**Janet:** This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm here today on September 12th, 1994. I'm here with Betty Bleich. We're in the oral history studio at Ellis Island. Mrs. Bleich came from Poland in 20 when she was 13 years old. Today you are eighty---

**Betty:** I'm going on 88.

**Janet:** Okay, so 87 going on 88 years old and Mrs. Bleich was not detained overnight at Ellis Island but she does remember.

**Betty:** Oh, I remember everything, yeah.

**Janet:** So I'm really looking forward to everything you can remember and lets start at the beginning Mrs. Bleich, tell me your birthday, when you were born.

**Betty:** I was born in February 14, 1907.

**Janet:** And where in Poland?

**Betty:** Warsaw.

**Janet:** Did you live in Warsaw up until you came?

**Betty:** I lived all my life in Warsaw.

**Janet:** When you think of Warsaw, what comes to your mind? Is there anything about living there, growing up there till you left?

**Betty:** Well, you mean coming here?

**Janet:** No, I mean before you came.

**Betty:** Oh before, well my father came here seven years before us and he was going to come back to Warsaw but my mother didn't let him. When he heard there's a war going on- well for four years when America went in then he couldn't come back but before when he heard that there's a war- you know when Europe there was going to be a war. It was really the First World War.

He was going to come back before it broke out. This was maybe he was here maybe three years and my mother wrote to him not to come back.

**Janet:** Why was that?

**Betty:** Because she said that the war was going to be and he'll have to go to war, then we couldn't correspond, we didn't know anything. He couldn't write to us, we couldn't write to him and then right after First World War we got tickets to come here, big package you know and my mother made the arrangements.

**Janet:** Tell me, what do you remember about your father before he left for the United States, when you were a little girl in Warsaw?

**Betty:** I hardly remember that because he went away, we were young then we went through and the world war there was no comparison the Second World War but still it was a war. They were rations, my mother was online to wait all night long for bread or for potato and we were young children.

**Janet:** What was your mother's name?

**Betty:** My mother's name was Gutsy.

**Janet:** And her maiden name?

**Betty:** Minski.

**Janet:** M-I-N-S-K-I.

**Betty:** M-I-N-S-K-I, I imagine.

**Janet:** And your father's name?

**Betty:** My father was Joseph Barrel.

**Janet:** Barrel and you had brothers and sisters?

**Betty:** Yes.

**Janet:** And their names.

**Betty:** I had my older brother was Sam then I was then I had three years younger than me a brother- Harry then I had a sister Edith. We were four children and then my brother Dave was born here. So with my brother Harry there's really history if you want me to--

**Janet:** Your brother Harry.

**Betty:** I'm the only one left, they were all deceased.

**Janet:** Your brother Harry came after you in line?

**Betty:** Yes, three younger than me. All the sailors were crazy about him with short and chubby, they loved him, so the sailors on the boat. They would take him on the ports when they change flags or they cleaned you know whatever had to be done they took him all over with them.

**Janet:** This is on the boat.

**Betty:** And my mother kept on sewing for him because he ripped, he shirt sleeves whatever he wore you know from climbing.

**Janet:** Let’s first talk about life in Warsaw and then we'll take about [inaudible 00:04:58]. In Warsaw did you go to school?

**Betty:** Well we were only compelled to go to school. It’s very very cold or snowy. Europe is cold you know the last winter we had a very bad winter here but Europe was bitter bitter cold. My grandmother would take rags, flannel rags and wrap my hands on and my neck and my feet but we hardly went you know it wasn't compelled to go.

**Janet:** So in other words you didn't go a lot of the time?

**Betty:** I went but it was bad, the weather was bad, the circumstances were very bad. That didn't compel us to go to school. We went.

**Janet:** So do you remember anything about school? What do you remember about school when you [inaudible 00:06:04]?

**Betty:** Not much, there was plenty water went under the bridge. Life [unclear 00:06:15], I went to work I was very young.

**Janet:** You went to work while you were in Warsaw?

**Betty:** No, my mother worked at 9 years old, she was when she worked in Europe.

**Janet:** You say your grandmother wrapped the flannel around you, was this your mother's mother or your father’s?

**Betty:** Yeah, my mother's mother.

**Janet:** And did you have a grandfather too?

**Betty:** Yes.

**Janet:** Do you remember them?

**Betty:** Sure, they were very good to us.

**Janet:** Tell me anything you remember, any story [inaudible 00:06:44] with your grandparents, either one of them.

**Betty:** My grandfather had a business, poultry. My mother had to help him then at night she would stay online to get us some food, potatoes like I said and they rationed potatoes and I sat all day long peeling potatoes [chuckle].

