**Dennis:** This is Dennis [inaudible 00:00:01] with the Oral History Program, October 17th 1984. With us here we have an immigrant. What’s your name ma’am?

**Nellie:** My name is Nellie, it was Nellie [unlcear00:00:13]. My age that time was 18 years old.

**Dennis:** 18 years old?

**Nellie:** I wasn’t but they gave me 18 years because to come to America I had to go work. I was 18 years old on the passport.

**Dennis:** What is your home town?

**Nellie:** My home town is in Russia Poland. The name is [inaudible 00:00:34], a very small town. My grandfather died and left me $80, and we were very poor. My father died and left my mother with six small children, she didn’t what to do.

She had a brother here in America so the brother said, “All right if you have money come to America.” We got $80 took an agent and he made the arrangements, my travelling.

**Dennis:** Through a travel agent?

**Nellie:** Yes travel agent. We had to [inaudible 00:01:13] because I couldn’t get a passport. I spent $25, but I was too young. They didn’t want since I was too young to go alone I need somebody to take me. You can’t go alone if you’re a girl. I was two years younger but I put myself 18 years.

**Dennis:** Did the rest of your family want to come to America?

**Nellie:** My rest couldn’t come; they didn’t have fare they couldn’t come. Mother had a child of four weeks old when my father died. The day my father died it was on a Friday. The Jewish people, are you Jewish?

**Dennis:** No.

**Nellie:** The Jewish people bury the next day. They couldn’t bury Saturday and they couldn’t bury there in Sunday. Because Sunday was a time that a lot of churches and they march with all the [inaudible 00:02:14] and all the [inaudible 00:02:16] they march and you got to pass through the street.

That time they didn’t bury you in a coffin, [inaudible 00:02:25] put in a bag the body. We went to the rabbi and the rabbi says, “Well, you do it Saturday night.”

They washed him and dressed him and all that was by two o’clock. They came back and the funeral was about five or six o’clock in the morning. It takes time till you get there, it’s far away. In order to bury him in the Jewish religion, so it happened like that.

We came, house empty, they stole everything we had. They knew that we are away, the Polish people knew that my father died, small town there was only 200 people Jewish. They took everything away. My father used to make coats for the peasants and he had a storage room, they took everything away.

My mother gave birth a month before my father died, unfortunately. My mother had 10 children but four died, in Europe that time they didn’t have the doctors, nothing.

**Dennis:** You felt you had to come to America?

**Nellie:** I had to come to America to work to help out. I had a sister already here, came four years before me. Made arrangements with the agent, and took us there. We passed the border and they arrested us, everybody, it was night

**Dennis:** They arrested the whole group?

**Nellie:** They stole everything we had. We didn’t even have the blanket to cover, we came back [inaudible 00:04:19]. It was very sad and mother had to send me to America just six children. One got married and [inaudible 00:04:30] America’s force [inaudible 00:04:31] no way were they making a living. She send a letter to her brother to send the $50. Then when I went to the border they arrested me …

**Dennis:** That’s the border of Poland?

**Nellie:** Yeah Polish border. Everybody was locked up for a couple of days and they bailed us out. We went again and we passed the border I came to Bremen. In Bremen they told me, I went to the doctor told me, “You can’t go to America because your eyes is bad.”

**Dennis:** What was wrong with your eyes?

**Nellie:** He said, I don’t know, he said [inaudible 00:05:15].

**Dennis:** Trachoma?

**Nellie:** Something like that. He says, “The good thing it’s curable, we’ll cure you if you stay here.” I stay there. People but we [inaudible 00:05:31] talking, “Don’t cry,” He says, “because if you go on second class they’ll pass you.”

The doctor said every time, “Your eyes is getting better.” I got on second class and they passed me by, the first class passengers then the second class. I didn’t go through Ellis Island [inaudible 00:05:59] these people.

**Dennis:** The doctor suggested?

**Nellie:** The doctor said, “Your eyes is good but before you go to the doctor when you get on the boat, use a drop and put a drop in your eyes so it doesn’t show.” I did it but they didn’t ask me, then I went on second class.

I got ill. When I had to take my social security [inaudible 00:06:27], I forgot all about it. They want to know how I came to America. They sent me a letter with the …

**Dennis:** This letter tells that you …

**Nellie:** This letter tells me the day that I came to America.

**Dennis:** March 17th 1914. On the SS Kronprinz Wilhelm.

**Nellie:** Yeah. This boat was a very fast boat. I was only in the boat about seven or eight days, but I was sick I was all the time. The whole six days that I was on the boat, eight days, but six days I was so sick that I was in bed. I kept on vomiting because the boat was very fast and I couldn’t take it.

