those, the casings there that's slacki in Polish and they used to grind—grind what, the pork and beef and all that and—
- ZIELONKA: And I remember pushing the meat—
- GURKA: Yeah, you pushed the meat into it.

ZIELONKA: You take the gut and you spread it over scissor handles and pushed the meat in by hand.

GURKA: Pushed the meat in, yeah.

ZIELONKA: That you made that kielbasa and then you smoked it.

SIGRIST: So that even in America when you were a child, they were still for the most part following the same—

ZIELONKA: I remember making kielbasa up until about ten, eleven years old.

GURKA: Yeah, but I mean—

ZIELONKA: We did it manually just to have our own and we used to grind up the meat, different kinds and very high spices and garlic and everything.

GURKA: Oh, yeah, garlic was—

ZIELONKA: I remember pushing the meat through scissors handles into—to the sheep casings or something.

GURKA: Yeah, well—

SIGRIST: Something, uh-huh.

GURKA: But see, [unclear] all the herbs that they grew themselves. See, now they're finding out that all of those herbs, that they can cure a lot of people in different things. But not there. We cured ourselves with all those herbs there. Like they used to grow that rumiane, they called it. What is that in English?

ZIELONKA: Chamomile.

GURKA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Chamomile. What was the name in Polish.

GURKA: Rumianek.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

GURKA: Yeah. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: [Laughs]

ZIELONKA: Some growing out here.

GURKA: That grows here I think, too. R-U-M-I-A-N-E-K. Rumianek.

SIGRIST: Thanks.

GURKA: That's yellow flowers and then—

SIGRIST: And what would they do with that? How would—what would they make?

GURKA: That even for the babies. They take the flowers. They—they like of tea. They boiled it like tea. They drain it and they—even the baby if they have a—what do you call that when they're sick? They have a fever, then they give it to them a little bit in a spoon and that brings the fever down. And then another thing, if you got a cut, they had another thing, those leaves that used to grow. Bobka they used to call them. Bobka leaf which is like a—like a—what do you—

ZIELONKA: Plantain.

GURKA: No, no bobka leaf is like a cabbage. It's like a cabbage leaf and it used to grow on the ground and if you got a cut on your leg or anywhere, you just take some mud with water, put it on your cut. Then put the bobka leaf on it and that cures you, too.

ZIELONKA: I used plantain leaf on our cuts. That what we used to do when we were [unclear].

GURKA: They used to do that, yeah.

ZIELONKA: [unclear] plantain.

GURKA: We had lot a lot of—

SIGRIST: I'd love you to talk about more of these kinds of things, if you can think of other ways that they—they—they treated.

GURKA: Then another thing was—what they call it here that stinks? Not onion, the other, garlic. Garlic, my mother used to take that and garlic we used a lot because she used to rub our chests with it, or else she'd hang it like a bead [unclear], and that keeps your colds away and it was very good for colds and stuff.

SIGRIST: And garlic was used in cooking, too, not just for medicine.

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- GURKA: Oh, we used an awful lot of garlic there. Here, no, not that much but they used it in different things. But now they're beginning to because they even tell you eat a lot before you get—you getting a cold, it's going to cure you, you know.
- SIGRIST: What about for a headache in Poland, how did they—how did they do that?
- GURKA: If you had a headache, my mother used to say just get a piece of cloth, wet it and put some vinegar on it and hold it, and it helps. It does because I do that.
- SIGRIST: This is very interesting.
- GURKA: I do that now even because sometimes I get a sinus problem and I get the headache and I—right away I take a washcloth and wet it and I put some vinegar because vinegar is—and when we ate cukes, cucumbers or anything like people do now with what do you call, sour cream and everything, we put vinegar in with—with, you know, salt and pepper instead of all that other things. So that was—that's the way we ate it, but see now it's everything different here. But they should have used more vinegar because vinegar is very good for you.

[END OF SIDE A, TAPE 1]

[BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE 1]

- SIGRIST: Do you remember in—in—in those five years that you were in Poland, do you remember you or one of the other children getting very sick? Or having a wound of some sort that sticks out in your mind?
- GURKA: Well, no, but they went through that—what was that sickness that they had there? A lot of people died. Not [unclear] they called it. [unclear]
- ZIELONKA: Influenza.
- SIGRIST: The influenza.
- GURKA: Influenza, that was a very bad and a lot of people died that we knew there, but we had cousins—
- ZIELONKA: Wanda. Tell them—
- GURKA: Huh?

ZIELONKA: Tell them about Wanda.

GURKA: About what?

ZIELONKA: Wanda, polio.

GURKA: Oh, yeah. Well, she had—oh, she got that in America. She didn't get it there. When she was born, yeah, but see that influenza, they used to take—like see, my father had it, but he had it here. He didn't have it there. When he had it here, the doctor said, "He's not going to live over night," you know, "unless you want to do this. Take a sheet and wet it with a lot of vinegar and put it around him," every so many hours and she did all night and he lived from that. And it was vinegar. Like they say, there was a lot of stuff—

SIGRIST: And that was right before you went back then to Poland, right? Is that when it happened?

GURKA: That—yeah, yeah, yeah. Yeah, but—

SIGRIST: Is that when it happened? You were still in America.

GURKA: But see—

ZIELONKA: Second time back.

GURKA: Yeah, well, second time when we went. So but there we had—oh, we had a lot of good times, my sister and I on the hill there we lived, a little hut because those people owned that little house, so we stayed there. Those people were wonderful. You didn't need anything. You had your grocery there. You had everything because every house had cherry trees, apple trees, pear trees, except oranges and bananas. That's something they never had there, but all the other fruit you had. Any kind of plums or anything, they had it or cherries. There wasn't only one kind because one, I remember when we were walking up to the church up the road there was all trees of big black cherries, and we used to climb them. We used to pick them in white dresses and we got black all over. We got a spanking for that. So I remember because we lived with my mother's sister first before we got to Poland the second time when I was seven. Well, so we lived for awhile until we got to that little house. But those people next door were very good to us, but they weren't our—they weren't our cousins or anything, but the whole village was—we had cousins there. The whole village practically.

SIGRIST: Mostly on your mother's side or your father's side, too?

- GURKA: Yeah, my mother and some on my father but not that much because he—they moved there after. But anyway, they all had farms and they made butter. They made bread. They had cows, horses, everything you could think of.
- SIGRIST: But—but this is a good time to talk about food. Let's talk about when you actually ate. What was your first meal of the day in Poland? What time—
- GURKA: Well, see—see, they—they didn't—bread and butter was mostly in the morning and a glass of milk, and then goat's milk we used to drink right straight from the goat. We used to drink the milk from the cow straight, warm yet and everything.
- SIGRIST: Did you have your own animals? Where did you get the milk from?
- GURKA: No, we didn't. We got it from the people next door to it because they had a big farm. They had everything there, and then cream and butter and everything. So I'm telling you like it was a store because you really didn't have to go for nothing nowhere because everything was there. If they wanted pork, they got the pigs they killed or all those different animals.
- SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing animals being slaughtered or any of that? Were you ever—
- GURKA: No, chickens mostly. Like they, you know, cut there—because on the hill there there was a guy that used to play a violin and another [unclear] and my sister Frances we were dancing all these Polish dances, you know. We used to go like around and round and do all the polkas and everything all that. So we really had a good time in Poland. We used to love it there.
- SIGRIST: What were—your mother and how many kids, five kids? How many were there in Poland?
- GURKA: Ah, four—Stanley, Frances, Wanda, me and then he was born in Posnine.
- SIGRIST: And your brother was born in 1923, right.
- GURKA: Born in Posnine. Yeah.
- SIGRIST: Right, yeah.

