

NPS-98/LOTH

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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ELLIS ISLAND ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee: Sally Loth
Interviewer: Margo Nash
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NASH: Today is June 13, 1979 and I am speaking with Mrs. Sally

Loth, who worked at Ellis Island from 1914 to 1918, and at that time her name was Sally Sanders. Mrs. Loth, what did you do at Ellis Island?

LOTH: Well, we had to do so many things. It was social service among the heavy immigration. We had two million people coming in within the last two years. See, there was a war in Europe and then before we closed out ports here, that was 1918, we had a terrific heavy immigration. I did social service work among the immigrants. I did secretarial work because we had the briefs to make out when the immigrant was detained, couldn't come in on account of illness or some member of the family or become a public charge, so these briefs had to be sent to Washington and I had a lawyer as my employer at the time and he would dictate this right on the machine. No such thing as shorthand, we had no time for anything like that.

NASH: What was his name?

LOTH: Lipsich, Mr. Lipsich. Anyway, I am not sure of his first name.

I think it was Irving, Irving Lipsich.

NASH: Where was your office?

LOTH: On Ellis Island on the ground floor. And we didn't have walls, we had like metal fences that divided the rooms and everything was open.

NASH: Were you in a room with the other social service agencies?

LOTH: We had other agencies. We had the Italian, I was with the Hebrew, and we had Italian, Polish, Russian, well, all the countries really were represented, but they all had just one desk and they spoke the language and they would go among the immigrants. Now, the Jewish immigration was the heaviest at the time on account of the pogroms that took place in Russia, and most of these people were either told that they had to become one-third Christian, one-third to emigrate, and one-third to be murdered, and they had these pogroms to kill them at. And I know some members of my own family were killed. The Cossacks used to go through the town with great big whips and anyone who was out in the street was whipped and murdered, you know, killed and so on. Well, my family had three growing sons. They were hiding in cellars and the Christians were very, very nice to my family. I suppose they were to all of the people. And my grandmother had three sons who were ready to serve in the army, fourteen, fifteen-year-old boys, sixteen-year-old boys, and so they had to escape on account of if they served in the army, these children had to become Christians. They were immediately served pork and forbidden foods and learned about Jesus and so, and they had to become Christians. And when they came home to Orthodox homes, they were really quite changed already so that the mothers had a great fear of them going into service. And the emigration was so heavy that my people had to

go through to England and stay there a full year before they were able to make a ship back to America.

NASH: Are you yourself an immigrant?

LOTH: No, my father. No, my father was the first generation and I am the second.

NASH: So how old were you when you started work at Ellis Island?

LOTH: I was about fifteen and a half.

NASH: Wasn't that young to be working there?

LOTH: I was taken out of high school and given this job.

NASH: But it was legal for you at that time?

LOTH: Oh yes, at fourteen we were allowed to go to work. And then I went to high school and made up my counts for high school. That's the way we handled it. We didn't go to high school all through or college. It was an expensive thing and so on. That's the way the children got their education, and very few of them had even as much education as I had. When they were through with public school, they thought they had a real fine education. Now I must tell you

that we were only six women working among four hundred men on Ellis Island. They didn't like women.

NASH: Why not?

LOTH: Well, women weren't employed. They were just women and didn't belong in any field.

NASH: How did they treat you?

LOTH: Just beautiful. Every one of them just loved me to death, you know, because I was a young, pretty girl at the time, and I was dressed in long dresses with a little black apron, white blouse.

NASH: Why did you wear an apron?

LOTH: Everybody wore an apron. That was the style in the office. And we had white cuffs, celluloid cuffs, to keep our sleeves clean. And every afternoon at 3 o'clock, I had to go among the immigrants with a big basket with crackers and milk to feed the children. That was given to them gratis.

NASH: This was just the Jewish immigrants?

LOTH: Among the Jewish. The others did other things. I should also mention to you that there was another Jewish organization--are you interested in Jewish?

NASH: Well, in everything.

LOTH: Well, at the time, an organization was formed and called the Council of Jewish Women, and Sadie American was the representative on Ellis Island, and they only had to do with wayward girls. When the immigrant girls came over, they had a terrible time keeping right. The work was ba, they worked in shops, they worked in private homes, and they would be taken advantage of by the men. Many men were without their families. They came here before they took their children. So many of them became pregnant, and this Council of Jewish Women would help these girls through, either see them through their confinement and then send them home or send them home right away. But this Council of Jewish Women was responsible for the wayward girls. We never bothered with the girls, our organization.

NASH: What did they do at Ellis Island?

LOTH: The Council of Jewish Women? Just picked up the girls who were wayward and helped them.

NASH: How did they know they were wayward?

LOTH: Well, we all knew because they would be arrested, and if they were arrested and they weren't citizens, they would be sent right away back to Ellis Island. And any man who was found stealing or begging also right away became a public charge. You know, that he had no one to take care of him. Now the Jewish HIAS, Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, saw these people through by helping them. We took care of their health, we gave them food, we gave them clothing. We gave them homes and we had representatives going all up and down the east coast in all kinds of groups to speak to them to employ these thousands who, you know, just without funds.

