

KECK-163

STEPHANIE SEMAK OKUNEWITCH

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RUSSIA, 1909

AGE 14

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APPLEBOME: This is Edward Applebome and I'm speaking with Mrs. Stephanie Okunewitch, on Monday, February 10, 1986. We are beginning this interview at about 10:30 in the morning. We are about to interview Mrs. Okunewitch about her immigration experience from Russia in 1909. Mrs. Okunewitch, can you tell me where and when you were born?

OKUNEWITCH: I was born in 1895, in Russia, because my father was working on the railroad, and it was and (?) and the town was NemaKsciai.

APPLEBOME: Can you spell that for us?

OKUNEWITCH: No I couldn't.

APPLEBOME: Oh, okay, well, I can't either. What was your maiden name, the family--

OKUNEWITCH: Semak. S-E-M-A-K.

APPLEBOME: Slower.

OKUNEWITCH: S-E-M-A-K.

APPLEBOME: What was your town near? Tell me one of the nearby towns.

OKUNEWITCH: What my, where I was born? Romla (?).

APPLEBOME: Was the biggest, was the nearest large city?

OKUNEWITCH: That was, yes, it was quite big because my father used to take us to church.

APPLEBOME: Okay. Tell us what life was like growing up in your town.

OKUNEWITCH: Well, this is the only town we knew of and of course it was very lonely. My mother died when I was only four years old, and I remember her dying because she died at home. And my father told us all to kneel down and say a prayer while she was dying. And I remember the funeral. Now I was only four years old but I guess the reason I remember, it was because of, it wasn't such a great, it was something I've never seen before, and we always talked about it. And my father was left with six small children after my mother died. And he had to work, and after a couple of years, he lived, he worked on the railroad and then he moved on the farm where his father was still living. And that was in a different town altogether. It was quite away, it was on a farm, and we stayed there until I came to this country, on the farm with my grandfather.

APPLEBOME: What was the town that he had moved to?

OKUNEWITCH: (?) and it was (?) which is, would be (?) is like state.

APPLEBOME: And what kind of farming did they do there?

OKUNEWITCH: Oh, they done everything there. They raised wheat, they raised potatoes, and corn for the--they would raise the farming enough to last them a whole year. They had cows and they had horses. They had sheep, they had chickens, they had just about everything they loved on for the whole year from their own farm that they raised.

APPLEBOME: Who took care of the children after your mother died?

OKUNEWITCH: My father. Well, the oldest one was 15 years old, my brother was 16, he just finished school in Russia, and he wanted to go to University in Russia, and they told him he couldn't because he was Roman Catholic. They, even though the Czarina (?), he, the only one he could go to, in Russia, to University, to become a lawyer, engineer, or a doctor, was Russian Orthodox. And, so they told my brother that he could go if he drops his name, and he drops his religion, they'd give him a new name, and they'll give him, he has to belong to the Russian Orthodox instead of Catholic. So, he asked my father to give him money and he wanted to come to United States. So he came at the age of 16 to United States. My brother was the first one to come here.

APPLEBOME: He came ahead of the rest of you?

OKUNEWITCH: He came ahead because my aunt was still here. Even then

you had to have somebody to come to. And my mother's sister was already here, married, and he was a baker. And my brother came here, of course, he couldn't become, couldn't go to college. He didn't speak the language or had no money.

APPLEBOME: Did he consider changing his religion in Russia?

OKUNEWITCH: No, no, no. That's something he wouldn't do it. Even at the age of 16, he said, if he can't live the way he was born, he didn't want to stay here. And they, after nine years, he couldn't even write in Russian after finishing Russian high school. But he hated the Russian religion so much because, Russian language so much, that he, you know, they wouldn't give him the opportunity to become what he wanted to be.

APPLEBOME: And what was your childhood like?

OKUNEWITCH: Well, for us, we was young and it was happy, it was good. We sort of got along.

APPLEBOME: What were some of the games that you played?

