

EI-917

LYDIA TARKMEES KALLIT

BIRTHDATE: SEPTEMBER 16, 1901

INTERVIEW DATE: JULY 31, 1997

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 95

RUNNING TIME: 51:48

INTERVIEWER: PAUL SIGRIST

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ESTONIA, 1926

AGE: 24

SHIP: THE DROTTNINGHOLM

PORT: GOTEBORG

RESIDENCES:

- **ESTONIA: OSLO; TALINN**
- **US:**

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service.

Today is Thursday, July 31st, 1997. I'm in Saratoga Springs, New York.

I'm at the Home of the Good Shepherd, which is a—a home for elderly people.

KALLIT: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And I'm here with Mrs. Lydia Kallit.

KALLIT: Kallit, yeah.

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SIGRIST: Mrs. Kallit came from Estonia. She arrived in America in June of 1926, and she was 24 when she arrived.

KALLIT: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Hadn't quite turned 25 yet.

KALLIT: That true.

SIGRIST: Great. Mrs. Kallit, thank you very much for letting me come and ask you these questions.

KALLIT: Oh, that's okay.

SIGRIST: Can we begin by you giving me your birth date?

KALLIT: A what?

SIGRIST: Your birth date.

KALLIT: September 16th.

SIGRIST: What year?

KALLIT: Is 1901.

SIGRIST: Thank you. And where were you born?

KALLIT: I was born in Estonia.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the town?

KALLIT: Ah, the town in the Baltic Sea is—there is two islands and Oslo, island name Oslo. My father was the teacher over there in Oslo. I was born on that island, Oslo, in the Baltic Sea.

SIGRIST: Can you spell the name of the island, Oslo?

KALLIT: Oslo. O-S-L-O, Oslo.

SIGRIST: And you said your father was the teacher—

KALLIT: Yes.

SIGRIST: —in town.

KALLIT: In a small village chur—ah, school.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little more about the island that you grew up on.

KALLIT: I don't know much about that island because, after I was two years old, my parents moved to Russia. And—and after the war and Revolution in Russia, I came back to Estonia, I think 1921. And we lived in Estonia in a city named Tallin.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

KALLIT: Tallin, T-A-L-L-I-N.

SIGRIST: Thank you. Well, what is your earliest memory?

KALLIT: From what?

SIGRIST: Well, the earliest memory that you have in your life. What's the first thing you remember as a child?

KALLIT: Well the first thing I remember, I had very hard childhood because I was the oldest. And after me, my mother had four boys, my four brothers. And I hardly ever had a chance to play with my girlfriends or nothing; because my mother always need the help and I had to always mind the babies, my brothers. Sometime I was very upset and crying that I can't go outside and play [chuckles] with my girlfriends. My mother need all the time help. That's my—that's my childhood.

SIGRIST: What was your mothers' name?

KALLIT: Anna.

SIGRIST: And what was her maiden name?

KALLIT: Tarmees.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

KALLIT: T-A-R-M-E-E-S. Tarmees.

SIGRIST: What do you know about your mother's childhood and her growing up?

KALLIT: My mother's?

SIGRIST: Yes, your mother's.

KALLIT: I know she had my aunts. She had two more sisters and one brother. And she was—my mother was very poor. She came to be a servant girl to the teacher. My father was a teacher in the school. Why, my father fell in love with her and they got married. I know that much.

SIGRIST: Do you know what year they got married?

KALLIT: No.

SIGRIST: No.

KALLIT: That I can't remember no more.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's personality like?

KALLIT: Well, she was—she was a hard worker. She was my dear mother. I helped her all the time.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things did you help your mother do in the house?

KALLIT: Well, to take care of the boys, four boys. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Do you re—

KALLIT: They go—they go running around and my—when the mealtime comes you can't find them. My mother used to send—"Look for this. Look for"—[chuckles] first was Nicholas; then was Victor. Then was Alexander; then was Johannes [PP]. Four brothers. I was the oldest; I was Moth—my mother's helper.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the birth of one of your brothers?