NASH: I want to concentrate on Ellis Island, so what exactly did they do at Ellis Island?

LOTH: Well, I'll tell you what we did. The boats came in from Hoboken, and they were not very good boats, but they were big enough to carry hundreds at a time.

NASH: Were they ferries?

LOTH: Yes, they were like ferries, but stronger than ferries. They weren't like the other silent ferry. That was a flat-bottom boat, but these had just like, more like the Hudson River boats. You know, the style that

go up and down, that have two and three tiers, you know.

NASH: The boats didn't go to New York at that time, they went to Hoboken?

LOTH: No, the big boats.

NASH: I am talking about the ships from Europe would dock first at Hoboken.

LOTH: Most of them came in to all places like Boston and New York, you know, and so on. And there they each had a place. Now when I was at Ellis Island, the boats sent their immigrants, the third passengers and worse than that, the steerage, we called them, to Ellis Island, and the doctors went along. They would sometimes have pretty sick people. We had the hospital at Ellis Island.

NASH: You say some boats went to Boston and other cities. Did those immigrants from Boston go to Ellis Island?

LOTH: No, they had their own--now my father came through what they called Castle Garden. That was the Port of New York. But there were too many. We couldn't handle them so they opened up this Ellis Island. Now, you want to know what else we did on Ellis Island. They were fed, they were

given dinner.

NASH: What do you remember about, you know, the whole process?
You saw them when they got the boat, right?

LOTH: Yes.

NASH: What exactly happened to them?

LOTH: They were fearful and very, terribly afraid, and none of them had anything, and the relatives would try to come in, but they weren't allowed on the boat, the ferry that took them across. When they were discharged, they were allowed to go on the boat with their immigrants and come across, and we employees use the upper part of the Ellis Island boat, that big ferry you saw, none of the immigrants, but the lawyers sometimes, they had to give a bond, they were allowed upstairs.

NASH: Where were the relatives? Now, when the people got off the boat, where on Ellis Island were the relatives and how did they get there?

LOTH: Now I'll tell you that. In order to bring a family over, the father made arrangements with various banks and so on and bought a ship's card, a passage, at a great sacrifice because these fathers who were here lived on

practically nothing but a herring and a piece of bread, and we had cellars where the herrings were in big boxes on the steps and they would go there for two cents a herring and they would save and they would plug and they worked very hard, especially in the needle industry, in sweat shops rolling tobacco and so on, that was the way. And the sweat shops were very, very bad places for the immigrants. They never had decent machines, they worked on fruit boxes and so on, and that's the way they accumulated their few cents and brought their family over. Now some of them had five and seven children which you saw in some of those pictures. And, well, they had to pay for every child. Now before they came to this port, the ship's company made it their business to examine the immigrants and not let them through if they were ill, and many of them were detained on the other side for months until certain diseases were cleared up like trachoma, favus of the scalp, well tuberculosis, a great many of our Jewish people had tuberculosis. It seemed to be a disease for the Jewish people, they were so underfed and undernourished while in the foreign countries. And they were book people so they were satisfied to read their books. Well, anyway, they came to this country and we would be notified. We would tell them, "Your family is coming over today." And they would get a pass to go on the boat, go on Ellis Island. Then they would be, just as the plane companies today have them fences looking in, waiting, you

know, they too would stand there. Ah, but they would never recognize them. They would never recognize each other because sometimes the children's names were change too, and they would ask the father in Yiddish, "Who are you waiting for?" "I am waiting for my wife and six children." "Give me the names of every child." He will make a mistake with one name like Hia or Clara or some name that the mother may all of a sudden change, and they wouldn't allow the family in for a simple thing like that. They went through a great deal of struggle. You want to know what I did on Ellis Island. It was my work also to get a verification of their landing. We had the statistical division there and terrific big books, oh about like that. Well, they were too heavy for me to carry and I would have to look up this man's landing in order for him to become a citizen. Now many names when they came through the isle and in a hurry, the clerk would say, "(?)" And he would say, "Goldberg, Goldenberg, Goldberg, Goldberg." And he put down the name of Goldberg instead of Goldenberg or Goldenberger, and I would have a great deal of trouble to get a verification of their landing, so that they would have to give me a lot of information. Not only the ship, but how many children there were, what the names of every one of them was, and so on, that they could become a citizen. It was very important for them to become a citizen. If they were able to vote, it was very important because they could get a license for peddling

and a lot of, you know, that way, here in New York.

NASH: That they could vote?

LOTH: Yes, it was very important.

NASH: Oh, if they wanted to vote?

LOTH: If they were able to vote and become a citizen, it cost about five dollars to get a license to peddle, and the politicians here were very much down on these poor people, so that they would make them pay either much more money or else deny them the privilege of peddling or working.

NASH: I don't understand. If they voted, then they were able to peddle, is that it?