When I came off the boat, my uncle came, my mother’s brother, came to pick me. They said, “We cannot give a man a girl, we don’t know …” I wasn’t born when they went away. They showed they say, “Is that your uncle? I says, “Yeah.” “How do you know? You wasn’t born that time when they came here.”

I says, “But my mother used to get pictures, I recognize him. “We don’t give, no.” They took me over [inaudible 00:07:57] and they called up my sister at the job where she worked. When she came she took me [inaudible 00:08:05] uncle. That’s the whole story.

**Dennis:** Do you remember getting any kind of inspection on the boat?

**Nellie:** A special what?

**Dennis:** Inspection, any sort of inspection? Did they check your eyes or?

**Nellie:** On the boat, no. On the third class they do check but on the second class people go. That was the two days that I was well I went down, such beautiful table cloths, such beautiful food. [Inaudible 00:08:33] people only go for good times most of the time.

They thought I’m [inaudible 00:08:43] that I came here rich girl on second class. It was at that time $25 it’s not like now, [inaudible 00:08:51]. The girl of 18 years comes to second class, just passed by so I didn’t see nothing.

**Dennis:** The inspection.

**Nellie:** Didn’t pass [inaudible 00:09:04] took me right off.

**Dennis:** For $25 did you have a private cabin?

**Nellie:** Private it was with two, but they [inaudible 00:09:14] up with private. Of course the Germans didn’t treat me so nice because I got vomit in my bed all the time; I did everything in my bed. I couldn’t go down, I was very sick.

A German man came and was he so mad at me, he said, “Why didn’t you go the bathroom? We have such a nice beautiful place? Why would you vomit all?” “I couldn’t go down.” [Inaudible 00:09:42] to eat and he was very mean.

**Dennis:** Did you get to see the steerage? Did you see the steerage compartment?

**Nellie:** I went down, it was [inaudible 00:09:57], I didn’t look I wanted [inaudible 00:10:02] fast. I was so much afraid of because my eyes and send me back to Europe. You were very poor and my mother was left with nothing, she was waiting that I should come here.

When I came here I didn’t know how to work a machine, I didn’t know what to do. Somebody took me up and I worked for two dollars and 75 cents a week for a year, 48 hours they taught me how to work.

Later on, I worked at the factory 375, but I worked 48 hours. We used to work overtime, two hours. We used to get 50 cents more extra. Whatever you made was [inaudible 00:10:43]. We didn’t have no union, nothing. It was tough.

**Dennis:** What had you heard about the US before you came here?

**Nellie:** My uncle was here that he came here, he run away from -He didn’t want to serve the Russian government. He went without a passport, he ran away from Europe.

He opened up here a candy store and made a living. He bought candy store, bought a bigger house on 18th Avenue [inaudible 00:11:23]. Made a living, he wasn’t a rich man but he made a living.

He was [inaudible 00:11:30] ran went away from Poland because in Poland, it was very bad for the Jews. You never knew if you can stay, all of a sudden police decided that the [inaudible 00:11:42] there. They tell you to move [inaudible 00:11:44] on the roof.

That’s what they did to him too. We was afraid, you had to be good girl, you have to be very good in order to stay there. It was a very hard life. In Poland that [inaudible 00:12:00] section the Catholic [inaudible 00:12:02] section, we’re supposed to go.

We need water we had to pass by the Catholics place to get water for tea. Because the water, the wells near [inaudible 00:12:20] was muddy, didn’t look good.

For tea we used to go to Catholic place we have to pass. They used to take out their dog and say they should bark at us and all that. We had a very hard life in Poland. The Polish people weren’t very nice to us. That’s what happened.

**Dennis:** What was your first job here in America?

**Nellie:** I worked in ladies underwear.

**Dennis:** Making it or sewing?

**Nellie:** Making it. I was working in a shop they took me up, somebody that my uncle knew a man, that he was a designer there in [inaudible 00:12:59] factory. Near Macy’s, across from Macy’s, on 34 Street and the name of the factory was [inaudible 00:13:07]. The man was the manager and he told the girls “Teach her how to work.” They taught me how to work little by little, [inaudible 00:13:18].

**Dennis:** How long did you work there for? How long did you work there?

**Nellie:** A couple of years till I worked myself up and I got a better job. The same, different place …

**Dennis:** Were you happy to be here?

**Nellie:** I was very happy. What we had there, everything was wonderful here [inaudible 00:13:41]. Because we lived very poor, after I stayed with my uncle for six months, then I moved to Essex Street with my sister to get a room for seven, eight dollars for two people. It was a cold …

**Dennis:** For a month?

**Nellie:** It was a cold apartment, that time it was a steam and the oven was only in the kitchen. We used to go out from the outside, you didn’t have to go to the ladies [inaudible 00:14:13], there was a door outside to take us outside.

