AKRF-115
PEARL POHRILLE
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GERMANY (BORN POLAND), 1921
AGE 10

DALLETT: My name is Nancy Dallett and I'm speaking with Pearl Pohrille on Friday, January 10, 1986. We are beginning this interview at 1:05, and we're about to interview Mrs. Pohrille about her immigration experience from Germany in 1921. This is Interview Number 115, side one. Let's start back at the beginning of your story, and could you tell me where and when you were born?

POHRILLE: Yes. I was born in a small town in Poland called Dobromil. I remember very little of that.

DALLETT: Could you tell me how you spell that, Dobromil?

POHRILLE: Yes. D-O-B-R-O-M-I-L.

DALLETT: And--

POHRILLE: And my mother, subsequent to my birth, was a victim of puerperal fever, and she never raised me, until I was three years old. I was raised by my grandmother, an uncle, and a couple of aunts.

DALLETT: Uh, what kind of fever was that?

POHRILLE: Puerperal. Childbirth fever.

DALLETT: Uh-huh. So, from the childbirth on for three years, you--

POHRILLE: And she was in Germany, I was in Poland.

DALLETT: So then you were reunited with her in Germany?

POHRILLE: Yes.

DALLETT: What came about that she had moved to Germany?

POHRILLE: I don't know. I don't know, because, as a question of eating, and having a place to live, Poland was very, very bad in 1911 or 1912. It was a time of unrest, and why they decided to go to Germany, maybe they were advised to do that, maybe it was more open opportunity for making some kind of a living. They went, and they left me with my grandmother.

DALLETT: So you were three when you were reunited with her.

POHRILLE: Three. And this was, this lady was a stranger to me and I was a stranger to her. She had never had the experience of raising me. And the relationship was always on the cold side, I want you to now. I was like a little adopted girl. We, uh, we had not a very close relationship. My mother tended to be ill and, even though I was the one and only, uh, she adopted a German upbringing. "Don't speak until you're spoken to, and at the table you behave yourself." It was a very strict upbringing.

DALLETT: And where was it in Germany that you moved to be with

her?

POHRILLE: Uh, to Berlin, no less.

DALLETT: Do you have any memories of, of that time when you were-

POHRILLE: Only, only faint ones, because we were in contact with our dear friend for many years. I was successful in bringing over part of the family in the Holocaust, so we were in contact. I would write English, and they would answer me in English. That was their second language. We stayed in Berlin until, I think, I was about five. Then we went to a terrible place called Saxony, and there I stayed until I was about six. I don't remember much about it. It was very farm-like, un-city-like. I'm a city girl and, uh, the little schooling I had there, I don't remember much of it, except it was, it was not a warm place to be. My, my parents came quickly to Hamburg on the advice of some people and that's where we stayed until we migrated to America.

DALLETT: Tell me about some of the things you remember about life between uh, the age of six and ten then, somewhere.

POHRILLE: Yes. Uh, my mother was successful in putting me into school, which was called a Higher Daughter's Private School. Now, why it was called Higher Daughter's, that's the German word, (German phrase). I

remember that. There I found friends. And there we had, the school was very rigid. You had about three hours of Hebrew instruction and four hours of, uh, German instruction. But when we got out of school, we had a good time. Our pastime was jumping rope and playing what we call over here patsy and, uh, I don't remember the other street games, but that I was a very good rope jumper, very good. I did all kinds of tricks, double dutch and anything. And, uh, what else? We did have, from school we had vacations where we took trips, class trips. That was very enjoyable. I don't know where we went, but it was on a distance, and we did it a few times a week. What else should I tell you?

DALLETT: What languages did you speak, then? You were learning Hebrew?

POHRILLE: Only German. I was learning Hebrew only as a sideline. It wasn't something I used except that we were taught how to pray in Hebrew, and that has remained with me all my life. We knew what portions of the Hebrew was dealt with every day life and high holidays and such things. Uh, we were. we kept our friendships very close. I remember a couple of kids that I was very friendly with. I don't know their names, but we saw each other every day. May I mention that school, we had

uniforms. We wore brown skirts, white blouses, and brown pinafores every day, and so that everybody should feel equal. There were no rich and poor. Everybody was the same .

DALLETT: You had mentioned that your father had difficulty finding work?

POHRILLE: May I say that my father just couldn't connect with any, uh, real work for a company because in Germany if you were not a citizen you did not get a worker's permit. So what he did was he'd go into different streets away from the neighborhood where we lived and he became an old clothes man. I'd buy old clothes, and they would call him up, and he would offer a price and bring it down and resell it. And that's the way he eked out a living. I don't think he made a living, but he eked out a living. And it was a struggle. Uh, our main fare during the week was potato soup. And my mother made the most delicious potato soup I have ever eaten. But, that was the main fare. But on, on the Sabbath Eve and on Saturday we had the regulation meal consisting of fish and chicken soup with noodles and chicken and

dessert, but that was only on Friday night and Saturdays. All week it was a very sparse meal. Not too much fruit. I don't remember about the vegetables, but I do remember my mother's potato soup. And that was the mainstay. Not only in Ireland for the potatoes, but Germany also. All kinds of, you know, potato balls and potato latkes and all kind of things made with potatoes.