LOTH: No, they could peddle without voting, but if they were a voter, the politicians accepted him much better because they would give him a vote. You know, the politician running. For instance, my people were in politics and we had an election day, we had a great big panel with all the star and all the various socialists and so on, parties. Now, the immigrant would come up and my mother would teach him how to vote. We were democrats, so

mother would say, "You see the star," they all loved the star because it was it was the Star of David. You know, they were familiar with the star.

NASH: What party was that?

LOTH: The Democratic. And my people were Democrats, and my mother would say, "You vote under the star, and go there," and in those days they didn't have machines, they just mad an mark and folded the ballot and threw it into a box. Now, if this man was sent, and my mother had given him two dollars for the voting, if this man was sent to vote and he didn't vote under the star, there would be men there in the polling place and give him a good beating up. He would never forget the beating. That was the way the poor people lived in those days. It was really very, very sad. I know that there were places in Lewis Street where they had about 160 people in a tiny little tenement house. All the relatives would come in with their children, they would sleep on the floor and fire escapes and so on just for a place to stay. Now, I want to get back to Ellis Island and then I'll tell you about the conditions in New York at the time. When they got off the boat at Ellis Island, they were put into sections and aisles. The doctor would be standing by his platform and various little tricks they had for allowing the immigrant to go through.

NASH: Where did that take place?

LOTH: On Ellis Island, in that main building that you showed me,
in the big hall, that's right.

NASH: What did you call it in those days?

LOTH: We didn't call it anything. We didn't have any names. We
had the railroad room, the statistical room, and
names like that, the commissioner's office, but we did not
have names for where the immigrants were. We had the dining
room, we had the detention room, you name, names like that,
but we did not have--now this big room they came through and
one behind the other.

NASH: Up the stairs?

LOTH: Yes, up that, by his desk. The doctor would stand there by
his desk, just one doctor from the Public Health
Service.

NASH: As they got off the stairs?

LOTH: Yes, they got off the boat and then they walked in, in a
parade, up those stairs into the building, and there they were put on line,

exactly on line. The mother would take her kids or a nursing baby on the arm and they would go through like that, and as soon as one of them or two of them were separated, the doctor could tell immediately by the condition of the children and the family if they were well or not or if she was pregnant. They weren't allowed to come in if she was pregnant. He had to post a bond for her too, and we had to separate those people.

NASH: If they were pregnant, that means it would be additional money they would have to--

LOTH: It would be a public charge. Who was going to take care of them? The father had no money, they came in without money. Who is going to confine her, where is she going to have the baby? Now those people were accustomed to having their babies in their homes, and it was no problem to them, but in our country here, they were not favorable to the--they had midwives at that time, and they had no such thing as a doctor in obstetrics or anything like that, but we knew that she couldn't go to work if she had--she couldn't take care of her children, you know.

NASH What happened if a baby was born on Ellis Island?

LOTH: She takes it along as an additional child. My mother happened to be one of those babies.

NASH: Born on Ellis Island?

LOTH: No, she was born just when they got to America, They came through Castle Garden.

NASH: So did that mean she could be an american citizen?

LOTH: Yes, she chooses her county.

NASH: So did that help her mother's entry in?

LOTH: Well, it didn't help her mother because her mother lost her husband also in one of those pogroms and my mother was born without a father nearby, and somebody in the group who they traveled with took care of grandmother and adopted the baby so that they can come through as a married family, not a public charge, or else I don't know what they would do with such people. But anyway, they were allowed to come through, and if it was dinner time, they sat down at these big, long tables. The Jews went into one section and the others went into another. We had a special cook for the Jewish immigrants. They wouldn't eat otherwise, and many of them came through with all their bedding and belongings, a piece a silver that they owned, their last possessions, you know, that they owned. And they looked pretty bad. Those pictures that you saw looked good. Those are nice children. But most of the children I saw were pretty shabby, the clothes torn, and mother would wear four or five petticoats because that was her baggage. You know, she would wear everything that they owned, not to accumulate so much and so on. A lot of crocheted things, a crocheted coat for the baby and for the children, you know, and so on. It was very bad.

Now, the Jewish immigrants were allowed to eat separately, and I never could stand the odor when I went near those kitchens. It was awful, you know, a lot of food.

NASH: The Kosher cooking?

LOTH: Yes. The food was alright and we had a nice Kosher cook, but the place wasn't clean and the odors were just awful.

NASH: Did HIAS pay for the cook or it was paid for by the state?

LOTH: No, the government, the city. The government allowed that the Jewish immigrant. Now after that, and if they were found well, the father could come and get his family. Now HIAS took over, and they walked quite a distance from South Ferry to Chatham Square, where the HIAS office was at that time, East Broadway, and there we had a nice building where we housed them so overnight they could stay, and sometimes the family came short distances like Philadelphia, you know, Jersey and so on to gather up their family, you know, after they were admitted. And we did a lot about admitting those children. If they were well and healthy, HIAS did a lot to influence the government officials and say, "This family, the father is waiting, he has a nice job and he is ready to take them off," and so on. And many of

the girls slept at HIAS overnight, looking for jobs right away as housemaids, you know, workers. The work was very,very insecure at the time. They couldn't find jobs. We had some hundred-and-odd pieces, a hundred and thirty or something, in a shirtwaist factory that burned down, and many of these girls worked there making shirtwaists.