OKUNEWITCH: The only game, with the only dolls we had, well many a times my grandchildren would say, "Grandma, what kind of a doll did you have?" We would take a little stick, and we'd put a little rag on it, and put like a kerchief, and make believe this is our little doll. And the only games that they had, where we lived were, on Easter time, they'd have, everybody put the swings up outside, and they would swing on the swing, and this is the

only game. Or we used to play, instead of checkers, we'd have little stones that you played checkers. This is the only kind of games that we had.

APPLEBOME: Did you go to school?

OKUNEWITCH: No. My father got a private tutor, because he said, "You can't go to a Polish church with a Russian book," so he got a Polish tutor and they came to the house. I remember a young man, and he, of course, it was only, not only our family, but people from the village would come, and the tutor would stay in one house for a week, then go some place else. And of course, he had to teach children from, maybe, five to sixteen, and there would be maybe 15 or 16 children. And we could not read loud. We had to whisper like because of the gendarme, that ;s the Russian police, would come through, and they'd hear this children there. And when we went on recess, we had to go only by two's, we couldn't go the whole crowd because they didn't want the gendarme to find out there is a teacher there in someplace where they teach more than Russian. We weren't allowed to teach Polish language. My father didn't think that we, the girls, of course my brother, my father took my brothers to the city to go to school. But the girls, he had the tutor in the house so he didn't feel they need as much education as the men.

APPLEBOME: Who took care of the housework after your mother had died?

OKUNEWITCH: My sisters.

APPLEBOME: And you?

OKUNEWITCH: No, I was only four years old. My mother died in 1900,
and my brother came right away in 1900 here, right after my
mother died.

APPLEBOME: What did you hear from him about the United States? Did
he write to the family?

OKUNEWITCH: Oh yes. He used to write to my father and asked him, "Oh
it's so beautiful, we should all come here. And it's free,
you can go to school, you can go to church and nobody stops you."
And, see we couldn't, even after 1904, we couldn't even, in
Russia, the Catholic Church couldn't have a procession outside of
the church because there was a little bit of revolution in 1904,
so after that you had to, the priest could not have a sermon
outside of the church, because it was hot in the summertime he had
to have it, everything was inside of the church. You couldn't
have anything outside the church. So we just, uh, but my father
was a very religious man. He used to take us to church, uh, even
when we lived on the railroad, where my father was working for the
railroad. He used, if the weather was nice, he would take us to
the city to go to church on Sunday. And, um, the best. I remember
the best part of it that we used to love to go to church because
after church, he would take us into a little inn, and he'd buy us
a glass of tea, and a pretzel. And that was such a big treat.

APPLEBOME: That's very nice. So you had heard from your brother in

the United States, and what--

OKUNEWITCH: And he wanted us to all come, and my father said he was too old, and then he wrote again and he says, "Let the girls come," so my father let the two middle ones go. My older sister and my, next to me and I was the youngest of the family. We stayed with my father 'til he died.

APPLEBOME: Where did you family get the money for your sisters to travel?

OKUNEWITCH: Well, at that time, believe it or not, even in 1909, my ticket from Russia to United States, was only \$19. So, my father borrowed it, first from my uncle, because my uncle, I guess, had a little more money. And he lent it to my brother, then my brother when he worked here, he sent the money back. and then my brother had sent us, after my father died, he sent us the money for the three of us, the rest of us to come.

APPLEBOME: Who were you staying with after your father had died?

OKUNEWITCH: We stayed in the house. My uncle lived across from us, and my uncle used to sort of watch over us, that nothing happened to us.

APPLEBOME: It was three children that were left in the house?

OKUNEWITCH: Three. After my brother came first, then my two sisters, then the three of us was left.

APPLEBOME: How old were the three of you?

OKUNEWITCH: Well, my sister Sophie, must have been, I know that I was the youngest, so my sister Sophie was, must have been about 15 or 16. And then Mary was just a year older than I was, than I would be.

APPLEBOME: And how were the arrangements made for you to travel?

OKUNEWITCH: Well, my brother sent a ticket, and the agent in this country told him if he sends one ticket so we wouldn't be separated, that being that we were young. So he sent one ticket, the agent, that's what he told him. So when they would call us, even on the train, when they called you to make sure that everybody gets on. Because you traveled sort of with an agent, you didn't travel alone. So the agent would come to the, at the station, and every, every so many stations, the agent would change hands, from agent to another. And they would call the names out, they would call, "Sophie, Mary, Stephanie Semak." So the three of us would never be separated from the train, or, so that's why we were always together until we came to, uh, we came from Russia. We came with a horse and wagon to the train. Then we took the train and we went as far as, uh, near Austrian border, then they put us up. Now we left sometime in February, and we didn't get here 'til March.