DALLETT: Uh, what came about that your father and mother first started making plans to come to this country? Were you aware of that?

POHRILLE: No. I heard talk, but I didn't connect. The, it came about because my father did not make a living, and my mother knew that she was a skilled cook. So she figured like that. She'll come, she contacted an uncle, a wealthy uncle in New York, and she figured if he would stake her to a little business she, with my father, would be able to, uh, make out very well. And they talked about it and they wrote to New York and they also, my mother had a sister here who was married who had a small candy store in the Brooklyn section called Bushwick Avenue. And my aunt was poor, but she prevailed on my uncle to send affidavits for my father, my mother and myself, which he did.

DALLETT: Did you, uh, know your aunt, or had you not met her, she

had not been living in--

POHRILLE: No. She, I had not known her. Uh, so when preparations were underway and my mother started packing those, uh, big coffers made out of woven straw. I mean, Germany had tremendous big, straw trunks, made of straw. And then I saw it was the real thing. I went about saying goodbye to my friends and then saying goodbye to my classmates, and my principal called me into her office. What she said I don't know, but she says, "Don't forget us, Pepi." Which was mt name in Germany. And here is a little book to remember us by." It's very sweet. They all, just like on graduation when you have those. So I have that book to this day. And I don't think you could offer me anything for it.

DALLETT: Did you ever know someone who had left from, from your town, to go to America?

POHRILLE: No, no. My mother knew. My mother did know, yes. There was always talk, people, after the World War, was always talking of opportunities, which were not good. You know, Germany was devastated and, uh, people like my parents, poor, from poorer to poor, had to find another

way of, of, uh, making a living. And this was the way. My father was for it, my mother reluctantly was for it. It meant leaving all people that she like in Europe. Because Poland to Germany is not very far, but Poland to America was like you'll never see anybody again. That was the, the feeling. So we went--

DALLETT: Did you travel back to Poland to say goodbye to family?

POHRILLE: No, no. But I think, I think my grandmother came to Germany to say goodbye to us. I don't remember. No, no we didn't go back there. Don't forget, when we left there was 1921, it was right, there was such devastation there from, the unrest there was pitiful. I don't know if I should mention that, but when I was three, and before I reached my mother, I was a refugee. My grandmother and I were refugees. We were fleeing from that little town of, of Dobromil. My grandmother persuaded a young boy of fourteen to take me on his back. She put a little can of candy in my hand to keep me quiet. I remember running with that boy and with her at my heels. Now, where we ran I do not know, but we were what the Germans called (German word), refugees. We were running away from one place to reach another place, and from there my grandmother brought me to Germany. I don't know how. Three doesn't remember very much about these things. But I remember the boy and me clinging to his back, with a little cup, a tin cup of candy in my hand. It's so funny. So, uh, we came to my mother and I

don't remember how long my grandmother stayed there, because the apartment was very small, very small, very sparse. That's in Germany we're talking about. You know, I'm jumping back and forth. Uh, when my grandmother left me, my mother put me on the floor. I was a chubby, fat kid. I was so fat, she described it to me. So what she did, she put me on the floor, and she put a bowl of strawberries on my lap. And I was munching the strawberries, and I decided to accept this lady. That's all I remember of my beginning in Germany.

DALLETT: So it was difficult for your mother to be introduced to, to motherhood, with a three year old.

POHRILLE: Absolutely. Absolutely. She was very, uh, I hate to go back. My mother was deprived in so many ways. My grandmother was thirty-two when she lost her husband and she had an infant of two months on her hands. And there was the question again of eating and giving her five children to eat. So she decided yo open an inn, because it seemed to me that good cooks came from that part of the family. And she worked very hard, and her children helped her. There were four girls and one boy. The boy went to war in 1914, lost a leg, became incapacitated, but I don't know what happened

afterwards. But you have to pick and go on from there. So what do you want to know now? (She laughs.)

DALLETT: Uh, that point where you're, you're conscious now that you're actually leaving. Uh, I forgot if you mentioned whether you remember saying goodbye to your grandmother.

POHRILLE: No, I don't. She came to Germany to say, you know, farewell to my parents. I don't remember that part, but I know that we did not go back to Poland. You know, the question of fare, even a train fare was a thing of, "Can we afford it?"

DALLETT: How did your father, how did they get the money together? Do you remember how much that might have been?

POHRILLE: No. I have no idea. All I know is that I think my, my grandfather, my uncle, his name was Jacob Rand, my uncle furnished the affidavit. He may have furnished the, uh, boat fare. He nay have. I don't remember. All I know is that my parents worked and returned to him the money for funding the little store, and maybe the fare, too. I don't remember.

DALLETT: Do you remember the actual beginning of the trip, taking

the train from Hamburg?

POHRILLE: Not at all.

DALLETT: Where does your memory come in again?

POHRILLE: Only in the boat. Only in the boat.