KALLIT: The what?

SIGRIST: The birth. When one of your brothers was born, does it stick out in your mind as being important, somehow?

KALLIT: No, I don't know. This I can't remember. I know I was—anytime my mother was expecting baby, I was praying and wishing to have a little sister but never was a sister, always a brother (laughs). That's all I remember.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what kind of games that you played as a child?

KALLIT: Oh, simple games. The boys pl—my brothers, they play all the rough boys games and—[pause] I really didn't have no time much for playing. I was—I was taking—helping my mother. And I was even when I was—oh, even when I was a small—I—I—we—my mother had geese and ducks. And I had to—I had to help—help her to—to get the—to get—I help her with everything on the—on the farm, whatever necessary, my mother. I didn't had much games to play.

SIGRIST: What was the chore that you disliked doing the most?

KALLIT: Disliked?

SIGRIST: Disliked. What—what job did you have around the house?

KALLIT: Taking care of the boys, of my brothers. I wish I—I wish I run away and play with my girlfriends. [laughs]

SIGRIST: Well, let's talk about your father. What was his name?

KALLIT: A-D-O.

SIGRIST: A-D-O.

KALLIT: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Ado?

KALLIT: Ado.

SIGRIST: Ado.

KALLIT: I—Ado.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. And do you know anything about his childhood and his upbringing?

KALLIT: My—my father's?

SIGRIST: Yes.

KALLIT: No, I can't tell you much about his childhood. He was a schoolteacher in a country—small school. And was a very—he was a very good man. He didn't drink and he—he was very talented. He play violin and all—sometimes they—my parents had a gathering. Their friends came. They play violin and sing songs and at that time was like this.

SIGRIST: Do you remember a song that you sang as a child?

KALLIT: Any what?

SIGRIST: A song that you sang as a child?

KALLIT: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you sing one for me now?

KALLIT: In Estonian?

SIGRIST: Yes.

KALLIT: Oh. [sings in Estonian]. Yeah, that's one song. Another one—[sings in Estonian]. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: What does that mean?

KALLIT: That means when—when you come you bring me flowers because I—I like to have a little flower. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me the house that you lived in?

KALLIT: I don't know.

SIGRIST: First, describe the house you lived in Russia first, because you moved to Russia when you were young. Correct?

KALLIT: Yeah. I was two years old when my parents moved to Russia.

SIGRIST: And how old were you when you moved back to Estonia?

KALLIT: We moved back to Estonia in 1919. I was grown up young girl and I had—my mother's youngest sister—her name was Elizabeth. She was 10 years older than me but we were friends. I was always going with her and, after I came to Estonia, she was a good friend of mine. My aun— youngest aunt, Elizabeth. She was very nice.

SIGRIST: When you were living in Russia and you were growing up in Russia—

KALLIT: That's right.

SIGRIST: Right. Can you describe for me the house that you lived in in Russia?

KALLIT: The house I lived in—oh, what time? After the Revolution or the czar time?

SIGRIST: Did you—did you live in different houses?

KALLIT: Yes.

SIGRIST: All right. Do—do during the czar time first.

KALLIT: The first?

SIGRIST: The first house you lived in in Russia.

KALLIT: In Russia, they were very rich landowners, beautiful estates they had. And they needed supervisor. And my father was working in—as a supervisor. And we had a beautiful house, little house with four rooms. And then we had—my father had in charge of the horses with the beautiful horse wagons. We used to take rides. My childhood in Russia

was very beautiful. It's before the Revolution when the czar was—Czar Nicholas was in Russia.

SIGRIST: Did you ever see the czar?

KALLIT: What?

SIGRIST: Did you ever see Czar Nicholas?

KALLIT: Ski?

SIGRIST: See him. See him. With your eyes, did you ever look at the czar?

KALLIT: At the czar?

SIGRIST: Did you ever see him in the street or—

KALLIT: Czar?

SIGRIST: Yes.

