**Janet:** Today is November 9th 1995. I’m here in New Bedford, Massachusetts in the apartment of Marguerite…

**Lussier:** Lussier.

**Janet:** Lussier and Marguerite came from France in 1914 when she was five years of age. I want to say I’m delighted to be here and I hope you will say everything that happened to you.

**Lussier:** I will.

**Janet:** When you came to Ellis Island

**Lussier:** You asked me over the phone if I could remember, yes I remember.

**Janet:** If you would start with giving your birth date and where in France you were born.

**Lussier:** I was born in a little village outside of Belfort. It’s called Rougegoutte, which means in English red drop. It was situated about 15 or 20 minutes from French Swiss and about an hour’s drive to the German border line.

**Janet:** And it was in Alsace?

**Lussier:** The Alsatian part of France, yes. My father was born when it was- I don’t know if you know the history but they would always fight, Alsace-Lorraine. When my father was born it belonged to France, so all the German books were thrown out of school and the French books went it. When the older brother and sister were born it belonged to Germany, so it was German books and they spoke German and Alsatian [inaudible 00:01:47].

But then when my father was born, whoever won the war won that section. This was the story behind it. My father when he was born, it belonged to France. I heard the history from him but he didn’t remember any Alsatian at all, just a few little words because he never learnt it really.

**Janet:** What was your father’s name?

**Lussier:** François which is French for Francis. In that custom, if you named a boy François you always, Xavier, Francis Xavier after the saint Francis Xavier.

**Janet:** His last name, your maiden name?

**Lussier:** Bleicher.

**Janet:** B-L-E-I …

**Lussier:** C-H-E-R, yes.

**Janet:** Your mother, what was her name?

**Lussier:** Her name was Eugenie Miclo, M-I-C-L-O. She was an Alsatian, she didn’t come from -They met when my father was in the military and he went into that village, she was stationed in village.

You’re going to laugh when I tell you this but it’s true because they always mentioned it. The fellows used to go through, it was country and where there was a big pile of manure they always said it’s all pretty girls. They were going to look to the girls where there was a big pile of manure.

**Janet:** There was a big pile of manure and your mother was …

**Lussier:** A big pile of manure.

**Janet:** Your mother was also from France?

**Lussier:** Yeah.

**Janet:** But just from a different part?

**Lussier:** A different section yeah.

**Janet:** You were five years old but do you remember life in Rougegoutte?

**Lussier:** Yes.

**Janet:** What do you remember?

**Lussier:** I don’t remember a lot like my older sister, but I remember a lot of things. I hadn’t gone to school, I was ready to go to school in September when my mother -My mother was here, my parents were here.

**Lussier:** You want me to start from the beginning?

**Janet:** Yes.

**Lussier:** There was a cotton mill in the village. Some of the men decided that they wanted to go to America. The streets supposedly were paved with gold. Finally, my father talked my mother into letting him come alone. He came with some other men.

At the time there were a lot of strikes in the cotton mills and one thing another. He was only a young man, he was in his early 30s and men don’t have the stamina that women do to persevere.

After a while of being here a few months, I suppose being alone and the mill’s going on strike and I think he went to some other city in Massachusetts to work, he decided to come back home. Guess who came nine months after? Me. There was only three girls.

**Janet:** You were the oldest?

**Lussier:** No, I was the youngest. He died at three months and was buried there so we never -After that there were four girls. So there was three girls when my father came here alone, my mother had three girls, Lucie, Suzanne and Jeanne. Then when he went back nine months after, along came me. I bet they wish they had left me behind.

When I was nine months old, my father talked my mother into coming to America with him. He said, “If you come with me we can both work together and when we get enough money we’ll send for the children. But if we take the children, you won’t be able to work.”

I was only nine months old and my other sister was only 20 months older than I, there’s only 20 months between all of us. He talked my mother into it and she came with him. I don’t fault my parents, they did what they thought was best for us. It must have been heartbreaking for her to leave four little children. Lucie was only six and a half, she remembered my mother. What do I know at nine months?

They came here and it took five years almost, before they accumulated enough money -Don’t forget in those days, you didn’t fly you sailed. Every year they would send money to have our portrait taken so they’d know what we looked like. That’s what happened.

When I was, like I said July, she alone came, they couldn’t afford both, my father had to work anyway. She came to get us. Now, I didn’t know any of this, everything was kept from me, I wouldn’t have understood because the woman that brought me up in the village, the two of us, three, Lucie, Suzanne and I the youngest. They couldn’t take Jeanne because there were too many small ones there but she stayed in the village with a nun.

I didn’t even know I had another sister because at that age you don’t go walking around outside. I called my mother and there were a lot of families here by that name, but they are all gone, Reiniche was their last name.

In French I used to call her momma Reiniche, I couldn’t just say momma, so momma Reiniche, so naturally this is what caused the trouble at Ellis Island.

