**Janet:** This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. I’m here in Far Rockaway, Long Island, New York with Nettie Rand, who came from Poland when she was seven years old in 1919. I’m very happy that I’m able to speak with you. We’ll try to cover as much as we can. Why don’t we start at the beginning Nettie, if you would tell me your birth date.

**Nettie:** I was born on February 12th, 1912 in Lodz, Poland.

**Janet:** Did you live in Lodz up until the time you left Poland?

**Nettie:** Yes.

**Janet:** What do you remember?

**Nettie:** As much as I can remember at that time, I was always hungry. Now I know and that time I don’t know if I realized what is was but there was a war on and there were a lot of soldiers in the area.

The soldiers did not mistreat us. I didn’t actually hear the shooting. Later on I found out that was, in 1914, the war broke out, the World War but at that time all I can remember was that my family and I lived in a development that was like a big house, a long house and we had two rooms, and we were six people, my brother and five sisters. My father was in America.

What I can recall of it was being hungry all the time, looking for food, running around with my sisters and my one brother wherever there was anything available to pick up to eat. My mother was always looking around scrounging for food. My father was in America. He had left before the war, when the war started he had left and gone to America, so my mother was left with… actually we were seven children but one died so we were left six children.

I remember there was bakery outside of the development where we lived. It wasn’t a development. It was like a housing where a lot of poor people lived. Outside was a street, and the streets were very clean and it was always whitewashed. I remember there was a bakery near us and I could smell the bread and the rolls and from that time on, I have a tremendous love for rolls which I still eat here in [unclear 00:02:58] because we have a lunch program and I’m on the lunch program where we have rolls giving out. But this is what I remember, being hungry.

I also remember getting food from a kitchen, from the Salvation Army, that served rice with cocoa. It was delicious because we didn’t have any food. We had very little food. My mother would scrounge around to pick up bread or anything that we could eat.

My one brother used to run errands for whatever he could, little shops, little stores… and this is what I remember about… there was no fighting. Later on I found out that the Germans and the Russians used to come into that area but they were very nice. They did not mistreat us. That’s as much as I can remember about the house till we went on the boat to America.

**Janet:** Did you go to school at all?

**Nettie:** No. There was no school because it was war time. There was nothing. I didn’t learn anything there. When I left I was a little girl who didn’t know any other language than Yiddish and a little Polish.

I wasn’t taught anything. My brother went to [unclear 00:04:27] but he was older than me so that was before the war, before my father went to America but during the war he did not go to any school, neither did my sisters. There was just no school that I can recall.

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

**Nettie:** My father’s name was Reuben. My name was Peter Kofsky, actually a polish name, but when we came to America he changed it to Peters. My brother kept his name. He kept Peter Kofsky.

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

**Nettie:** P-E-T-E-R Peter, K-O-F-S-K-Y. It’s newly easy. That was my name Nettie Peter Kofsky, until I got married.

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

**Nettie:** Her name was Rose.

**Janet:** Her maiden name?

**Nettie:** Shimshevitz.

**Janet:** Can you spell it?

**Nettie:** S-H-I-M-S-H-E-V-I-T-Z, Shimshevitz Rose.

**Janet:** Did you have grandparents?

**Nettie:** I never recall any grandparents at all. I never and I really regret, that I never had any grandparents. I think they must have died before the war. I never knew them.

**Janet:** How about aunts and uncles?

**Nettie:** Yes. My mother and father both had a lot of sisters and brothers. I remember two or three aunts that stayed in Europe but my father’s brothers also went to America. When we landed in America and we lived in New York, I remember later on going to visit all these relatives of my father’s brothers, not my mother. My mother’s sisters never came here but my father’s I remember visiting a lot of cousins.

**Janet:** Do you remember any family gatherings in Poland?

**Nettie:** Not in Poland, not during the war. All I can remember about the war was being hungry, always scrounging for food, but being healthy, not being sick. None of us was sick. One of my sisters died of tuberculosis. I think there was an epidemic during the war and she died.

**Janet:** Do you remember that?

**Nettie:** No, I don’t. I was told.

**Janet:** Is there anything else about Lodz that you can think of? Anything about the town, about the community, about your home…?

**Nettie:** All I can remember is that it was…I used to run around to play. We used to play in that house where I lived. I remember there was a… where my mother hung clothes. It was like an attic, a big attic on top and we used to run around and play, the little girls and boys. I remember one time one of my aunts who was a little bit better off than we were, we used to go to her and she used to give us little delicacies to eat, a piece of cake. If she opened up an orange and the smell of that orange and the taste it’s still with me.

