**Janet:** Today is November 6th, 1995 and I'm here in Derry, New Hampshire. I'm with Mrs. Helen Burba whose maiden name was Plocharczyk and she came from Poland. She was only 18months old when she come to the United States through Ellis Island however, she can relate some of the stories that her parents told her and then she can talk about having immigrated from Poland and settling first in Nashua and now and go later in Derry.

**Helen:** Manchester.

**Janet:** Manchester first and then Derry.

**Helen:** Yeah.

**Janet:** Okay, I'm delighted to be here and I'm looking forward to what you have to say, whatever you can remember. If we would start at the beginning, tell me where you were born in Poland.

**Helen:** I was born in Przylaj, it’s a little country town in the northern part of Poland, probably a few miles from Warsaw because I remember my grandfather telling later about going then to Warsaw and because no cars it was horse and buggies so it wasn't too far from Warsaw.

**Janet:** And could you spell for the tape the town?

**Helen:** P-R-Z-Y-L-A-J.

**Janet:** What was your birth date?

**Helen:** February 25th, 1908.

**Janet:** You would have no memory of Poland.

**Helen:** No.

**Janet:** But what do you remember that your mother or father or anyone told you about it.

**Helen:** I know that I was very spoilt by my grandfather, he thought the world of me and I can remember her telling me about how spoilt I was. I wanted to bath in the middle of the night or play in the tub of water and my grandfather would get up in the night and heat the water and put the tub out in the kitchen and let me sit there and splash all I wanted [laughter], my mother told me that.

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

**Helen:** What was his name Dorothy?

**Dorothy:** Was it Stanley?

**Helen:** Stanley.

**Janet:** Stanley, now was this your father's mother?

**Helen:** My Father's father.

**Janet:** And your maiden name? Your father's last name?

**Helen:** It was Plocharczyk.

**Janet:** P-L-O-C-H-A-R-C-Z-Y-K.

**Helen:** Yeah, my dad's name was Joseph.

**Janet:** Joseph, and your mother's name?

**Helen:** Ellenora.

**Janet:** And do you know your mother's maiden name?

**Helen:** Grzegoaczyk.

**Janet:** Oh boy, can you spell that one?

**Hellen:** Yes, G-R-Z-E-G-O-A-C-Z-Y-K.

**Janet:** Did you have a lot of relatives in Poland on your mother's side and your father's side?

**Helen:** No, my mother was an orphan at the age of nine then an aunt brought her up and she had a sister and that’s all I know about them. Her sister came to this country too and she's settled out in Philadelphia in Pennsylvania and of course my mother got married and she came here Manchester but she had no mother.

I mean actually she doesn't remember her mother or father, all she knew that her father died before she was born and that he was a cabinet maker, he made beautiful cabinet and that’s all she remembers of her father that was told to her by her aunt that brought her up and her sister like I said they got separated, she married somebody and my mother married somebody but later on in the years after they came to this country, my sister [unclear 00:04:47] took my mother to Philadelphia to see her sister after all this years.

**Dorothy:** That was her niece Helen, that was her sister's daughter- niece. [Unclear 00:05:00] was her niece.

**Helen:** Yeah, but didn't you go see her.

**Dorothy:** But that was mama's niece not her sister.

**Helen:** Oh, it was, I thought it was her sister.

**Dorothy:** Oh no, it was her niece [unclear 00:05:13].

**Helen:** Well, didn't she go out there too.

**Dorothy:** Her sister died in Poland and left mama, that's why mama went on her own at nine years old.

**Janet:** Her mother had died too.

**Dorothy:** Her sister died when she was nine and my mother was on her own after she was nine years old. She worked for the wealthy polish gypsies.

**Janet:** I see, so what did your mother ever tell you about her life in Poland?

**Helen:** Nothing much but you know it was bad. She remembers practically living with the gypsies, there used to be a band of gypsies that used to come on the land there and I remember her telling about there being the gypsies and that was about it till she met my father.