DALLETT: What was the name of the boat?

POHRILLE: I don't know.

DALLETT: Do you remember that?

POHRILLE: No. I don't know. It was, uh, horrible, because we were put into steerage and , you know, my mother, who didn't say anything on the boat because everybody was afraid of officials, but when she saw the, the uh, accommodations, she was aghast, because we, I understand that she had paid for tourist class, that we were supposed to be in a cabin together, mother, father and child. We weren't. My father was put in steerage with a lot of men, hundreds of men, and my mother and I occupied a tiny little, not a cabin, but a tiny little boarded bed with maybe ten other people in a room. And do you know how, we had to figure out how to sleep? I would

sleep at her feet so that my head wouldn't take take up so much room. And it was awful. The night were awful.

DALLETT: And you had paid for--

POHRILLE: And my mother said that she had paid for tourist class, which was called third class, but not steerage. So we looked only to go up on board where we could have some fresh air, but we had to come down for meals. And I did tell you that our main meal consisted of herring and potatoes and bread and tea. That was what--(addresses engineer). I'm not coming across well enough? (He replies off mike.) So, but, you know, children are very resilient and I found playmates and on board we ran around and we looked at the sea and we talked. We didn't care where we went. I mean, America did not mean a row of beans to me. I didn't even know what to expect because my mother was reticent, and she didn't know what the future held for her. My father was a lackadaisical man. "God will provide." So the, the trip on, on the surface of the boat was very bearable, because we used to play, uh, dancing things, and somebody would always have a, uh, accordion. They would have music. But the going to sleep was pretty bad. My mother was sick, probably a half of the tour. She wouldn't eat. She wouldn't sleep. She was a bad traveler. I can always take a voyage, a sea voyage, even today. I love it. So that passed.

DALLETT: Do you remember what, you were talking about the straw sort of trunks that your mother was packing up. Do you remember what she brought with her?

POHRILLE: Yes, everything. Her linens, her, don't forget, no, you wouldn't know. Orthodox Jews have two of everything, a dairy set of dishes and a meat set of dishes. So she had, her dish towels were dairy and meat and her sets of cutlery were dairy and meat. So we had a lot of things to take along, because she didn't think that you could buy pots here. So she bought beautiful pots and pans and, uh, dishes. Germany had beautiful dishes. And, uh, she brought everything. But they ruined most of the things. Even the wearing apparel was shrunken when we finally got it. They fumigated it in such a way with such pressure of steam that most of the things she got out, I mean, and she was a careful, uh, housewife. She had nice things. She was a preserver. It was shambles. But my aunt reassured her when we met her that it can be replaced. And it was.

DALLETT: Who, who was it that fumigated?

POHRILLE: The, uh, the boat or the, uh, maybe the, uh, with the rules of American immigration law, that if you go steerage you're bringing bugs with you, you're bringing unwanted things and you have to have your things fumigated. But under such pressure that most of it is ruined. And my mother had no idea that she would have to go through that process. She was really the one, in our family she was the one that was hurt the most, because she couldn't set up her housekeeping as she wished.

DALLETT: On the boat, were you traveling with, uh, mostly Germans, as far as you know?

POHRILLE: No. I don't think so. I think we were, a lot of us immigrants were from different parts. I remember women with babushkas. Maybe I'm just thinking I remember, but I think I do. And people that were very ill clad. We weren't. I mean, the clothing we brought on board without, the ones that were fumigated, were German clothing. Clean, immaculate and timely, as of, but--

DALLETT: What was the style then? Do you remember what it would have been, what you were wearing?

POHRILLE: Uh, what I was wearing? Mostly skirts and blouses. That was, a schoolgirl wore a skirt and a blouse. My mother wore skirts and

blouses, even in America. This was a very fancy blouse. This, she was doing, she was wearing her finery in this picture and I was wearing my fancy little rayon dress, and my father was wearing his Sabbath suit. And they all looked so forbidding, don't they? Even the kid looks very formal. So, uh, skirts and blouses for, for the girls and women. 1921. I remember seeing pictures. Girls walked to work in skirts and blouses, remember that famous Triangle fire where the girls worked on blouses, shirtwaists? I remember that only.

DALLETT: And how long did the trip take?

POHRILLE: About two weeks. At least two weeks.

DALLETT: Did you make stops along the way?

POHRILLE: No. This was straight route. I mean, the lanes were, what I could conjecture is, in '21 the lanes were now safe for travel, and this was a big boat, with lots of people in it. 1921, where I'd read about it, an awful lot of people came to these shores. We were on e of them. We were among them.

DALLETT: Do you remember being examined at all? I forgot to ask you that, in Hamburg?

POHRILLE: Yes. Not in Hamburg.

DALLETT: No examination at that point.