**Janet:** How do you spell Reiniche?

**Lussier:** R-E-I-N-I-C-H-E.

**Janet:** How was it that this woman, momma Reiniche- how was it that she came to take care of you and your sister?

**Lussier:** My mother had to find a home for somebody. When she came with my father they had to find a home for us. These people lived right across my godfather incidentally and they had a farm. Because they took it, in other words to make money too, my parents would send the board money.

The reason, as I said, they didn’t take Jeanne because they had small ones of their own and there was only 20 months difference between Jeanne and I, my third sister. When my mother came for us, my sister kept saying, my sister Lucie the oldest said -Wait, this woman came in the house, I said this woman, my biological mother.

I still can see her. They had shoes a color like ox blood. Of course my first pair of shoes, by the way, was when I came to America. We had wooden shoes, we lived with wooden shoes. I remember seeing those shoes and incidentally they had no closets in the home. They had big burrows, where they put –I remember seeing those shoes and I didn’t like this woman.

My sister Lucie kept saying, “This is your new mother.” Well, we never bonded really. One day I walked all over her shoes with my wooden shoes, of course that didn’t endear me to her. Everything was done so I wasn’t aware that I was going to be taken away.

**Janet:** Before we talk about your going to America with your mother and sisters, tell me about momma …

**Lussier:** Reiniche.

**Janet:** Reiniche, what was she like? What do you remember about her?

**Lussier:** To me from my point of view, she was an angel. She was a martyr with her husband, he was a drunk and he was mean. I don’t know, I can’t remember -My sister Lucie, they used to get punished if they did anything wrong.

Lucie said I used to squeal so they’d get punished. Lucie remembered that he was very mean to her. As I grew older and I went back to France quite a few times with my mother, they verified that, the neighbors that she was a martyr. He had a farm, cows, he sold the milk, he would not let his children drink it and the two youngest died- TB.

They had to be careful with us because there would be neighbors that would write to my mother but she was an angel, she went to town to the city to cash the check whenever my mother send it, she always brought candy back and she had to hide it, she had to tell us, “Don’t show it to him.”

I don’t remember the meanness there. All I know I cried for that woman for years, I just cried, even today I think about her. I guess we went to passport pictures, I remember I got a pair of shoes, my first pair of shoes.

**Janet:** Do you remember the house you lived in?

**Lussier:** Yes.

**Janet:** With momma Reiniche?

**Lussier:** Yes.

**Janet:** What was that like?

**Lussier:** Right next door to this one. In those days there was a farm house, it was not rich, they were just poor peasants. They had two older children and the two younger ones that died young. I think they died after we came to America.

I remember she was washing me one day and she stood me on a chair -She brought me a doll from America. She stood me on a chair and I could see this big bucket of water and she washed me. Then she put me on the chair and dressed me up, put my shoes and when her back was turned and I jumped in the water with my shoes.

**Janet:** This was your first pair of shoes?

**Lussier:** My first pair of shoes, five years old, what do you expect? Then on top of that in my childish mind I must have sensed something. My sister kept saying –I kept calling to my other mother momma and she kept saying, “This is your real mother.” She kept pounding that into me. I guess at five years old the more you pound it into a child then you have to realize that out of the four of us I was the odd one.

**Janet:** What was your …

**Lussier:** Like my father …

**Janet:** What was your father like?

**Lussier:** My mother was very serious. She had had a hard life, very hard life taking care of her sisters and brothers. Her mother died when she was young, 18, 19 and she had four sisters to take care of. By the way her father, my grandfather, was burned alive by the Germans and thrown in the grave.

She found that out after World War 1. I remember saying to her, “What do you want to go wear black for? He was no good.” Oh God, you don’t tell that to your parents in those days. However …

**Janet:** Why did you say that? He was no good?

**Lussier:** Because he deserted his family. He left his wife with four, five children and one of them was retarded and went to live in the Alsatian hills with a maiden nun who had money. Then when my grandmother died, my mother was left with all those to bring up.

She found out after the war that, I guess when the Germans took over that village, this was World War 1. I guess he was nasty to the Germans at the village and you don’t bite the enemy.

He was a drunk, one day they dug a hole, they set him on fire and they threw him in. She kept that out when the war was over. That was how we had our picture taken. It was like I was going on a little trip and we went on the Savoie, it took 10 days.

**Janet:** Do you remember saying goodbye to your …?

**Lussier:** No, I don’t remember that, but I do remember that that woman cried forever after. She said that she would never -we saw her back again, my mother took me when I was 18. She said she wouldn’t take any other children again. It broke her heart too much to let them go.

Probably she was more attached to me than the others because she took me as a baby. The more my sister kept saying, “This is your new mother.” The more I kept saying, “I don’t want my new mother.”

**Janet:** Do you have any memories before your mother came back to take you and your sisters? Do you have any memory?