**Janet:** Now, how old were you when you started peeling?

**Betty:** As soon as the war broke up everything was rationed.

**Janet:** Do you remember anything about your grandfather's poultry business?

**Betty:** Yeah.

**Janet:** What do you remember?

**Betty:** Well, he was selling everything under the sun. He was selling rabbits, he was selling whatever there was in poultry and we lived in a place, very simple lives, they go into and they open up the gates. That’s how we lived, big six floors, seven floors but no elevator.

**Janet:** A courtyard was there a courtyard.

**Betty:** We lived on the fifth floor and we had to walk up.

**Janet:** Now was is a lot of buildings around [crosstalk 00:08:05]?

**Betty:** Yes, all around buildings and then there were push carts business and each place, each building had like a commissioner. If anybody was born, anybody died we had to report it you know and every war, there’s an epidemic they had typhoid fever so my older brother got it and we thought it funny you know its typhoid fever, it all fever you know.

He used to uncover himself and run out of the bed, he says his [unclear 00:08:44], we were kids, we were [unclear 00:08:47], so he asked for the bible you know if he's going to die he wanted to read the bible, not that we were so religious and then one Friday night, I was the oldest girl.

You can imagine I had an aunt, when my father came here we were five children because one of the twins was killed during the war. His heel had a shoe it was from Red Cross wooden shoe, so the heel would go into the truck, come back to school, he went on one side and his twin brother went on the other.

**Janet:** What was his name? The one who's heel [inaudible 00:09:38].

**Betty:** His Jewish name was Mendel.

**Janet:** Mendel, who was he the twin of? Who was his twin?

**Betty:** Harry.

**Janet:** Harry, I see.

**Betty:** That’s why was short and chubby. I was the oldest girl so when my father came here, my mother moved in with her parents. They had two enormous rooms, we had my uncle well, every 10 months she had a baby. The midwife would come, deliver the baby and I took over and you can imagine.

Well, she came and doing [unclear 00:10:19] see how everything is so I was a child you know. So, I took over and I was taking care of the baby infant. I didn't have one because I know about but the mid wife came back and forth. I started off my brother was sick, so one night you know I was the oldest girl, Saturday and Friday we had a better meal.

**Janet:** What might you have for Friday night?

**Betty:** Chicken and we had better meal than all week. I used to serve the table. I was the oldest girl, so I served the table for everybody to eat. I didn't cook, my mother cooked, my aunt cooked but to put the silver on and then of course I used to serve also but the one Friday I wasn't around and after my brother got well. My mother had to go onto the commissioner and tell him that he got sick, so he figured my mother is still home, my mother should take care of him so he don't have to go to the hospital then when I he got better, I got sick.

This was Friday night, they were looking to me and I was in bed. I wasn't the type to complain, I just couldn't hold my head up so I went on to bed then they find me bed they knew already I'm good and fit because I never complained. When I got sick my mother got sick, so my mother got sick they had to report somebody else to my family and the commissioner said that we got to go two people in one house, no place to stay when two people are sick.

**Janet:** Now did you have typhoid fever.

**Betty:** Yeah, and my mother got it too. So Saturday morning they took us to the hospital and there was an uproar in the hospital, the brought a mother and her daughter and Saturday was a big thing that they should bring in the hospital, to drive and all so that was it so my mother got sick and I got sick so the nurse would bring me in pills, I would put them under the bed.

I would never take it and I still can't take pills, I get sick so then there was a discussion about coming to here after we got well, the doctors had a conference and all the doctors from the hospital that they should cut my mother’s hair or not. So they cut my hair and my mother they decided not to cut, it would look nice. So they shaved my hair off and I wore a kerchief and that was it.

**Janet:** Do you remember how they treated the typhoid fever? Do you remember anything about the treatment or the hospital?

**Betty:** Well, they gave me pills that the most I remember. Years ago I don't think they had injections like now.

**Janet:** Do you remember anything about the hospital, like how it compared with hospitals here after you got here?

**Betty:** Well, it wasn't like here.

**Janet:** What was it like?

**Betty:** No, you know people there brought in hundreds of people. It was like a clinic but they had beds, we were in bed. They gave us beds and the medications, the pills that all. I remember they gave me the pills and then I threw mine under the bed, my mother took a shoe on and she had high fever, she used to say to me, "Take the pills," and you know I can't take even now. I go to doctors and I go very often, I have high blood pressure, she gives me pills I just can't take them, they make me more sick. As a child as you grow older you act the same way.