POHRILLE: No, no, no, because from Hamburg, with our affidavits, it was easy to get a visa and my mother had no hurdles to jump over. I don't remember, because the affidavits were good and she probably showed that she had money for the passage. They must have taken her money from her and given her the, merest space, because she had the wherewith to go like a traveler, like a tourist. Anyway, uh, we came here. Let me tell you about Ellis Island. I love that part. We came from the boat, we went down, and we stepped off into a big, it looked like an airplane hanger. What was now, it was so big and so empty and we were ushered into lots of wooden benches. We had to sit on wooden benches waiting to be called. And I think I remember I was impressed because people were examined by doctors. Their hair was examined, their tonsils, their eyes and their throats. That's all I remember seeing. And some of them were told to go in area where they were separated from other people. We passed the examination, and after a few hours we were permitted to go to another part of Ellis Island where the relatives of the incoming people were waiting for them. So if we landed in the morning about three o'clock or four o'clock we were allowed to join our relatives. They came to claim us. So it was my aunt and uncle who came.

And the first--

DALLETT: Did you have trouble, do you remember those examinations, the doctors' examinations?

POHRILLE: I remember being examined. No, they did not ask any questions. They were English speaking people.

DALLETT: How did you understand what, uh--

POHRILLE: Well, open your mouth or something? I don't know. But, uh, we--

DALLETT: There wasn't a translator? You don't remember?

POHRILLE: I don't know. I really don't know. Uh, the first thing, I know my, my aunt and uncle took a cab to take all our luggage and, uh, us, to their home in Brooklyn and the first thing my uncle did to me was to give me a stick of chewing gum. And I looked at the man, and I looked at this piece of flat something or other which I had never seen before and I quickly ate it and swallowed it. I said, "That's what he give me?" And then, I have never liked chewing gum since then, I can tell you. And, uh, when we came into the house we were treated to an evening meal. And I

remember my aunt as a treat gave us bananas with sour cream. I did not like it. Had she given me a slice of bread and butter I would have appreciated it much more and, uh, I didn't eat much of it but, you know, I was tired. That's all I remember from the first day.

DALLETT: Was it a grand reunion with your aunt and your mother?

POHRILLE: I didn't have a grand reunion. I imagine those two ladies did. I don't remember watching them. You see, uh, you have to have a reporter's viewpoint to see what's doing there. I know that the men spoke together in Yiddish and my aunt and her sisters, my mother, probably spoke together, but I was bewildered, and I was more interested, there was, there were two little boys there, and I loved children. Those were my cousins. So I was more interested in looking at them. One was in the high chair, and he was howling like anything at these intruders. The other was a quiet little boy. I was interested in that. That's all I remember.

DALLETT: Before we go on and you tell me about what happened, uh, here, could you just go back to Ellis Island a little bit. Uh, any other thing you can remember about the details of, of the building? You said it was just a huge, was it one of those large buildings you had seen, or--

POHRILLE: I had, the room we were in, it was very high, it was, it was grey looking. Maybe the day was grey, I don't know. It was a grey looking room. There was nothing that I could recommend in the room. It was a frightening experience. We knew that we were up for examination and, uh, that's all I remember. A tenseness, both in my parents and myself. We did watch some people bursting out in tears when they were separated from families if there was something wrong, like some children were separated. They can't, they had to be sent back or something. Either my parents spoke about it later, or I remembered. But the Ellis Island itself, believe me, it made no wonderful impression on me. No.

DALLETT: Do you, do you recall at all how you were treated by the officials? Was it--

POHRILLE: No. Rubber stamping right along, no I don't recall any unpleasantness, and it was, whatever they said was Greek to me. You said if there was an interpreter, I don't remember. Maybe there was. Maybe they inquired certain information from my parents that I was not conscious of.

DALLETT: And at what point was it that they, they took your, your bags from your mother and father and fumigated them? Did they just take them away?

POHRILLE: That was before we entered the boat.

DALLETT: So it was in Hamburg.

POHRILLE: Whatever, but I mean, she found--

DALLETT: I thought you said it was at Ellis Island?

POHRILLE: No, no, no,. No. It was fait accompli already. Yes. She had no knowledge, because the didn't, they didn't go with us to steerage. They were in another part of the boat. But she found out that they had fumigated it before they put it into the hold, or something. Oh, it was awful. You should have seen that stuff. It was really incredible.

DALLETT: So they didn't do anything like that at Ellis Island with your possessions? You were just--

POHRILLE: No. No, I don't think so. No. This was done before we

came on the boat. I think they were worried about infestation. I'm just talking now from, from my adult point of view, but it was not fair, my mother's things.

DALLETT: Did they feed you?

POHRILLE: Did they feed me?

DALLETT: At Ellis Island? Or were you there not long enough to have a meal?

POHRILLE: I don't remember being, being served a meal there at all. All those, just those benches were filled with people waiting and waiting. I don't remember a meal given me there.

DALLETT: And how many hours do you think you might have--

POHRILLE: We might have been there for four or five hours, that's all. This was not a big deal. Now, whether my mother had the foresight to ask for bread and butter and, and, you know, a kid is hungry, maybe she brought it along with her, I don't remember being served at, at all, in Ellis Island. No.

DALLETT: And do you remember at all, uh, your father having to show, uh, any money? Did they ask?