KALLIT: No, no. Never. He was in a—in a—Peterburg. You know where that—he—the estate where I grow up and my father, that was in the country. Beautiful estates, those rich Russian novels had. They must lived in—in Europe and France and England and all over. And my father was taking care of the estates. And there with my brothers and me, we grow up that way.

SIGRIST: Tell me what happened during the Revolution.

KALLIT: During the Revolution, the Revolution was something very terrible. The communists came. They start to burn all this big states. And all [unclear] these noble people, they run into Germany and France and all over different—and, oh, my father—we have to escape. We run in the woods and we had a very hard time.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me about some of the hardship that you went through during the Revolution?

KALLIT: Yeah, we were starving. We have to go—we—there was nothing to eat. Me and my mother, we have to go to the villages and they—to get some potatoes or bread. And they didn't want no money because the money was worthless that time. They want clothes or some items or—or jewelry or something for exchange for the potatoes. And that's the way we exist till we came to the—finally, to the Volga River and we waited for the—for the big ship to bring us away from there. And finally, my father got chance—would—from Russia to escape to Estonia after the Revolution.

SIGRIST: During the Revolution, did you witness any fighting?

KALLIT: No.

SIGRIST: Any soldiers or anything like that?

KALLIT: I witness burning the homes and people running and—but soldiers do—yes. Yes, I saw soldiers do, yes. This—a red soldier, communist soldier, they were very brutal. Me and my girlfriend, who has to hide in the woods—we know when they were coming we have to hide. We were very scared. That's all I know.

SIGRIST: Did you go to school at this time?

KALLIT: Oh, yes. I finished the high school in—in Russia. I graduated.

SIGRIST: Even during the Revolution you were still allowed to go to school.

KALLIT: Yeah, even during the Revolution I was going to school. Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about going to school in Russia?

KALLIT: Oh, I remember very nice—I had lot of girlfriends and—and studied good and it's a different type of school than here. You know, we had dormitories. We—we sleep there. We sleep in dormitories before because my parents, they—they didn't live nearby when my—when my school years. The life was so changeable from one year to another. You never can be sure of anything that—that time of state.

SIGRIST: What religion were you then?

KALLIT: I was Russian Orthodox.

SIGRIST: And were—was there a church nearby where you could go?

KALLIT: Yeah, but when communists came all the churches were destroyed. I went to church when I was a little girl. Before the Revolution I did go.

SIGRIST: Do you—does anything stick out in your mind about that experience, going to church?

KALLIT: Oh, yeah. Was beautiful.

SIGRIST: Yeah?

KALLIT: Yeah, we went to confessions and—and I sing and—

SIGRIST: Did you celebrate holidays?

KALLIT: We celebrate all the holidays.

SIGRIST: What was your favorite holiday as a child?

KALLIT: Christmas.

SIGRIST: How did you celebrate Christmas?

KALLIT: Oh, we had a nice Christmas tree. My—my brothers and my father, they went in the woods. They cut the tree themselves; they bring it in. And I was with them and we decorate. The decorations were just little pieces of cotton. And—and we—and they—if we had red apples, we hang on the trees the apples and—and some candy, regular candy and—and a—and a—if they had—candy was wrapped in a nice, bright paper. So we had regular. We didn't have that typical decorations like here. Just had what we had.

SIGRIST: Did you give gifts at Christmas time?

KALLIT: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Does a—does a gift that you received stick out in your mind?

KALLIT: I received when—you mean when I was a child?

SIGRIST: Yes.

KALLIT: A doll—doll. I received a doll. And you know what happened? I had the doll in my hand and I was running. And the—the doll's head hit the wall and went little crooked. I was so unhappy. I was crying. [chuckles]
Yeah.

SIGRIST: What about—were there special foods that you ate during the holidays?

KALLIT: Oh, well. All kind of *pieroske* and nice bread with raisins in. That was—that was—and cottage cheese, a lot of cottage cheese and—plain food. Never in a store. Everything made herself.