APPLEBOME: This was February of 1909?

OKUNEWITCH: That's right. And, we were put in a barn near the Russian border, so when they took us, of course, in February then, it was very, it was a lot of snow. And they made us walk, in fact, when they put us in the barn, they told us we could not talk, the whole crowd, how many was there. And, we had to whisper, and then sometime during the night, the agent woke us up and told us to walk this one straight line where the snow was, not to

make footsteps, until we come to the Russian border. And the Russian border, there was a soldier there. He took his coat off, and he told us to step on the coat, not to step on the snow, there shouldn't be any marks, and then we crossed the Russian border into Austria. Then we were taken into a little inn there, and I remember the lady made us hot chocolate, and told us we could talk, we didn't have to whisper any more.

APPLEBOME: You were crossing the border illegally. Did you know that?

OKUNEWITCH: Oh well, we knew because, see there was a lot of young men with us. And the Russia didn't want the young men to leave the country because on account of when they were 18 or 21, they had to serve in the army. So that's why they, so this whole group went not legally across the border, yes, that's right.

APPLEBOME: Were you afraid?

OKUNEWITCH: No, I guess we were too young to, to be afraid, and before we left, we had to go to the town, and get a passport. Because in Russia, you had to get a passport and they told us to get a passport into the country, that we were not leaving the country. So our passport was into Russia, because if you were going out of Russia you got a different passport, because on a train, the conductor would come by and want to know where's your passport, so you had to have a passport. So we all had passports into Russia, not out of Russia.

APPLEBOME: Do you remember who had to pay a bribe to the soldier?

OKUNEWITCH: Must have been probably the agent, because we didn't.

APPLEBOME: So you crossed the border. What were you carrying with you?

OKUNEWITCH: Well, my sister-in-law Rhoda said, told us just to bring pillows, nothing else. So we didn't carry them, that went with the luggage, whatever it was luggage, because when we got to Holland, where we took the boat, we had to wait a couple of days 'til our luggage came, our pillows that my sister-in-law said. So the kerchief, I guess that's the kerchief I must have worn when I came to this country, because she says not to bring anything, so maybe just a change of clothes we had, I don't remember, we didn't have anything to carry.

APPLEBOME: Were you carrying anything over your shoulder, do you remember? Were you carrying food?

OKUNEWITCH: No, because we got food all over, we got free food, we got food on the train, we got food when we got the train, everything was sort of provided, I guess, by the agent.

APPLEBOME: How did you feel about leaving your village?

OKUNEWITCH: Oh, we was happy. I was very happy because I was coming, I was coming to see the rest of the, my other two sisters and my brother. Yes, we were happy.

APPLEBOME: Do you remember what other children said about you leaving?

OKUNEWITCH: Ah, my family, or you mean--

APPLEBOME: Other children in the neighborhood?

OKUNEWITCH: No, I don't remember, there were, we had friends and they
all came to say goodbye to us and we all got into a wagon, and
drove off with the horse and wagon, of course. No cars then.

APPLEBOME: Okay, so you had crossed the border, then what happened?

OKUNEWITCH: Then we went to Austria, and from Austria, we were put
on a train and we went on the train, I remember the train
through Germany, went like an elevator, and we could see cars, and
that's the first time I saw an automobile. Because in Russia we
didn't see it, you know, we saw the trolley or the horse car but
we thought, looking out the window, and we see this cars running
without any horses pulling it! And we went from Austria into
Germany and from Germany into Holland and that's where we got the
boat, from Holland. I don't remember, it was Notterdam or Bremen.
So, one was the boat and one was the city, which it was I don't
remember, but I know it was either the city Notterdam or the town
Notterdam, then the boat would be Bremen, whatever.

APPLEBOME: If it was Holland, it was probably Rotterdam.

OKUNEWITCH: Rotterdam, maybe.