GURKA: Well, then when we—when we were coming back, I was twelve. He was three, a little older. Well, he says three and a half, but I don't. But anyway—

SIGRIST: I want to talk a little bit about your mother in Poland. Now, you said that she—she was getting money from your dad.

GURKA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And that's how she was supporting the family.

GURKA: Yes.

SIGRIST: What did your mother do for fun? For entertainment?

GURKA: Not really nothing. She just took care of us and we stayed on then and then when she used to go to the—to the different places, you know, like to that jarmak there or somewhere to buy different things, because you didn't have them in the village. So she had to go there. So she bought all that stuff and—and then she—no, then usually she was always around there like helping out, you know, on the farm there or something and we were picking mushrooms and different things. So we had all different things to do and then when—

ZIELONKA: My mother used to like to read.

GURKA: Oh, read. Yeah, she liked to read.

ZIELONKA: [unclear]

GURKA: Of course, there was a lot of weddings there, you know. So in the—when we were just a little ways off where we lived, and that was our cousins that had the place there where all the weddings used to be, and of course we used to go to all those weddings. My sister and I, we used to watch them and—and there used to be fights and there used to be yelling because this guy took somebody else's girl and they got married, and stuff like that. Like you know happens a lot of times, and then—

SIGRIST: Are there traditions—in Poland when people were married, were there certain traditions that were followed during the ceremony that were unique to Polish weddings at that time?

GURKA: Well, yeah. Well, yes because they—I used to love Polish weddings. I wish they would have them more here because I used to love them, the way they were dressed with those costumes.

SIGRIST: Can you describe what the costume looked like?

GURKA: Well, the costumes were all the skirts with all those, you know, different colors like ribbons and sewed on and then they had those vests with all those beads and different things. And then in their hair they had wreaths with hanging ribbons and those boots, you know, like up to the knee. And then when the wedding was coming, they were out on the horse. The—the—the big wagon was coming and they were sitting on the wagon with all the bridesmaids, the groom and the bride, and horses were decorated with all kinds of all flowers and everything, also. And you could see them coming down the road and they were throwing cookies to all the children on both sides, and then the wedding by itself was very beautiful because every one of them that was—if the—what do you call that? Bridesmaids and the—and the—the other one, what are they?

ZIELONKA: Ushers.

GURKA: Ushers. When the both of them went before they got married, a week before that, they were singing to the bride near the windows and they were playing music and—and different things. And then when the wedding was on, when she was going to become already, after the church and their different songs and then they put her on a seat and then they take her veil off and they put like a wreath around her head then because she was already married, so she's a woman already. And they'd sing different things—songs to her, and then when they were—the wedding was on then I used to like that because all the usher and the—when they were dancing, they stopped near the musicians, which they had the big basse, you know, they called it that.

ZIELONKA: Bass violin.

GURKA: That base violin. They used to put money in there and every time they stepped, then they would sing and then they would play that and they would dance. Then another one would sing a song and then they would dance around and play. Oh, I used to love those weddings.

SIGRIST: What—what was the groom dressed in?

GURKA: The groom was dressed like in—like the Polish guy with those pants with the boots and with the vest—

ZIELONKA: Like mountaineers.

GURKA: Yeah, mountain, with the hat with the feathers.

ZIELONKA: [unclear].

GURKA: [unclear], like you know, and then, but I—I used to love those—those weddings. Oh, God, how I used to go and see those.

ZIELONKA: A Polish wedding usually last three days.

GURKA: Yeah, then next—

ZIELONKA: After the first day of the wedding, the bride and groom took off. Then you had two days of what they call [unclear].

GURKA: Yeah.

ZIELONKA: That means like a correction, or—

GURKA: You know, next day. They have a good time next day.

ZIELONKA: Two or three. In fact, yours—your wedding here lasted three days.

GURKA: Oh, gee.

ZIELONKA: She got married in 1935.

GURKA: '4.

ZIELONKA: '4. It lasted three days.

SIGRIST: So—so a Polish wedding traditionally—a Polish Catholic wedding would take a few days.

GURKA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: I mean it was an extended thing.

GURKA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: It involved a lot of singing, a lot of dancing. It involved very specific kinds of costumes.

GURKA: Yes, yeah, because they would—

ZIELONKA: Traditions and very detailed specific traditions.

GURKA: And see the—

SIGRIST: You mentioned songs. Is there another song that you can think of that was—

GURKA: The songs were like, let's see. Like the groom—not the groom only. The usher and the [unclear] stopped near the—you know—oh, see the sun?

SIGRIST: It's coming out finally.

GURKA: So then they stopped near the—the basse there and they put the money and they start singing, [sings in Polish] That's a song that you look at the sky and see how many stars are in there because that's how much you're going to be scared that night, the first night. And then another—then they dance because they play that song, the—the—the musicians. Then after when they—another one start and of course he started playing something—another started singing and—oh, I know so many of those songs and right now—

SIGRIST: But there were certain songs that were always sung at the weddings.

GURKA: Oh, they were always for that. Like when they were putting the thing on her, they—they used to sing [sings in Polish]. She used to run away and they used to look for her after they put the crown on her with the flowers.

SIGRIST: Now—now the couple, if you don't mind me asking this question, where would they spend their first night? What—did they actually go on a honeymoon like we have in the States?

GURKA: No.

SIGRIST: Or did they—or where did they spend—

GURKA: No, they never did have a honeymoon. That was just to their home. They—they already had a home. They'd go there, that's all. Not nowhere. You know, they really didn't go like here they go different places and—you know. So—

SIGRIST: This is very interesting. This is like the first description I think we have in the whole collection of a—of a wedding like that. That's wonderful.

GURKA: Well, because, see, we had a lot of them and then our cousins owned the places there. The whole—everybody like the whole village that we had cousins there all over. So.

SIGRIST: May I ask you the flip side of this. Could you describe a Polish funeral for me at that time in Poland? Did you attend one or—

GURKA: Uh. Oh, yeah. Well, I was—I carried one of them. It was a girl that I played with and we liked her and she was jumping rope and something when she was trying to jump the rope—we showed her how because they didn't have—they didn't even knew how to jump rope there or whatever. Certain things. So we showed her how to jump rope and then after we felt bad because something happened to her inside that she—of course, there was no doctors. Like—like, you know, you had to go to the—in a village like there would be. So something happened to her and of course she died. So of course the funeral—not funeral. There was no funeral parlors. Only they just went and the box. They put a box together, you know, and they put her in there and like later on—like from the beginning when I used to see that, when they used to carry the wooden boxes, but then for her they had like a coffin, white one, but it was painted after. So we carried it to the cemetery, you know, like the girls, so many of us. We—we—

SIGRIST: The girls actually carried—

GURKA: Carried the coffin, yes.