SIGRIST: And who made it?

KALLIT: My mother.

SIGRIST: Did you ever help her?

KALLIT: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: What did you help her do in the kitchen?

KALLIT: [chuckles] Helped her make different little *pieroske*, they call.

SIGRIST: How do you do that?

KALLIT: What?

SIGRIST: How did you do that? How did you make—

KALLIT: Well, you make a dough and you fill up with whatever you have, some kind of apple jam or something. And you close it up and put in—into oven. But the oven was—first, you—you fill up the oven with the wood and make the oven hot, and have to take all the wood out and then put your—whatever you—you bake, you put in.

SIGRIST: Why did your family move back to Estonia?

KALLIT: Well, because we were not Russians. We were Estonians. And my father went to Petrograd, to the Russian—you know, the Russian capital city. And went to the Estonian Consulate and start talk—make application that we want to go back to our country. And he got permit and they let us go and we went to Estonia.

SIGRIST: You were so young when you left Estonia.

KALLIT: I was two years old.

SIGRIST: How did you feel about moving back to Estonia?

KALLIT: Well, I was young that time. I—I didn't mind. I liked it.

SIGRIST: Do you remember it, actually going to Estonia from Russia?

KALLIT: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: How did you move all your belongings?

KALLIT: Oh, the belongings. What we had? We—we didn't had—just any—some clothes in a—in a bag. So we didn't—had no suitcases. Everybody in bags. And then when we came to Estonia there was a—a

immigrant—such a organization. You have to go in and everything got to be sterilized. They took us naked. They took all the clothes. They sterilized and they let us in Estonia because they didn't want to bring—bring any germs from Russia and Revolution. Yes.

SIGRIST: Did any of your brothers stay in Russia?

KALLIT: No.

SIGRIST: The whole family came back.

KALLIT: All family.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. And when you got back to Estonia, where did you go to live?

KALLIT: Oh, my mother's brother, my uncle, Johannes, his name was. We went to him. He took us into his house.

SIGRIST: Was he on that same island where you had been born?

KALLIT: No, no. He was—lived—he had—we didn't go back to that island no more. We were on a—on a Tallinn—Tallinn, Estonian capital city. My uncle, Johannes, he had a good position there. He took us in; he help us. And after awhile, maybe a couple—well, maybe took couple years. Oh, and I got a teaching job in Estonia. I teach Russian because I—I finished high school in Russia and I grow up. And children in Estonia like to—to know Russian language. I was a teacher and my—my father was teacher all his life in Russia and before he went to Russia. And he got teaching—he was a—some kind of inspector or something in—in education line there. And we got a lovely little home by the river, I remember, and my brothers—everybody was so happy. My brothers,

nighttime, they went catching lobster—lobsters in river. [chuckles]
Yeah.

SIGRIST: When you lived in Estonia—when you moved back to Estonia, you said you got a job. How did you get that job?

KALLIT: Through my father. Somehow, he—he got that job because he had the high position before he went to Russia [unclear].

SIGRIST: So you spoke Estonian and Russian.

KALLIT: Yes.

SIGRIST: Any other languages?

KALLIT: Oh, ever—in—in Russia before the Revolution—when I grow up in a school, you can't graduate. You have to know two foreign languages. So I know—Estonian was my home language, family language. Russian, because I lived in Russia -- and German and French. I study in a—in a—in a school, because they—I had to have two foreign languages, see.

SIGRIST: Do you remember a prayer that you know in Estonian or in Russian, like the Lord's Prayer or some prayer that you learned in either Estonian or Russian?

KALLIT: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Can you say it for me on tape?

KALLIT: In Estonian?

SIGRIST: Can you do it in Estonian?

KALLIT: You want me to say it in Estonian or—

SIGRIST: Yes.

KALLIT: —or in English?

SIGRIST: In Estonian.

KALLIT: Oh. [speaking Estonian]. This is like, “Our Father in Heaven. Hallowed be Thy Name.”