**Janet:** Getting back to your grandfather with the poultry business, did you have a push cart? How [crosstalk 00:15:17]?

**Betty:** He had a push cart.

**Janet:** Did you ever help him?

**Betty:** No, I was in the house mostly, helping out my aunt with the children and he didn't work my uncle so he made children [chuckle]. Less than every year they had children.

**Janet:** What was your aunt's name?

**Betty:** My aunt’s name was Mendel, it would have been Mandy.

**Janet:** And she was your mother's sister?

**Betty:** Yes, and my father, grandmother were very nice. I was the laughable type. I used to giggle, so my grandfather, his mind was not on hearing me giggle all the time so he used to stop whatever. I remember my grandmother used to say, "Don't, don't. Let here live, what else has she done?" Until now, I mean that’s what keeps me going, I'm good natured and I like to do favors and what’s life all about if you're not--but I got into the wrong place, I can’t' tell you how rent I get it at times.

So you know I get my rent is- what is it called? Oh, I can't think of the word, it’s subsidized. You see, that’s why they have no use for people but I live in a big building. The social workers told me three quarters of the building is subsidized but they got my records and they go off with somebody that help without the manager and that’s it.

**Janet:** Well tell me about anything else you remember about the house you lived in Warsaw.

**Betty**: Well, that is it.

**Janet:**  You went in through a big gate, and there was a courtyard?

**Betty:** Oh yeah then there was all around buildings.

**Janet:** Yeah and then you walked upstairs.

**Betty:** We walked upstairs there were people living on the sixth floor, we lived on the fifth and the seven floors there was the attics. Each side has a room for an attic.

**Janet:** To store things?

**Betty:** Yes.

**Janet:** Do you remember any games that you played when you were in Warsaw?

**Betty:** For the holidays we used to play like tic tac toe with the nuts.

**Janet:** You mean like hop scotch.

**Betty:** Yeah and they used to say there's a ghost down there [chuckle] so I used to be afraid. My mother, she didn't know how to read and write Jewish. In Europe, "Are you Jewish?" No, yeah.

**Janet:** I'm not very well informed however but yeah.

**Betty:** Yeah, but anyway my mother didn't know how to read and write she had to start going to work at 9 years old and I had an older brother. Not that he had a big [unclear 00:18:42], nobody could afford it but she had a rabbi come in. So a rabbi a meal and a quarter that’s what he got paid so she being she didn't know how to read and write she was anxious for me to learn. So he taught me and he taught my brother. Whenever he came my brother wasn't around, he used to run around to the family and he [unclear 00:19:08], he would get a meal.

He would go to my other grandparents so I used to stay in the house. After he taught me the lessons, my mother wanted me to go look for my brother [unclear 00:19:30], so I used to tell her I'm afraid at night especially in winter and they used to say that the ghost hiding in the attics, on every floor you know and every room so I was really afraid.

So he told my mother, he said, "If anybody is afraid you're not supposed to make them do things." He told my mother not to do that and many a times he wouldn't even come my brother, he was away.

**Janet:** He didn't want to learn? Is that it--?

**Betty:** He did but sometimes the weather was bad or whatever.

**Janet:** So you said the rabbi would get paid a meal and a quarter?

**Betty:** A meal and a quarter that’s how she do it but the meal and a quarter to my mother it was worth it. I corresponded with my father, she used to dictate me and I used to write Jewish letters to him. Then when we came here we started one day and I was a big girl, so the teacher would walk out, they put me in 1A so she would make me monitor. I was tall for my age but the learning was very easy for me, ABC in Polish is A aah, Be, Ce. It was no time I learnt how to read and write English.

**Janet:** Do you remember any stories that you were told as a child in Poland?

**Betty:** What kind of stories?

**Janet:** Did your grandmother ever tell you stories or your mother?

**Betty:** Yeah, she would tell me old fashioned stories like years years ago they ate up a meal and they would throw the plates outside and buy new one, they had no water. They had to go outside, well even for my time. So yeah, I mean to my time sure.

My other grandparent where were here we had a bathroom but my grandmother lived like in a one family dwelling you know they had all the bungalows there and they would have the bathrooms on the outside and then my grandmother would tell me stories about the plates you know how they would finish eating and they would throw the plates out, they were so cheap. China was very cheap but there was no water, they had to walk to the well. I mean she used to tell me stories like she used to say you know years ago, many years ago.

