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ELLIS ISLAND ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee:	Anna Hinitz
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NASH: Today is October 8, 1974. I am visiting with Mrs. Anna Hinitz who was born in Russia and cam to the United States in 1912. Where were you born Mrs. Hinitz?

HINITZ: I was born in small town in Ukraine called Klewara Osieral near Odessa in 1899. Our coming to the States in 1912 was because my oldest three brothers all had already escaped from the Russian Army and they settled in the States. In 1912 my folks realized there was no use of staying longer, but to join the sons in the States.

NASH: Tell me something about the city that you come from and what your family's life was like there.

HINITZ: We were a middle-class family. My folks, of course, were very orthodox, Jewish Orthodox, and we dealt in eggs, buying off from the farmers. My father was with the group of men who had a place where they candled the eggs and shipped them out to Germany. My mother helped out a great deal with that and that is how a living was made, from my memories. I never knew to be poor, but neither were we rich. I believe they said that we had at that time about two thousand families in the town of Klewara Osieral, which would say about ten thousand people. My father's family, some of them were quite well off and whom I remember a great deal. Most of them are in the States, the descendants.

NASH: Was the town mostly Jewish?

HINITZ: Most of the small towns, the Jews congregated in the center of town while the peasants around it had their land around and they came into the city for market day and so on. There were Christians living, but the Jewish population were living together, not far from each other. In fact, there were no Christians between the one house and the other house. We were not living in a ghetto as far as I remember. The opposite was nicely built up, paved street, a very well-kept house. From my earliest days, what I can remember from the town was from 1905 when my father and my brothers prepared for a pogrom. They buried everything in the house in the cellar except to leave one pillow for my mother and myself to rest on. My father and my brothers went out with axes in their hands and they saved the city that night. There was no pogrom. Not only they, of course, all the men. Most likely they organized and I imagine who wanted to staged a pogrom, realized they were going to get immediately counter-attacks and that time the city was saved. Not long after that my mother took me to a second city to visit her sister and there I saw the city, half of it burned down and I asked why, and that was the result of a pogrom. From then on my childish instinct and memory developed

this hatred for pogroms, for not being free to live your free life, which eventually crystallized in my future life. I imagine my parents also felt this hardship although during the business time they had very good contact with the peasants, very respectful, one to another, but because of my brothers who had left already, it was time to leave. I have a little story to tell in between. One of my brothers who escaped from the army was married. He escaped and left his wife pregnant with nine months later a baby was born. No registration of a marriage was recorded, no registration of a baby being born. My father concocted a passport to leave Russia. This mother with a baby, she became our oldest daughter, unmarried daughter. The baby became my parents' youngest baby of six months. All our ages were moved down from my parents to be able to have a six-month baby. I was already then thirteen years old. I became about ten years old. I had a younger brother. His age was moved down. And that is how we crossed the border from Russia to Hamburg. To continue with that, as soon as she crossed the border, of course, she took the baby. Well, my older brother and I took care of the baby all the time. She bought a ticket straight to New York where her husband, my brother, lived. We bought, my father and mother bought straight tickets to Minneapolis where my other two

brothers had settled.

NASH: You bought these tickets in Hamburg?

HINITZ: Yes. In Hamburg we bought tickets straight to Minneapolis or to New York and when we arrived in New York on the ship, the President Grant, in June 1912, right away we were separated. She with the baby was taken to one side and we three children, an older brother, myself, and my younger brother and my parents, on a second, another side.

NASH: Another side of what?

HINITZ: At Ellis Island by the boat. And it was on Thursday and they told us that we will have to travel by train to Minneapolis.

NASH: Let's go back to the boat. What was that like?

HINITZ: My memory of the boat is of a great big under-deck place, not single rooms. We were lodged bed near bed, bunkers on top of us. Very crowded. My parents brought some food with them from Russia. It was a good thing that we had more to eat on the boat. Of course, we youngsters played on deck so we didn't mind it so much. But three

weeks time to travel from Hamburg to New York was not easy. To continue with when we landed, my father wanted to leave money in order we should be able to stay over Saturday to meet with my brother and the family here and he sent his wife and baby home with some other family who came along with him and he searched for us all day Thursday and the two men did not meet. We had to travel, we were taken by a boat to a train and why we went to Buffalo north instead of going straight to Minneapolis, going West, I don't know.