SIGRIST: Can you do a prayer in Russian for me? Do you remember any?

KALLIT: [speaking Russian]. That’s in Russian. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: [laughs] When you had the job as a teacher—

KALLIT: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —what did you do with the money that you made as a teacher?

KALLIT: [laughs] Spend on—on—on myself. I was a young girl, buy clothes and—clothing and—

SIGRIST: What kind of clothing did people wear back then in the early 1920s?

KALLIT: Well, the clothing depends how the style was.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what that style was?

KALLIT: I don't. I know that the—the dresses were short. Well—

SIGRIST: Well, we'll look at the pictures when we're done. Don't look at them now.

KALLIT: I—I show you the pictures what—when I was a child—

SIGRIST: Okay.

KALLIT: —and everything.

SIGRIST: We'll—we'll look at them when we're finished because I'd like to see them, definitely.

KALLIT: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: How did you wear your hair back then when you were young? Your hair?

KALLIT: Ev—braided. I was redheaded.

SIGRIST: Really?

KALLIT: Yes.

SIGRIST: You've got thick, white hair now.

KALLIT: Yeah, and I had braids—two braids up to here. Yeah. When I came from Russia to Estonia and then my—I met my—I met a young man after we dated and then. I mean, my husband, who later on I marry, his

mother says that, “We here in—we don’t wear braids like that. We wear the hair short.” And then I—oh, for years, they cut my hair for this redheaded braids. I kept it for years and I don’t know. Finally, I don’t know. I get rid of them

SIGRIST: When you were in Estonia, what did you know about America?

KALLIT: What I know about America. There—the young man who finally I—we married—his sister lived in Philadelphia here in America long time before I met my husband. She lived years in Philadelphia. And after, when I met my husband and he told me about his sister, and he told me that he has plans that—to go to America and make some money. That’s the way.

SIGRIST: Did you marry this man in Estonia?

KALLIT: Who?

SIGRIST: Did you marry the man before you left Estonia?

KALLIT: No, that’s a long story. I didn’t ma—we didn’t get married. My husband, he was here two years in America and then he send me the money and papers and everything. And I came. And that—I was in Ellis Island and they didn’t let me off. They didn’t trust whoever was—sponsored for me. I had to—we had to get married and civils---the judge was there. And he marry us on Ellis Island. And then when we went to Philadelphia to his—my husband’s sister, we had a church wedding in Philadelphia. And we lived in—my husband was working in Philadelphia and we lived by my sister-in-law two years. And then we decide we go on our own. We go to New York City because was more work that time. My husband was on a building trade. They were building lot of new houses in New York City.

He had—he made good money and we—we took apartment in New York City. And we lived—and my two children were born in New York.

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

SIGRIST: So—so the man came two years before you did?

KALLIT: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Okay. What—did you want to come to the United States?

KALLIT: Did what?

SIGRIST: Did you want to come to the United States?

KALLIT: If I wanted?

SIGRIST: Did you want to come?

KALLIT: He was sending me so many letters. He—he was in love with me. He wants to marry me. He says, “You come and come”—he sent me all the money and tickets. And I came.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about getting ready to leave Estonia?

KALLIT: Oh, well. What I remember, I was very excited. I—I’m going in America. My—my—my three—three brothers was still living. One was—was dead by th—I had four brothers but one—my—of my brothers died in Russia yet.

SIGRIST: What did he die of?

KALLIT: He was eight years old—boy. And the boys went swimming in the Volga River and he got drowned.

SIGRIST: Which brother was that? What was his name?

KALLIT: Alexander.

SIGRIST: It was Alexander.

KALLIT: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So when you moved back to Estonia, there were only three brothers.

KALLIT: Three.

SIGRIST: That's right.

KALLIT: Yeah.

SIGRIST: When you were getting ready to leave, did you have to see a doctor?

KALLIT: Oh, yes. Yes. I had to see the doctor in emergent—in the immigrant *punkt* in Tallin. Before I took a ship, the Drottningholm, I had to see a doctor.