SIGRIST: Really?

GURKA: And we were there when they buried her. But then one lady—that was a very funny thing because one lady, she wasn't even sick, only she fell over the trash or something. She slipped and they said that she died. They buried her, but of course we never knew if she was alive or not because, see, there was no doctors there that, you know, that they could go get anyone. So we went to a few—few funerals like for kids there, which was very sad and, you know, and a little baby drowned, too, one time in a tub. And in fact that was from our families, too. That cousins and that—that was awful, too, because that was a white little coffin and we—the boys carried it, you know.

SIGRIST: And were there certain traditional things that—like the wedding, you know, you're talking about different—different activities you did at the wedding. Were there similar traditional things that people did at these funerals—

GURKA: Well, yeah. Well, they went after to that place there where they had—they had something to eat and thing, but it was nothing like too much. It was very sad and—and not like here. They—they, you know, they go and have all that, you know. But there was a little bit different because they just feel—see, the people stayed in the houses. They

didn't have places like here, undertakers. Only there was a wreath on the door and they laid there for three—

SIGRIST: A wreath?

GURKA: Yeah, for three days and then after they buried them and see, that's the way you knew that somebody died. And things like that, but like other things, oh, I don't know. Then my mother, of course, when the—that was a very—this thing here that maybe you'll be interested in because when they—when I went to Poland in '85 to visit—

SIGRIST: 1985, uh-huh.

GURKA: Yeah. I went to visit those people where you live next door to us. They really weren't our cousin, but they were so good to us that—

SIGRIST: Right.

GURKA: Their house during the war, the Second World War, burned. Everything. Everything was destroyed in the Gogolow. Complete. So they even showed us films in one place where we went about how the planes came and stuff and how they destroyed the—the town of Gogolow and all that. So we—so that—those people—those people, when I went to visit them, they—she showed me and she used to write to my mother that she—two things were saved when she—my mother, when she left for Poland, when we left, when we went that time—

SIGRIST: In 1926?

GURKA: Yeah, she gave her a sewing machine that left—she left a sewing machine for her, Singer, that was brought from America over there for my mother because she used to sew. So, and then not only—and then she had a picture of Madonna and baby in a beautiful frame and then they—I went over there and they said, "Do you know that everything burned in that house." Everything, but whatever they could get out, they brought it out and everything was burned but never—that picture was never touched and that sewing machine. The two things my mother gave her. She had it there because I saw it and it still works. The sewing machine works. The picture's hanging right over—beautiful frame and everything. Not a scratch, not a burn, nothing. So I saw that picture when I went.

SIGRIST: Wow, and these—these things your mother had given to these people when they were leaving in '26.

GURKA: Yes. Yes. Yeah, and then it was still there and just so nice and like, you know, I don't know. I couldn't believe it that it was, you know. And of course they were building another church there now when I was there, a new one. Of course, I went to the old one and I was near altar and I remembered everything and—

SIGRIST: Well, good. Well, why don't we—the story about the—the woman having the Singer machine and the picture is a good way to begin talking about when your mother left in '26 again.

GURKA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Your father was still in America?

GURKA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: He was still in America. Why did she chose to leave in 1926?

GURKA: Because she was supposed to leave right after when she sold out the thing there in Posinine. She was supposed to leave then, but she says, "I'm going to go there and we're going to go and have, you know—I'm going to stay visit all my cousins and everything in Poland," because her sisters lived there, a lot of them. So she said, "I'm going to stay there and visit them and then when—when we're ready, well"—then he kept writing, writing to come home, come home. So finally we decided to go.

SIGRIST: Let me just ask you one quick question before we get you on your way. Do you remember when your brother was born? When Mr. Zielonka was born?

GURKA: Well, yeah, he was born in Posnine there where we had that big—you know, all the things there.

SIGRIST: And what do you remember about the whole process when your mother was carrying him as a baby and when he was born?

GURKA: Not really because you don't like don't pay no—too much attention to all that because my mother really didn't show too much. My mother didn't show too much, too, you know, to real—to really know that—because—[coughs] Excuse me.

SIGRIST: We're going to actually go onto another tape, so there'll be plenty of time.

ZIELONKA: Save two—we're going to sing.

GURKA: Huh?

ZIELONKA: Save two minutes then, because we're going to sing our mother's favorite song.

SIGRIST: We will. We will, but we're going to—we're going to go onto another tape.

GURKA: So see the—[stuttering]. So then when we—she said, "Well, we have to leave now because he just keeps, you know, calling and saying, you know, writing to come home." So when he—she said that, well, we had to, you know, tell them all that we were leaving. We were very disappointed. We were crying. We loved it there, but—

SIGRIST: What do you remember packing to take with you?

GURKA: Well, we just took few things. We didn't—we didn't care for too much because we would have everything here. So we left a lot of clothes there. Even, in fact, when I went in '85 I brought them a whole suitcase of clothes there.

SIGRIST: But do you remember packing like an object? Something that was yours that you wanted to take with you as a—as a memory of Poland?

GURKA: Not really. Not really. We didn't, no. No, just the regular things. Whatever we had, we—you know—

SIGRIST: But you didn't want to go?

GURKA: If somebody—no, we didn't want to go, but my mother had to go so we—so when we went to Warsaw, they checked my sister. My sister, something was wrong with her eyes, my sister Wanda. So they says, "You can't leave." So they kept us there for two—two weeks in a hotel and so she says, "What can we do?" So she—so all of a sudden she thought, "Well, let's go back to Gogolow and let's go see what we can do." So in the meantime, the ship we were going to take had left. That was Olympic and then after when we came back, she said, "Well, there's another one going, so we have to leave," but we couldn't take her because by the time her eyes were cleared. So we left her. My mother left her, she said, with the people that were so nice there, and we went to Warsaw and then we took Majestic.

SIGRIST: So you—so you were supposed to come on the Olympic.

GURKA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: But you ended up coming on the Majestic.

GURKA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And you came, and you left your sister there while her eyes cleared up.

GURKA: Yeah, there. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Before you got to Warsaw, do you remember some kind of a gathering to say goodbye to—to the family members or the neighbors or anything like that?

GURKA: Well, yeah. Well, they all came to say goodbye and they—you know, and all that, and they were all crying. They didn't want to see us go and things like that, but you know, it's not—

SIGRIST: Did any of them give any of you something as a gift?

GURKA: Oh, yes, they give you like things from Poland that you don't have here, you know.

SIGRIST: Like what?

GURKA: Like something maybe a vest that you like or a blouse that you like there. Or, you know, different things that—or beads from Poland and stuff like that. So we used to bring home and—but see, after awhile you put them somewhere and you—you don't even remember what you—what you brought after awhile because we were kids, you know. So we—you know, I—I don't remember anything like really that I—because they—they—they didn't really like have anything like. Like, I'm saying, a blouse or—or something that they crocheted.

SIGRIST: Right, but you don't remember anything that you were given specifically?

GURKA: No.

SIGRIST: No.

GURKA: No, not really like that, no. There was—see, because I didn't—they had things probably in the cities, but see, there they didn't have anything much. Like if you wanted a tablecloth or you wanted something like that, they would give it to you that they had or they maybe crocheted it or [unclear] or something like. Well, that's what they would give us.