**Janet:** So that was a treat, to have a piece of an orange. Then the war was over. Did your father send you tickets?

**Nettie:** Yes. He sent us tickets and money. We had to wait, I remember, for a quarter and the day that the tickets came, we were so happy. Everyone was so elated that we were finally going to America. We waited for a boat to be available for us to go.

We did get a boat finally and I remember preparing to go and my mother would… whatever she had, she packed up, even bedding. She even took a quilt along with her. We always had a feather quilt that she brought to America. She brought salamis to go on the boat to eat with the bread, with things that we took along, with the whole gang of us that we went.

I remember being happy, not being afraid, looking for such a new land, a new country was very exciting.

**Janet:** Do you remember leaving Lodz?

**Nettie:** No, I don’t remember when I left. All I remember is that we got on this boat and I remember we went to Havre, France first. It took a long time and we were on a cattle boat. We were in steerage, underneath. The boat had cows and they’d get back when we were right next to them.

My mother was sea sick all the time, my sisters were sick, but I wasn’t. I used to run around and the sailors used to pick me up and play with me. I enjoyed the trip. I remember stopping at Havre and having an ice cream cone which I never in my life ate. I remember the taste of that ice cream, things that I recall.

**Janet:** When you went from Poland and then you took the ship from Le Havre, right in France?

**Nettie:** We went to Le Havre but I think it was a Polish port that we stopped from because Le Havre is in France and we were in Poland. I don’t remember from where we took, from what port in Poland we took it. I think it was [unclear 00:10:31] if I remember. [Unclear 00:10:32] had a port and we had to take a train to get to that.

**Janet:** Where the cattle were on the boat, was that the boat that you took to Le Havre or the boat that you took from Le Havre to the United States?

**Nettie:** I think it was to Le Havre and then we took another one, but we were at all times, in the lowest steerage.

**Janet:** Is there anything else about the voyage? Were you examined before end or not until you got to Ellis Island?

**Nettie:** No, at Ellis Island.

**Janet:** Tell me about the ship coming into the New York Harbor.

**Nettie:** That was something. It took a long time. We must have had very bad weather. It took to me it seemed an eternity, although I enjoyed all of it. My mother was sick all the time but when we finally had one day, everyone was very excited and everyone was saying, “Come on deck” in all different languages, in Yiddish, in Polish, and from France we picked up a lot of people too.

Of course I was there too. My brother picked me up, put me on his shoulder, and… I was the youngest of all my family. He always used to carry me around.

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

**Nettie:** My brother’s name was Morris, and he kept that name Morris. It was so crowded. I saw this tremendous lady, this beautiful…it was really a sight and everyone was yelling and screaming and shouting, “Hoorah we made it”. It was a very tumultuous trip. It was a lot of storms. People were afraid that we would never get here, seeing that Statue of Liberty was just marvellous.

Then of course when we reached, I didn’t know at that time it was Ellis Island, these things I learned later on. But I remember coming into this big hall with a lot of people, with a lot of noise, with a lot going on.

My mother with all our brood, we were put into a cubicle, into a place together, so that we shouldn’t get lost waiting for my father to come to pick us up. I don’t know how long we waited but it seemed an awful long time.

When my father finally came, I had never seen my father. He must have known when I was born, but he left and I never knew him. He was a complete stranger. He knew everyone else but he didn’t know me. When he saw me he just looked at me, chucked me under the chin, but he was so excited with his family. I don’t know very much how I felt about my father. I didn’t really ever feel very close, my mother was my whole life. She was my protector.

**Janet:** Do you remember the examinations that you got at Ellis Island?

**Nettie:** I don’t remember exactly how it was. I know that we talked about- I remember our hair. They looked for lice and after that my mother used to always use, especially when I started school, she was always telling me that my head had to be washed with kerosene, with all kinds of… because we were a little bit germ-stricken with our heads.

We were scrubbed, we had to take baths before we came through as far as I know, but we did not have any things on our hands, or any kind of… we were admitted. Our eyes were examined, we were all healthy, we didn’t have any disease, we didn’t carry any diseases except for our hair that I remember we were told my mother had to wash our hair.

**Janet:** Were you detained overnight at Ellis Island?

**Nettie:** I think we were there one night, overnight.

**Janet:** Do you remember that? Where you slept?

**Nettie:** No. I don’t remember sleeping anyway. I remember we were all hurdled together in one spot. There was no place to sleep. I think my mother might have had a bench or a chair and maybe we stayed on the floor. I don’t remember. But it was so crowded, there were so many people at that time when the boat arrived, and then we had to wait to be picked up.