**Janet:** Did you ever hear the story of how your mother and father met?

**Helen:** No, I don't know how they met unless she went to work their farm. How well I don't know.

**Janet:** What was your father doing for work in Poland?

**Helen:** Working on the farm, they all worked on the farm. They had a big farm and they all worked on the farm. Don't wiggle the paper. I know the sisters, my father's sisters would always go out at morning and work in the fields and so they only had one brother- my father did. He's still in Poland, he's dead now but he was the only one left to take care of the farm.

All the sisters and my father all came to this country and he was left there and I did correspond with him when I was a kid because I went to a Polish school and I learned to read and write in Polish you know language so I used to do my mother's writing for her and we used to write to my uncle in Poland and I know that one time they called us and I mean wrote to us and asked for if we could send them some material. One of the daughters was getting married and they wanted for a wedding gown you know.

We didn't have any more money out here than we did out there. My dad was peddling coal in the winter time and wood in the summer time you know going around houses and peddling it and mama just stayed home. We had boarders. She took in boarders to kind of make a little bit easier for us.

**Janet:** Before we talk about life in this country, is there anything that you recall that your mother or father said about the family's life in Poland before they came here?

**Helen:** Like I said that that’s all I know is that they were farmers. I know my mother's saying went to church every Sunday.

**Janet:** What church was it?

**Helen:** I don't know the name of the church.

**Janet:** Was it a catholic church?

**Helen:** Catholic church and they'd only have one pair of shoes and they would go to church barefooted and when they got near the church they put their shoes on and when they'd come out of church they took the shoes off and walk home barefooted to save you know that’s the kind of a life they had.

**Janet:** You mentioned something about your mother was afraid that you would cry?

**Helen:** Oh yes, you see what happened was my dad was in the Russian army. We were under the Russian rule. Poland got her independence during the World War 2 and the Russians- Japanese war broke out and my dad knew he would have to go and fight for Russia and he said then, "I’ll fight for Poland but I will not fight for Russia."

So he had a sister here in Manchester already and she sent him money to come out here and he left me and my mother in Poland and he came out here to Manchester and he got himself a job and that’s when he sent money for my mother and I but in the meantime my mother was pregnant with her second baby. Sent money and like I said we had to be smuggled out of Poland because on account of what my father did.

He skipped the army and the only way we would get, there was a hay wagon, the man from the town where we lived took us in the hay wagon loaded with hay and we got under the hay. Got us over to German border into Germany to get our ship to come to the United States and my mother was very very sick. We went steerage, you know what that is and mama was very very sick because she was pregnant too and the voyage was very rough but she said the sailors took a liking to me--

**Janet:** No first before you tell about the ship. So you were all in a hay wagon?

**Helen:** Yeah, just the two of us. Yeah, my mother and I in the hay wagon and like I said we got on the ship alright and everything and she was very sick, she couldn't take care of me and the sailors she said were so good to me and there was a Jewish lady who was riding first class, she took me and she took care of me till we got into the United States. So my dad used to always say, 'Your mother went steerage but you went first class [chuckle]."

**Janet:** Well, did you know this woman who took care of you?

**Helen:** No, she was a perfect stranger. Didn't know her, isn't that something.

**Janet:** Was it because your mother was ill that she took you?

**Helen:** Yeah, that’s right because she was ill and couldn't take care of me and I was only 18 months old.

**Janet:** Did you ever hear from that woman again [crosstalk 00:12:10]?

**Helen:** No, see isn't that something?

**Janet:** No, wasn't that a kind act.

**Helen:** Yeah, she was very good to me, she took care of me and she said the sailors on the ship they were so good to me too. I probably was a little brat. I don't know [laughter].

**Janet:** But you were probably cute [laughter], everybody like you. Do you remember your mother saying anything about when the ship came to New York and specifically to--

**Helen:** Well isn't that funny, yeah she remembers us getting in New York but of course New York didn't mean nothing to her, God love her, she never read, she didn't know anything.

She didn't read, she didn't write polish or English you know what it means and we went through the customs and I guess we passed alright health wise you know and everything because they let us go but that’s about all but like you said the statue of liberty didn't mean nothing to her.

**Janet:** So then the family came to Manchester.