APPLEBOME: And then what arrangements were made for you to board the
boat?

OKUNEWITCH: Well, we, I remember us getting onto a small boat, and we all were so scared because we thought, "How can we cross with this little boat, across the big ocean?" But that little boat took us to a big one, and we got on this German, uh, Dutch boat, and of course, the sailors and everybody spoke German, and it was also Jewish Passover. And of course, we traveled third class, down below. But we met some nice children and they were on the first class and they would ask us, and would go up there with the guest that would ask us, the children, and they would give us matzoth, they had, because that was Jewish Easter that time. And I think it took us 12 or 13 days to go across the ocean, to get to United, to Ellis Island.

APPLEBOME: Did you get seasick?

OKUNEWITCH: No, my sister Mary and I, the youngest, were never seasick. We used to run around, up and down on the stairs and everything. My sister Sophie, the oldest one, was sick, she was seasick. But we wasn't.

APPLEBOME: Did you play with other children?

OKUNEWITCH: Yes, on the boat, yes. We had a lot of friends, we met a lot of friends. And of course, Jewish friends could speak Jewish, so that was good, could speak Russian, so that was good. But, the other Dutch, we sort of motioned with our hands, somehow we got along, everybody got along fine. Until we came to the United States. I remember coming when we were close to Ellis Island, and the people that was here already. I remember them, they, older

people, grown-ups, they all got down on their knees and they prayed loud, "Than God we're here," and that's when they saw the Statue of Liberty.

APPLEBOME: What did you think when you saw the Statue of Liberty?

OKUNEWITCH: Well, we didn't know, well it was, of course, we knew that's where my brother's going to pick us up, you know, we were--it was Easter Sunday when we arrived here, and they wouldn't let us off the boat, being it was Easter Sunday, we had to wait 'til Monday. And on Monday, we went through, there was a doctor, looked at our eyes, on the boat, then when we got off on Ellis Island, a doctor--I remember that most of them, they were more interested in eyes than anything else. And they examined our eyes, and let us go through, and then was a big, big, long room. We didn't stay overnight on Ellis Island because it was Monday and my brother came to pick us up. And it was a great big room, and my brother was standing on one end of the room, and three of us was standing over here, and somebody asked, "Do you know him?" After nor seeing my brother, because he left in 1900, and that was none years ago. Of course, he got a little heavier, a little older, but we said, "Yes, it is my brother." (she laughs) even when we know it was him.

APPLEBOME: And was it?

OKUNEWITCH: Yes, it was.

APPLEBOME: Good.

OKUNEWITCH: Yeah. He was already married and he had one son. And he picks us up, and I remember taking another ferry--

APPLEBOME: Let's just talk a little bit more about Ellis Island, if

we can? Do you remember any of the questions that they asked you?

OKUNEWITCH: No, I don't remember> The only thing I remember, the first time I saw a black person. And I was so scared because these ladies were wearing a white uniform and their faces and their hands was so black, and we were so terribly scared of them, because we didn't even hear in Russia, about the black people. So that's the only thing that, you know, of Ellis Island I remember was, scared of black people, and that's about it.

APPLEBOME: Did you see people who didn't pass the medical examination?

OKUNEWITCH: No. Because they, you just went into, like one person at a time, and so you don't know if the rest were passed or not.

APPLEBOME: What did it look like in the great hall?

OKUNEWITCH: Well, I remember it was just one big room, to me it was a very big room. And of course, to me, anything to us that we hadn't seen anything so big, and huge and beautiful, as it was, so to us it was just another beautiful place.

APPLEBOME: Was your sister in charge of shepherding you along, your older sister?

OKUNEWITCH: My, well, of course, we were so close to her because she's always been with us since my mother died. She was, you know, the oldest of the girls, and she, we sort of always cling to her, more than ourselves.

APPLEBOME: She had a big responsibility.

OKUNEWITCH: She had a big responsibility, yes.

APPLEBOME: Was she worried that you might not be admitted into the country?

OKUNEWITCH: No, I guess none of us were worried, you know, (she laughs) I don't think we thought of being worried, because my brother had no trouble of coming to this country. When my two sisters came, they had no trouble of coming to this country. So I guess we just thought, there is no problem at all.