NASH: You mean Triangle?

LOTH: The Triangle fire. And I remember as a little girl how the coffins were going through the east streets. They were very narrow, the streets downtown, and the wailing and the crying and the carry--and these are all immigrant girls, you know, with their first jobs, just helping the family, so that it was hard to make a living and get by. You want to know more about Ellis Island. If they had places like to go to the West or Middle West, the steamship company had to send them, and they would be waiting in the railroad room, and we would give them a box of food, quite a nice tall box. It was about a foot wide.

NASH: I heard about that.

LOTH: And in those boxes, if they were Jewish immigrants, they would get cheese sandwiches, and if they were the Christian immigrants, they would get ham. And they were very happy and thankful, or a can of sardines, lot of bread, they were happy and thankful to get those boxes, but I was

very sick when I saw those boxes because we had a dining room where people came in from outside to make those sandwiches, and it was spread out on the table with cheese and big mounds, and the ham and big mounds, and when the 4 O'clock whistle blew, everybody stopped working. They didn't clear the tables and put everything back in the icebox, you know, where it belonged, but they would leave them on the table.

NASH: You said HIAS made the sandwiches.

LOTH: No, the government or the steamship companies and so on. We had so many rats there at Ellis Island that if you took a walk on the boardwalk outside, you could see them playing around the piers. It was really awful. But nobody seemed to mind it. In fact, if you were eating sandwiches, it would be nothing to throw a piece down and feed the rats with, you know, some sandwich.

NASH: People fed the rats?

LOTH: Yes, they fed the rats just like, they treated them like little animals, you know, came near the pier, yes. We had a wonderful hospital there on Ellis Island under the government, but many of our people died. It was real sad, you know.

NASH: Were people cremated at Ellis Island?

LOTH: No, they were never cremated. The father's had to bury them, and HIAS did a great deal to help them. We had many very important men like Schiff and Strauss, and if I could remember some of their names, and Baron de Hurst. Baron de Hurst did a lot to, and Cora de Hurst was another one, and many of the organizations like the synagogues would make contributions for the final burial. We had a place at Chatham Square where the Bowery is now. We called it the Bowery. The Bowery means a Bower, where it was Dutch, for the farm, yes, Bowery. And there was the first Jewish cemetery. And only recently were the remains of these people taken from there because they want to build there, and transferred to a place for the Portuguese, Spanish Portuguese synagogue took care of them and buried them into regular ground.

NASH: Did you ever hear of anyone ever being buried at Ellis Island?

LOTH: Only when they died. I mean they were buried and died, many of the Christians, and they weren't particular about burial.

NASH: They were buried at Ellis Island?

LOTH: Yes, they were. I think they were thrown overboard in the water after they were dead. You know, like a sailor would be and so on.

NASH: But they were never buried in the earth?

LOTH: I don't think they were ever brought to New York, and they were never sent to Europe, back.

NASH: So, in other words they buried at sea, not right near Ellis Island?

LOTH: No, not near Ellis Island, no. We didn't even have time to beautify Ellis Island at that time. They did have nice grass, but such a thing like a public institution, like today, you see flowers and nice greens. They never had time for anything like that. And when the heavy immigration came, we worked overtime. My hours were from nine in the morning, a 9 o'clock boat, until 4:40, so it took twenty minutes to come over, and many times we worked to 7, 8 o'clock. There was no such thing as extra pay for overtime or anything. And we worked six days a week and sometimes seven when the immigrants--but never with extra pay. There was no such thing as extra pay.

NASH: Who paid you?

LOTH: The HIAS. They made the contribution and they gathered it from all benevolent associations, the Bernay Abraham, and many rich people made their contributions toward the support of these people.

NASH: You began to tell me before how they would examine people and see little tricks.

LOTH: Yes, the little tricks they played, yes. The doctor would have them put their hands down on the desk like that, and if they showed pink, they allowed them that they didn't suffer with heart condition, but when the nails were very blue, we put them aside as a heart case. When the man came in with a very thin little striggly beard, he was like a physical development for some reason. When he walked and hesitated and constantly looked down on the ground to see where, you know, they knew that he had trouble with his eyes, and when a woman was pregnant, she always had the disheveled hair for some reason. We all wear our hair neat in those days with braids, you know, and very careful, but those little women, their hair seemed, what they looked like today, you know, in short cut, and very pale and very dirty. They knew that there was something wrong with the woman. Now the tuberculosis all had, not hunchbacks, but they were all with a little curvature of the spine. They showed it

that way. And they were not admitted either, they were pushed aside too. And then we opened up, of course, our place in Denver, Colorado to treat the Jewish immigrants. That started with a Jewish group and we sent our sick people there and, as I tell you, we had a great deal of sadness among them. I was always tearful with them. When I came along they would call me the Angel of Mercy or some name. Let's see, the Angel of--some name like that when I would come to give the children their milk and their crackers. They had Uneda biscuits, and I would distribute a big basket like that, what the butchers use, great big, and put it on my arm and go up among them. They weren't even used to drinking milk, but I would force it on them, give them a little cup and give them milk and that HIAS would contribute. And when they got to New York, they were very tired and very much excited. We would make little musicals for them, like a Saturday night to dance or we had a little food there and start them out with some clothing. We were very charitable.