**Janet:** When your father did come, where did he take you to?

**Nettie:** He had to take a cab, we took a taxi and we went from Ellis Island to Delancey Street, in New York where my father had a tenement apartment. There were two rooms. There was a dining room at that time, there was no couch or anything, just chairs and a table that he had set up for us. There was a kitchen with a washtub they called it, it was not a bathtub, it was a washtub. The toilet was in the hall and there were five or six flights, I don’t remember. To me it was nothing.

Later on, we stayed there about a year and a half I remember and again, when we did come into New York from the cab, we were a whole brood, and we saw what was going on in New York with the pushcarts, that’s where we went around Delancey Street and on the sides we were right near the Brooklyn Bridge. This was Columbia Street and Delancey Street round this way, and to me it was like heaven. It was so beautiful. It was so big, so unique.

In Poland we didn’t have these very big tenement houses. We had small houses not higher than two or three flights, and this was so tremendous that we kept going up on these spiral stairs. I remember seeing all these pushcarts and all these people, and later on that’s what we used to do. We used to roam in the streets and look at the pushcarts.

I remember that the kitchen was set up for a meal. My father had told one of our relatives, or one of his brother’s wives, and there was chicken soup, there was chicken, and there was so much food on the table. First thing we did we all ran over to the food and we saw the house. This is what I remember the first time.

**Janet:** Do you remember any things that struck you as new and different? I know a lot of things did, but that you remember those first few days and weeks that you saw…?

**Nettie:** I remember coming home and seeing all that food. I remember sitting down and eating, that it was so much food that I kept picking up this and picking up that and I kept holding it as if to say, “This isn’t going to last. I’m going to keep it”. But then I found out that one thing we always had, as far as I can remember, we always had food. It was always chicken and chicken soup on Friday, on the holidays.

My father was very orthodox and I remember being orthodox when I was a little girl because I felt that all this was going to fade. This was going to be taken away. Food became my most important issue at that time. We were always rummaging and holding on… we were very poor.

My brother and my father immediately took my brother in, and one of my older sisters or two of them, into the sweatshop. He was a tailor, and they immediately learnt how to sew and this is what they did. My brother was a very learned fellow. He used to go to his [unclear 00:18:53] and he was very smart, he always was. He learnt English very fast. He went to night school. I started one in the first grade.

**Janet:** What was that like? Going to school?

**Nettie:** I don’t remember what it was like in the beginning when I first went. I remember being very shy but they put us in a special class where they knew that I was not able to understand and there were interpretations and that’s how I learnt but I learned so fast. I was so anxious to learn everything. I became very smart little girl and I was eventually skipped from first grade… I even won, in junior high school, a medal of excellence.

**Janet:** Did your other sisters go to school too?

**Nettie:** One other sister who was two and half years older than me. She and I both went. She went to ninth grade and I went to ninth grade. My other sisters one of them went to night school and one other one that was older did not go. My brother went to school, but he went to night school.

**Janet:** Do you remember any attitudes, or values, or ideals that your mother and father tried to instil in you?

**Nettie:** My father tried to instil Jewish, the religion. He was very strict, very orthodox. I remember my brother; he a few times had arguments and my older sisters if they stayed out on a Friday night. There was no such thing as smoking at that time. My sister didn’t smoke. My father didn’t smoke, so there was no smoking on the holidays. We never had enough money to buy cigarettes.

They did stay out and they did do certain things that my father didn’t approve of, but that’s the only moral thing he told us never, about staying out late or being in crime, or being raped in the streets at night. There was no such restriction in my family. There was no need for it. All we were anxious to do we were always with the cleanliness. Always my mother was scrubbing one or the other of us.

There was no privacy. We slept sometimes three in a bed. There was one bedroom and my brother slept in the dining room on the [unclear 00:21:31]. My father and mother had their bedroom. They were the only ones but there was no privacy. We all slept together, we all did together. I remember playing with little [unclear 00:21:43] dolls and a matchbox that I made for a crib, and I was happy. I always remember being happy because I was loved.

**Janet:** What was it like being with your father? Having not known him before, how did that work out?

**Nettie:** I didn’t like him. I never liked him. He didn’t pay too much attention to me. He was very busy working and he was interested a lot in my brother. My brother was the only son that he had and he was a smart brother, smart boy.

He never paid very much attention to me. My interests were mainly playing with dolls, going to school, my sisters. I enjoyed my sisters. We would take walks on Delancey Street and go up on the bridge. The bridge fascinated me.