NASH: When you say the two men did not meet, you mean your father and your--

HINITZ: My mother and two brothers and I.

NASH: Who didn't meet?

HINITZ: My father and my brother who lived in New York. They searched for each other and we never met. On the way going to the train we were stopped and asked, "How many people are you?" My father said, "Five." "Where are you going?" "To Minneapolis." "Give us three dollars. Do you have?" "Yes," my father said, "I have money." He gave them three dollars and we received three tremendous bags full of food to last us all the way from New York to Minneapolis.

NASH: Who sold these?

HINITZ: These were men from HIAS, and my father became after that a life-long member of HIAS. We had bread and wurst and sardines and sugar and salt and fruit, oranges, bananas, last for five people for three days.

NASH: Tell me, what was it like on Ellis Island? What did they give you at Ellis Island?

HINITZ: Nothing. We just went through being sorted out and we were put on the boat to go to a train.

NASH: And where did these people from HIAS meet you?

HINITZ: Right in Ellis Island, on the way out to the train. Well, for three days we traveled day and night, which we had to change trains in Montreal on Friday night. It was one of the hardest things for my father because it was Saturday. He was a very religious Jew, but he couldn't help himself. So we reached St. Paul, Minneapolis on Sunday morning, met by my brothers and friends. My brother had already rented an apartment for us, furnished it before we came, and we rested up for a weeks time and

my father said he has to go to work. So he went to the fruit market in Minneapolis, worked for a week, and early Friday afternoon, he said, "I'm leaving work. I am going home to prepare for Saturday." They asked him, "Are you coming tomorrow?" He said, "No. Tomorrow is Saturday. I don't work." "Well, if you are not working tomorrow, you are discharged." That was the end of my father's working out as a laborer. To reflect, that came to my mind a great number of times. Why was it at that time that we had so many small candy stores, little nooks for merchandise, some groceries or other things? Because at that time a great number of religious Jews arrived and they would not work on Saturday. At that time we didn't have a five-day week, so they established these little businesses, and now when I return to New York in '69 and '74, because they still had those little nooks. They are being accused of living someplace else and living out on the population surrounding those little corner stores, which in reality was a result of necessity that those people had in the early '90s when they arrived here. My parents bought off a horse and a wagon from a man who delivered milk and butter and cheese. My father knew about horses as I know how to make a pair of shoes. When I say not compared to be a doctor, what woman doesn't know a little first aid, but he didn't even know how to harness

a horse, and from that we began, with us children's help, did not continue with milk. That was too hardest task. We began to make cottage cheese, butter. He could work on Sunday to make deliveries and during the week, and my parents lived a full, religious life with their contemporaries. It was the year when Wilson was elected President, my father knew the history by reading of the United States more than high school graduates. He gloried in the idea freedom of speech, freedom of press, no oppression. And his biggest tragedy was that he couldn't become a citizen of the United States because he didn't know English. I, my brothers, were taught and it was maybe demanded of us that we have to help support and to carry on the family's economic situation. Naturally, as a youngster I went to school, I shipped grades, it was hard on me the English language. I had marvelous teachers, absolutely marvelous teachers. And came World War I. My brother was drafted into the war and came on my shoulders to help carry on.

NASH: Were your brothers at that time citizens?

HINITZ: Both my husband and my brothers, my husband whom I met later years, a great many of those young men who were not citizens yet, they may have had their first

papers, the United States gave them full citizenship and they were drafted into the Army. Well, it was my duty to carry on. I was in the midst of last year in high school and I told my teacher I have to quit because of the situation. A couple of days later she came to see me. "We will give you opportunity to go to school, to finish school. You don't have to report," she said, "To roll call. Just come to your classes. You don't have to take gym, you don't have to take music, just the essential subjects and when you are through you are free to go home without reporting." And when I told this story to a number of students, later my nephews, they couldn't realize, and to this day don't realize that the students received such wonderful treatment. But I did not graduate high school because of something else. The terrible flu that raged during the beginning of World War I. More people fell at that time from the flu than in the war. Sickness took place in my mother's house. She was very sick and, of course, I did everything physical possible to save her and I did. I did not get the flu, but neither did I continue school anymore.