A little apartment, [inaudible 00:14:21] like big from here to there. We were pretty close on the wall, two people in one room. They used to give us supper night, [inaudible 00:14:34] a quarter stake dinner, peas, chicken, nice like the restaurant, a very good meal.

[Inaudible 00:14:45] it was six meals. It was seven meals was a dollar 75 of each. [Inaudible 00:14:54] have dollars. We’d have to put every day, every week, a couple of pennies to send my mother because she depended on us. It wasn’t easy, we didn’t buy any clothes. My family [inaudible 00:15:16] dress for a couple of years [inaudible 00:15:23].

**Dennis:** Did you ever want your mother to come over to America?

**Nellie:** Yeah my mother had one daughter that didn’t want to come she was married. She didn’t want to come. I came here in March and the war broke, the First World War broke out in July …

**Dennis:** The what?

**Nellie:** The First World War broke out in July. They couldn’t come and for years we didn’t hear from them. Then we [inaudible 00:15:58] heard from them that Hitler came, 1942 and they all was killed.

**Dennis:** How old were you in that picture?

**Nellie:** In that picture I was two years [inaudible 00:17:02] to this I was 20 years. My mother, I got her pictures here, beautiful and they were all killed. We found out my mother was burned alive with all her grandchildren, my sister had four children, they were all buried alive.

We had a friend, a Gentile man. He was very friendly to us. He was good to polish people too, very friendly. He was in the concentration camp too, he saw the way they burned my mother and they were screaming. They were screaming before they died, it was terrible. They put them all in one place and burned them alive.

**Dennis:** Have you always lived in New York?

**Nellie:** I lived in New York, Brooklyn in New York, in the Bronx.

**Dennis:** Did you ever want to go elsewhere?

**Nellie:** No.

**Dennis:** No? You were happy here once you got here.

**Nellie:** I was happy. Found it very hard, my English wasn’t so good, I didn’t go to school. In Europe the Jewish people they wouldn’t let us to go to school either that time. The Gentile wouldn’t let the Jewish -We didn’t have the school.

My mother took in a teacher for six children for an hour each. What could you learn? We had to know a couple of languages; I used to speak Russian, Polish, Ukrainian. It wasn’t learned I just picked that like I picked up English.

English I went to school, I went to night school [inaudible 00:18:53] school to educate myself. When I came here even though I just [inaudible 00:18:58] up a little few things that you learn for one hour a week, six people. It was a very hard life [inaudible 00:19:07] to America.

**Dennis:** Did you ever get married?

**Nellie:** Sure. I married, I have a son, a doctor, I have a daughter-in-law, professor. That’s my daughter-in-law, my daughter-in-law is a professor, she teaches in [inaudible 00:20:10] college. My son had an office in Brooklyn and a neighbor became very bad.

He [inaudible 00:20:19] working for 50 years and the neighbors became so bad that he sold the [inaudible 00:20:28] made it only on there, [inaudible 00:20:34]. He got a job in that college, the chief medical doctor there.

My husband was sick a long time, my husband died cancer. I had to work and my son wanted to become a doctor. First he went to [inaudible 00:21:02] school for four years and didn’t like it. He says, he wants to be. He went to Chicago and became a doctor. [Inaudible 00:21:11] have two beautiful grandchildren.

**Dennis:** When you first came to America did you find it was a lot of different and a lot harder than?

**Nellie:** Of course it was different. I didn’t know how to speak a word of English, it was very hard. Came in the factory where the girls was, a lot of them were Gentile girls who spoke their language. I didn’t know how to speak they were very kind to me. They were trying to help me but I couldn’t understand a word they were saying. It was hard but you learn little by little.

**Dennis:** Did your eyes ever give you any more trouble?

**Nellie:** My eyes didn’t give me trouble, I read now without glasses. I mean they told me I have cataract now. My eyes didn’t bother but they weren’t healthy eyes [inaudible 00:22:06]. In fact before I went I went a couple of months to a different city Europe to a doctor but he says, “Its okay you could go,” but when I came on the way it got worse.

**Dennis:** This is your passport

**Nellie:** This is just the envelope where I had my ticket.

**Dennis:** It has the name of the boat.

**Nellie:** The boat [inaudible 00:22:36] there. It says over here the name of the boat. The German name is [inaudible 00:22:42].

**Dennis:** On the boat you didn’t see any officials from the US? When you came to America you didn’t see any officials?

**Nellie:** Officials?

**Dennis:** Inspectors coming onto the boat?

**Nellie:** No on the boat. When I was working my boss used to say I go into [inaudible 00:23:16] because young girl [inaudible 00:23:19] I have 18 years. He used to tell me to go out when the inspector came into the place because I was very young. I was a little younger than I am on the passport.