NASH: When it was thought that they might have certain illnesses, did they mark them off in the back? Do you remember what the different initials stood for?

LOTH: No, they didn't have initial, but every one of them wore a ship's card on the, you know, (?) ship's card, well whatever, President

Lincoln or President Grant, what ever the boat happened to be, Carpathia and all those old boats, and they would just put a cross for special examination. Now if the doctor showed he was mistaken, of course, he would push them right through. Many a time, with a little pull, we were able to push through a case. It was, shall I say, even I had that pull.

NASH: You began to mention that if they didn't have any money that--

LOTH: Yes, we would give it to them and hold it and that was part of our duties. And I should also say about the girls that came through and the men. They were always so terribly afraid, and the men would hold onto their little pocket with their money and the girl, you know, they would be afraid to talk to each other, to know each other, to mingle with each other. And I should tell you this too, that the German immigrant was quite different from the Russian immigrant, and the Germans always considered themselves of a higher culture. And when they passed a Russian, they would take their clothes and push it, you know, that it shouldn't touch the Russian, and say, "These are Russian immigrants." as though they were especially buggy or dirty, and the Germans generally were cleaner and came from a better element, I must say. Now, about the speech, our Russian Jews all spoke just Yiddish, and different dialects from different sections where they came from. And I learned, this is quite amusing

to, the various dialects. Now, for instance, I didn't know how to speak Dutch, but I would say to the immigrant, "(?)," and that meant, "What ship did you come with?" You know, I would learn just words and didn't even know what they were, only you know, who would yo say, "What ship's card," you know and I would say, "(?)," "ah," then they would show me their card, you know, and so on. Sometimes they had to wait a long time in the railroad room to be shipped on trains out West to go to their destination.

NASH: They had a hard time sometimes telling them where they were going, didn't they?

LOTH: Oh yes, but we always had that little card with a string so they don't get lost and that the families stay together. And that gave us the story. Okay, passed, you know, and so on, held for special inquiry. You talked about Mr. Burkman and what was the other one's name?

NASH: Emma Goldman.

LOTH: Emma Goldman. I was there and I remember when an immigrant was brought in that was to be deported. They were sent to the second-class section on Ellis Island. They had a group where second-class passengers could stay, and they were given a little special treatment.

NASH: The people who were to be deported?

LOTH: Yes.

NASH: Why were the people who were going to be deported given special treatment?

LOTH: These were important people. They were important. They were newspaper people. We had a lot of newspaper men and columnists and so on come to the Island, you know, to interview them and to look at them like if they were monkeys, you know, and they were given very nice treatment on Ellis Island. Yes, they were treated much better than the immigrant was treated. And then, of course, they can speak a little English already, and none of our immigrants spoke English. We has schools right away on the East Side. We had the Henry Street Settlement where we took care of our pregnant women. We had the Lillian Wald Group, you know, that took up with these. We had lots of doctors contributed, you know, toward the help, and they were a real sorry lot, but I must say that within the shortest time, our immigrants became self-sufficient. The mother was a hard-working woman, scrubbed and cleaned from those children, and when they were allowed to go to school, it was just the most beautiful thing you ever saw, how they appreciated this free schooling and free tutoring, and we had a very lot of poor,

poor Jewish Rabbis. I shouldn't say Jewish, our Rabbis are not, but they weren't really Rabbis, they called themselves Rabbis, and they would go to cemeteries to say the prayers and also if a boy became Bar Mitzvah, you know, to help them with their first year of schooling. Many time they didn't like the schooling, the children. They wanted to be American and run wild, play with skates, and you know, we didn't have public libraries then. It was a privilege to go to a library and get a book out. The children came home from school with their little pads and appreciated it very much. I remember when I was a child, the teachers were so sweet that I'm sorry I haven't got it here to show you, but I have a wedding present that one of my early teachers sent me. They would follow you up and find out how you are getting along and give you a nice gift, you know, from time to time or allow you to visit with them and so on.

NASH: What elementary school did you go to?

LOTH: Public School, Livingston Street, Number 4. And then I went to Washington Irving High and I walked from East Broadway where my mother had her home to 20th Street and Seventh Avenue. It was an old broken-down school building, you know.

NASH: I'm going to bring it back to Ellis Island. This is all

very interesting, but you know what--we don't know many people who worked there at that time.

LOTH: I should tell you too that all the Jewish immigrants, the women, wore shitles, wigs, very much the way you wear your hair now. They parted it in the middle and then very few of them had a curl and they had their hair cut.

NASH: Even when it was gray?

LOTH: No, no. They had a little knot in the back and they had their hair cut when they were married and had to look just as ugly as they could. I remember my grandmother, she wore a wig, and well I don't want to go into my own private life because you said you wanted to stick to Ellis Island.