NASH: Tell me something about the Jewish community in Minneapolis at the time.

HINITZ: We really had and have to this day a very outstanding Jewish community in Minneapolis. In 1907 the leaders of the community understood what it means a Hebrew education. Not that every synagogue gets his own little school, the children are own members. They realized there should be a communal Hebrew school without strings attached and they really established something which to this day is a renowned school. The children went five days a week, not just one or two days a week. From that school, they graduated, became Rabbis and social workers and leaders wherever community they came to the United States. And a great number of those people also went to Israel. Even the pre-state time. And, of course, all of us, it reflected on all of us and we got education and my nephews and nieces benefited from that.

NASH: Do you remember at that time when they were talking about forming a Jewish state?

HINITZ: About the Jewish state. My Zionism came at an early age where as a state for the Jewish people was in the far away dream, although Hetzel predicted from 1899 that fifty years later will be a state. How he was a prophet like that, that would end that same fifty years, the state was born in 1948. But to me it was these childish memories of the pogroms. I was older, before I was married yet. There was pogrom in our city, Klewara

Osieral, where they killed two thousand people. A great number of my father's family, including my uncle's children, cousins, other people whom I remember. That left me in a strong desire to become a whole person. Now please understand me. I have nothing, nothing against United States because, as I have told before, how wonderful my teachers were and opportunities were. Just the same, the Jew life probably that any ethnic group has to lead, and may I say especially the Jewish people, that the street and the school is not the same as the home. I wanted, my husband and I wanted to raise our children within an atmosphere where there could be no conflict between Christmas and Hanukkah and other holidays. A whole group, a whole person, and to that end my husband and I were always involved in Zionist work and the absorption of people that came to Israel and it wasn't just to work for Israel, but to be a participant in Israel to help with whatever we could by plain establishing a settlement, take a piece of land of sand dunes and build out of that a garden city which not be ashamed to stand in any suburb in the United States. The idea was with that all the time until 1932 when emissaries came that Palestine then, they had acquired for the Jewish National Fund a great stretch of land and they wanted to populate it, and they came to the movement of the Labor Zionist Movement where we belonged to talk to people who sincerely meant what they were practicing, to transfer ourselves from the Unites States to Israel with the knowledge that we are going to meet hardships. But they were also practical by giving us conditions that they are going to plant citrus orchards, grapefruit and oranges and clementinas and lemons. All the citrus fruit that takes almost six to seven years until they bear fruit. And in six or

seven years we should be able to immigrate, that we should come to something that will give us a minimum to live on until we establish ourselves further. And we signed up for that.

NASH: What was your husband doing?

HINITZ: My husband in the beginning when he came, because of his brother being in box business at that time, it was more the wooden boxes than the cartons. He joined him to prepare the boxes for the manufacturers, for shipment, and so on. And so my husband continued until--then they separated and became on our own, cartons became more the work than wooden boxes, until 1940. There is a famous date I remember in Minneapolis, in Minnesota, of the terrific, terrible storm that raged November 11, 1940. That day forty people perished on the lakes. Within hours the city was cut off, no transportation, the storm was so great. To give you a little idea, that since November until March they walked in trenches. So high was the snow that the sidewalks were cleared and piled up on both sides, that we actually walked in trenches until the snow began to melt. But that had a bearing on my husband's health.

NASH: --1932 and they said in six or seven years there will be citrus fruits growing. That was 1938, '39, the Second World War got in the way I suppose.

HINITZ: That's right. Second World War came along and who could

think of migrating at that time. We couldn't. And it came to '44, '45, and the thrust is from Hitler and England putting a quota on immigration and we couldn't go. We couldn't get certificates because certificates to go to Palestine at that time under the English Mandate were more important whatever the (?) could be safe from Europe. So we weren't entitled to any certificates to go until the state was established. And in '49 as soon as the state was established, we had free immigration.

NASH: How old were you then when you went?

HINITZ: Just 50. Yes, the historic date is that my parents were the age of 50 when they transferred from Russia to the United States, my husband was 54 and I was 50 when we transferred from the United States to Israel.