SIGRIST: Uh-hmm.

GURKA: But other things, well, they didn't—

SIGRIST: Tell me about when you went to Warsaw. Was that the first time you had been in a—in Warsaw?

GURKA: Unless we were going to—to Poland in, then maybe we had to go through there or—

SIGRIST: I'm just wondering what as a twelve year old girl sticks out in your mind about being in Warsaw for those two weeks/

GURKA: Oh, we just loved it because we were in a hotel and we were running around there and outside and everywhere. So, see, it wasn't—we used to see the—the marchings of soldiers there all the time because they always were practicing one way or another. And we saw all those canons going by and things like that, you know, through the windows or go outside and—because that was always there for that, you know. Like to have parades or different things, you know.

SIGRIST: Whose job was it to take care of the little kids?

GURKA: Hmm.

SIGRIST: Your job.

GURKA: Uh-hmm.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

GURKA: I always did. I was the oldest from the girls so I—I used to take care of everybody, you know, and so—

SIGRIST: Did you have just one room in the hotel or did you have more than one room?

GURKA: No, just one. Yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: So all of you were in that room.

GURKA: Yeah, we just stayed there because we didn't know when we were going to leave or how we were going to leave or anything until she had told—get word to the ones in the Gogolow there and see if we could

stay there and, you know, but of course we could, they said. So we went, but—

SIGRIST: What—what kind of examinations did you have to undergo in Warsaw? That you remember?

GURKA: They check you all over to see if there's any disease or anything before you go, but you have to do that after at Ellis Island anyway.

SIGRIST: Right, but I'm wondering what you remember in—in Warsaw.

GURKA: Well, yeah. Well, they do. They check you all. See, that's when they found out that my sister's eyes, something was wrong with them and they—we—she couldn't go, so we had to all stay. Either stay until she was healed, but we already had all the tickets and my mother had everything ready, so she says, "We can't just postpone it again for maybe another half a year or something. Depends."

SIGRIST: Did your mother or your sister later—in later years ever talk about how they felt about having—how your mother felt about having to make that decision and how your sister felt about being left behind? Did any—either one talk about—

GURKA: Well, she did—no. Well, she—she cried a lot. She didn't want to stay, but what could she do, and my mother said she's going to send for you as soon as she can, and of course she stayed there I think about a year. Wanda. Something. Or maybe more.

ZIELONKA: Five years. Five years.

GURKA: Something because after they—

ZIELONKA: We came over in '26. She got back in '30 or '31.

GURKA: Yeah, well, see, because I think she liked it there after. She didn't want to come after, so—but then after a while, well, she—

SIGRIST: How old was Wanda at that time in '26?

GURKA: When she stayed?

SIGRIST: Yeah.

GURKA: She was two years older than me and I was—

SIGRIST: So she was ten.

GURKA: She was—when I was seven, she was five.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

GURKA: So when I—yeah, ten because I was twelve.

SIGRIST: So she was ten years old. It must have been scary for a ten year old to be left—

GURKA: It was, but she liked it there. We all liked it there, so she was kind of happy that she had—that she could stay and we went. See, I was crying. I wanted to stay.

SIGRIST: What—what did you stay when you were about to—of course, you'd been on a ship before.

GURKA: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: You had gone back and forth. But the Majestic was a nice ship.

GURKA: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: You know, I was just wondering what were your impressions of—of getting onto the ship and—

GURKA: Oh, God, it's so big when you come and stand here and you got to go on it. And it is, and then the music played all night. We had beautiful weather all the time. Then only one time there that we were coming, I don't know, to America or to Poland—of course, it takes two weeks both ways. For so long, you know, that first time we came my father was at the Ellis Island. So he—we stayed there over night and then— but then some kind of girl drowned there when we were because we were standing near the thing in the rain and my sister and I, all of a sudden we saw this girl like this in the water.

ZIELONKA: [pounds on table] Yes, I remember that. I remember that.

GURKA: Yeah?

ZIELONKA: Aboard the ship.

GURKA: And then they said—

ZIELONKA: I remember that—that drowning.

GURKA: Yeah, and I says, “Oh, my God, there’s somebody drowning there.” So we ran and we told them and they put the boats down, you know, right away and all that, but they couldn’t find her. She was in [unclear]. I don’t know if that was to America or to Poland.

ZIELONKA: It was coming over here in ’26. I remember that—

GURKA: Because, see, the people—

ZIELONKA: Just before we got to Ellis Island that happened.

GURKA: Oh, because, she—she was in love with somebody, with a guy and they wouldn’t let him get married, so she—they sent her to the other country and she jumped. She—she drowned herself.

SIGRIST: That’s a horrible [unclear].

GURKA: So that was awful, but they, you know—or when my mother—well, that’s long ago. When my mother was coming when we were small, she was telling us how the ship was—how something happened to the ship and it was just in the middle of the ocean turning go round and round and all the—the whole, all the cabins were full of water already. She was telling us that, and she said, “We thought we were going to be all done then. You know, that we were going to sink with the ship.”

SIGRIST: Do—do you know the names of the ships that you took in earlier trips?

GURKA: Well, one was—one was Battare.

SIGRIST: The Battare.

GURKA: Yeah, and they were—

SIGRIST: Yeah, do you remember which trip that was?

GURKA: No, see—see then because then I—you like don’t pay attention to much too all that. Like after when I was older, twelve years old, see, but—

SIGRIST: So the Majestic is the one that sticks out in your mind.

GURKA: Majestic is the one, but Olympic was the one we were going to go, but Olympic something happened to it, too, when it was going. So it’s a good thing we took the Majestic, but the other one, it was something happened and she says, oh, everybody was crying, praying, because

they thought they were all going. But then another ship came to the rescue, but they already fixed whatever was wrong, so they continued.

SIGRIST: Where—where did you sleep on the Majestic?

GURKA: We had like one, two, three, four in a room there. Like four beds up down, up down on both sides.

SIGRIST: And did—did your mother and all the kids stay in one cabin?

GURKA: Yeah. Yeah, we did.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

GURKA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Who—who slept with little Mr. Zielonka?

GURKA: Well, he was with my mother, yeah, and my sisters and me in, you know. And then—what do you call that? But we were always first class, anyway, so we were always on top there because the people, when they were down, that was very scary. But we wanted to see everything, my sister and I, so we went all over. Of course—

SIGRIST: What do you remember seeing on the ship?

GURKA: What do we—those cabins everywhere. You know, there are just so many down bottom. Then of course on top it was beautiful. And then the kitchens, we were always in there because they liked my sister and me, the cooks and all them. So they used to feed us cookies and everything in the kitchen there, but we—we—it was beautiful ship. Dancing.

SIGRIST: Did you see anything on the ship that you had never seen before in your life?

GURKA: Well, see, like I said, the—everything was so beautiful that it was like that you—you don't—you can't say like shiny and the lamps and everything and the—the dining rooms. Everything that's so beautiful that it's like, like a palace that you—you really—everything is nice. So you really can't say, you know, but really stairs going all around, up and down and everything. All the different things like that, you know.

