

NPS-5/ADELA HUTNER

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POLAND, 1931

AGE 22

PASSAGE ON "THE KOSCIUSKO"

NASH: Today is August 20, 1973 and I am visiting with Mrs. Adela Hutner in her home and she lives in Queens. What section of Queens?

HUTNER: Rego Park.

NASH: In Rego Park (break in tape) came to the United States in 1931 at the age of?

HUTNER: Twenty two.

NASH: And she came--she had just been married and we are going to get her story about where she lived, where she grew up and what it was like to come to this country and make the adjustments that all immigrants must make.

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Mrs. Hutner, what year were you born?

HUTNER: I was born on October 11, 1908 in Tarnow, Poland. At that time it was the Austro-Hungary Empire. I was the youngest member of a large family. There were six of us, six daughters and one son. My father was a merchant and my mother was a very kind, warm housewife. I went to school there like all my sisters and my brother and some of them are professional people. I was a law clerk for a criminal lawyer. I met my husband when I was still twenty-one. We were introduced by mutual friends. He was American born visiting his grandparents in my home town and we fell in love and three months and nine days later we were married. He went back to his job as a teacher in the New York City School System in January of 1931 and I came here on a very bleak March 16th morning of 1931. I landed in New York City port, I believe it was Brooklyn.

NASH: And what boat was it that you took?

HUTNER: It was a Polish boat, "Kosciusko."

NASH: Could you tell me a little bit about the trip?

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HUTNER: It was a very long trip. It took us thirteen days. I was in the first class and it was a rough voyage. We went all the way up north. We even saw the northern lights and a couple of icebergs passed us and I finally landed in New York and I didn't see my husband at first and I was so upset about it and then he showed up and it was wonderful.

NASH: Mrs. Hutner, could we go back to, you said that during the First World War that you left Tarnow and went to Vienna. Could you tell me something about that time?

HUTNER: Well, I was quite young and we traveled, my whole family and my mother, because I don't know. My father was someplace detained by the Russians and we lived in a refugee camp near Vienna for quite a while and it was pretty miserable there. I don't remember much about it, but my two older sisters were nurses in Vienna in the military hospital and the rest of us were together and then we were reunited with our father. And for a while I went to school there and then we came back to Tarnow.

NASH: Were there any special problems that you encountered, being Jewish? Do you remember any?

HUTNER: In Poland?

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NASH: Yes.

HUTNER: Oh, yes, of course. Like every other Jew in Poland was always open to persecution, rejection. However, I was very fortunate, I did not live in our city's ghetto. We lived outside of it. We went to private school, "Gymnasium, and it wasn't so bad for us, but I have friends who lived in ghettos and they were much more open to various discrimination and actual body hurts.

NASH: Could you tell us specifically some incidents that you recall?

HUTNER: Well, on one Friday morning, we were getting worried that there was going to a pogrom and we all hid. The windows were closed and shuttered, and I remember distinctly that I hid under a bed, however, nothing happened in my neighborhood, but some of the ghetto parts were hit. There was some danger but I was quite young. Don't remember some incidents...

NASH: What about before you came to the United States in 1930? How had the climate changed?

HUTNER: Well, the climate was always very unhealthy and we began to hear about things happening in Germany and there was talk about war and persecution and it was a very unhealthy climate. Everybody sort of envied me that I was leaving the country.

However, my family was very unhappy about it because...

NASH: About your leaving?

HUTNER: About my leaving because I was the youngest and to them it seemed such a long journey to away from home. Unfortunately, it turned out that I never saw them again. They all perished in the Holocaust and I was the only one to remain my children and my husband too. As I said, my husband was born here so he had grandparents and relatives there who also perished. Some of them miraculously survived, some of them are in Israel now and in France. But his sister, the only sister and his cousins were here. He really has his family here, his parents.

NASH: Did your family have to go to a concentration camp?

HUTNER: Yes, they did. Some of them died in Auschwitz, Bausenberg, and you name it and that's where they were. Some of them just died in my home town when the liquidation was--I went back in 1965 and I met some people who told me what happened and I never heard from them again.

NASH: You told me that before this time that your sisters were-- what were your sisters?

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HUTNER: Well, I had a sister who was a dentist, one who was a chemist was a Ph.D. My brother was a teacher, a professor. He studied in Vienna. And I had one sister who was a teacher and two were nurses. They were all married. Some practiced their profession and some didn't.

NASH: Was it unusual for a woman to be a dentist at that time?

HUTNER: Well, I didn't think so, not at that time because there were, during the First World War, so many men were killed in Europe that eventually the women had to replace them and they entered all sorts of professions. I knew somebody who was an engineer and she was an engineer and architect and she wasn't considered very unusual.

NASH: What about the position of women in the home? Did this kind of working outside the home change their role within the home?

HUTNER: Well, in most cases they had maids or nurses for their children, so they were professional women and they had the same standing as men. They didn't do any housework.

NASH: They didn't?

HUTNER: No, like here where a woman works and she still comes home

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and she cooks - no. It wasn't so because the minute she a woman there had a profession or worked, she had help at home.

NASH: Well, could you tell us something about your first impressions of the United States?

HUTNER: I will be very happy to because I came here, and as I said, first when I spotted my husband, I didn't come here as an immigrant like most people. He was born here and I received a "non-quota visa." "Non-quota visa." That entitles me to become a citizen within a year.

NASH: Because you were married to him?

HUTNER: Because I was married to a native. And here I have immigrant identification card and it states here someplace that--on my passport non-quota visa. Has to be here someplace, on my passport non-quota visa...

NASH: Right now I am looking at a card that says, "Immigrant's Identification Card, United States Department of Labor," and it says Mrs. Hutner's date of birth and the country of birth, Polish, and the name of the ship that she came on which was the "Kosciusko," New York was the port of arrival, and status of admission here says, "Immigrant."