APPLEBOME: And you said there were people who got down on the deck of the ship and started to pray?

OKUNEWITCH: Started praying loud. "Thank God that we--" Everybody prayed in their own language, that they were here, but we knew what they were praying for because they were down on their knees.

APPLEBOME: All along the deck of the boat?

OKUNEWITCH: Yes, yes, when they, because we were out on the deck, and the, when they saw the Statue of Liberty. That's the first thing the people, all the people got down on their knees, and they thanked God that we're here.

APPLEBOME: Okay, so we're up to, you've passed through the examination on Ellis Island, and your brother has met you,

then what happened?

OKUNEWITCH: Then he took us on a ferry, and we, after we got off the
ferry, he took us on the trolley, until we got to my brother's
house in Newark, New Jersey. And he lived, 26 Montgomery Street,
Newark, New Jersey, which I don't remember my daughter's phone
number but I remember that address, and I think I will always
remember it. It was so great and, of course, I was too young to
get a job. My sisters, my sister Sophie, right away, got a, I
stayed with my brother, my sister Mary and I stayed with my
brother for awhile. And my sister Sophie went to work in St.
Joseph's Seminary. That's where my sister Anna, when she first
came to this country, she worked in the Seminary, and then my
sister Sophie went to work there. And my sister Mary, when she
was 16 years old, they took her, but they wouldn't take me because
I was too young. Even then, you had to be 16 years old to go to
work someplace. So I couldn't get a job, until Sisters, nuns,
found a place for me, up in Pelham, New York, to do housework.

APPLEBOME: But when you first arrived in Newark, what did you do
then?

OKUNEWITCH: Oh nothing, we, whatever my sister-in-law used to tell
us to do, we done it. And then she would tell us to get out
of the house, she would say, "Go for a walk," and my sister Mary
and I would go and walk on Springfield Avenue, because that's
where the beautiful stores were. At least to us they were
beautiful. And we'd walk and look through the window, and we'd
walk there until we got hungry, and the only way that I remember

that we knew where to come back to my brother's house, was the barber shop there, that the, that round pole turned so we would walk on Springfield Avenue, then we walked back/ And when we came to that pole we knew that we had to turn here one block over to my brother's house, and we were hungry to get back for lunch or dinner, or whatever.

APPLEBOME: Did you go to school?

OKUNEWITCH: No.

APPLEBOME: So how did you--

OKUNEWITCH: I went to school, well, when I worked for these people in Pelham, they were very kind to me. They didn't pay me much. I got \$5 a month, pay, but they bought me two uniforms, and they got me a Polish and English book, and she told me my work had to be done by, well, of course, I couldn't speak a word of English, even when I got there. So, they really were, had to put up with me a lot, because I couldn't speak the language. So, she got me a Polish and English book, and she told me by noon, after I give the ladies lunch, of course, for weeks she took me into the pantry, and she would show me, "Stephanie, this is flour, this is sugar, this is--" and she would make me repeat it. And sometimes she would tell me to wash the floor, "Get down on your knees and show me how to wash the floor," because I didn't know how. And she would stand in the middle of the floor and I would nudge her, and I would say, "Mrs. Walker, uh," and she would say, "Stephanie, say 'excuse me please'." So, whatever I know today, it's those

people that taught me. They were very kind to me, and they got me Polish and English book and she says I had to be finished with my work at 1:00 and from 1:00 to 3:00. I had to sit and read my book, and then copy the English. And I was there nine months, and I was there nine months and I talked better English when I went to visit my sister, than my sister was here, that came before us in 1906.

APPLEBOME: How was it, the sisters that you hadn't seen, that left ahead of you, how was it when you finally got to see them again?

OKUNEWITCH: Oh, they came to see us, as soon as we came, they came to my brother's house to see, to see us because--

APPLEBOME: Where were they living?

OKUNEWITCH: They were working in St. Joseph's Seminary.

APPLEBOME: And they lived there also?