She remembered, there was no mirrors, so there was a woman looking for her husband, she didn't know where to find him so she once went up to an attic and he invented the mirrors. So she walked in, she didn't see anybody, she was looking for him and all of a sudden she sees a mirror standing up so she looked up and she said, "You know you should excuse me." "Push," she said that [unclear 00:23:06]. She looked at herself you know [unclear 00:23:10]. You understand what I'm saying.

**Janet:** Yes, say it on the tape.

**Betty:** In Jewish?

**Janet:** No, say it in English.

**Betty:** How will I pronounce it?

**Janet:** Just translate it.

**Betty:** Yeah, but how? Did they hear the story about the mirror? No? So she went pooh, are you also--- [chuckle], I don't know how to say.

**Janet:** Are you a woman or a man?

**Betty:** It was a woman she was looking for her husband, so how can I translate it?

**Janet:** Well, I guess that’s good enough.

**Betty:** Are you for real [laughter], something like that. She told me little stories.

**Janet:** Yeah, that’s nice.

**Betty:** Then my grandfather had a lot of books I would read. Not really very religious bible but he had a big library, a lot of books and they died just before we came here. Luckily. They were so happy together I remember that they always wished they should die together you know at the same time and they had their wish.

My cousin was in war and he went on the cemetery, he saw all his family, my grandparents lying there without a corpse or anything, just lying there they use to make lampshade out of the skin. Did you ever hear that but my family imagine children, they were young boys and they saw my grandparents just lying there. They died within days before we came here.

**Janet:** You say you weren't particularly religious family.

**Betty:** No.

**Janet:** But did you do some observances?

**Betty:** You know Saturday we would keep- not that I had to go to work or anything, you know the only thing is we didn't cook. We didn't have what to cook.

**Janet:** What did you eat? Like not on the Sabbath but on the regular days.

**Betty:** We had like I said potatoes, bread. There was hardly anything to eat.

**Janet:** Did your mother bake the bread?

**Betty:** No, we got it. It was potato bread they called it. It was like black pumpkin with potatoes. You could see the potatoes lying you know they mixed.

**Janet:** I see, is there anything else about life in Warsaw that you can remember?

**Betty:** Well, they had a museum. Before we went to America I had an uncle he was a rich man. He used to make the cork top of the bottles so he treated us to go to the museum, you know we went and that’s about all. I mean I was a child, I didn't go out much, I was mostly in the house.

**Janet:** So you were the one who wrote to your father?

**Betty:** Yeah.

**Janet:** Do you remember what you would write to him?

**Betty:** Whatever my mother you know like we stopped off, she didn't want all the money at once to come here. Wherever we stopped, he would send us money. They used to steal money everywhere they're professional. Wherever we stopped on each port like we were in Germany for three days, there where we went by train from Warsaw to Berlin we were there three days to go to Amsterdam, then we got the boat. So, my father wherever we stopped he would send us money.

**Janet:** I see, he knew where you were going to stop.

**Betty:** Then he send us money to Amsterdam and she bought clothing, when we came here we were like Americans. She bought the navy skirts and white merry blouses, tailor collars when we came here nobody would believe that we were from Europe. My sister was a red head, she had a face like an apple and red cheeks and my cousins brought their friends they would never believe that we were starving in Europe and I was never too thin, it was my nature.

**Janet:** Tell me when your mother dictated the letters to your father before you came, what did she dictate? Do you remember any of the kinds of things that she wanted to say to him when he was in America?

**Betty:** Well, he wanted to come back and he did not know how long the war would go on so he wanted to come back. He thought he would come here and bring us here, he had a good trade, he was a watch maker.

**Janet:** Was he a watch maker in Warsaw and a watch maker in United States?

**Betty:** Yeah, his great grandparents were watch makers and he was a watch maker before he came here and years ago they didn't pay you so much but he was a very good watch maker you know from years back.

**Janet:** Do you remember what you knew about the United States before you came?

**Betty:** Oh yes, they used to say that we sleep here in golden beds and we step on gold. We walk on gold. I guess you heard about it.

**Janet:** Did you think that was true?

**Betty:** No, I started going to work in a factory, I was 15 years old. 14 vacation time. There was a factory there that had all year round. Day and night they were open- a textile. So, I didn't have the nerves to ask my mother, well if I had asked my mother she would say, "Go home and give daddy”- you know my father a kiss. I was getting mature too early.

Anyways seven years without a father or a mother, with a mother it’s a different story, you get warmed up right away but with a father you feel a little strange you know I was maturing, so she said, "Go over and give papa a kiss."

