

EI-868

GILL TERRY CRAMER

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LEVINE: Today is April 25th, 1997 and this is Janet Levine. I'm here at the Oral History Studio at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum with Terry Cramer. This is an interview too that is unlike most of our interviews in the collection in that Terry herself was born here and is much too young to have come through Ellis Island. However, [clears throat] this is one of the interviews that is of interest because it—it shows how the Ellis Island experience translates to later generations and—and what meaning it has and—and the sort of generativity of it. So we're going to just play this by ear and I'll start out, Terry, by asking you your—your whole name and your birth date and where you were born.

CRAMER: My name is actually—my first name is actually Gill, spelled with a G, and that's because I was named after my maternal grandmother, whose name was Gertrude. And it had to be a G because of the Ashkenazi Jewish tradition of naming after a relative who had died. And my Hebrew name is Hebrew name is Gittel [PH] or Geetel [PH]. And then Terry and Cramer, with a C, now. Used to spelled with a K. I was born May 4th, 1952 in Hartford—West Hartford, Connecticut, which is where

all of my Cramer relatives settled when they came over from the Ukraine.

LEVINE: Okay. Maybe you could tell the story of how the Cramer got to be C instead of K.

CRAMER: Well, my great grandfather, whose name was Shia [PH] Kramer with a K, in Pyatigory [PH], Ukraine, came over first by himself to—he came through Ellis Island. And then, apparently, there were some relatives in West Hartford, Connecticut. And also, many other people came from Pyatigory. And so he lived with some relatives or a friend. And he changed his name to Samuel. And he lived in Hartford, Connecticut tutoring boys who were studying to become bar mitzvah. And he was working and trying to bring his family over. And eventually, when he did he brought over his oldest daughter, Sarah, who was about 11, and his son, whose name in Pyatigory was Sander, who was nine. And he changed—they—they changed his name to Samuel also. So then you had two Samuel Cramers. And for the Jews of that area of the world, this was not a good thing. I—I think it was almost a little—they almost believed they were sort of jinxing themselves. And—because you real—you really weren't supposed to be named after a relative who was still alive. So they changed—I don't know when but they changed all of the—of the children, my grandfather and his siblings' name—last name to Cramer with a C so there wouldn't be two identical Samuel Cramers. That's the story I was told. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Oh, great. Okay. So the—the relatives that you have who actually came through Ellis Island, who were they?

CRAMER: Well, I think the first one was probably my great grandfather, Shia Cramer. And he was—it was 1903, apparently. And the czar's army was looking for recruits. And apparently, according to a lot of people who know about this, the Jews were sort of used as cannon fodder. They were recruited into the army, sometimes at a very young age, and they st—and they made them stay in for maybe 25 years [chuckles] and sent them to the worst possible places and were very cruel to them. So when someone in the town got word that they were looking for them to—for the army, a lot of times—sometimes they would shoot themselves in the foot. Or they would do something—my great uncle told me they would rub something into their skin to give themselves boils, anything to get themselves out, or they would escape. So apparently, my great grandfather escaped through the woods and on foot and whatever to the United States. That was the first time. And he worked for a while and then he went back several years later to try to get his wife and other children out and again, had to escape [chuckles] without getting them out. And then—

LEVINE: How did you learn about this?

CRAMER: Well, his—his youngest son, my great—great grandfather's youngest son is still living. He's my great uncle. And he's told me most of these stories. He heard them from his father.

LEVINE: Okay.

CRAMER: And he—he was the only one born in this country in his family. Everyone else was born there.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And is he the only one left?

CRAMER: He's the only one alive.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

CRAMER: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

CRAMER: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. So—so he—did he come through Ellis Island, your great gr—

CRAMER: So he came through—he came through Ellis Island at least two times. I have his copy of his ship passenger manifest for the—it must be the second time because it's 1909. And he came with about \$75 and it gives his description, his—he was five foot, three and the color of his eyes and all that. And his profession is listed a—as joiner. I don't know if that was accurate or not.

LEVINE: That's a carpentry—

CRAMER: I think so.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

CRAMER: He—I—he never—I don't think he did that when he was here. So I—so I can't—I haven't found his 1903 passenger manifest but I know that he ca—he did come over earlier. And then I—and then his—then in 1909, later in the year, his wife and—well, not—then it was three children because he had been there earlier and he had—so there was this little infant involved—came over. And I can't find their manifest either. But I have—I have a story about when they came over.

LEVINE: Good.