POHRILLE: I didn't see it. They must have. You cannot become a ward of the state. He must have had some money with him.

DALLETT: (Addresses sound engineer.) How are we on tape? I'm just going to ask to turn the tape over. That is the end of side one of tape of Interview Number 115 with Pearl Pohrille.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

DALLETT: This is the beginning of side two of Interview Number 115 with Pearl Pohrille. Okay. Let's pick up at the point where, uh, you were, uh, you're in, where it is now Bushwick?

POHRILLE: Bushwick Avenue, in Brooklyn.

DALLETT: Uh, what were some of the new things that you were

seeing in Brooklyn that might not have been part of your life in, in Hamburg?

POHRILLE: It was not a clean city when we came here. Uh, I did not take to the, uh, to my environment very easily. Uh, everything was strange. The only thing I enjoyed were my two little boy cousins. My aunt was very gracious and, uh, tried to make us feel at home. I don't remember-- I remember my aunt much later on, when she had some kind of influence on my life. But at that point, the streets did not, uh, what should I say, they were not something I easily became used to. They were drab. It wasn't a nice street. Uh, then my experience in school was a little bit better. My aunt registered me into a foreign class, because I had no knowledge of English. And the class was broken up into three sections, and the teacher had to teach three classes in one room. So for an hour or so she would take the first class and then make them busy, and then went into the second section, and after that the third. Our work in school was to have a lot of split peas, those were the half split peas, the yellow and green split peas, on the desk, and she would write a few words on the blackboard and she let us know, I don't know how, that we were to copy the words on out flat desks. I did it for a couple of days, but it was the most boring thing I could think of.

DALLETT: Did she speak other, did she speak other than English? No.

POHRILLE: No, she spoke English and we would nudge each other what she meant. But she made it very plain that we were to copy those with our split peas. We had no pencil or paper, which was different later on. And--

DALLETT: Were the other kids all speaking German, or different languages?

POHRILLE: I remember German and Jewish. I don't remember other languages, but I don't think I would associate with somebody who spoke Polish or Russian. These were European people. So I wouldn't, because I couldn't communicate with them. But what I do know is that the second class had readers. and I would always look to my companion to the right of me what she had in her reading book, and the teacher had hard work to teach those kids reading. But I would look in with her, and I could make out some words. I don't know how, but I could make out some words. But I always tell everybody the first word I really learned to read was the word, "Beautiful." I pronounced it, I thought it was great. To this day I love that word. When we were promoted I went, I was so

proud, I told my aunt, I was skipped to 2-B. From then it was easy. From then on it was easy. I wouldn't speak the language until I was here a year. I didn't like the way it was spoken on Bushwick Avenue and I didn't like the way it was spoken when we relocated to Delancey Street down here because they never said, "Yes," like my teachers, and they never finished their words. It was always swallowed, and I didn't like the sound of it. So I would listen to the teacher and imbibe her way of speaking and also how it sounded. And when I spoke it was the way the teacher spoke, not the way the kids around me spoke. Do you know that they used to call me, "Heinie." I came from Germany, so I was a "Heinie." What was that meaning, "Heinie?" I felt very affronted. And, uh, at first some of the kids kept away because we couldn't communicate, but by 2-B I began to have friends. In the beginning it was rough. Can I tell you a funny thing that I always tell everybody that happened in that first class? It was a hot June day, before the term ended, and we must have been out, recess or something, and we were all flushed, and I flush very easily. And she sent the children out to the toilets, to the washrooms, to wash their faces.

I didn't ask anybody what faces meant, but I figured faces was close to feetses, feet. So I scrubbed my knees. I figured if the teacher wants me to wash my feet I'll scrub my feet, because I wore knee socks, that was as far as I could go. I came back very much puzzled at that teacher, why she would want us to wash our feet. I didn't ask any questions. The teachers were feared. We didn't talk. That I remember from the first grade. And 2-B was easy. The language came easy. I loved English and grammar. Arithmetic, nah. But it was easy. I, uh, can I go quickly?

DALLETT: Yeah. Sure, please.

POHRILLE: At fourteen and a half I graduated, together with my classmates and, uh, I enrolled in Washington Irving High School for a four year commercial course, and my mother brought me a bunch of roses at graduation, which was very nice of her.

DALLETT: Did she start picking up the language?

POHRILLE: Very superficially because in my mother's place of business which was called a dairy restaurant, as opposed to a restaurant

that served all kinds of meals. Uh, she served milk and milk products and, uh, everything, uh, pertaining to milk products. I can't even begin, you wouldn't know what I was talking about if I told you her specialties.

DALLETT: Tell me anyway.

POHRILLE: All right. My mother was very good. First of all, she had a very light hand in making Danish pastry, and coffeecakes and cheesecakes. She was excellent. Then she was very good at making potato peirogi and cheese peirogi and pancakes. And I'm a pretty mean pancake maker myself, if I do say so. And, uh, we worked very hard in the store.

DALLETT: Where was the store?

POHRILLE: 188 Delancey Street.