**Janet:** This is when you first saw him again? When you saw him here?

**Betty:** Yeah, when we saw him. Yeah, here. So we didn't even know him so I'm 14 years old and I had a girlfriend, she was born here and she was stupid [chuckle]. She went to work in that factory, so we both went there for vacation, I used to foreman we came from California and we worked and then after that you know I had to go back to school. I said I got to go back to California then after that I go on back there and I kept on working.

**Janet:** Tell me about the ship. Now you got to Amsterdam, you got more money from your father when you were in Amsterdam.

**Betty:** Yeah, he sent us money to Amsterdam so she brought us clothing.

**Janet:** Did you stay in Amsterdam a while before you left?

**Betty:** Yeah, we stayed there a week before we got the boat.

**Janet:** What do you remember about that, that week in Amsterdam?

**Betty:** Amsterdam was just beautiful you know years ago they were really wooden shoe, the pointed shoes and the hats. When we came here we had very long hair, my father wanted us to look Americanized, so he went into about three- four barbers before he would cut my hair and my sisters because she was a red head.

Finally, he got a barber that cut our hair so we have the [unclear 00:32:00], my father there well migrated, she made wigs out of these. She dyed my sister’s hair and made a wig and my hair she made a wig. I had nice color, all blonde.

**Janet:** So how did you get your hair cut? When the barber cut your hair, how was it cut?

**Betty:** Well, I had very thick hair. My mother used to braid my hair in Europe, two big braids, so I had thick wary hair and my sister also had very thick hair. She braided but three or four barbers yelled at my father, "You want us to cut her hair?" in Italian but finally he got one who cut it.

**Janet:** And when he cut it, did he cut it real short or how did he cut it?

**Betty:** Not too short, I started to wear short because the braids, - you know I look good this way because she made it two braids.

**Janet:** Going up sort of.

**Betty:** Braided into two big braids so my hair was really long all these time. So that was about it.

**Janet:** So just had shorter braids after that?

**Betty:** Yeah, I got shorter, cut short. You always look good in short. Well, later on I had it growing back but I looked too old you know why, when I got old I used to let it grow, my hair grew very fast so I used to let it grow and cut it.

**Janet:** So was there anything else?

**Betty:** About speaking English. My mother we felt sorry for her you know we went to school so we spoke to my mother in Jewish when we came here, so my father wanted my mother to learn English and he wanted us too.

So when he was home, he used to watch us that was for fun. He held something in his hand to make belief he'll throw us, he looked into our mouth if we would speak Jewish, he would throw something at us but that was only a joke, so when we saw he held something so we spoke in English.

**Janet:** Did anybody ever know polish? Did anybody in the family?

**Betty:** I remembered mostly, my older brother didn't care to remember things you know and that way, I remembered a lot of things.

**Janet:** And when you went to school in Poland was the school in polish?

**Betty:** Oh Yeah, but that’s one of the good advantage I had from polish to English. It was very easy, the teachers were wondering.

**Janet:** Okay, so what was the name of the ship that you came with?

**Betty:** Rotterdam, it was three chimneys. I read in the paper what they told people [inaudible 00:35:15].

**Janet:** What do you remember of the voyage? Do you remember [crosstalk 00:35:23]?

**Betty:** The voyage, that was the voyage you know we were supposed to be in the third class so my brother Harry he was never in the first class. The sailors would call him in there, he would eat with them and then we all went in there, we'd run back and forth.

We were children, we run back and forth and we had a good time but when we saw Statue of Liberty we started to dance on the boat and what we carried on, everybody young and old. We saw the Statue of Liberty I think two days before it landed.

**Janet:** You had to stay on the ship two days [crosstalk 00:36:09].

**Betty:** After you see for 14 days, water and the sky, we hardly saw her so it took about two days then coming here we didn't know who our father was, there were hundreds of men. Maybe more than maybe thousands of men. People waiting for the ship to come in so we used to say if we saw a man all dressed up we'd say he's our father but among the kids you know brothers and sisters we had fun.

**Janet:** So do you remember actually seeing your father for the first time?

**Betty:** Yeah.

**Janet:** How was that?

**Betty:** It was an excitement, then we couldn't get an apartment you know it was very hard to get an apartment so my father cousin had one family house with a basement, he rented us and we lived a short time and we got an apartment, a bigger apartment. We were four children and six people so we got a bigger apartment.

**Janet:** Do you remember the reunion with your mother and father when they first saw each other having been apart for all those years? When you were here in Ellis Island?