NASH: You started to talk about Emma Goldman.

LOTH: Yes. I remember Emma Goldman. Not too much, but I remember her sitting there and also her companion, Burkman.

NASH: What was his first name, do you remember?

LOTH: Byerkman. He was also a very well-known Communist, and they were supposed to be, these Communists in those days were supposed to break down our government. You know, that

sense. They were wicked people and that you couldn't communicate with a Communist. You know, they were a very bad lot. They were going to destroy our whole country and, of course, the Americans didn't want their country destroyed, so they would be looked at as very, very bad people. I remember when we had the first birth control. I forgot what her name was.

NASH: Martha Stanger.

LOTH: Martha Stanger.

NASH: Margaret.

LOTH: That's right, and she was arrested time and time and time again because she taught these poor immigrants how to keep from having more children. They were so poor and didn't have enough to eat. I remember going into their homes on Friday when they were supposed to make Friday night, you know, dinner, they would have empty pots, just water cooking, so that they can show their neighbors that they too have some food to give the children, you know, on a Friday night. Now that's how poor, how very poor they were. Of course, our styles and everything were, everything was seasonal. All of their work was seasonal. If they went into the shops, it was seasonal, just a little period of

time, and they would come home, you would see them walking on the streets with great big bags over their backs, and they would bring home for the wife and the children to help pulling threads, you know, and even in my own family, when they were very, very poor, they would go down Friday and pluck chickens just to make maybe a chicken for the holiday for the, you know, day. And on Friday night, anyone who happened to be in Shule, that's our synagogue, would be invited home. Grandmother always had four or five very poor men. My grandfather would bring them home from the synagogue to have dinner with us, and first they would have to wash their hands. Grandmother couldn't let them sit down with very dirty hands and faces and very unkept beards and so on. Those were the conditions in those days. You want to go back to Ellis Island.

NASH: I hate to keep going back like this, but what do you remember about Emma Goldman, what did she look like?

LOTH: Well, all of the women in those days looked alike. They were all full-bosomed and large people. We were all very big. They had no such thing as nice, trim corsets and figures, and they all had long dresses and lots of underclothes that even made you look much fuller, and down to the floor. And she had quite a round face and was a very

ordinary, what we call, nothing especially but Byerkamn was her boyfriend, and he was quite a writer at one time, I understand, but none of us would dare take up with those people. They were bad people, you know. Not only Socialists, but Communists. If they were Socialists, we would tolerate them. And even in those days a Socialist was quite a liberal thinker among the immigrants. They soon learned though to handle themselves, and when the children went to school they were cleaned and , you know, their clothes were always made from the older sister or brother to the youngest one. Everything was made over. There was no such thing as throwing it away. Everything was, well I should tell you this too, that we had indoor sports and we learned how to bargain. And I would take a group of children on the avenue, like Avenue A or Hester Street or wherever there were pushcarts and I would stand there at the pushcart. Now the poor fellow would stand all day waiting for a few cents, but here is why we would do it. I would say, "How much is this little bank?" the little bank he had on his pushcart was worth a nickel, and he would say "Five cents," and my children would stand around me. These were members of the family. And I would say, "I haven't got five cents, would you accept three cents?" "No, I will not." "Four cents." "No, three cents." "Four cents." And we would argue and the children would stand there, and finally I would say, "Well, I haven't got the three cents, I'll go

back and get them," you know, and never give the poor fellow even the four cents or three cents. It was really very sad, but that was our sport. That's the way we enjoyed life, just to teach the children how to bargain, and that is part of our bringing up, you know.

NASH: The First World War started in 1914.

LOTH: Yes, but we didn't go into it until 1918.

NASH: Well, I wondered, how did that affect immigration? Did you see it change?

LOTH: It stopped completely.

NASH: When did it stop?

LOTH: In 1918. It stopped in 1918. I was twenty years old and I was given the position to go to Governors Island as secretary. All the men went into the war. And they went in willingly. They weren't drafted as much. The only ones who were drafted and you couldn't get were the married men with children. They hated to give up their families. But the young fellows were all very anxious because the minute they went into war and became a soldier, they were given American citizenship, and that was a big help to them see.

So when immigration stopped and they didn't want to discharge all these people, they were looking for jobs, and the Commissioner of Immigration recommended me for a secretarial job on Governors Island to take a man's place, and there I became Colonel Nolton's private secretary and we made all the vouchers in that time from Washington, and I made Pershing's vouchers out when he went abroad. Now that's a fact. And they were made right from Governors Island. Then I left there. Every child of a good family studied music and art and literature. We were very, very ambitious. I was singing operatic music and going to the opera and going to be a singer, learning to play the piano, did recitation work, and so on. That was part of our culture, you know. There were nice children, you know, that came from good families.

NASH: Do you remember the Black Tom explosion?

LOTH: Yes. I happened to be on 18th Street on the Est Side, sleeping over with some relatives when we had the windows blown in in our apartment and we thought that it was just an explosion until after the next day, we heard. We didn't have radio in those days and you always had to wait and then such false rumors were spread because we didn't have radios and someone would, you know, the donkeys got little ears and the next one has bigger ears, and terrible

stories were spread all the time.