SIGRIST: Did—did they have any kind of organized entertainments for people or—

GURKA: Always music, dancing, yeah. They did have all that for people to dance but of course my—my mother when we were going down to Poland, she made jars of honey liquor and all that. She made us for—that's for colds, in case we got colds, you know. So she used to do that for us, give it to us at night or something. So her and I went, we found it and we drank it. We got drunk. My sister and I, we were drunk. [Laughs] We drank the whole thing.

SIGRIST: It doesn't matter now. [Laughs]

GURKA: What? What's the matter?

SIGRIST: You mentioned that you—you had access to the kitchen. You—you could wander into the kitchen.

GURKA: Oh, yeah, we could go anywhere.

SIGRIST: Did you have—did you have any other interaction with the staff on the ship at all? You mentioned the cooks. What about like the stewards or—

GURKA: Yeah, they were all—all nice. They all liked us there, so we—you know, we—we were with them most of the time. Always we came there, and we were with them and all over the—all over the ship everywhere.

SIGRIST: Did—did little Mr. Zielonka do anything memorable on that ship/

GURKA: No, he was too—he was too little.

SIGRIST: I know, but did—did—do you have a story about him on the ship? Something that might have happened?

GURKA: No, no, because he was a little baby, so we used to—you know.

ZIELONKA: Well-behaved one.

SIGRIST: I guess, very well-behaved. [Laughs]

GURKA: Well, he had to be, for three years old. But he used to run around, too, because he could talk.

SIGRIST: Did your mother—did anyone get seasick?

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GURKA: I never got seasick. I don't know. People, yes, they were laying everywhere. You know, people were all standing near the railings and, oh, God, everywhere. Or in their cabins all over everywhere.

SIGRIST: And how long did you say it took?

GURKA: Two—two weeks.

SIGRIST: Two weeks and what time of the—

GURKA: Well, first we got—we had to come with another smaller—smaller ship to go to the big one. I don't know what that—what it was.

SIGRIST: You took a small ship from—where did you leave from in Poland?

GURKA: I—that I don't know. Heading through the canal somewhere.

SIGRIST: So you're not sure what port you left from in Poland.

GURKA: No, it was from—

SIGRIST: But you took something smaller to get to the Majestic.

GURKA: Yeah. To get to the big one, yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

GURKA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: We're going to pause right now. This is a good place to stop and I'll put in another tape and we'll keep going with this.

GURKA: Hmm, you mean I blab so much?

SIGRIST: This is great.

[END OF SIDE B, TAPE 1]

[BEGIN SIDE A, TAPE 2]

SIGRIST: Okay, we're now beginning Tape Two.

GURKA: Oh, my goodness.

SIGRIST: Today is Thursday, October 10th, 1996 and we're here with Kazmiera Gurka, who came from Poland in 1926 when she was twelve, and with her also is her younger brother, Mr. Zielonka, who was three in 192—three and a half in 1926 when they came to America. We were just talking about the end of the—of the voyage on the ocean in 1926 on the Majestic. It took two weeks. What do you remember about the ship coming into New York?

GURKA: Oh, everybody was so happy. We saw the Statue of Liberty. That's the first thing you see. So everybody says, "Oh, there it is. So we're close to land." So naturally we got to Ellis Island, and there they kept us, too, there for overnight.

SIGRIST: You stayed overnight at Ellis Island?

GURKA: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

GURKA: Uh-hmm.

ZIELONKA: Was it foggy that morning?

GURKA: Yeah, it was kind of funny, you know, but you could see, you know, a little bit of like when you came closer to everything. But then—

SIGRIST: Where did the ship dock? Do you remember where the ship docked?

GURKA: Well, it had to dock right near it there somewhere because that's where we got off somewhere there.

SIGRIST: Well, actually on—on—yeah, on—on Mr. Zielonka's—

ZIELONKA: It was supposed to be in Hoboken.

SIGRIST: It was in Hoboken the ship docked and then you were ferried out to Ellis Island.

GURKA: Oh, well, I don't know, because see, all I know is that we went there and we were—they took all our clothes off and they—we had to take showers and they looked in your hair and they checked you right through everywhere, and every single thing that you go through, like those long line you go McDonald's or anywhere, through the lines like that, you know. And so I remember all that and all the ladies taking showers all at once and then the men all at once, and then other—you know—

ZIELONKA: And I had to take—

GURKA: They burn all your clothes. Oh, not burn, only they boil all your clothes and everything and anybody who's sick, they found out anything on them, they had to stay back.

SIGRIST: How did you feel about having to take your clothes off and taking a shower that way?

GURKA: Well, you kind of don't like it, but you had to do it. So they just say "Strip," and that's all. You have to do it.

SIGRIST: And did—where did the children shower?

GURKA: With the—the ladies with the—with the children and the men with the—with the men. That's all they—

ZIELONKA: I had to take a shower in the women's—

GURKA: I don't—we didn't like it, but you had to do it. They just say, you know, "That happens here all the time."

ZIELONKA: In the main room in Ellis Island, are there arches and columns?

GURKA: Well, there was those things where you go through and all around is the rooms—

ZIELONKA: On top—

GURKA: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

ZIELONKA: Were there arches and columns there or not?

GURKA: Yeah, and then the—

ZIELONKA: All right.

GURKA: Because after when I went with our club, we went for a trip there about a month ago—

SIGRIST: More recently.

GURKA: Yeah. I said, "Oh, my God, I remember this and I remember that, going through here and here, and all those suitcases piled up there."

People that never made it and it was behind and, you know, different things. They were sick and they were sent back and—

SIGRIST: Do you know why you had to stay overnight? Was there a reason that you had to stay overnight?

GURKA: Because they have to check you and everything. Then they let your father—my father know that we're here. So then he came to pick us up next day.

SIGRIST: Do you remember if they fed you at Ellis Island?

GURKA: Oh, yeah. Well, they—nothing much really. Breakfast like probably milk and, you know, cereal and stuff like that, but nothing—because he came right after that. You know, they let him know so he came like after breakfast sometime. So then when we went, but—

SIGRIST: Do you remember where you slept at Ellis Island?

GURKA: Yes. There was like that room we're talking—he's talking, that's a big, big room and then there's all banisters like all around and there rooms were all in a—all around like that, rooms. So that's where everybody had a room there. So that's where—

SIGRIST: Does anything stick out in your mind about having to sleep there? Anything about—details about the room or what happened while you were in that room?

GURKA: No, they were just plain rooms. There was nothing fancy in there or anything. Just wallpaper and—and that's it, but you know—but we used to go out from the room and, of course, the railing was all around like that and you could see all the people coming out of the rooms because that's—they were like a going, you know, all around. So that's—but then my father came and—and we came home.

SIGRIST: Where did he take you? Where did your father bring you?

GURKA: Where the heck was he—did we live—

ZIELONKA: Came to Chicopee, remember?

GURKA: Chicopee on Center Street, wasn't it?

ZIELONKA: Yeah.

GURKA: Yeah.

ZIELONKA: Yeah, next to [unclear].

SIGRIST: Center Street?

GURKA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: On Center Street.

GURKA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What did you—how long had it been since you saw your father last?

GURKA: Now? From now?