**Betty:** Yeah.

**Janet:** How did you find out which of those men was your father?

**Betty:** My mother knew, I mean my mother would recognize and he would know my mother. He would somehow would recognize was such a thrill but I felt I’m going to break down today you know here I’m the only one left. My brother lost him in January, he was sick for three months and he was gone and Florida.

**Janet:** This is Harry?

**Betty:** No, harry died a long time ago. He died about 10-12 years. He had no children when they got married.

**Janet:** So this is Sam now you're talking about? No David.

**Betty:** David was the youngest, he was born here he died in January. He died in Florida and everybody wanted me to go to see him. How can you go and see when somebody is dying and I would break down with him but he got his very fast cancer, it was three months.

**Janet:** So tell me when you first came to this country, were there things about it that struck you as different, things you've never seen before?

**Betty:** Oh yeah, this I must tell you when we came to Ellis Island we saw black people so we used to call out in Jewish [foreign 00:39:17], so my mother never told us about you know none there were all over Europe but we'd never saw them, she said, "shhh," she was smart, she said, "Shhh." Don't say, you see then we called them [unclear 00:39:39] and then really now they're black, they don't like when you call them colored you know that.

**Janet:** So was there anything else once you went to the apartment, the things that you saw that were different?

**Betty:** My father got furniture through a peddler, in payouts you know he couldn't afford it. We had four rooms in the basement, so we paid out a peddler.

**Janet:** Now wait how was he peddling? Would the peddler actually have a --?

**Betty:** They had peddlers coming into the house. They were selling everything, linens everything.

**Janet:** So in other words, this peddler would come in, would you see this furniture before you bought it?

**Betty:** My father gets one to see it, he went to pick it up so they would come and show you pictures.

**Janet:** So there were all kinds of salesmen coming around to sell things? The linens, furniture everything else.

**Betty:** Yeah, everything and my father was never experienced, I remember he always said he didn't know how to cook or clean. Now they know, years ago they didn't know especially European men, they don't know anything. He always used to say if to die he wants to die before my mother, she knows how to cook, how to clean. I always heard that conversation you know when you start a talk you talk about a new born and then you start to talk about dying so he died very young. He wasn't even 60 years old.

**Janet:** What did he do when your mother and your brothers and sisters were still in Warsaw and he was here? How did he live?

**Betty:** He lived in [unclear 00:41:42], women used to tell my father used to talk to my mother that we had company from the ship. You get to know [unclear 00:41:54] from the boat. My mother got to know a lot of people so they used to come around and they used to converse.

All the other men that had their wives come in, come the same boat that we came in, all maids used to say to my father, "What do you need to bring here a woman with four children?" and he was crazy this and, "Do you see how women are?"

Then another thing, men would send the pack right after the war, the women never believed they never heard from men, they were too stupid to understand that you couldn't do war, you couldn't correspond. We didn't hear nothing from my father for four years, they couldn't understand and they thought that the husband don't want them with the children, so big packages came in for four children- five you know money and tickets to come here.

You know what they would do, they would throw it out the window, they threw the kids out they thought they asked for the [unclear 00:43:09], that’s how people were stupid. They used to throw the children out the window and they would go after them, commit suicide they thought they would never come here that their husbands don't want them and this is the truth. You never heard anybody tell you this.

**Janet:** No, now in Warsaw during the war, was there anything that affected you directly? I mean did you see anything of the war, of the soldiers, of the fighters?

**Betty:** German soldiers would come into war, so it was a beautiful state. Well before the First World War it belonged to Russia if you know. I mean that’s in history then they would come in the soldiers, they would throw us down, had beautiful uniform they wore, the red and navy and whatever and horses they were just beautiful.

They wanted also to buy off the people so they would throw down chocolates from the horses you know so high up and candy, cookie. They would throw a lot of things down.

**Janet:** So the people were inclined to like the Germans soldiers.

**Betty:** They wanted yeah but they weren't like Hitler was. Maybe he was building, getting ready to be a Hitler but they were very good, they were good to us especially children. They saw we came home from school. They would throw things down that were really good. We never saw anything like it.

**Janet:** So you personally knew of some women who threw their children out the window and then jumped because they felt their husbands no longer wanted them?

**Betty:** Their husband and doesn't want them.

**Janet:** I haven't heard that.

**Betty:** Well, I come from but everybody had to come to us to get whatever they needed. They had like the sanitary and everything.