SIGRIST: Right. Had you ever been to a doctor before?

KALLIT: Before that?

SIGRIST: Before that. Had you ever been to a doctor?

KALLIT: Oh, I—oh, yes. In Russia, my fa—my parents, they took me to the doctor. Yeah. But the thing—when I was a—how would I remember? I was a little girl, I fell and I—I busted this eye since—

SIGRIST: That's your left eye?

KALLIT: Yeah. Since childhood, I don't see nothing with this eye.

SIGRIST: I see. Do you remember what you packed to take to America? What did you take for—for objects to America?

KALLIT: Just the clothing. Nothing much. Dress—dresses, what I had, and shoes and, yeah. No, n—nothing on furniture or anything.

SIGRIST: Did your family give you a goodbye—

KALLIT: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: —occasion?

KALLIT: Yes, yes. My family send me away. My mother was crying. She didn't want me to go. But that was my fate.

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

KALLIT: Tallin. That I took a—I took a ship on Tallin over the Baltic Sea.

SIGRIST: Are you saying an Italian ship?

KALLIT: What?

SIGRIST: What—what—what did you say? You took a ship—Tallin?

KALLIT: Tallin. That's a—a—

SIGRIST: Is it a city?

KALLIT: —Estonian—Estonian—

SIGRIST: Okay.

KALLIT: Talion—you take a ship over the Baltic Sea to the—I came with the Swedish American Line. You—you come to Sweden and over to Sweden from Baltic Sea, I flew over Sweden to the— Goteborg in Sweden. And then I took big ship Atla-- for Atlantic Ocean.

SIGRIST: You—you said you flew. You didn't fly to Sweden. You took a ship to Sweden?

KALLIT: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah, took a boat to Sweden.

KALLIT: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Right. How long was the journey to America? How long did it take?

KALLIT: Three weeks.

SIGRIST: Three weeks. And tell me what it was like to be on the ship.

KALLIT: [chuckles] I was seasick most of the time, could—could hardly lift my head. And the ship—I don't know what it took, two weeks in Atlantic to come to New York to Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: So it took a week to get to Sweden and then two weeks from Sweden to America?

KALLIT: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah. What do you remember about being on the ship? Do you remember where you slept at night?

KALLIT: Oh, I was young. I had —there was some young men who—who worked on this big sh—big liner. There was one—one Swe—Swedish young man—were—they had dances and all this kind of thing. And it was very nice. But the—I was seasick awful. I couldn't hardly eat anything, you know. It took almost two weeks over Atlantic. Could you imagine that? Now—now they—they [chuckles]—they—in no time.

SIGRIST: Just a couple hours now.

KALLIT: Yeah, yeah. Yeah—

SIGRIST: Lydia, I didn't ask earlier what your—your maiden name was. What was your name before you were married?

KALLIT: Tarkmees.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

KALLIT: T-A—Tark—R—Tark—

SIGRIST: T-A-R-K?

KALLIT: R-K-M-E-E-S. Tarkmees.

SIGRIST: T-A-R-K—

KALLIT: M—M—

SIGRIST: M-E-E-S.

KALLIT: S.

SIGRIST: Tarkmees.

KALLIT: Tarkmees.

SIGRIST: Okay.

KALLIT: Yeah.

SIGRIST: I should have asked you that before.

KALLIT: Tarkmees.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the ship arriving in New York?

KALLIT: Oh, well. Ship came to Ellis Island and they took us—there was all kind of—all kind of officials and they took us in. And they—we have to give all our clothes. We went, like, a shower room. And we have to give all our clothes to be sterilized. And then they gave us all the clothes back. And

then they told me that—that my—some nice men—some men, by name—John Kallit is—was—is responsible for me and taking—is waiting for me. But before—then he came. My—he was two years in America, didn't see him. We were very happy to see each other. And then it came—there was a judge. He—we had a civil ceremony. He didn't—he—be—they were responsible for me. I came to America all alone, young girl, in New York. You know how it is. And a judge marry us there on—on Ellis Island. But after my—and I pack up my little things what I had and my husband—my husband. We went to Philadelphia.