DALLETT: So right, really, in the heart of things.

POHRILLE: Not only that, but our store and the beginning of the Williamsburg Bridge were almost opposite each other.

DALLETT: So it was a small dairy restaurant.

POHRILLE: Very small. It had about four tables and, uh, my name had changed from Pepi to Polly to Pauline and Pauline would be asked, at three o'clock, to throw her books down and start working.

DALLETT: How did you go from Pepi to Polly to Pauline?

POHRILLE: Pepi was my German name. The kids in London where we had a stay over for four weeks, maybe the, maybe our things were fumigated there before we went on another boat. I don't remember. But we had a stay over of four weeks and we stayed in an area of, inhabited by Orthodox Jews and when the kids played with me they said, "You're not Pepi. You're Polly." So I was Polly there for four weeks. When I came here, my teacher enrolled me, or my, or my, uh, aunt enrolled me as Pauline. So all through public school I was Pauline. And then when I went to high school, I said I'm going to reclaim my name, which is Pearl. Nobody liked it, even I can't say it without going way down in the register, but that's my name.

DALLETT: So you were helping your mother and father?

POHRILLE: Put down yes. They said, "Throw down the books ." I never did any homework. "Come into the kitchen." Either it was to wash the dishes or to peel potatoes or to wait on tables. Something, something interesting like that, for year and years and years.

DALLETT: And who, mostly, would come in? Were there a lot of German Jews that would come and eat?

POHRILLE: Oh, no, no, no. Do you know what we had, the trade we had? Peddlers. We had the Jewish peddlers, the people who didn't have any trade, who took their little pushcarts on Rivington Street or Delancey Street, and they would pile it with bananas or potatoes or whatever, and hope that by the end of the day, if it wasn't too cold or too rainy or too hot they would have the means to support their families.

DALLETT: Was it too long ago, or could you remember some of the, the prices that food would have been?

POHRILLE: I know that rolls were two cents a piece, or a penny. I think it was two cents, maybe, as I got older. I thing bread was five cents a pound. Maybe it was, uh, my mother charged two cents a glass of milk. She charged six cents a bowl of soup and the other prices I don't remember. Uh, a piece of cake she charged a lot of money, five cents, but she gave a very large piece of cake. (She laughs.)

DALLETT: Were you also, then, living on Delancey Street, or--

POHRILLE: Oh, I wanted to, you reminded me of such a horrible thing again. We couldn't afford, we couldn't afford an apartment right away because my parents owed money to my uncle. So there was a storeroom in the back of the restaurant, and my mother put up three cots near the bags of potatoes, near the bags of rice, near the bags of all kinds of, and we used to sleep in that room I think about a year. And it was horrible because there were mice there and I heard them. But then there was an apartment that was vacated in that house where we had the store, and it was three rooms to the back, so we moved up in the world. From one room to three rooms.

DALLETT: How did you feel during that time? Do you remember feeling you were sorry you were, you had come?

POHRILLE: Disassociated. It was not a happy time. My parents, my parents were not happy with the area. My mother was a hard working woman. She was married to a man who was not a hard working man. She had to, if, if they were in harness, she had to pull the load. He just plodded along. So I had to pitch in and help wherever was necessary, and I helped in all chinks and crannies.

And there was no rest. I used to envy all the kids. On Sunday they used to go to Coney Island. For five cents you went to Coney Island, for five cents you got an ice cream cone. It was a big event in my life when my mother took out a nickel and bought me an ice cream cone. It was not every day. So, uh, it wasn't. I wasn't happy.

DALLETT: Did you have kids to jump rope with, and do that kind of stuff?

POHRILLE: Yes. Yes. Near the Williamsburg Bridge, we used to go across the street, I used to sneak out, because I was supposed to be working. I used to sneak out and play with my friends for half an hour. Then my father would yell, "Come inside." And the I had a very dear friend that I made in school. That was already in 3-A. She's my friend to this day. And, uh, we spoke the same language. Our parents gave us trouble, they didn't understand us. Does that sound familiar to you? So we used to exchange tidbits. She came from large family. I envied her, her brothers and sisters. But, then again, I thought that I had something to complain about, too. My parents made me work. I couldn't go and go to Coney Island, I couldn't take trips. I had to work. It was serious. We used to, we used to lean on each other's shoulders and complain. And ah, then I had some

friends in school. I want to tell you that we were so inbred, this little group of immigrants, that in public school I had difficulty making friends with gentile girls. Somehow they were removed from me. They could do everything that I couldn't do. So a little bit it was envy and a little bit it was strangeness. Cause they used to tell me they go to double features on Saturday. I had never seen a double feature in my life. And they saw cartoons and comics. This was something very foreign to me the first three, four, five years that I was her in this country. Because we were only aiming at paying off our debts. My mother was conscious of owing money. And she didn't want that. So we worked to pay off the debts of my uncle and maybe to my aunt, too. I don't know who gave us the money for the boat. So I didn't have any fun when I was a little girl. I just had a restaurant and I had school. School was fun because we had English. That was my favorite subject. That I excelled in. I used to write good papers and when the teacher used to call on me to recite I was in seventh heaven. And ah, it was a bleak, when I look back on what the kids have today, it was a very bleak kind of four or five years. In high school the world opened a little wider. Washington Irving High School was a beautiful school. All girls at that time. But it was gorgeous. I just loved walking into that lobby. And we had student council. We had, we had to vote for, it was a nice place. An in, in high school I was able to work outside of my home. And I was able to get, towards the latter part of my high school terms, I was able to work in an office and get a quarter an hour for work. And I felt so gratified.