NASH: What did they say it was?

LOTH: We thought it was just an explosion and there may have been a bad family around downstairs who were sure they wanted to kill us, you know, and talk of that kind.

NASH: Were you working at Ellis Island at the time?

LOTH: No. I left Ellis Island and I was going to be married, and my husband, my first husband was a dentist, and I went to Columbia and became an oral hygienist and helped him in his dental work.

NASH: I would hear stories from immigrants about, you know, like somebody would leave around 1913 or 1914 from Russia and then they would say, "I was on the last boat that left Russia before the First World War."

LOTH: No, they didn't know that. No, they couldn't because, as I said, we didn't get the news that way. We didn't. But when the boys left, we were all in tears, and a lot of wailing and , you know, quite different. Today there is more spirit and more joy and music and so on, but in those years it was very traumatic for a man to have to serve because we came from Russia and they all ran away because they had to serve and come here to this country and serve again. Well, this was unheard of. And I must tell you

too that New York was divided into little sections. The Chinese lived in one section, the Germans lived, the Hungarians lived, the Pole lived, and so the immigrant was able to walk up and down a street and recognize his landsman and speak his own language. You know, Polish, Russian, and also Yiddish carried them through. I know that my father tells a story, and I was very inquisitive about the family, that they came through on Castle Garden and lived at Baxter Street, and that was Italian at the time. And my grandmother never spoke a word of English, only Yiddish, and didn't speak Russian either, and she went out looking and got lost, and she was sitting on the edge of the curb crying that she didn't know where she was and a man came over to her and he said in Yiddish, "Are you lost?" And she said, "You speak Yiddish (?)," and she said, "I don't know," and she was all mixed up. And he said, "What are you living here for? Why don't you live with your own people." "We have Jews here?" "Sure you have Jews here." He said, "You go home. Come with me." And he saw her home and told her family that there are real Jews living and that she should come there immediately and , you know, live with these people and so on. They felt very much at home among their own, you know, that they can converse with one another. They were very fearful. And their cooking, the Russian Jew at that time, his cooking was very, very poor, their table. The Germans fed their children noodles, the Hungarian also pancakes, the Russian would give them borscht, cabbage, and going through a house you smelled the different odors, you would know immediately where these people came from, you would know who they were. I am very much on odors anyway. When they were very smelly, the immigrant too, very, very smelly. Not only that they smelled from the ship, you know, but their clothing was very, very soiled and very, very smelly.

Their babies were just awful, awful, awful. When a family was to be deported or a child, we would take them to Ellis Island and there would be a charge for the hospitalization. Sometimes it was a year. HIAS stood a great deal of that money also because the father had to travel and take a five-cent trolley car to get to the Island, you know, and that was a big expense to them in those days, so that we stood it and then the government and the ship, the ship's company. It was their fault. They allowed this family to come in sick and they were responsible and they would either send them back or we would plead to have them stay. Now, supposing we had such a condition, we would have to file a bond with the government, file a brief first of all and ask the government's permission to have this child treated at Ellis Island, and a lawyer would have to come in from outside and place a bond that they would not leave the payment. And we had many good men, Jewish Real Estatenics, we called them, and they would come here and place a three hundred bond to five hundred dollar bond for the period of, you know, but this lawyer was paid for his service. I mean he didn't lose the five hundred dollars because they never had to lose their bond. We would stand good for, the HIAS and so on. You talk about if an immigrant died. Yes, we would buy them right here in New York in one of the free cemeteries with all the honors of a real burial.

NASH: What happened to a child if it went back without its family?

LOTH: That was very sad. It couldn't go back without its family so we would keep the family here and make the mother go back or an older brother or sister, and that was why we

took it so to heart that this little child, five or six years old, little immigrant, just because he is sick, developed a fever, that he had to go back to be treated on the other side. The hospitals were cheaper and the ship companies were able to handle it, so that that's the way he was--and then he came back, oh six months later.

NASH: Did the family have to pay for another ticket?

LOTH: They did not have to pay for the ticket that took them to Europe, but they had to pay for the ticket to bring them back here. They were deported, as we call it, free because the company was responsible, but they are not responsible for bring them back here is the country again, you know, so that the poor father had to again struggle and save and put penny to penny.

NASH: Were you there? Do you remember any instance where that would happen, where they would have to say good-bye?

LOTH: Oh, often, often, often, often. We were making briefs out all the time. I was typing and typing and typing and typing to make these briefs out, and they were on long legal paper, giving the government reason why this family should stay and that the little boy should be allowed to be treated at Ellis Island too. It was a hardship for the family, that the mother was pregnant at the time and the

father just had a small job, and you know, giving all sorts of sad reasons, and the government let them slip through very often, very often. But we had to have it done legally, you know, not to think that, especially some of the small politicians would say. "You know, sure, the Jews have a much better representation so they would get away with it." You know what I mean so that you had to be very, very careful.