**Janet:** Were you in Warsaw? Were you living in a special Jewish section?

**Betty:** There were known, we happened to live right near the church and it was a big--

**Janet:** Catholic Church?

**Betty:** Catholic Church, they had maybe 10 floors, 12 floors high and when we passed they watched us, they were sitting there lower or higher. Maybe the lower ones would tip off the higher ones, anyway they watched us. We speak Jewish or polish. When as soon as we bought the pet we spoke polish and those were the good times.

**Janet:** Did you get a long in general with the pols, with the Catholic pols.

**Betty:** Yeah, my grandfather he sold rabbits, he had a deal with the polish people.

**Janet:** Did he buy the rabbits and things from them?

**Betty:** Yeah, they used to bring it to him and then he would sell it. They had fruit market. A lot of them would bring fruit to the town to sell fruit. Once I took an apple, they counted everything and I wanted to know what it tastes like, so I got an argument because I took an apple and they were counting everything, the polish whatever they brought. Then one day I took a bite on a tomato and I thought it was an apple and since then I don't like tomatoes. You see I was so disappointed in the taste.

**Janet:** What else did you have, a fruit besides the apples?

**Betty:** They had oranges also but we couldn't get anything unless you take and that’s like stealing, even from my grandfather because whatever they sold him everything was counted for. There really couldn't get anything, I couldn't walk because you know I was undernourished and then when I came here I started to have trouble with my spine and osteoporosis I have, it all started when you're very young.

No milk, no nothing. All we ate was potatoes and bread and we were happy to have that to stay all night long. My older brother would go release my mother, she should go home and have a cup of coffee, I don't think she even had time to put coffee. She had to go right back to- he was a child they wouldn't give him when it would come to her time, so they wouldn’t' give him anything.

**Janet:** So when you got to this country, did you discover new foods, here that you had never had?

**Betty:** Oh yeah, we had food. You know our mother used to ask me, she said we'll ever come to America, she would ask what to buy, what to cook because I suffered the most. I sat all day long and it’s no good for the spine either, I couldn’t' walk, I couldn't walk, so then I had to pick a trade all textile walk and standing all day and lifting heavy things.

**Janet:** That was here.

**Betty:** Yeah.

**Janet:** Do you remember any attitudes or anything that you're mother or father tried to teach you, tried to instill in you? Any ideas?

**Betty:** They tried, my father wanted me to continue going to school. He wanted us to look our best and you know he used to give my mother- my mother wanted table money years ago and they didn't make much. I know myself I made $10 a week.

**Janet:** When you first started working?

**Betty:** All in all maybe the most I made when I start working was $18. My mother tried her best, she asked me every morning what she should cook and she cooked the best for us. She used to yell at us, we should eat, eat, eat and I loved my food, I really did. I do.

You know you work in a factory it’s not easy, 50 hours I worked, Saturdays till 1 O'clock. My father too worked to 1 O'clock, we came home we had a feast, seven course meal my mother would make. She never knew how to bake in Europe, here she used to bake and bake. I'm telling you she made everything. She made [unclear 00:51:04].

**Janet:** Did your father become a citizen?

**Betty:** Oh yeah, oh sure.

**Janet:** Do you remember when he became?

**Betty:** Oh sure, he became a citizen I think in 1927.

**Janet:** Do you remember- was he proud of that? Do you remember if he was proud of that?

**Betty:** Oh, he was very proud. You know he got pneumonia and tanks you know what do you call? To breath- the oxygen then President Roosevelt ran for the last time, everybody got out to vote for him. My father he had pneumonia, he got out of bed to vote for him. So my mother said that the voting poll to a policeman, “You see he's sick, he was perspiring, he had pneumonia.”

Walking pneumonia, so the policeman said, "Look lady, there are here cripples and they're sick." So he stood in line and he came home and he died two days later or a day later. He was not even 60 years old because everybody voted for Roosevelt and believe me if not for Roosevelt where would we be with social security, I live on that. Although my mother didn't get it.

**Janet:** Was your father then- did he take notice of politics and what was going on in the country?

**Betty:** Politics, he knew oh sure. He used to read the Jewish paper.

**Janet:** What are you most proud of that you've done in your lifetime?

**Betty:** I'm proud of everything, I love America. What can I tell you? They used to say we step on money but people make up stories.

**Janet:** When you got here then you started working and then when did you meet your husband?

**Betty:** Not right away, I didn't start work. I started--

**Janet:** School first.

**Betty:** At that summer, I worked maybe six weeks then I waited till I was 16 and I went to work. My husband I met when I was about 19. When I got married I was 191/2. For years ago, my father thought I would be an old maid. Years ago you got married young, 18-19.

