**Janet:** This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. It’s Thursday September 26th 1991. I’m here at Ellis Island with Helen Rosenthal who came through here from Poland in 1940 when she was 30 years of age. It’s very nice to have you here Mrs. Rosenthal. Let’s begin by my asking you your birth date.

**Helen:** I was born October 7, 1910.

**Janet:** Where?

**Helen:** Blarzowa, Galicia at the time under Austria.

**Janet:** Could you spell …

**Helen:** The province of Austria.

**Janet:** Could you spell …

**Helen:** Galicia, G-A-L-I-C-I-A.

**Janet:** The name of …

**Helen:** The name is Galicia, that’s the province.

**Janet:** The town?

**Helen:** The town is Blarzowa, B-L-A-R-Z-O-W-A. It’s a very small town. There was no rail road, in the lower Carpathian Mountains in Poland.

**Janet:** Was it a farming town? Was it a town where farming was the main occupation?

**Helen:** A small town, there were something like 4- 500 people in town. One small street with stores and one market where people came every Wednesday brought their greens, their vegetables and the cows and things like that to sell. Also bought what they needed like kerosene and different material for the clothing.

The town in itself was small but nice. It was like home, you knew everybody in town and most of the people who came knew everybody else. It was comfortable. There was a little brook and we could go swimming there. There was lots and lots of woods where we could go walking and playing. It was quiet, convenient, very nice.

My father and mother they had a nice brick house. Because before I was born, 1907 there was a big fire the whole town burned down, they were all wooden houses. When they rebuilt it was already houses of -Brick houses.

We lived with us a grandma, also my father’s sister who died. Her child was at that time two and a half years and my mother took care of him. We were four children our own, my two brothers and two sisters, I was the third in the row.

My name in Poland was Chaja. Chaja is a Hebrew name, it means actually an animal and Chaja means life. You could say a live animal or if my husband wanted to tease me he said a wild animal. When I came here they read it Chaja, C-H-A-J-A, everybody said Chaja, I didn’t like that name. When I became a citizen I changed my name to Helen.

My maiden name is Intrater. My family came to Poland. We lived there for 400 years from Spain. We have no papers left, everything was gone when my parents were killed by the Nazis, nothing was left.

I lived in Blarzowa till I was 20. I wanted to leave, my mother didn’t want to let me go, I was a Zionist and wanted to go to Israel. When I was 10 years old in 1920, Poland became a country by itself after the First World War.

I’ll never forget that day, when we came to school, all the children said, “Get out of here [foreign language 00:05:38] the Palestine.” I felt like nothing and that day I made up my mind that I won’t have a child in Poland. I said to my father, “If you keep me here, I will be an old maid because I will never have a child here.” That was my way of getting out there.

My sister married a man who went to Belgium and she lived in Antwerp, Belgium since she was married. Then my oldest brother went there, he came back, he married his sweetheart and he went back to Belgium.

I said, “Now it’s my time.” My father said, “Let your youngest brother go, you stay with us because we need somebody here with.” I said, “You should come with us there, there’s no point for you to stay here. Sell the house, sell the business and come.”

They were very orthodox and they didn’t feel like going to a big town like Antwerp Belgium. They just felt, “We were born here, we lived our lives here, we’ll die here.”

**Janet:** What year was that?

**Helen:** In 1936 I have to tell you that I was married, met my husband in Belgium in Antwerp and we got married. We went home on our honeymoon because his parents also lived in Poland.

We went to their house first in [Torun 00:07:39], that was a big town in Poland. His parents, his brothers and sisters came with us to my parents’ house. It was like a seven day wedding that they made for us in my mother and father’s house.

**Janet:** Before we leave the town in Poland, before you left it, tell me what was your mother’s maiden name?

**Helen:** My mother’s maiden name was Necha, N-E-C-H-A. Her name from home was [Goldwinda 00:08:23], I don’t know the translates like a German name at that time.

**Janet:** That was her first name?

**Helen:** No, that was her maiden name, the first name was Necha. You would read it Necha, N-E-C-H-A.

**Janet:** Both your mother and father’s families were from the little town in Poland? They were both located there?

**Helen:** No, my mother was born in another town but my father was born in Blarzowa and lived there all his life, had a business. We had a- how you call it? An iron, all the things that you have to plough and use all the little machinery …

**Janet:** Tools?

**Helen:** Also pots and pans, a file or a thing to cut the grass, that all these kinds. To build a stove, because stoves were built out of -There was no electricity and no gas in Blarzowa, not even in 1936 when I came back. There was no rail road, but in 1936 they had already bus that went to the big town.

**Janet:** Your father sold these implements in a store?

**Helen:** In a store.

**Janet:** He had a store?

**Helen:** The house had four rooms and a big tremendous eating kitchen. The store was at the front side of the house also, big store with iron, with all for to make stoves for cooking and stoves for heating. Everything was heated with wood, there was lots of wood. We were surrounded by woods all over.

**Janet:** Would you describe your father, what kind of a man was he?

**Helen:** My father wore a beard. He was not a very tall man, but my mother was thin and tall. Mother was very good looking woman, very thin and tall. He was chunky like, not heavy but smaller built but more and you can see the picture if you want to see it there. No, that’s my husband.

I have one picture of my father, if I would have known you’re going to ask I would have brought it. We lost all our pictures, we lost everything when we flee, it’s another story.

**Janet:** How about in temperament, what was your father like?

**Helen:** He was a good man, but my grandma used to say, “I’ll tell your father,” if I did something wrong. I used to say, “I’m not afraid.” She says, “You’re not?” I said, “No” I could talk to my father. He was a man mostly of learning. He studied a lot of Torah, a lot of Hebrew. He wasn’t a store but only because he had to make a living, but his major thing was to study.