CRAMER: And the—the story is that my great grandmother, whose name was Razel [PH] Gross Cramer, and they changed her name to Rose when she got to this country, got on the boat with her daughter, Sarah, about 11, my grandfather, Sander (later Samuel), who was nine, and the baby, Nathan, who was—I don't know, an infant or a few months old, not—not too old. And as they traveled, apparently the baby developed this bad rash on his face, maybe eczema. Apparently, it was pretty bad looking. Many of the other passengers w—urged my great grandmother to throw him overboard, [chuckles] which is—ap—apparently wasn't that uncommon because they felt he wouldn't be—they wouldn't take him, he'd be—they'd say he was sick. They wouldn't take him—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CRAMER: —when he got over there and it would be all kinds of trouble. Maybe they'd send her back. So my grand—so my great grandmother, of course, didn't do that. And the story, the myth—and maybe it's true; who knows—is that when she nursed him she also put some of the breast milk on his face on the rash and that it cleared it up. And when he got to Ellis Island he didn't have the rash anymore.

LEVINE: Wow.

CRAMER: [laughs] So—and they got in without a problem.

LEVINE: That's amazing.

CRAMER: Yeah. [chuckles]

LEVINE: So she told that story to your great uncle, who then told it to you? Is that how you came by that?

CRAMER: My great uncle told me, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

CRAMER: I imagine that—

LEVINE: Wow.

CRAMER: —the story was told. They used to—at—at—they used to live in a—when they finally got a house, my great uncle lived with his parents, this woman who—who had this story, and the father who had escaped a

couple of times. And they also lived with a sister of Shia, the—the—my great grandfather and my great uncle's father. They lived with a sister and—and her husband. And eventually, the grandmother came over. And there were a couple of other siblings who lived in the area and every night they would get together and tell stories. So this is what my great uncle remembers from the—from the stories, although he wasn't—he said at the time he was a kid; he wasn't that interested. But he heard—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CRAMER: He heard the different stories. And he would—every night, he would have to un—roll out the bed for his—I think his grandmother or his aunt. They had this whole ritual of he would roll out a bed for her and she would go up into the top of the house, and the relatives—the other relatives who didn't live there would go home. And—and then in the morning, I guess he would roll it back in and—and he also learned—my—my great uncle, who's still alive, learned a very sort of antiquated form of Yiddish that, from his—from his grandmother, who came over actually a little later than they all did in 1920. And when he would speak this Yiddish to some of his fellow country—well, he didn't come from Pyatigory but when he—he—there were a lot of people in Hartford who did. And when he'd speak to them they would say, "Where did you learn that Yiddish?" [chuckles] Because it was very old fashioned.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, did he pass that along to—to any of his family or—that you know of?

CRAMER: No. Nobody—unfortunately, not that I know of. I don't think any of us speaks Yiddish. I—I started taking Yiddish at Yevo [PH]—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CRAMER: —at one point. But I—I don't really know that much. But no. Nobody seems to have—they—like a lot of the Jews of the time, they used it when they didn't want you to understand [chuckles] what they were saying.

LEVINE: Right.

CRAMER: And in fact, my grandfather came over when he was nine, didn't even have an accent of any sort. So—

LEVINE: Wow.

CRAMER: No, they were very, very interested in assimilating. At least—I don't know my—my great grandparents but my grandparents were very assimilated, very—you know, the bridge clubs and the coun—golf. And they were—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

CRAMER: —pretty assimilated. I mean, very Jewish identified but not—they didn't want to be immigrants.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did they hang onto any of the ways of the Old Country that—that you are aware of?

CRAMER: Well, apparently, my—my—actually, my great grandfather, Shia Cramer, was—was orthodox and he was a cantor or a huzzan [PH] in the Old Country. And he remained orthodox and a cantor until he died and his wife was orthodox. They kept a kosher home and they were pretty—pretty strict. My—my father remembers going over there as a little boy and having to, you know, do the prayers with the—to fill in in the talis [PH] and everything. His—my—his oldest son, my grandfather, I think then became maybe conservative later on. They didn't remain orthodox. But his—the—the son who had the eczema on his [chuckles] face when he came over became a cantor also. And he—actually, I have a tape of him and he has a spec—he had a spectacular voice. And so he remained a very observant Jew and also carried on the—the singing. And they both performed in many synagogues in the area, not just one, and were fairly sought after, especially my great uncle—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CRAMER: —whose voice was very, very good. And a—and I think that's about probably the most that's been—that's been handed down. And I, in fact, myself, sing for a synagogue. I mean, not—not solo but—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CRAMER: —in a synagogue choir.