OKUNEWITCH: Oh, they lived there too, yeah. See, they, when they came, the agent made a mistake. Instead of putting 26 Montgomery Street, Newark, New Jersey, he put 26th Street, New York, New York, and when they came to Ellis Island, there was no such thing in New York. So they used to have nuns, at the Bowery in New York, they had Sisters. Polish Sisters, Irish Sisters, German Sisters, and those girls that came without, they lost the address or something, these nuns would take them. And then place them into, to do housework somewhere. So they had a home. And by the time my sisters, so these Polish Sisters took my two sisters off because they had no address. They took them and they placed them to work in St. Joseph's Seminary. Of course, there was no airmail then. so it took months 'til they

wrote to my father and said that they were working here and my brother didn't know where they were, and then my brother, my father wrote to my brother and told him where they were, and my brother went to pick them up and they didn't want to leave there because there was a lot of Polish girls working there together and they liked it. So they stayed there. In fact my sister Mary, my sister Anna, worked there until she got married, that's how she liked it there so much at St. Joseph's Seminary.

APPLEBOME: Okay, let's just take a break for a second and we'll flip
 the tape. This is the end of side one of tape one of the
 interview with Mrs. Stephanie Okunewitch.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

APPLEBOME: This is side two of tape one of the interview with Mrs.
 Stephanie Okunewitch. Your brother must have been worried
 when he wasn't able to find your sisters?

OKUNEWITCH: Oh, I imagine he was, because the, uh, but they were very
 happy and they, my sister Antoinette had left the Seminary
 after a while, but my sister Anna stayed there 'til she got
 married. And my sister Antoinette worked in the laundry in New
 York, and we went to visit her for a while, after, I guess, my
 sister-in-law, maybe, got tired of us staying there.

APPLEBOME: I have a question, but weren't your sisters concerned
 when they didn't get to your brother's house?

OKUNEWITCH: Well, they knew there's nothing that they could do about it, so they wrote to my father and said that they, they arrived . They lived in Seminary and they worked there, and how much they making, and they were happy. And then of course, my father wrote to my brother, sent him the address to St. Joseph's Seminary, because this was up in Yonkers, New York, and my brother lived in Newark. So it wasn't far, it was only, at that time it most probably was only a nickel subway.

APPLEBOME: And how many months was it before he found out where they were?

OKUNEWITCH: I don't remember how many months it was but it must have been a long time because it, it used to take about four weeks for a letter to come one way. And then four weeks back again. So that's already two months, and God knows how many months it was. But they were happy, and they liked it. I remember one thing, when I went and stayed with my sister Antoinette, in New York, she was staying with my cousin, and she was working in the laundry. She would give us a nickel, one nickel, and say, "Go to the delicatessen store," it was a German delicatessen store, "And get three rolls and bologna." And we'd walk into that delicatessen store, couldn't speak English. So we'd show to the rolls and we'd show three fingers, we wanted three rolls, then we'd show him that we got only one nickel. So he would give us, we'd show him what we wanted, bologna, so he'd give us bologna. And one thing that I remember, he was such a lovely person, he would say, "I'll throw a pickle in." So, with the nickel, we'd get three rolls, the bologna, and a pickle, we's come home and make tea, when my sister

would come home. There she had lunch, we all had lunch for a nickel, the three of us, three sandwiches, and a pickle, we'd cut it in three and we had it.

APPLEBOME: Tell me, what in Newark was so different from what you had ever seen before?

OKUNEWITCH: Well, of course, the city, the people and the worst thing that I remember was, that was the hardest for me, was the language. We couldn't speak, we couldn't understand what people were talking about, it's like a dummy. You see people talking, you know they're talking, and you don't know what they're talking about. So, that was the hardest thing for me until I went to work for Mrs. Walter that I, they got me Polish and English book that I started to learn. Because my sister-in-law spoke to us in Polish, in the house. My brother did too.

APPLEBOME: Had your brother learned English?

OKUNEWITCH: Yes, my brother was very successful before he died. He, when we came to this country, he started to work in the bakery. Then he opened his own bakery, and it was Up To Date Bakery, that's what he called it. So he was very successful.

APPLEBOME: How did other children treat you since you couldn't speak any English?