SIGRIST: How long were you at Ellis Island?

KALLIT: On Ellis Island?

SIGRIST: Yes.

KALLIT: Oh, it didn't take long, maybe a couple days.

SIGRIST: Couple of days?

KALLIT: Yeah, be—

SIGRIST: So you—so you slept at Ellis Island?

KALLIT: Before—before all this went through, you know. All for [unclear]. A judge was there. They didn't let me—young girl. They didn't let me in New York out—somebody has to be responsible. And my—my husband says he's responsible but then the official says, "We let—we can't let her go like this. You never know what's going to happen. If—if you want to marry, you"—my husband says, "This is my bride. We're going to get married." So this—they had a judge there. He marry us and I know—

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the ceremony itself? What sticks out in your mind about the judge and—

KALLIT: Well, there was no ceremony. There was a judge, just write something in the books and—and that was all.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how you felt when that was happening?

KALLIT: I was young. I was very happy. That's my sweetheart, my husband. We were married. I'm in America. My God! [chuckles]

SIGRIST: If you stayed at Ellis Island for a couple of days, where did you sleep?

KALLIT: Well, oh, they had immigrant—for all the immigrants, they had places there where to be.

SIGRIST: Do you remember anything specific?

KALLIT: Oh, nothing. Just all different kind of people from all different—from—from Italy a lot, from—from Poland. A lot of Jews—Jewish people escaping. They were all there, a lot of different people, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of the employees, any of the staff people at Ellis Island who—

KALLIT: I—I remember the judge—

SIGRIST: Judge.

KALLIT: —who marry—who marry us. That's all.

SIGRIST: So when you were finished at Ellis Island, you got married and then your husband took you to Philadelphia.

KALLIT: Yes.

SIGRIST: Tell me what some of your first impressions of America were. What—what did you notice?

KALLIT: Oh, that was a lot of fun. My—my sister-in-law—my husband's sister in Philadelphia—she had—her husband had—they lived in America long time. Her husband—they had a good job and she had a lovely home in Philadelphia. And she—she—a lot of—lot of Estonian immigrants who came before me, she call everybody to—to—to—to our wedding to see John's bri—new bride. Was very nice and we had a church wedding and then we had a wedding party at my sister-in-law's house. And a lot of other young people were there and—

SIGRIST: What were some of the things in America that you had never seen before, things that were new to you?

KALLIT: Oh, I guess so many—all kind of fancy food and—oh, and then my sister-in-law, after, she—she took me many places. We went to the theater and we had a nice time.

SIGRIST: Do you remember some of the foods that you had never seen before?

KALLIT: Food?

SIGRIST: Yes, you said some of the fancy foods. Do you remember what—

KALLIT: Well, all kind of—[chuckles] mostly, she baked herself all kind of cakes and pies and a lot of fruit, what I haven't seen before. I never seen banana in my life. First time I saw banana. And then sh—she had a lovely home. They had—she had a little, like, a pear tree in the back yard. We had pears and we didn't live very long there. My husband want to go to New York City because there was opportunity to get more jobs. He was in the building trade. When we came to New York City we got apartment on the top floor. Four flights up, we have to walk. Four rooms.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the address?

KALLIT: Yeah, 100 Fir--First Street. New York, 101st Street. Forgot the number. Was near—near Mount Sinai Hospital.

SIGRIST: Mount Sinai Hospital?

KALLIT: Yeah, near. And Central Park was near. We lived there 16 years in that house, long time.

SIGRIST: At 101st Street?

KALLIT: 101st. And I—I got a job in Mount Sinai Hospital.

SIGRIST: Was that your first job—

KALLIT: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —that you got in America?

KALLIT: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. What job did you get?

KALLIT: I was working in the dietary department in—in Mount Sinai Hospital.