LEVINE: Hmm. Interesting. I wonder, when they were doing their canting, was—was it mainly a immigrant congregation, do you think, or—

CRAMER: My great grandfather, I'm pretty sure, was orthodox, probably even people from their town. I—I recently discovered a book on—on the Jews from West Hartford and th—and my—they were written up. And it listed some of the synagogues, actually, so I'll have to do a little research. And my great uncle, well, then that gets to be another

generation—no, they probably—there probably were a lot of immigrants in—in both of the synagogues that they were—

LEVINE: Your great uncle would still be in the Ellis Island—

CRAMER: Yes.

LEVINE: —computers.

CRAMER: Because he came over—he was an infant but he wasn't—but they came over in 1909. So he wasn't—it wasn't—

LEVINE: Right, [unclear].

CRAMER: Yeah, it was still a generation—

LEVINE: Right.

CRAMER: —that people were still coming over—

LEVINE: Absolutely.

CRAMER: —way after that.

LEVINE: Right.

CRAMER: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, it was your—so it was your great grandfather, Shia—

CRAMER: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: —who came through Ellis.

CRAMER: Uh-hmm. And—and—

LEVINE: And the infant. No, wait. [unclear].

CRAMER: Well, it was my great grandfather, who came by himself—

LEVINE: Right.

CRAMER: —and then again by himself, and then his wife and three kids—

LEVINE: Three children.

CRAMER: —which included my grandfather. They all came through.

LEVINE: They all came.

CRAMER: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

CRAMER: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, did they ever tell you anything about Ellis Island, per se? Or did you get anything through your great uncle, any Ellis Island stories?

CRAMER: I don't have—well, I have just the story about the boat.

LEVINE: Boat, right.

CRAMER: I don't have any—I'll—I'll have to actually ask him more specifically about Ellis Island because he may have them. But I don't think I have anything specifically, just mainly about the boat—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

CRAMER: —and the passenger—

LEVINE: And—

CRAMER: —manifest—

LEVINE: Right.

CRAMER: —showing that they landed here.

LEVINE: And showing the fear of—

CRAMER: Right, the fear that—

LEVINE: —being rejected.

CRAMER: Yeah. That, you know, throw the baby overboard because what they'd heard was they'd be sent back.

LEVINE: Right, right. Now, as far as—as far as your researching your family history and everything, what do you—why are you doing it? Or wh—why is it important to you to—to—to do this?

CRAMER: Well, there are a lot of reasons. I've always been interested in it. I don't really know why but I guess early in my childhood I learned about the Holocaust, and so I was always really interested in where my grandparents had come from and my great grandparents. And I never thought I would be able to find anything out, because the common myth is that you can't, if you're Jewish and your ancestors came over from Eastern Europe. They're—you can't find out. And then I heard a talk by Arthur Kurzweil [PH] and he has written about how to go about doing Jewish genealogy research. And he also told his story about how he had found people, actually found people in—in Poland, relatives who didn't know they had any relatives. And it was very moving and I realized that I could do it. So I was very excited and I began by reconnecting with this great uncle of mine, who I didn't even realize had all these stories. I didn't even know the name of the town. And—and then I realized I could also find information out about other parts of my family. And I've actually found relatives I didn't know I had. I actually found a woman who knew my great grandmother on my mother's side some—through a coincidence. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Wow.

CRAMER: So—and I've just—and I found that there's a lot more I could probably find too but I haven't been able to do all the research [chuckles] at—but I—and I think of my great grandfather and great grandmother and the people who came over as heroes, and especially the way they came over and—and the way they struggled when they were here. And I've just—I've always been fascinated with that. I—I—I do writing and it's just always been something I've been drawn to. And I think it's also important to know where you come from and to have a sense of who you are and where you are and—and even some of the things that you might do behaviorally or emotionally. You can sometimes trace back and find somebody else who was not too different and—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CRAMER: —it kind of rounds out your—who you are as a person. And—and I think it honors—it—I also want to honor—I know there are a couple of relatives I had who died in a pogrom. And I don't know their names. I know how they were related to me. It was a great—my great aunt's husband and baby were killed in a pogrom probably around the turn of the century in Pyatigory. And I would like to memorialize them. And I'm sure I have Holocaust deaths. Just about every Jewish genealogist finds somewhere, even if they don't know about them, and Arthur Kurzweil, when he did his genealogy, memorialized all the people he found who had died in the Holocaust and sent them to all the family members he had. And so I'd like to also do that.