OKUNEWITCH: They were very good. Everybody seemed to be very, very good to us. And, you know, the people, the older people, and

the younger people--I remember when I worked for the, in Pelham, for those wealthy people, because in 1909 they had two cars, so they must have been wealthy. And, this people across the street sent a piece of cake for Mrs. Walker, and Mrs. Walker washed the plate, I didn't see the cake, and she says, "Stephanie, take this plate, and go to the back door, and say, "Thank you very much, the cake was very good.'" So, I go to the back door and knock at the door, rang the bell, and there was three maids there, where our house was the same like hers. And here I was 14 years old, a kid, and they pulled me in, I says, "No, no. Mrs. Walker said to come home." They pulled me in, they sat me down, and they gave me tea, they gave me cake, and when I come back, Mrs. Walker was so mad, because I stayed so long. Of course, they were trying to pump me out what I was doing, how much money I was getting, and what kind of work I was doing, but these girls just wanted to pump the news out of me.

APPLEBOME: They spoke Polish also?

OKUNEWITCH: No, no, English. No, they were English people.

APPLEBOME: What would you do for entertainment?

OKUNEWITCH: What kind of entertainment? Well--

APPLEBOME: If you had a nickel would you go to the movies?

OKUNEWITCH: The first movie I went to must have been, uh, I was already working for Middlebrooks in South Orange, New Jersey, and whatever it was, a nickel or

whatever I spent, and I thought it was so terrible. Here I spent a nickel to see, to see the movie. And that was the first movie I saw, maybe in 1918 or 1919, I never went--we never went to movies, never. There was no television, there was no radio, but it was happy. It was different.

APPLEBOME: When you finally got to drive in a car, 'cause you said
 you had never seen a car, then you saw one in Germany, when
 did you finally get to drive in one?

OKUNEWITCH: When I worked, the first place that I worked for, for Walker's.
They had two cars, and every Sunday they would take me to church. And that's when I drove
the car, uh, that we went in a car. That's the first time.

APPLEBOME: You enjoyed that?

OKUNEWITCH: Well, anything, it was, even if I went to, fora walk around the
block, I enjoyed it because it was, it was so beautiful, it was so different, and I guess
that's why.

APPLEBOME: Did you miss your old country?

OKUNEWITCH: No, never, because even when I, after my husband died,
 mu son-in-law would say, "Mother, why don't you take a, go to
Europe, you've got money, why don't you go to Europe, and see the
place where you was born?" And I says, "There's nothing there
that I want to see, I don't want to see nothing there, forget it.
There's nothing that I miss there." I would have liked to see my
uncle, because he was very kind to us, after my father died, but
he must have died too, because he never wrote to us anymore. And,

but as far as seeing the place where I was born, I says, "Well, maybe I'd like to see my father's grave, but, but goodness, I could go to any cemetery and make believe my father is buried there." I didn't want to go back there, and I wouldn't go back there.

APPLEBOME: Did you ever hear from your grandparents after you had left?

OKUNEWITCH: I didn't have any. My grandfather lived with, my father's father lived to 106 years old, because I remember him, he was such a kind, gentle person. And he was kind to us because, even in Russia, we spoke Russian and Polish, even in Russia, they spoke different dialect Russian, in the, on the farm that we did, where we came from. So, it was hard for my grandmother to understand us, or my grandfather, but he used to put up with us. He was very kind to us. And he died when he was 106, my grandmother died when she was 104. And yet my father died so young, and my mother.

APPLEBOME: What did your parents die from?

OKUNEWITCH: Well, in Europe, there was no doctors. If you got sick, you had to go, at least where we came from at that time, you had to go to the hospital. And my mother was so afraid to go to the hospital, because her mother, my mother's mother, when she went to the hospital, she was a young woman, because my mother got married when she was 16 years old, and when she went to the hospital, and she was very sick and they, she got better, and she wanted to go home, my grandfather went to pick her up--this is the story that my father told us. And that's why my mother used to be so afraid to go to the hospital, and because when she wanted to go