SIGRIST: Well, from—when you saw him in 1926 at Ellis Island—

GURKA: Oh, oh.

SIGRIST: How long had it been since you—

GURKA: Oh, since he was in Poland.

SIGRIST: Oh, roughly—

GURKA: It was when he was born. After he left.

SIGRIST: Three and a half, four years before, roughly.

GURKA: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, because we stayed there for a while, yeah, after.

ZIELONKA: That was—

GURKA: Two years was—two years or what? Three?

ZIELONKA: It would have to be three years, somewhere like that.

GURKA: Three. Yeah, three because you were three.

ZIELONKA: Two and a half.

GURKA: Yeah, something like that because—yeah, because she didn't want to go. She always felt better in Poland. I don't know what it was, but she always felt better health there.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me the—does anything stick out in your mind about the trip from New York to Chicopee?

GURKA: No.

SIGRIST: How did you get to Chicopee?

GURKA: By car. Somebody had—I think he came—he came by car.

ZIELONKA: He came by railroad.

GURKA: Railroad?

ZIELONKA: I remember.

GURKA: I thought it was—oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah, yeah, because I remember going in New York under the thing and then we came up the stairs and there was railings, and then we went to the train. Yeah, that's where it was, to the train. Yeah, train.

ZIELONKA: Remember the insulators on the telephone poles.

SIGRIST: And he took you to a place on Center Street here in Chicopee?

GURKA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you describe—is this where he was living?

GURKA: No, wait a minute, we didn't come to Center Street. We came to near Patrick [unclear] School. That was that—

ZIELONKA: Uh-uh, we went to--

GURKA: The [unclear].

ZIELONKA: Center Street first, dear, P&A. Then we went on Hamden Street second. Well—

SIGRIST: Do you remember the first night that you spent? What did you do the first night that you spent in America?

GURKA: Well, we were kind of strange—everything strange because we, you know, were there so long and everywhere that they—when you come home, you are like lost. You are lost. You're just like say, "Why am I here?" or something, but that was your home, so what do you—you know.

SIGRIST: When you were—when you were growing up in America before you went to Poland to live for those five years, did you speak English?

GURKA: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you learn to speak English?

GURKA: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: When you were in Poland then from '21 to '26, did you use your English at all?

GURKA: With my mother or I, you know, but not that—that much there because nobody else. So I went to Polish school there, yeah, because the school wasn't far, but here I only went one year before we went to Poland to St. Stan, you know, on Front Street.

SIGRIST: Before you left in '21.

GURKA: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

GURKA: That's all, just one.

SIGRIST: What—what I'm wondering is when you got back to America for good, you know, in 1926—

GURKA: Uh-hmm.

SIGRIST: How much of your English did you remember or could you use?

GURKA: I remembered all English because they put me in sixth grade and I was twelve years old—old and I—and I could do arithmetic perfect because I got hundred in that all the time because that you only add. Doesn't matter if it's English or Polish, but it's—it was hard for me like about history or different things, you know, but I knew how to speak English right along. So see, so it didn't matter—

SIGRIST: I'm just wondering if the transition was difficult for you to make—

GURKA: No, because, see, I only went a year and a half here to school, that's all here. That's al, five years there.

ZIELONKA: I didn't know any English.

GURKA: No, see, him, no, because he—

SIGRIST: Well, what language did you speak in the house?

GURKA: Polish.

SIGRIST: Polish. Always?

GURKA: Mostly.

SIGRIST: Mostly.

GURKA: Yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me—tell me the extent to which your parents could speak English. Or chose to speak English?

GURKA: Oh—oh, yeah. Oh, they could speak English right along to anybody, all the time. Oh, yeah, they were—they were in America before so—so they knew how to speak English but me, no. I—I learned here and I remembered it when we weren't there, and I guess my mother kept talking to us in English, too, you know, so we wouldn't forget in case we got back here, which we wasn't supposed to. We were supposed to stay there and buy all the things there and stay there, but my father didn't care for it so we came back here. But see, that's—like that. I always could speak English. I don't know.

SIGRIST: Did you have—when you first were put into school here, tell me a little bit about how you felt about being put into the sixth grade?

GURKA: Well, not—not too good because you feel there you're older and the other kids were younger and, you know, but everybody was very nice, you know, and they tried to help you all they could and everything. Bug you felt funny because you were so old, you know. You were twelve and they were maybe eight or seven, whatever. And then from there, I went to Pebowe School and then from there we went to Valentine School over here on Green Street.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the first school? Pee--

GURKA: Pebowe

SIGRIST: Pebowe

GURKA: Pebowe

SIGRIST: How do you spell that?

GURKA: Just P-E bow.

SIGRIST: Oh.

GURKA: B-O-W-E. Pebowe.

SIGRIST: Oh, P-E-B-O-W.

GURKA: Yeah, that was on Hampton Street.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

GURKA: That school, yeah.

SIGRIST: Were there other immigrant children in the class that you can remember?

GURKA: No. Not then, no. Because I think they—they came like later or before or something.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

GURKA: Because they—because when my mother and father came from Poland, I think they went to New Britain and then from New Britain they went to—

SIGRIST: When they first came here, yeah.

GURKA: Yeah, but then they went to Jewett City. They got it—they both—they got—well, they got married in Jewett City.

SIGRIST: Jewett City, yes. J-E-W-E-T-T.

GURKA: Yeah, Jewett City.

SIGRIST: We actually spoke at length about that in the—

GURKA: Or no—and they lived in—

SIGRIST: In your brother's interview.

GURKA: Then they lived in Norwich. In Norwich and then of course that's when he got a job there, but [unclear]. I—then he got married in the same place.

SIGRIST: Yes, we talked about that in the interview.

GURKA: Isn't that funny?

SIGRIST: In fact, these two interviews really compliment each other very nicely.

GURKA: I know. Isn't that funny how he got married the same church?

SIGRIST: Yes. Tell me a little bit about—in your brother's interview we talked a lot about the neighborhood here in Chicopee and the Polish community.

GURKA: Hmm.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit, from a woman's perspective about the community and—and maybe social organizations that—that—that Polish belonged to and what was particularly geared towards women in the community?

GURKA: Well, I didn't really belong to anything then because I was young, but my mother belonged to Polish National Home to all the different societies.

SIGRIST: And what—can you just describe what those societies were and what they did?

GURKA: Those societies, well, they had different meetings and then she used to write. She used to write plays. She did a few Polish plays. In fact--

SIGRIST: She wrote plays in Polish?

GURKA: In fact he was in one of them. So was I. [Laughs] And he had one of those, what do you call them? Those sticks that they had then like on the end like—

ZIELONKA: Shepherd's—

SIGRIST: Like a shepherd's crook?