**Dennis:** Do you remember coming into New York harbor and seeing New York for the first time?

**Nellie:** Sure, I came in. By the way the [inaudible 00:23:39] came because my uncle they had to call them up to come and take me. It took time, [inaudible 00:23:47] 18th Avenue. When he came they wouldn’t, they took me in the office and said, “We have to wait for your sister,” because they wouldn’t give a man a young girl.

**Dennis:** Where was this at?

**Nellie:** My sister worked on 34th Street, this was in New York, [inaudible 00:24:07] in New York, I didn’t know New York somewhere [inaudible 00:24:11].

**Dennis:** Along the pier there [inaudible 00:24:13].

**Nellie:** I don’t know if it says here. [Inaudible 00:24:24].

**Dennis:** No [inaudible 00:24:28] was helping you?

**Nellie:** Yeah. They took me to an office and I was sitting there waiting for my sister to come. She came she took me home, she took me to my uncle’s house and I was there for six months.

Then when I saved up 27,000, wouldn’t take from me money until I had a few dollars. Then I went to the room and asked for seven, eight dollars a month with my sister together. The lady used to charge me five cents for my breakfast, she would give me roll and butter and a cup of coffee.

Lunch we used to get for five, six cents. The boss used to make coffee in a kettle. I used to come in with bread, butter, piece of herring for five cents, two cents on the bread, penny for the herring and [inaudible 00:25:28].

**Dennis:** Did you know of anyone that tried to come to America and was sent back?

**Nellie:** On the boat I saw many go back in the boat, but [inaudible 00:25:45] I never saw anybody. They were sitting crying that they sent them back because there was something wrong with them. They had [inaudible 00:25:54] couldn’t get in.

**Dennis:** You must have been pretty nervous?

**Nellie:** A lot of tears. The 12 weeks that I was travelling I met a lot of people that had to go back and they would say I’m lucky. I says,   
“I don’t know how lucky I am I [inaudible 00:26:13] there maybe they’ll send me back too.” The doctor says, “You’re all right,” he says, “You know the doctor comes put a drop in your eye it will help.”

**Dennis:** It took you 12 weeks you said?

**Nellie:** It took about 12 weeks, [inaudible 00:26:32] I left Europe …

**Dennis:** In 1914.

**Nellie:** 12 weeks when my sister came, she was yelling at me, she says, “Why did it take you three months to get here?” My sister was very [inaudible 00:27:01] me and I says, “I was waiting you should send me $25 you didn’t.” When you come to America you got to show them that you got $25. $25 I had to pay to change my ticket.

**Dennis:** To exchange your ticket?

**Nellie:** I changed from third class to second class, it was $25 extra.

**Dennis:** Because of what the doctor told you.

**Nellie:** Yeah, the doctor [inaudible 00:27:24] there they said, “Go on second class you won’t have no trouble. If you’re very sick they wouldn’t let you,” but what I had wasn’t so dangerous.

**Dennis:** Did you ever see the third class people?

**Nellie:** I hardly saw them because I wouldn’t go down, I was sick all the time there, I was laying in bed. The last two days, why should I go to third class? I wanted to see first class.

**Dennis:** Was it daylight when you came into New York? Was it light when you came into New York?

**Nellie:** Yeah I came in the morning it was light. I saw all the peddlers, it was [inaudible 00:28:08] and I came [inaudible 00:28:10] I saw the peddlers with fruit. I was very sick on the boat they came and they asked me if I want something.

I says, “I would like a piece of fruit.” The waiter brought me up a banana and I never saw that in my life. I was afraid to eat it and I felt nauseous. Since I was hungry, I’ll eat it and I loved it.

**Dennis:** You knew how to?

**Nellie:** I didn’t, in Europe we never saw that.

**Dennis:** How did you know how to open it up?

**Nellie:** You could see.

**Dennis:** You figured it out?

**Nellie:** Figured it out, like a potato, peel it.

**Dennis:** Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty [inaudible 00:29:01]?

**Nellie:** Yeah I saw the Statue of Liberty. Everything was wonderful. I came from a very small town. We once saw a car passing by in Europe, that time I was about 10 years old. Everybody were afraid standing on the sidewalk and shivering, the car passed away so fast.

Also when the car had to pass by our city, we used to clean our windows and we used to clean outside walls. We were afraid to go out because the [inaudible 00:29:48] and we were frightened very much. We looked out through the window and [inaudible 00:29:55] had to pass by my city. It was such a commotion to clean and wash the walls of the house, because the …

**Dennis:** It’s a lot different over here?

**Nellie:** Yeah. Here you could say anything, over there every Jewish person’s got to have [inaudible 00:30:19] and all the children. God forbid if somebody passes by and you make [inaudible 00:30:28], boy you could get arrested. You got to be [inaudible 00:30:32]. It’s a wonderful country here [inaudible 00:30:38].

**Dennis:** Thank you Nellie.

**Nellie:** You’re welcome.