home, the doctors told her to stay there, and she stayed overnight and in the morning, my grandfather came to pick her up, and they said, "There's nobody by name of Colamboska (?), because that was my mother's maiden name, Colamboska (?). And who you going to sue, because the hospital was owned by the Czar. So you couldn't sue them, and she just disappeared. That was it! Was gone. So, during the Russian-Turkish War, my father, met my grandfather, he was also in the same army. And the male nurse was in that same outfit, and he was shot through the legs, that male nurse, and when they brought the three of them in the hospital in the same room, my father, my grandfather, and this male nurse. And this male nurse recognized my grandfather and he said to the doctor, "Is his name--" this is the story that my father told us--he says. "His name Colamboska?" he says, "Yes." So he says, "I've got a confession to make. I was the one that put your wife to sleep during the night, the doctors wanted to find out what she died from, they opened her, and they never sewed he up, they just, she died and that was the end of it." And that's why, when my mother, everytime she got sick, of course, there was no doctors, you had to go to hospital. Soon as she got a little better, she cried she wanted to go home. So, she was sick, she came home, and she was, I don't know how long she was sick home, and she died. And my father, I don't know, he just died, whatever it was, who knows?

APPLEBOME: So, you had come to the United States, and first you were in Newark, and then you were in Pelham, what happened after that?

OKUNEWITCH: After Pelham, I went to work with my sister. Antoinette was working in New York, on 50th and Ninth Avenue for people and they had a little girl, Elaine, nine months old. And my sister came to see me. And she says, "You're working for \$5 a month, and you're doing this housework, and washing and ironing in this great bi house. You come and stay with me, and all you have to do, just take care of Elaine, the baby, nine months old." So, I thought that was great, so I told Mrs. Walker, "I'm leaving," and she was mad because, you know, she, they put up a lot with me. And anyway, I left, and I went to work with my sister for awhile.

APPLEBOME: How did you like New York City?

OKUNEWITCH: Anything that I, there wasn't a thing that I disliked. I liked New York City, and we lived on 50th and Ninth. The people had a drug store, and I took care of Elaine, and my sister done the housework, and cooking. Then my sister left, then I took over the house, the work and the cooking and everything, Elaine was already older. Then from there I wanted to work together with my sisters in the Seminary, so I went to work in St. Joseph's Seminary. So I left Shapiro's and I went to work in the Seminary and I worked there for awhile. Then my sister-in-law insists that I should leave and stay with them and work in the shop or somewheres. She says, "People are hiring to work in Edison, New Jersey, in Harrison. So I went to stay with my sister-in-law and I worked for two weeks, in Harrison, at Edison, to put the little brass things that you screw on. Well, I worked so hard. It wasn't, it was, the work wasn't that bad but I worked from nine to five. I'd come home, my brother was then had a bakery, my sister-

in-law had four children. I had to take of the children, do the housework. On Saturday and Sunday, I had to scrub the floors, my sister-in law wanted me to scrub them. And I worked there two weeks, and I says, "Forget it." This is, it's true I got more money, but I was working harder, so then I went, I quit and I went to an employment agency and I said, "I want to do housework again," and they, that's when I started to work in South Orange, New Jersey, for the people named Middlebrooks, and they were awfully nice to me too. And I worked there until I got married in 1918.

APPLEBOME: How did you meet your husband?

OKUNEWITCH: I, uh, my sister was already married, my sister Anna was already married, and I used to, on my day off, I used to come to see her, and she lived in New York, and, of course, I used to come to see my sister Anna, and my husband had come to visit her, and that's how I met him. We didn't know each other for long, maybe couple of months, maybe I saw him three times, and we got married (she laughs).

APPLEBOME: Was he an immigrant also?

OKUNEWITCH: Yes, yes. He came just before the First World War broke out. He also sneaked the border, because, he served four years, or three and half, whatever, in the Russian Army, had to serve before the War. And he served in the Army and then as soon as he gets back from the Army, and he came to the United States. He had some Jewish friends from his hometown, and they, he came to

them and he stayed with them. And then when I met my husband, we got married in 1918, in May, and I was married 'til 1949, 'til he died. Had four children.

APPLEBOME: Thank you very much. That was a very good interview.

OKUNEWITCH: Oh, thank you (she laughs).

APPLEBOME: This is the end of side two of tape one of the interview with Mrs. Stephanie Okunewitch. This is the end of Interview Number 163.