NASH: How do you explain the fact that so many people had their names changed at Ellis Island?

LOTH: They had to. They spoke very badly and they were very nervous and many of them say, "Where do you come--Ich bein a Berliner," and they would put the name down Berliner. It was never Berlin or Berlina. That's no name. But all the witz's, and shy, they got their name from their father, like this is Maison, the son of Mia. By the way, Mrs. Maison, the representative from Israel, she changed her name to Mia because she said she wasn't a son, she was a daughter. But we knew by the witz's and sky's that meant the son of, and it made Royalinson, the son of Royalin, from all the countries, and they changed their names here because they were spelled so badly. For instance, a Polish name would be Skyzerti. It was so bad that they themselves didn't know how to spell it. So they would change it from Sandofsky to Sander, to names like that, and it was a much

easier way. And then they had Vladamir, who has a name like Vladamir. That would be Walter in american or Willy or some name like that, but Vladamir was strictly Russian, you know, and so they would, of, they were very anxious to Americanize very, very quickly. The children and the parents, they were, sometimes they were Jews, the first name, like for instance if they'll say Adams, the mother would call the father Adam and it was Mr. Adam, Mr. Adam, you know, that was the way they went through.

NASH: In general, how did they treat the immigrants at Ellis Island?

LOTH: Very nicely. There was no abuse, that is sure. We didn't do anything that wasn't right because there was so many thousands, we had to clear them out as quickly as possible, as quickly as possible. The little doctor who was working for the Public Health Service used to climb up and down the ladders on those ships that came in, you know, and worked very, very hard. Sometimes they had to meet a ship two or three times in the morning and they would start their work at that time. I remember one of the doctors asking me on an Italian ship, I forgot the name of it now, to have dinner with him. The ship came in and it was 6 o'clock in the morning. We went out and had lamb chops, which was a novelty, such a wonderful meal in those days, you know. By

the way, we had a beautiful dining room on Ellis Island for visitors, and people who could afford it, with table cloths and napkins and nice silver service, and the Commissary Contractors, they were called, and they served nice meals. We could eat there, the employees or the visitors or lawyers who came, you know. That part was very nice. There was no trouble. But the rest of the Island was very strong with disinfectant, you know, to---oh, when a ship came in with smallpox, every one of us was re-inoculated for smallpox with serum, which was very dangerous in those days because the needles were never cleaned as they are today. We give you an injection today and the doctor throws away the needle. There they had to sterilize them and many times a patient would get sick after such an injection. And they didn't bother doing too much in disease in those days. If they were sick, they were ready to die. I mean we didn't try to save lives, and if a patient had to go to the hospital, there was such a wailing and breaking of the heads and so on because the hospitals were so very bad and poorly equipped. When a woman had a baby, the doctor came with a Prince Albert instead of a nice white, yes, those (?). you know, instead of a nice white robe, and his hands washed and so on, and he would touch a woman and she would die in childbirth from bacteria. It was Doctor Sumuwise, by the way, a Jewish doctor--now we had the Greek immigrant that came through with the Greek costume with the white, you

know, fluffy skirt and so on. We had--the Germans came through, all of them with very pink cheeks and handmade crocheted. I remember their pink cheeks for some reason and their shiny eyes and they all had--all the garments were knitted and crocheted. They didn't wear coats in those days though. Some of these people looked very nice, but most of them just wore shawls, the mothers, you know, and this may have been taken a little bit later when, oh 80, 85 years ago, when the children wore big ties, and that was considered the way the children looked, you know, and many of the fathers were so ashamed to bring their families home, you know, that the children and the wife looked so very poor, you know. He was almost ashamed to go to sleep with the poor wife, that she wasn't clean, anything, you know. They had no such thing as a bathtub. They had outdoor, outside toilets in the yard and no such thing as a bathtub and they would use the little washtub in the kitchen to bathe the children. For the woman, we had mikfers, we had baths where the woman went on Friday or after the menstrual period to get cleaned up, you know, and so on. And the men weren't much cleaner either, I should tell you that too. My father, when he came to America, was lucky to get a job to make cigarettes, to roll cigars, not cigarettes. In those days cigarettes weren't so popular, but nice fine cigars and he made good money. Most of the Russian Jews went in for that, making rolled cigars. They

made nice money. I never remember my father ever being free of less than two jobs a day, always. And his vacation, always working. I never remember, although he lived to a good age, he was eighty, and he was considered a good citizen, a very fine American man. But he got all his americanization right here in this country. Now, let's see, the Italians were very, very poorly dressed.

NASH: (?).

LOTH: The Italians were very, very poorly dressed. They came to this country and most of them got jobs in the subway to work and they always had a paper bag and they would have a bottle of wine and a meat sandwich, bologna especially, a garlic bologna, and they would sit on the curb or the street for their dinner and that's the way they finished off the day. But the Irish liked the railroad for some reason. I remember that. We were always able to place a few of the Irish, you know, on the railroad.

NASH: When you say we were able to place the Irish, do you mean yourself or do you mean--

LOTH: No, no. I had nothing to do with it. At the immigrant, the--