LEVINE: Wh—what did he do? He memor—memorialized them by—

CRAMER: He discovered he had something like a hundred relatives murdered in the shoa [PH]. And he put them on his family tree, their full names, and basically sent them out to all his relatives sort of as a memorial to them so their names weren't lost.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CRAMER: And so I would like to do that. I'm sure—I'm—I—what I've found is just about everyone I know who's done research—Jewish genealogists who've done research, even if they didn't think they had anyone that they lost in the Holocaust, pretty much everyone does. If you go back a generation, there's a—a sibling who didn't get out, you know, of a grandfather or great grandfather or mother. And the—you'll find you have probably about a hundred—at least a hundred relatives who—who were killed. And I just feel that it's quite a good thing to honor those people. And then, I also found out that, in the Talmud, [chuckles] also from Arthur Kurzweil, who's a Talmud scholar, there's a—sort of a—an em—I want to say a commandment or a—a mitzvah that has been asked of Jews to do after the destruction of the—I think the second temple. The Jews were told to go out and do their genealogy.

LEVINE: Really?

CRAMER: Yeah. And—because that was a way of rebuilding the Jewish community. So I feel, yeah, it's j—it's just sort of very, very kind of profound—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CRAMER: —thing for me—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CRAMER: —to be—to do this and to discover the kinds of people who I've been discovering, both alive and dead. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Have you discovered any—I mean, you mentioned that you sing in the—in the synagogue chorus.

CRAMER: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: And that—that you can trace to—

CRAMER: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: —cantors in your—in your family. Are there any other kinds of ways that you have become more connected with the history of your family members through doing this genealogy?

CRAMER: Well, that—I think that's the main thing that I didn't really know as much about. Also, I found out my grandmother, who I'm named from—for, went to Pratt. She was an art—art student, which—which I'm proud of. My mother—I already knew—my mother is an artist and I have also sort of discovered some art—artistic talent that I have. Oh. Oh, actually, there is something that I found really interesting. The grandmother, who I'm named from, was very interested also in helping—there was an orphanage in—in Hartford where—where they lived. And she used to do volunteer work and help out there. And I—and I, myself, have been very drawn to—I would like to adopt a Russian child. And I keep feeling like it's some connection with—with her.

LEVINE: Hmm.

CRAMER: And I—I don't know. I can't really—I—I found—I also like to stay up late reading books all night. And I found a sister of my grandmother's who—the same grandmother who I just referred to who also did that a lot. And so that—so it's pretty interesting to find these people who—who h—did similar things or had similar interests.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Does it sort of validate you by learning that you come by it sort of naturally or—

CRAMER: Yeah. It—it's validating and it's also—you know, feels like a legacy or a family tradition or if—if there is such a thing as—as relatives be—people who have died being somehow spiritually connected or present—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CRAMER: —it—it feels like a connection. It—it makes—it just—it feels more like, rather than I'm just a—a single person sort of walking around not connected to t—anything in time and space, I feel almost like I'm accompanied by sort of the—the ghosts of—good ghosts of—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CRAMER: —of the past, which is, I think, a very en—it feels very enriching, like another dimension—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CRAMER: —comes alive and—and gives another meaning, I—I feel.

LEVINE: Another level of—

CRAMER: Yeah.

LEVINE: —of meaning. Uh-huh.

CRAMER: To—to what one is doing in one's life. That's how I feel.

LEVINE: Great.

CRAMER: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah, that's wonderful. Now, how about any other stories that—that you have come upon that somehow are relevant to the immigrant experience within your own family?

CRAMER: Well, the story of how my great grandfather got out of Pyatigory is—I—I think I told that already but—that—that they were coming from hi—

LEVINE: For him.

CRAMER: —for him and he got out.

LEVINE: Could you spell the name of—of Pyatigory?

CRAMER: Oh, yeah. Well, let's see. This year, I think it's spelled [chuckles]—

LEVINE: [laughs]

CRAMER: It's spelled a lot of different ways. It's P-Y-A-T-I-G-O-R-Y. And in Yiddish it's Piater, which is spelled either P-I-A-T-E-R, or P-I-A-T-O-H-O-R.

LEVINE: And you mentioned it was near—where did you say it was—

CRAMER: It's south of Kiev.

LEVINE: Kiev.