I was making money. That was the first real money. My parents did not believe in giving me any kind of an allowance. It was all ours. I mean, kids now have ten. I know my daughter was eight when I started giving her an allowance. I used to say to her, "Harriet, here's twenty-five cents. You do what ever you want with it. You're not getting any more until next week." At the end of the week she always had five cents left over. To this day that's her thing. But I never had an allowance. If my parents thought about it they'd give me an ice cream cone. If they didn't, do without it.

DALLETT: Did you continue with Hebrew school?

POHRILLE: No. Uh, sadly lacking, we had the store on Delancey Street and our home was on Delancey Street. And then we had another store on Rivington Street. I can't begin to describe the decrepit area where we lived. And my mother was so involved with her store. My mother used to get up at five o'clock in the morning, bathe, get dressed clean, and then go and open the store at six. My father would sleep until eight. Why didn't he have to hurry? And then she'd say, "Come on, it's getting late." So she didn't find any time. There were some marvelous Hebrew schools but they were this side of Delancey Street which was an entirely different area. They had beautiful living quarters on Grand Street. And on East Broadway. Nice Hebrew schools. I would have loved to go, but nobody mentioned it and I, a child did not ask for things in my era. She was told what to do. And

I did it. Uh, my mother was nice enough to find out from the patrons at the restaurant that there was a group of girls very much like myself. But that was when I was nineteen. See, I'm jumping ahead. And she said, "Investigate that, see if you like that group of girls." Which I did. And to this day some of my friends are still alive and we're still friends. But that was when I got older.

DALLETT: At what point was it that ah, you were sure of the language and started to feel accustomed--

POHRILLE: A year later. A year after I acme. Then I was comfortable with it. Because I found out that the public library gives you free books. And I became one of the, uh, what do you call it, when you go and become a member of the library? I was a very frequent visitor. To this day, they know me there. Miss Kellogg knows me at the East Broadway Library. Uh, when I found out you could get free books, you know, in Germany you didn't have that. So I began to be very comfortable with the language.

DALLETT: And was it at that point that you began to feel that maybe it wasn't such a bad thing that you had come here or--, when did that start to happen?

POHRILLE: May I mention something to you? When we lived on Delancey Street. The poverty was so, so apparent and so severe. I don't think people had garbage cans in their homes because what we were accustomed to was having a bundle of garbage thrown down on out heads. People would throw lighted cigarettes out of the window. People would but bottles of milk out the window and what if they fell down from the ledge. To save a piece of ice, to save the money. I cam at a very difficult time to this country. I didn't like much of anything about New York. What I saw of New York I didn't like. When I began to see more of it, like Madison Avenue and Lexington Avenue and Fifth Avenue, I began to appreciate the other side of New York. It's galleries, it's beautiful streets with it's hansom cabs. I mean, but, my eyes were open then, I was big girl. We used to take, my friends and I, used to take for ten cents the Fifth Avenue bus and go up on top and we used to revel in that. And then get off on Central Park and walk around and it was great. We used to walk on a Saturday when we didn't have what to do. So either we went to Clinton Street and that was the fashion avenue of the Lower East Side. The most beautiful dresses and hats. And we used to think, "Oh, we would have money, we're grown up, we're gonna wear this." And we used to dream. If we wanted exercise we would go up the steps to the Williamsburg Bridge and walk over to Williamsburg and maybe meet some people there and then walk back. And this was our daily, Saturday exercise. So we had, we had the kind of activities which didn't cost anything. But we participated.

DALLETT: Did any other kids that you had known from Germany come over to New York?

POHRILLE: The only ones I knew were the ones I helped come over. Four people. But that was in 1942. Yes, they kept, we kept in contact with the Germans from Berlin who were like the father and mother were like aunt and uncle to me. I didn't have any sisters or brothers, I adopted them as my cousins. And they were incarcerated. They paid their price. But the children pleaded with me that I should go to a cousin of theirs, very wealthy, in West Orange, New Jersey, to ask her to send affidavits. Which I did. I didn't know how to get to West Orange, New Jersey from Rivington Street but I somehow, I got there. And I prevailed on her to send four affidavits for those children. When they came we, we just kept in touch for a very short time. They moved to New Jersey, for a group of German speaking, and by that time I was not so interested in the German speaking group. I was more interested in the English speaking group. And we saw each other maybe three, four years after that, but the relationship cooled. Otherwise I had no contact with German speaking people, none.

DALLETT: And when was it you became a citizen?