NASH: Was your husband a citizen of the United States?

HINITZ: Of course, through the World War. I was the last year that a woman could become a citizen through marriage in 1921. I couldn't become a citizen through my father because he didn't become a citizen, and when I was the age to become a citizen, already was going around with my husband realizing that I will become a citizen anyway, so I became a citizen through marriage.

NASH: During that time before you left for Israel, did you feel like an American? Did you have that identity as an American or what?

HINITZ: Oh, very much so. I vote in the elections and who should be our president and I remember talking about Truman should continue to be president and, of course, we felt the '32 of what the Roosevelt era did for that time for the unemployment and all what was going on. Of course, we felt it and we know it. The people that had small business did not suffer so much because we were not in the high bracket, we didn't have shares and we didn't lose anything, so naturally it was reflected on small business, but we never suffered personally. But I remember the era very well, what Roosevelt did and the changes that came about afterwards, the work in the country, produce work for all over the country and then came the social benefits for the workers. Of course, the unions here were strong. Through the immigration the unions became strong. Instead of working fourteen hours a day for a minimum, at that time established the hours of work. There became no child labor, there was when I came, and the Social Security began to be established.

NASH: Tell me about when you left for Israel. Did you take your children with you?

HINITZ: Well, my oldest daughter was already married and at the time we left she already had a baby of six months so she was already out of our jurisdiction. She belonged to her husband. And my two daughters who also had already graduated University of Minnesota and the Talmud Torah. She became a teacher in both languages, and in Hebrew and in English. She immigrated in her own right to give at least a years time to see whether she could settle or not, but she had already met her husband in the United States through the youth movement, the Zionists. His parents in Washington, D.C., signed up to go to Israel, the same settlement, we call it Baetferute, as we did in Minneapolis. And the two met and they met again in Israel and got married there. My youngest one did not finish high school and after a year she went back to the States to continue her education and she met her husband here and got married and they live here. So in the States is my oldest daughter, husband, two sons and a daughter; my youngest daughter, married and have a boy and a girl; and my daughter married her husband in Israel, three sons, one is already out of the Army and is now in the University of Jerusalem. The second son, who is twenty, already graduated to be a flier in the Israeli Air Force, and very devoted to the country, defense of it, that wee should be

able to establish a state where we could live in freedom without wars.

NASH: I still want to know how it was you went to Israel for the first time. I assume that it is when you immigrated. What was it like when you got on that boat and when you got off that boat and who else was on the boat?

HINITZ: Well, what helped us out a great deal was not that somebody has to do something for us. We knew we had no housing, we knew that Israel lacked everything of necessity and in spite of it all, with all our belongings, what we had accumulated in Minneapolis, we transferred ourselves there. For thirteen months we lived under very hard condition in a one room, which you couldn't call a room. It was where you raise baby chicks. Nobody provided us any housing as the immigration demands now, and until we took a piece of land and we couldn't build wherever we wanted. There was already a number of families in this settlement and you could only build next to a house, another house, another pipe for water, another house, another post for electricity. And the feeling of taking a piece of sand dune land that was allocation for the settlement because they reserved the flat ground and

the black earth for the orange groves. And believe me, the feeling of pioneering work was great because you took a piece of land and you built a home, you planted trees, planted flowers, planted grass, and it survived.

NASH: It was sand when you started out?

HINITZ: Yes, it was sand, very much, the whole settlement. We are just about a couple of blocks away from the ocean. The sand dunes out there. What a beauty to see the ocean right from my porch gives you something also. The main thing is that we have a community congenial. Can't say that everyone becomes your friend immediately, but eventually. My age group are certainly friends. There are three generations living there now and each generation meets their own friends. And now with the grandchildren, there is certainly no problem of integration because they are all born there. Whether you come from the United States or from Poland or from Russia or from other countries, and not all the families who signed up in 1932 immigrated to Israel. We were one of the younger families. 1932 I was only 33 years old, while other people signed up whose children were older and already getting married and it wasn't easy to leave married children to immigrate. Some did, so those who didn't now