GURKA: A shepherd, yeah. See, he was with that—

ZIELONKA: [unclear]

- GURKA: Dancing on thing there, yeah, in the—
- SIGRIST: Well, this—this is very interesting. So—so your mother actually—there was like a theatrical—
- GURKA: Yeah.
- SIGRIST: They did plays, I guess.
- GURKA: Yeah, they did.
- SIGRIST: They did plays in Polish.
- GURKA: Yeah.
- ZIELONKA: They made me kiss the little girls, which I hated at the age.
- GURKA: Not only that, but they—they were teaching dancing, too. Polish dancing and I belonged to the Polish Falcons, which we used to do all kinds of exercises and dances and then—
- SIGRIST: Falcons like—like hawks.
- GURKA: Yeah, and—yeah, like when you go the [unclear] and then this, that, this way and of course I've forgotten now. I used to be—
- SIGRIST: Is this like gymnastics sort of?
- GURKA: Yeah. Yeah, and then we went to Ware once with the whole group and we were doing their parades. You know, they had a parade in Ware and—
- SIGRIST: To the town of Ware, W-A-R-E.
- GURKA: Yeah. Yeah, and we were there with the parade and then they had dancing.
- SIGRIST: Can you talk—is that important in Polish culture? Teaching gymnastics?
- GURKA: The dancing—yes, and then the dancing the Polish dances and all that stuff because they do have that different places like—
- ZIELONKA: Traditional dancing.

GURKA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: These are like folk dances?

GURKA: Yeah, Polish. Yeah.

ZIELONKA: Traditional folk dancing.

GURKA: With the costumes and everything because—

SIGRIST: Did you have your own little peasant costume that you wore?

GURKA: No, not here. No, no. I never-

SIGRIST: To do the dancing in?

GURKA: Only as—when I was in a play there or something like that, but—

ZIELONKA: They made them for us, remember, when we put the plays on?

GURKA: Yeah, but see, I could never—I could never be—I'm saying like a teenager because I had to take care of the whole family, see. When we came from Poland, I had to take care of all the kids and my mother went to work after.

SIGRIST: When—when she came here, to Chicopee she went to work.

GURKA: This—the last time, yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Where did she work?

GURKA: She worked in—Jesus, what was that? Arms? Some kind of arms thing in Chicopee Falls.

ZIELONKA: Stevens?

GURKA: Stevens, I think. Yeah.

ZIELONKA: Savage Arms.

SIGRIST: Savage Arms.

GURKA: Savage Arms. Yeah, that they—

SIGRIST: The microphone actually won't pick you up quite so far away probably.

- GURKA: They knocked it down I think already, that—that—
- SIGRIST: All right, tell me what you remember about your mother going off to work. First of all, did she want to go off to work?
- GURKA: Well, she—I think she had to because after when we came back and then the kids were growing up, it was like everything was more and everything. So, you know, so my father worked at Fiskes, still, but she—she got the job there and I took care of the house. I started to learn how to cook and everything, so I did everything in the house. Cooking.
- ZIELONKA: She went to work because we try—we were trying after the American Dream.
- GURKA: We what? [Laughs] Okay? So I used to do everything, clean, cook.
- SIGRIST: Come sit down, if you're going to talk because it won't pick you up if you're walking around.
- GURKA: Okay, I did all the work at home. I cooked.
- SIGRIST: Who taught you to cook?
- GURKA: That's why I can cook everything.
- SIGRIST: Who taught you to cook?
- GURKA: My mother.
- SIGRIST: When? Were you in Poland or were you in America?
- GURKA: Well, in Poland some of it and here in America. Whatever I saw—heard the women, well, I used to watch and cook.
- SIGRIST: And as a young lady, what was the one dish that you could prepare with confidence that everybody would eat?
- GURKA: I can make a galumpki pierogi. I can make a—
- SIGRIST: How do you make a galumpki, tell me.
- GURKA: Galumpki is the Hamburg and rice, and then you cook your cabbage. Then you take the leaves off. Then you mix the Hamburg with the rice and of course onions that you fry, and you put it in a leaf. You—you

know, roll it. Then you close them like that and you do them in a dish, you know, in a pot, and you do them one after another until—

ZIELONKA: With lots of butter.

GURKA: All of them, and butter and I put and I put tomato soup over it and—

SIGRIST: And that's something that your mother taught you how to cook?

GURKA: Oh, yeah, and pierogi. The two. Pierogi is very hard—it's harder to do because you got to make the dough and if you don't make the dough right, then they don't stick. They come apart or something. So if you do the dough and then you got to roll it up and you got to cut it and you got to make your stuffing, either cabbage or—or potato and cheese. Or you can make it with anything. Blueberries.

ZIELONKA: [unclear] blueberries [unclear].

GURKA: Yeah, if somebody likes it with that. You can make it with meat. You can do it with anything you want for pierogi, but see I—I learned and I used to always have it. Even now.

SIGRIST: And these were some of the things that you would prepare for the family when your mother had gone to work.

GURKA: Uh-hmm. Uh-hmm, and soups and all that. And chicken soup. We always make it from scratch. You know, they used to kill the chicken and you got to take the feathers off in Poland, and then you'd have to—they cut it all up and clean it. You have to know how to—now you got everything clean. Before you had to clean the chicken inside and all the inside and cut it in pieces and everything they make your soup.

ZIELONKA: And everything was delivered and when the chicken man came, you had your choice of a live chicken to feather. You had your choice of a chicken still feathered but killed. You had your choice of killed, defeathered and gutted. So you—the price depended on what you wanted, you know.

GURKA: The price is what you want to pay.

ZIELONKA: So that's the way it was.

SIGRIST: That's also an interesting reflection of what the community wanted.

GURKA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: You know, that—that—that—that the butcher would have to supply these choices for people.

ZIELONKA: I'm sure they'd want the premium kind of delivery, but—

GURKA: First, we did, but how—

ZIELONKA: People couldn't afford it. They could save a couple of pennies if they just took it live and killed it themselves and plucked it and everything else.

GURKA: Yeah, but how many times—ma used to kill chickens, and how many times we always had to take the feathers off. You put them in hot water and then you take the feather and then, of course, they used to make—in Poland they used to make from goose, geese, they used to make those feather beds and all that. Piezyna they used to call it, you know.

SIGRIST: Can you say that word?

GURKA: Piezyna

SIGRIST: Can you spell it? Piezyna.

GURKA: Oh, I write to Poland, so—

ZIELONKA: The down.

GURKA: Yeah.

ZIELONKA: Thick blanket in Poland.

GURKA: P-I-E-Z-Y-N-A. Piezyna.

SIGRIST: Piezyna.

GURKA: Yeah, well, they even given me feathers in Poland when I was leaving in '85, a whole thing full of. "Take it on the airplane." I says, "I can't take that on the airplane. Why don't you make me the thing and then send it?" So then they left it and then they send me the—the thing all made. It was nice. It's warm.

SIGRIST: Yeah, that's a nice way to have it, for them to do it for you.