**Janet:** How did you meet your husband?

**Betty:** In the club, you know boys and girls.

**Janet:** Was it a club of people from the same country or was it people who were coming from--?

**Betty:** Social, no, no. I just went into the [unclear 00:54:16]. I wasn't too much of a run around, I worked hard, very hard at the textile is the worst job.

**Janet:** So did your husband come to this country or was he born here?

**Betty:** No, he wasn't born. He also came here.

**Janet:** From where?

**Betty:** Russia.

**Janet:** From Russia. How many children did you have?

**Betty:** Just her, my daughter. One.

**Janet:** Just Diana.

**Betty:** One child.

**Janet:** Do you have grandchildren.

**Betty:** I have great grandchildren. I have a great granddaughter, she was 14 in May.

**Janet:** She's older than you were when you came to this country?

**Betty:** Yeah, but America is beautiful. It’s only bad now you know the people will make it bad. Before I got married, I could have walked. When I was single we'd go out, girls would meet you know we knew each other from where I worked. We used to go to movies Saturdays and then we went to a night [unclear 00:55:29] and you didn't see a soul but you could have walked all night.

**Janet:** Do you remember the movies that influenced you when you were first here?

**Betty:** Harold Lloyd, all they do very funny with Charlie chaplain. All these old actresses, nothing learn. You were born here naturally.

**Janet:** Yes, I was.

**Betty:** You're very sweet.

**Janet:** Oh thank you.

**Betty:** You got a beautiful disposition.

**Janet:** Thank you.

**Betty:** Well, that’s your job I guess.

**Janet:** Well, I like my job, so it also works out well.

**Betty:** No, you know the way you are.

**Janet:** Thank you. Tell me who else? So were there any other people that you looked up to in your life? Like you considered somebody, either a famous person or maybe somebody you knew that you really admired?

**Betty:** Well, I read a lot and I like a lot of people. I love people. I was a [unclear 00:56:37] in there and that’s just me lingerie and I loved people and to my bad luck I moved into senior citizen [unclear 00:56:50] an old age home, the people are so mean.

You know there should be a write up about these senior citizens homes, I really mean it. It’s terrible what’s going on. They hurt, they're sick. They make the next one sick and then they die. Does that go into tape?

**Janet:** it’s all on here [chuckle].

**Betty:** Well, I don’t' care.

**Janet:** It’s alright, it’s okay, it’s your opinion.

**Betty:** Where this go? The tape?

**Janet:** This tape will stay, Ellis Island we have a library and then I can make you a copy and your family will have one and there will be one in Ellis Island in the library. How do you think it influenced you, the fact that you started out in Poland, you stayed there for 12-13 years of your life and then you came here and you lived out the rest of your life here? How do you think that made a difference, the fact that you were born in another country?

**Betty:** Well, it made a difference because my father was here and my mother build the- what can I tell you we really build a light here.

**Janet:** Did your family ever want to go back?

**Betty:** I don't think so, I don't think so. There's nothing to go back to. They were killed. I had a cousin that he had seven beautiful sisters and brothers with talents they were killed. Then I told you about that rich uncle, he had two beautiful children. One by the way, his daughter was killed but the son is in Israel, he's a lawyer. He's a very big lawyer. They were very rich, maids and everything.

**Janet:** How about your family and their customs and how they did things? Do you think they tried to become Americanized or they tried to hold on to [inaudible 00:58:56]?

**Betty:** No, as I said my father wanted us to be Americanized by the way. He was so happy that we spoke you know when we first started to speak English. He wanted my mother to learn too. He didn't want us to talk our mother language. He wanted her to be Americanized.

**Janet:** Did she learn?

**Betty:** Yeah. We had to otherwise my father would--

**Janet:** Throw something at you [laughter].

**Betty:** Yeah and we laughed, it was funny. We really loved that my father loved this country.

**Janet:** And did you grow out to be close to your father?

**Betty:** Yes, you know in the beginning it was odd but my father was very good to us. He gave us everything you know whatever he could.

**Janet:** Okay, I think we are at the end of tape and maybe this is just as good a place to end us anything. I want to thank you very very much.

**Betty:** Oh, you want to thank me, I should thank you [laughter].

**Janet:** You're very sweet, very nice interview.

**Betty:** I really thought I'd break down today because you know as I said we came here with my mother and we got thrill meeting our father here and good old America, the best country in the world. I don't have to say it as everybody knows that.

**Janet:** Okay, I just want to close by saying I'm speaking with Betty Bleich, Its September 12, 1994. We're here in the Ellis Island studio and this Janet Levine signing off.