POHRILLE: In, if the teams of waiting was five years, as soon as

my father was able to, he showed his second papers and he wanted to become a citizen. So he and his daughter became citizens and his wife went to night school, learned a lot of questions and answers and she followed about a half a year later. She also became a citizen. So I, I'm a citizen since 19-- I think my father's papers said 1927. So it could have taken more than five years. And I kept my father's papers until about a year ago and I said, "Why do I have to keep it?" I'm telling you, all these kids, they said, "Look, clean up your house." I kept my father's papers until about a year ago.

DALLETT: Do you have any of the other papers? Did you hold onto anything else? Ship tickets or anything? The National Park Service wants to know.

POHRILLE: No, no. I have nothing. No memorabilia, none whatsoever. Because if they had, if my parents had, they also cleaned it out eventually. I would have had to take it from them because.

DALLETT: How about some of the things that you mentioned that your mother had brought with her?

POHRILLE: I found this on her wall (pointing to a family portrait with mother, father and herself) and, well, when she died I moved out her

furniture. But I didn't find anything of particular interest. My father had some very ancient coins from his father but he didn't give them to me. When he migrated to Israel, he took them along. I was hoping he would leave them for me but he didn't.

DALLETT: When did he migrate to Israel?

POHRILLE; 1962. My mother died in 1960 and he had a brother living in Israel and he said, "Well, I'm getting older." My father was seventy-four when he went there. And at eighty-four he died. He spent ten years in Israel.

DALLETT: And when, when he was in Germany thinking about whether to come to the United States, was there any possibility of going anywhere other than America?

POHRILLE: No, my mother had a sister here. My mother had an uncle here. This was the golden land.

DALLETT: His brother then wasn't in Israel?

POHRILLE: Oh, no, no. This happened after the Second World War. I mean, that's another story. No, no. Over there anybody who had a

relative in America, there was such an influx of immigrants at that time. I remember. We had a big load of people coming over.

DALLETT: And when was it that you really felt that you were Americanized?

POHRILLE: In high school. Because I got along with my teachers and we seemed to be speaking the same language. And I felt at home. I did not like my surroundings. I thought they were dirty. I mean, Grand Street is now wonderful to what is was, you know, to what Rivington and Delancey Street were at that time. This is, this is a, I feel very comfortable now in my East Side surroundings. But at that time I was quite unhappy. Very.

DALLETT: Did you ever think then about the possibility of going back to Germany or--

POHRILLE: No.

DALLETT: Did your father ever discuss that?

POHRILLE: No. My father had a hard time in Germany. My mother was probably hungry in Germany. And there was no future for Poles in Germany. We were outsiders. And Germany made you feel, very definitely if

you were an outsider. People who were born in Germany were felt to be outsiders in 1934, 1936, 1938. I mean, people who felt why, "i;m a Berliner, nothing will happen to me." And things happened to them. So I don't remember anyone ever saying, "Oh, I wish we could go back to Europe." No. Some people recognized that this was the land of opportunity. They made the best of it. People really, when you think of poor kids, u, who is the head of RCA? Who is that wonderful wizard of radio? When he had a penny and he sent a postcard to one of the recording companies to give him his first job. He always speaks very well of the United States. People who had it in them made a very good thing of being here in the United States. Some people didn't. There were peddlers who were there all their life long. But they saw that their children should become lawyers. My daughter the accountant. My son the lawyer. My son the doctor. I mean, they saw that their kids, it was a free education. And they saw to it that they got it. Which you could never get in Europe. No, there was no talk of going back.

DALLETT: From what you talked about earlier it sounds like you sort of passed along those values to your children because you--

POHRILLE: Definitely. Definitely. Uh, there's almost, anything if you want to do it, and you go about preparing for it. I, you see, my parents were very negative. I had very good grades in high school and I

registered for City College. So my mother made me a very unfortunate remark in front of my friends. And she said, "Look who wants to go to college." And, you know, it's lie a balloon. I just thought, "If my mother doesn't think I have the capacity to go to college." She was afraid that I would get too, I don't know what it was. That was the European ethic, the small town ethic, the shetl ethic, you know, don't get too big. So I never went for registration for my classes. Some of my friends did. But I didn't. I just became a little office girl eventually. No, it's, uh, you need a lot of encouragement.

DALLETT: Which you provided for your children.

POHRILLE: Oh yes, oh I used to push them, yes. My daughters are college graduates and still within the boundaries of the Orthodox community, but they are wide awake, they are aware of what's happening here. And it's nice.

DALLETT: Well, I think I've asked you everything I need to, unless there's just anything at all you want to add.

POHRILLE: Well, you always ask me about Ellis Island and I say that it was a very, it was a very disappointing thing for a child. But one thing Ellis Island gave me a chance to stay here and live here and bring my

children up here. And for that I'm grateful. For that little island. I can't say anything else.

DALLETT: Okay. Thank you very much.

POHRILLE: You're every welcome.

DALLETT: And that is the end of Interview Number 115, sid two, with Pearl Pohrille and it is 2:05.