**Janet:** Your father was mainly interested in your brother.

**Nettie:** He was interested in my brother but I didn’t have too much to do. I was doing my own thing. [Unclear 00:23:07] the street usually looking for food, going to the movies with my sister…

**Janet:** Do you remember that?

**Nettie:** Yes, I remember going. I think it was five cents to get into the movies. We didn’t always have the money and many times there were men standing there and we went into the movies with someone who took us in and they would… at that time I didn’t know what it was, but they would…men who wanted to… this was the only crime that I remember.

Being taken into a movie, me and my sister, never alone because she always held my hand, and there were men who were trying to touch us or get some thrill out of us because they couldn’t do very much in the movies, but I remember them touching me in the movies and they would buy me candy and buy me whatever it is, and we saw a movie. We were on our own. Our parents did not watch us.

**Janet:** Do you remember the movies? What kind…?

**Nettie:** Yes. I remember Charlie Chaplain. We’d laugh and that’s about the only thing I remember at that time on Delancey Street, where the peddlers were.

Later we moved to Brooklyn and that’s another phase I was going through growing up, going to school, seeing boys and getting interested in different things, in my appearance, and what I should wear.

I was always telling my mother that she was always making my dresses. I never had anything bought in the store except a pair of shoes. I would always get hand-me downs for my other sisters. All I remember is growing up gradually with my mother, with my sisters, always very happy, always something to do, always very inquisitive, finding things out. I love my family. We were very close later on but I never recall caring about my father.

**Janet:** Can you say your sisters’ names?

**Nettie:** Yes. I had a sister named Lilly, and I had a sister named Sally, and I had a sister named Eva, and I had a sister named Hellen, and my brother’s name was Morris.

**Janet:** When you moved to Brooklyn you were still in school?

**Nettie:** Yes, then I really started school. In Delancey Street I must have started in the first grade and then when I went immediately I remember moving into P.S. 189. I was there till the sixth grade and then I moved to junior high school 149 on Vermont Street in Brooklyn and I graduated from Vermont Street Junior High, and I went to business school for a year.

**Janet:** What was your first job?

**Nettie:** I never got to be a bookkeeper or a stenographer, or a typist. That’s what I took up a commercial course. I was good at it but I was never good at stenography, so I went right into depression time. I remember growing up we were never well to-do so I never got a good job.

My first job was in the factory, in [unclear 00:26:39] on DeKalb Avenue in Brooklyn. I was a smart girl and I was very educated and I loved to read. Wherever I could they had me do office jobs. I was wonderful in vocabulary, it was my… to this day, I do crossword puzzles. I love them, I love words. This was my growing up time. I never married into a rich family. I married a poor man also from the other side, also from Europe.

**Janet:** How did you meet him?

**Nettie:** I met him in Second Avenue Social Club and we got married from there. But he had no job, he had no trade, he had no nothing, so I went to work. After five years, we got married during the depression and after five years, I had a baby.

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

**Nettie:** Saul and his name was Rand, R-A-N-D.

**Janet:** And your children?

**Nettie:** Martin and Robert. I have two sons. I have four grandchildren. My husband died about eight years ago here in [unclear 00:27:49], where I live now.

**Janet:** Tell me what effect you think growing up in Poland during those very difficult times for your first seven years, what effect do you think that had on you in the rest of your life in this country?

**Nettie:** I think it made me very aware of the importance of having security, of having something to eat, of not being hungry, of being together with the family, of being close, of never being alone. I hate to be alone. To this day I love people and I like to be with people. I think I didn’t know the meaning of war at the time. I was too young to realize I know now, and the only remembrance I have is of being hungry.

**Janet:** What do you feel most proud of in your life?

**Nettie:** What do you mean?

**Janet:** Or grateful for maybe?

**Nettie:** I have come to realize in my old age at the beginning I was just lapping everything up. I was poor all my life and I had to work and help my husband and the most I ever got out of anything right now is to be with a family, to be with someone you love. That the most important thing in life is not to be rich, but to be healthy.

Health means an awful lot and I was always healthy. It’s just now when I’m getting old that I realize how important health is and that I didn’t pay more attention to material… people seem to be looking for something all the time. I wasn’t looking. I was just living day by day. I don’t know if I learned anything.

All I learned was that I have to be secure. I like to be able to take care of myself, to be able to take care of my children, and to teach my children the value of being…not religious. I was not a religious mother, neither was my husband, but the fear of God. The fear to do the right thing, not to do anything to shame us and to be happy with what we have.

This is my… that the most important thing is love, to be with your family, to love your children, to love your country, to love the things around you. This is what I live with.

**Janet:** That’s a beautiful place to end. I want to thank you. I’m speaking with Nettie Rand. Nettie is 82 years old now, and it’s August 4th 1994. We’re at Far Rockaway in New York. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, I’m signing off, and thank you very much.

**Nettie:** Thank you.