CRAMER: It was very small, maybe—I can't really remember the—the numbers. It was quite small. And after World War II, nothing remained of any sign of any Jews. I—I know another person doing genealogy researcher there and he—he made a trip there a couple of years ago. And—and as with

a lot of small shtetls in Eastern Europe, there's no sign of any Jews anymore. But the town itself stands. And there's actually a shtetl song, which we've un—which I uncovered at Yevo.

LEVINE: Really?

CRAMER: And he had it translated into English from the Yiddish. And it described the town.

LEVINE: Wow. Could—could you possibly sing it?

CRAMER: Oh, I don't know it yet.

LEVINE: Oh, okay.

CRAMER: I have it writ—I have it in my—[chuckles] in my folder.

LEVINE: [chuckles] Okay.

CRAMER: I—I would like to—and it says what it's sung to. It's sung to the tune of a Yiddish song, which I am going to—I—I have a friend. I'm going to try to—

LEVINE: Wow.

CRAMER: —find out what that tune is and maybe learn how to sing it. But I haven't yet. But it does describe the—must have been sort of like a—a little marsh or something, because it describes the green muck of something or other at one point and a couple of different parts of the town. And it describes sitting in the little shul or synagogue and praying and how good it felt to be among country people and the—I mean the, you know landsleit and sort of a wistful, homesick—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CRAMER: —kind of song.

LEVINE: Now, are the s—do the synagogues stand—

CRAMER: No, no.

LEVINE: No.

CRAMER: There's nothing—

LEVINE: Oh.

CRAMER: Nothing that indicates—I don't—I don't even think—well, he didn't find any cemeteries or anything. So there's—as far as I know, according to this man who visited, there's nothing—there's no evidence that Jews were ever there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

CRAMER: Which is not uncommon in a lot of these little towns—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CRAMER: —after the Holocaust. And I—I don't find a [unclear] memorial book for the town either anywhere.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CRAMER: So I don't know. I mean, there were people who came over and did a lot of work around trying to get people out of Europe. But I don't see any kind of book memor—memorializing the town. So I don't know if that exists somewhere. I haven't found it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Well, how about this place, Ellis Island? I mean, do you feel connected to this national monument?

CRAMER: Yeah. I—I feel quite a—it's hard to describe the feeling, knowing that—especially my great grandfather, who came over by himself and escaped and, you know, I have this picture of him, you know, this little—short little stocky guy and all by himself. And I just came—it's amazing that, let's see—you know, something like 90—94 years ago, he was—he was in this area. He was here and now I'm here. Especially coming over in the boat and looking at the Statue of Liberty and just really trying to think of—well, what I think of is that he and the other—especially, the other Jews who had the—well, it wasn't really just foresight because they were chasing after him. But some people stayed and went in the army or maimed themselves or whatever. I—I—and I don't criticize them but I feel like I have—I feel very thankful that he got out and he got the family out, because they might have all been annihilated, either in a pogrom or in World War II. And sometimes, [chuckles] I—and when I—when I came over the first time to Ellis Island when th—when they first were setting it up here—

LEVINE: Was it—it hadn't been restored yet or had—

CRAMER: Yeah, it had just been restored.

LEVINE: Restored, uh-huh.

CRAMER: Yeah. And I tho—and I was thinking—I was actually thinking, ‘I hope—I hope that I can live up to’—you know, I—I mean, ‘I hope I can make good.’ Because I felt like, almost as though our—our lives had to really honor that they went through all this trauma to come over here and set up new lives.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CRAMER: And I—and so when I’m—when I’m here, I really sort of feel that almost in the—in the air and—and how frightened they must have been. And—and just how—how disorienting it must have been to come to a whole new country under such scary circumstances. I have a very strong feeling for it, especially coming over on the boat and you see it looming up.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CRAMER: I just think, ‘Boy.’ Very dramatic.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

LEVINE: Do you have any idea where you got the sense of—of honoring your family? Because you seem—you seem to have a—a really, you know, a—a big sense of—of that and what that means.