HUTNER: Right, and here I have my Polish passport with the American

visa which I received on February 20, 1931 at the American Consulate in Warsaw, Poland. It says here that my immigration visa is a "non-quota." Therefore, I became a citizen very shortly, within two years afterwards. I also have Polish expositura. That means an emigration visa from the Polish government in Tarnow and the visa, Polish passport.

NASH: It is a very attractive passport. It is blue and gold.

HUTNER: And with the Polish eagle on it.

NASH: With the Polish eagle on it. Could you pronounce that, what this says here?

HUTNER: (In Polish) "Polish Republic." And this is my United States citizenship certificate which I received on January '33. Right?

NASH: January 31, 1933.

HUTNER: Right.

NASH: It says race, "Hebrew."

HUTNER: Now I don't think we would have that. In those days they still tagged you. You were white and you were Hebrew. I believe if I went

to the Civil Liberty place now they would erase it, but I really don't care.

NASH: So, we were talking about your first impressions of the United States.

HUTNER: Right. Well, when I came here and my husband took me off the boat and I went to his family, they were very kind to me, very nice and I was a little bewildered. And my husband took me to Manhattan. They lived in Queens, in Ozone Park. I began to look around and then I was here three days when I first saw a New York policeman and they passed me and smiled and he sort of shook his hand. And I said, "My God, this is really truly a free country," and I just fell in love with this place.

NASH: Because the policemen was friendly?

HUTNER: Because the policeman was friendly, so much different than the Polish police. And I just decided to stay here and learn the language and become a part of this great nation.

NASH: What other impressions did you have, early impressions?

HUTNER: Well, there were so many that it is difficult to--

NASH: How did New York look to you?

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HUTNER: Well, it was a magnificent, big city. After all, Tarnow was a population of 40,000. There is no comparison. I was very impressed by the magnificence of the buildings and the wide streets and so many people, and, of course, so many cars. That was my first introduction to the coach on wheels. There were so many cars here. I never had the, I went to Warsaw, but even in Warsaw you just saw horse-drawn carriages. I, this was overwhelmed by that.

NASH: Did you find that the food was very different than the food you were accustomed to?

HUTNER: Well, not really. First of all, my in-laws were very much like my own family. Their food was the same, but of course, when I was introduced to chow mein and spaghetti, that was a little different. But I just liked everything. I just took to everything here. There was this magnificent feeling of belonging and wanting to be part of this place.

NASH: What language did you speak?

HUTNER: With my husband, German. I learned a little Jewish to speak to his parents, but I didn't speak any Polish at all.

NASH: What language had you spoken at home?

HUTNER: At home? Polish. Polish only. I knew very, very little Jewish. And, of course, I began to learn English. The first school was Columbia University where they were giving a course for foreigners. And then I went to evening school, then I went to Jamaica High School, then years later I went to Queens College for a while, but I really didn't get any formal education in this country. Whatever I learned was on my own by reading and by talking English only. When I went back to Poland in 1965 I was surprised to learn how much Polish I retained and which Polish I understood and was still able to read and write and speak it.

NASH: What was the reaction of the people? You actually went to the town that you--

HUTNER: Yes, I went to Europe, my husband and I. When we were in Vienna I saw the Polish Travel Bureau, "Orbis," and they had big photographs of Krakow and Tarnow and I just became terribly homesick and I decided to go. And after talking to the Consulate into giving me a visa there, I went to Poland for three days. I flew there from Vienna and I came to Krakow and then I went to Tarnow. A very depressing, very painful experience. The Jewish sections were practically razed to the ground and there people are sad, people are depressed.

NASH: Were there Jewish people left there?

HUTNER: Very few. In my home town there were something like ten Jewish families, but I couldn't get in touch with them. I wasn't there long enough and it was difficult to find them. I just knew nobody there with exception of one Polish woman who gave me some information about my family.

NASH: So that you didn't actually meet anybody you knew from--

HUTNER: No, no, not at all. Nobody I knew really remained in my home town.

NASH: Mrs. Hutner, I would like to know a little bit about the story of what happened to your family, what are your children doing and what is the vocation of your husband, for example.

HUTNER: Well, my husband, as I said, was a teacher and then he went on to become an assistant principal and eventually he was--for the past fifteen years of his life he was a principal of a public school.

NASH: Would you like to say what school?

HUTNER: He was the principal of PS-146, Howard Beach, Queens. He was also for a while a principal of PS-2 in the Bronx. He was very successful, a very good man and he was a delight to live with. I lost him a year ago, August

25, 1972, while we were vacationing in St. Moritz, Switzerland. He died there suddenly. We have two daughters. Our elder daughter at present lives in Atlanta, Georgia and she has a little son three and half months old, Michael, Michael Jacob. I have a younger daughter, Jacqueline who lives here just became engaged. Our elder daughter is an economist. Of course, she is not working now, but before she became a mother she was an economist with the Chase Manhattan Bank. She studied at various schools here and also at the London School of Economics in London, England. My younger daughter has a Master from NYU. She majored in English. At present she is and assistant editor of a business magazine and Wall Street.

NASH: Mrs. Hutner, is there anything that you would like to add?
Any ideas you might have about future immigration policy
in the United States, having been one yourself?

HUTNER: Well, having been an immigrant myself and been so well-adjusted to this country, been so happy here, I would hope that as many people as the government can possibly permit a place in this country, should come. And I am sure they will be just as, given themselves a little push, a little confidence, I'm sure they will make a good life for themselves in this country. It still is a free country. It still is a country with various economical, social educational possibilities and I hope they would come.

NASH: Thank you, Mrs. Hutner.