GURKA: Sure. Now, how were they—

- SIGRIST: Were there were any ways that you as a—as a teenager rebelled against your parents' Polish culture? Or—or their—their—their old world culture?
- GURKA: No, I used to love Poland. Polish. I was a real Pollock. I loved Polish everything. Dancing, singing.
- SIGRIST: Even as a teenager?
- GURKA: Everything, I just love it. I loved it always. I just—I always wanted to—to do the dancing like they did, like when that—what's her name? The [unclear] used to be. The [unclear] used to teach all those Polish dances and she—I used to like to do all them, but I never got the chance because like I said, I had to stay home and cook, clean and take care of the kids.
- SIGRIST: You know, this is—this might be a good time in the course of interview to actually sing a little more. You mentioned when we were at the break that you were going to sing your mother's favorite song together, and anything else you can think of, I'd love. This would be a good time I think to do that.
- GURKA: What do you mean what do I know in my life—[tape off/on] [both singing in Polish]
- ZIELONKA: That was her favorite tune.
- GURKA: Yeah.
- ZIELONKA: She used to sing that all the time.
- SIGRIST: What does that mean?
- GURKA: That means all the hills in Poland and all the old times that she always used to love and she could never forget.
- ZIELONKA: It's—it's really like literally "Hey, hills. My hills, my hills. Where did all the woods go? Where did our youth go?" Stuff like that.
- GURKA: Yeah.
- SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Are there any other songs that you can remember singing as children or when you were growing up that—that are along these lines?

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GURKA: There were a lot of songs. There was a lot of songs. I know them all, but I—

SIGRIST: You can sing them all. [Laughs]

GURKA: Give me the paper. Give me that thing. No, give me that—see if I—if there's anything in there because I—no, that was I only I brought from the Ellis Island that they had it done for the mother and the father there.

SIGRIST: Yes, right, that's the Wall of Honor.

GURKA: Yeah, that's the Wall. I think there was something there, see.

SIGRIST: Some more songs? Well, sing another song.

GURKA: There was one of them that I used to like and that's that [speaks in Polish]. That used to be my favorite song.

SIGRIST: Yeah, sing it.

GURKA: But that is not in here.

SIGRIST: Oh, that's okay. Sing it, anyway.

GURKA: [Laughs] And see, this one is [speaks in Polish] and then there's [speaks in Polish]. My mother—no, let's see. That's when she—I don't know. This is kind of nice. No, wait a minute. If it's here. Oh, this one.

SIGRIST: Okay, go ahead and sing it.

GURKA: [sings in Polish]

SIGRIST: Thank you.

GURKA: You know, that's nice because it's my mother was with the cradle singing with us in Polish about she was teaching us the Polish prayer. This is about it.

SIGRIST: May I ask you about your Polish pronunciation. When you speak Polish or sing Polish, do you sing it with a dialect that's very distinctive of a certain part of Poland?

ZIELONKA: Yes!

GURKA: Yes, and then you—

ZIELONKA: Can I explain?

GURKA: And you know, in everything—every song usually in Poland is almost the same. You know what I mean? No, what do you call that? Tone.

SIGRIST: Yes, but I mean if—if somebody from—someone from the west of Poland—

ZIELONKA: I'll explain. There are three—there was a partition. The eastern part of Poland was German. The—the western part of Poland was German. The eastern part was Russian. The southern part was Austro—Austrian. Austro-Hungarian. I—I can tell by somebody speaking to me whether he's from the eastern half, the southern half or the western half. For instance, if he says cigaretten, cigarki, that's the German side, the western side. If he's from the eastern side, he'll say popurosay. That's the Russian. Another thing, potatoes. If he says katofla in Polish, that's German. German says katofla—katofla or close. If it's from the Russian side, gimiki. So there is a very distinct—or a eastern man will pronounce a W like an L. Like for slope, Russian side will say middlo, and the Polish and the German side would say middwo. So that's one little inflection.

SIGRIST: So it's a country whose—which—which language really reflects the various invasions and—

ZIELONKA: Right.

SIGRIST: And surrounding [unclear – all three speaking at once]

GURKA: It sounds like—yeah.

ZIELONKA: The influence of these three countries that partitioned them had on them for many, many years. They were partitioned, what, two, three hundred years, I guess. Something like that.

GURKA: Yeah, but if you listen to different things here, too, like you got a [unclear] they said different words different way. Well, so we do we like if they were more rich and from a city they will speak different. They know right away. Like you will know a rich people. Right away you can see that they're rich because the way they talk.

SIGRIST: So the social class is reflected in language, also.

GURKA: Yes, it's—yeah, that's it.

ZIELONKA: Modern Poland has two languages now. What they call the common language and they have the aristocracy—the aristocratic Polish. They're very distinct languages now. That's what my wife told me when she visited there in what, 1984 or '5?

GURKA: Yeah, they went—

ZIELONKA: Where she—but there are two distinct languages there. That's odd.

GURKA: Yeah, they talk different in certain cities and things and—

SIGRIST: Mrs. Gurka, can you say the Lord's Prayer in Polish?

GURKA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you say it for us, but say it slowly?

GURKA: Uh-hmm. The whole thing or—

SIGRIST: From the Our Father to the Amen.

GURKA: Our Father and—uh-huh. Let's see. Because that's the only way I pray. I—I cannot remember it in—

ZIELONKA: I can't remember that right now.

GURKA: You can't?

ZIELONKA: And we used to have to [unclear].

SIGRIST: But do it slowly and distinctly so we can hear the language.

GURKA: Okay. [speaks Polish] [Mr. Zielonka joins in occasionally]

SIGRIST: Thank you very much. It was very interesting to listen to the language being pronounced very slowly.

GURKA: Because I always say my rosary in Polish because—I can say it in English, but I—I never—

SIGRIST: And I would bet that when you're saying it, you do it almost as second nature without even—but the words just sort of come.

GURKA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: When I ask people to do this, because I often ask people to say the Lord's Prayer in the language, it's interesting how it takes them a minute because they're used to do it so responsively and not really listening to what they're saying.

GURKA: I know, yeah, because—

ZIELONKA: Yeah.

GURKA: See, I always when they pray in church like in English, and I always say mine in Polish to myself, you know.

ZIELONKA: It's difficult to recount at this second because your thought is on something else. Like I know a lot of Polish songs, and yet I couldn't think of one.

SIGRIST: That's right. That's right.

GURKA: Yeah. So, he knew one that he couldn't sing.

ZIELONKA: And the same with the prayers.

GURKA: That—that's the one that he couldn't sing, but the one he was going to sing. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Let me—we just have a couple minutes left and I—there's one more question I want to ask you. When you think of yourself in terms of nationality, who you are, do you think of yourself as Polish? As American? As Polish American? How do you think of yourself in terms of nationality?

GURKA: First, Polish. Real Polish. Real Pollock I call myself. I was born in Polish. I speak in Polish. I sing in Polish. Anything, I'm Polish. But of course I'm American because, you know, my father and mother were citizens after and all that. But like I said, I still say to everybody "I'm a real Pollock." That's it.

SIGRIST: [Laughs] Well, I think that's probably a good place for us to—to end. I want to say to whomever may be listening to this tape in the future that this interview dovetails beautifully with the interview with Mrs. Gurka's brother, Mr. Zielonka and I recommend whomever is listening to this, that if you have not listened to the other interview, you should listen to the interview, also. Mrs. Gurka, thank you very much.

GURKA: You're welcome.

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SIGRIST: This has been a wonderful interview. Mr. Zielonka, thank you very much. It was great to have the interplay of both of you.

GURKA: Uh-hmm.

SIGRIST: That's always a very unique situation. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Kazmiera Gurka on Thursday, October 10th, 1996 with her younger brother, Mr. Zielonka, present, also. Thank you.

GURKA: Okay.

[END OF INTERVIEW]