SIGRIST: Doing what?

KALLIT: What?

SIGRIST: What—what were—what—what were you responsible for at—

KALLIT: Oh, in dietary department I was going in a—it was a—a private pavilion. It's a Jewish hospital, very rich—all kind of sick Jewish people there. They all had private rooms. I—I have to go from room to room and mark it down, their diets. And then I have to go back to the—to the kitchen and ma—set the trays and some of them's not allowed salt. Some of them fat frees—this and that. I have to know all that. I worked 25 years in Mount Sinai Hospital.

SIGRIST: When you first got to America and got this job in New York, what language did you communicate with the patients? What languages did you use?

KALLIT: Well, I tell you. In New York City was lot of Jewish people. They talk Russian a lot, all the Jews. And I—I communicate with them in Russian. And I made lot of friends. And then, eventually, times goes by. I start to learn English. And when my children—I had—my daughter was born 1920—1929—19—my—my—1920—I wasn't married too long, my daughter—daughter was born. And then 1930, my son was born. And after—when they grew up little bit, they start to go to school—they bring

schoolbooks home. And I learn together with them. I didn't go to school in America, not one day. And I—I could read and write. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember some of the first English words that you learned?

KALLIT: [chuckles] Hello, how are you? You know.

SIGRIST: Could your husband speak English?

KALLIT: Oh, yes. We all spe—well, was—in beginning was very hard but we speak—we get by. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Did you become an American citizen?

KALLIT: Oh, yeah. I became American citizen. You see, in 19—my boy was 12 years old and my girl was—no, my girl was 12 and my boy was, I think, 10 years old. We went back to Estonia visiting my parents. We didn't stay long. We stay six months and came back to America.

SIGRIST: And when did you become a citizen? Did you—were you a citizen before you went?

KALLIT: We ca—you see, we went to—to—to Estonia for a visit and then we—we weren't citizens. But the children—my son and daughter, they were born in America. They are citi—and only on account the chil—children—then start already, the Second World War was threatening. And only on account of that our children were American, they let us come back. And after when they came—we came back, we became citizens right away. And—

SIGRIST: And what did you have to go through to become a citizen?

KALLIT: I have to go and judge ask me all kind question. Who was the first president? And about the—when the slaves were—oh, he asked me couple questions in American history. And I answered. He said, “Oh, you’re doing okay.” [chuckles] And we got our citizen papers.

SIGRIST: How did that make you feel?

KALLIT: Oh, I was very happy. [chuckles] We were happy. Yeah.

SIGRIST: I just have a couple more questions to ask and then we’ll be finished.

KALLIT: Okay.

SIGRIST: When you think of yourself in terms of nationality, how do you think of yourself?

KALLIT: Now?

SIGRIST: Now.

KALLIT: Now, I think I’m American. My children born here. But then 1937 was—in New York City was infantile paralysis epidemic. And my daughter got sick. I lost my daughter.

SIGRIST: How old was she?

KALLIT: She was seven years old. Yes. So I only have—my son still lives in Glens Falls here.

SIGRIST: When you look back on your life, what did you do that makes you the most proud?

KALLIT: Was proud.

SIGRIST: What did you do in your life that you're the most proud of?

KALLIT: Well, I'm proud that I—I work hard and I save some money. Now, it—I'm proud at my old age I could be taking care that I didn't—I didn't drink and I didn't—my husband was very hard worker. When he died, he left me some money. My son, he had a college education. He had a good job. Now, he's—my son is already 67 years old. He's retired. He's not working. I have great grandchildren.

SIGRIST: Great. Well, Mrs. Kallit, thank you very much for letting me interview you about your life.

KALLIT: Oh, that's okay.

SIGRIST: Let me just—we'll sign off and then we'll look at the photographs that you have.

KALLIT: I want to show you how I looked.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Lydia Kallit on Thursday, July 31st, 1997 at the Home of the Good Shepherd in Saratoga. Thank you.

[END OF INTERVIEW]