we sold them out to other immigrants and now a great number, not all, of the sons and daughters want to settle in the same settlement, which is a lot of progress. Our income comes from the citrus fruit. We established a silk screening printing which we print a lot of advertising like posters, a lot of things. It is not a printing place for books or like that. Silk screen printing. And we were the first settlement to bring in the white turkey to Israel. Now meat is a big problem in Israel and we brought it in and my son-in-law knew about turkeys when his mother served a roast turkey on Thanksgiving there in Washington. But the settlement chose him to start raising turkeys. He started it up, he came to the States, got a contract for the certain breed, and Israel became turkey conscious and a lot of settlements and kibbutz were saved because they could have turkeys to raise and produce. And we established also, because we have turkeys, to produce a washed and smoked turkey meat and all in combination with that, which is very, very fine product. We have our own members who know electricity, our own members who know how to fix the truck and the cars that break down. That is not for even the private members, just for the whole settlement. The settlement is a cooperative. The income is into one treasurer. We receive monthly wages according what we set up to the demand of the time when things

became so much costlier, increased the wages, and we pay a lot of taxes in Israel, everybody does. We are responsible for our young people to go through high school. We have Cupotfuline, which is a social work for medicine, and I am a great advocate of that. I think that saved the country because the people that I noticed here in the United States, I wouldn't say the lower class, but I would say the class that are not financially able to pay these exorbitant prices of medicine and hospitalization and for operations, there to that social fund we get hospitalization, examination, x-ray, medicines, and that really is a savior for the individual family. Well, I advocate for the United States. But it doesn't seem to work so easy in the United States. Their views are strong on that.

NASH: How would you compare, I mean just overall, the experience of immigrating to the United States and the immigration to Israel?

HINITZ: I don't know how to say it just now. Immigrating from Russia to the United States is this terrific freedom that one felt, was so overwhelming, was so good, that you just can't pass it over. Immigrating to Israel, I also came into a country that has freedom of

press, freedom of speech, criticize people. No difference in that atmosphere. The only difference is that my holidays and my Saturdays and my school and my street and my house is one. That is the difference. I have nothing against the United States. It is a beautiful country. Very nice. You can live in it very, very well. But this individual idealism, call it that, is what makes some of us leave the United States or other countries as goes without saying. I wish you could take in all the immigration from Russia now. By leaving the United States, those who do immigrate to Israel, it is not because they are going to be financially better off, by no means. The opposite, we advocate, we talk, please do not come to know that you will be able to be financially better off. If you have this feeling of idealism of a whole family, where are your children going, what are they doing, even the older problem of wars, knowing that we are going to lose so many of our young people, which is the greatest heartache, which is just a year ago that took place. Not easy and yet, and yet there are immigration coming and I have talked with some, a lot of number of Russian immigrants, and it is not easy for them to adjust. We prepare for them much more than we ever had, but eventually when they saw this Yom Kippur War, 1973, October 1973, how the whole country went out in defense

without thinking of various groups, whether the religious group or non-religious group or whether you are wealthy or not wealthy, whether you are the professor ar student or shoemaker or the bus driver. It makes no difference. Everybody goes out in defense of their country. To the age of 49 you are a soldier and after that you also have duties to perform to guard the country. When they saw that I think it took a great deal of transformation into Russian immigrants to realize what it means to get united with your own people. I have heard of Russian immigrants with their hardships, others which are elated, and of a young couple who are making it hard yet to adjust, they will kiss the ground of Israel. We will not leave. They must have gone through the oppression. Now when I read the press and seeing one doctor is being accused for the old times when they used to accuse the Jews of blood baths, of killing people for the use of blood, which is so horrid to think, which is the negative of everything that is in the Jewish life. The opposite, we broil liver in order not to eat the blood of it. And now to accuse a doctor who is well-known, thirty years practice, just because he wants his family to leave for Israel, being accused of poisoning his patients. Who can tolerate and who can think of such conditions.

NASH: Well, just one last question. Do you still think of yourself as an American?

HINITZ: Yes, I am an American citizen. I am. We can have now dual citizenship. Mostly because I am divided between oceans. Two daughters here and their families, a daughter there and the families. I am an Israeli, but I have the freedom to come. No questions. I have my passport, I come and I leave. Every new year I can come again. And that is the only thing, that is the only thing that I need. Another question?

NASH: Okay, thank you.