CRAMER: [sighs] Well, my grandparents were very important to me. They were central figures in my—in my life. And my great uncle, who was the cantor when we had Seders and things like that, he sang. And that voice always stayed with me. It was a very, very powerful and beautiful voice. So I always had a strong connection to that and—and to that cul—the—the Jewishness and the culture that they came from. I think that’s it. And then I also had a rabbi when I was about 14, who was—was very good at getting all the kids in this—in the religious school very interested in being proud of their Jewish background.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CRAMER: He was very, very charismatic and he wanted us to be proud of it. And he would sort of tell us all the good things that Jews had done and sort of really built up our self-esteem—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CRAMER: —in connection with that. So I think probably—and I was very moved. I was a very sensitive kid. And I was very moved when they—in a religious school, they showed us pictures of Holocaust, horrible Holocaust things. So I—I just always had a really strong identification with being Jewish and—and I just always wondered. Even when I was a kid, I used to walk around thinking, 'I wonder what it would be like, you know, in the winter if I—if I, you know, were to be walking around in the Russian Steppes' [PH] or something, even though I was no near—where near the Russian Steppes—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CRAMER: —I would try to imagine myself in Russia or something. I d—I don't really know exactly why but just—

LEVINE: Huh.

CRAMER: I think the connection with my grandparents, probably.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. How do you reconcile Jewishness and—and American? Do you have any take on that?

CRAMER: Well, I—I really feel that being Jewish is—is almost more of a nationality than an ethnicity because the Jews, wherever they've been in the past have never been considered that nationality. You know, if they were in Poland, the Poles didn't consider them Polish.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CRAMER: Et cetera, et cetera. Of course, now in the United States I don't think that's true. But I, myself, consider myself really probably Jewish first—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CRAMER: —and American after that.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CRAMER: Just because I'm so aware of all the things that happened to the Jews for so many years. And I don't have any problem with that. To me, it

seems—I—it doesn't matter to me if people don't understand that bec— it's just come to me through all the research I've done and—and all the—and the persecution I've seen, and—and also, just the way the Jews would cling to their identity, even in the midst of all the different cultures until really recently. Well, not everybody, because some people assimilated in Eastern Europe also, but—but many, many people in—in—you know, in Russia and Poland really kept their identities very intact, didn't even speak the language. And so I—I—I don't know. I feel sort of it's important to continue to identify as Jewish, almost to preserve that in some way.

LEVINE: And you mentioned you—you do writing? Do you—do you write on these topics? Or is it prose or poetry or—

CRAMER: Well, mostly I wrote—I write poetry. I have—I have tried—I have done some little writing on that, nothing that's really very finished at this point.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CRAMER: But I—I'm—I have sort of gone in that direction, trying to sort of get a handle on some of the different relatives and—and who they might have been. But I—again, I haven't really finished anything. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-huh. This is sort of a far-out question but [chuckles] why not? D—do you feel, somehow, in your collective unconscious you have this—this—th—these experiences somehow as part of your person?

CRAMER: Well, it's possible. I'm not really [chuckles] a Jungian so I'm not sure if I totally believe in that, the—

LEVINE: Concept of—

CRAMER: —concept of—

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

CRAMER: But maybe something similar. So pr—so, possibly, in a different kind of parallel way, po—possibly.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

CRAMER: Because I—because I definitely feel part of that world, in a way. Part of the world. I mean, I can tell because of the—when I talk to some other people, they don't have that—

LEVINE: Right.

CRAMER: —feeling. But—but then, many people do. So—I don't know. I don't really have a definitive—

LEVINE: Yeah, right.

CRAMER: —answer for that. But it's a good—it's a very interesting question though.

LEVINE: Well, is there anything else that you can think of that—that pertains to—to your connection to [chuckles] Ellis Island, essentially, that maybe we haven't talked about? Any other anecdotes? Any other—I guess, just, connections with this place? I mean, we may have covered everything.

CRAMER: I think—I think that's about it. Th—there are probably some other stories that I've forgotten but [chuckles]—

LEVINE: Right.

CRAMER: Yeah.

LEVINE: B—but that you certainly have remembered a—a lot.

CRAMER: Yeah.

LEVINE: And it's really very, very interesting how you—how you really feel a genuine connection—

CRAMER: Yeah.

LEVINE: —with this past that started in Russia and—and—

CRAMER: Yeah.

LEVINE: —immigrated here. Okay. Well, I think maybe we'll stop here. I've been speaking with Terry Cramer, who—whose great grandfather, grandmother and three—what—uncles and—

CRAMER: Grand—ah—

LEVINE: [chuckles] Great uncles and aunts?

CRAMER: Some great uncles and a grandfather and a great great grandmother.

LEVINE: Okay. [chuckles] Immigrated and has some very strong connections to the immigration of her family in the past. And this is Janet Levine and

EI-868/CRAMER

I'm closing here. And we're at the Ellis Island Studio on April 25th, 1997, signing off.

[END OF INTERVIEW]