**Janet:** He was a religious man?

**Helen:** Very religious. My mother too and my grandma, that’s another story.

**Janet:** She was religious as well?

**Helen:** She wanted us to be so terribly religious, which was a hardship.

**Janet:** How about your mother, what was she like?

**Helen:** My mother, how do I describe her? My daughter is like my mother, good people, such a good person is far to see. She cooked and she always had little pots to send out to give to this one, to give to this one.

She never cooked for the family alone, there was always people coming and going and eating. People came for wood. We had a big wood shed. She loaded their things. One woman came with sledges so she sent me out to help her to bring it home. The woman didn’t have wood to make for Friday night, for Saturday the meal so she sent us out to go and get it.

My father, whenever a holiday came, he had a woman who used to breastfeed him because his mother got sick at the time and he was the youngest.

**Janet:** What did you call that? What was the word you used?

**Helen:** I beg your pardon?

**Janet:** What was the word you used to describe that?

**Helen:** [Foreign language 00:14:06], that’s a Polish word, a woman who breast- as a substitute breast feeder. Whenever holiday came he says, her name was Tonka, he says, “Go and bring Tonka this.” He used to send her some money so she should feel good. To live there was a pleasure but I still wanted to leave.

**Janet:** Why did you want to leave? How did you feel?

**Helen:** I wanted to go to Israel, to work for Israel. I went to learn how to sew.

**Janet:** Did you feel the anti-Semitism in your town?

**Helen:** Not really, only at one time when Poland was declared Poland. That time, it was a Saturday and on the Saturday all the stores were closed because they were owned by Jewish people. One man came and knocked and knocked at the door.

Father says, “He knows I’m not going to sell him anything.” My brother went out, he says, “No, I don’t want to buy anything I just want to talk to your father.” My father’s name was Simcha S-I-M-C-H-A and that means in Hebrew, happiness.

He says, “Pan Simcha” that’s polish like, “Sir Simcha.” He says, “I came to take your family to my house.” He says, “You know it’s a Saturday we are not going on the Sabbath to travel.” He says, “They’re going to come to this city, they’re going to rob you. They decided and I came to take you.”

My father said, “Look, you go home, I thank you very much. I’m going to go to the synagogue and I’m going to tell everybody when it comes evening to leave their homes and go to their neighbors that are not Jewish.” Because there were a lot of good people too, you can’t say these people were bad. They were good and bad people all over the world and this is the way it is.

**Janet:** What was the composition of the town? Was it half and half?

**Helen:** Mostly Jewish.

**Janet:** It was mostly Jewish?

**Helen:** Yeah, the mayor was not Jewish and there were a lot of people who lived there too. Most of the stores were Jewish predominantly. There were two synagogues in that little town, there were rabbi.

We had no running water but they built a place where they had water for the women to immerse themselves. They had places where you could go in and soak in the water and wash yourself. The Jewish people built that on their own but anybody could come and take a bath.

**Janet:** What happened that evening? Did in fact did …?

**Helen:** That evening, my father came back from the synagogue. Saturday night there was a ceremony that you light a candle and you said the prayer. That the Sabbath is at end and we are now free to do whatever we want to do because through the Sabbath we did nothing, just pray or read a book or read the bible, nothing else we could do.

Then my father said, “Take the candles, the silver menorah and all the silver, whatever we had. We put it up on the roof, in the attic.” My brother and my cousin who lived with us, he was older than my oldest brother, they did it.

Then we started to hear shooting. When shooting came, my father said, “Take grandma and go up to our neighbor.” About a block away from us was a neighbor, he was the organ player at the church, “He’ll let you in.” Mother and I will lock up and we’ll come up.

We started walking with grandma and grandma said, “I can’t walk no more,” she got scared, “I’m going to go into this Jewish place right here and you go ahead.” She went in, she knocked at the door they let her in and she stayed there. Five children went up to this place.

When we came there, the daughter opened the door and she says, “Our house is full, everybody came to our house. I have no place to put you. I’ll put you with the animals in the …”

**Janet:** Stable?

**Helen:** Where the cow -What do you call?

**Janet:** The barn or stable?

**Helen:** The barn, “in the cow barn.” We had a little brother and he started crying, so we said, “We‘re going to wait till my father and mother is coming. We waited about half hour outside by the house and then my father and mother came up.

He knocked at the door and the man came out and he says, “I’ll take you in in my daughter’s room.” He gave us and we put our youngest brother into the bed of hers and we sat there. Then the man came and, we call it the organist, the man who play the organ in the church he says, “I’m going to out to look at the town, I’ll come back.”

My father said, “I have a request of you, I’ll give you the keys to my house, we forgot the book.” He says, “What kind of a book?” He says, “You know all year round the farmer comes, he takes the things at the end of the year and he gets produce then he pays us back. Everything is written down in that book. If they’re going to come in they may tear up the book.”

He says, “I’ll go in and get it.” Then my father says, “I left a one lamp there lighted when we went out from the house.” He says, “I’ll see.” He took the key and he went.

He came back without the book, he says, “I’ll tell you something, your house wasn’t opened, your store isn’t touched. They did not get in there. I was afraid if I’ll open and go in somebody else will follow me they’ll start robbing it.”

He says, “So I did not open it but they ruined the whole street, every store but they couldn’t take whatever sacks of flour, of sugar, they couldn’t take, it was too heavy. They put [unclear 00:22:47], petrol over it to spoil it.”

When we came back in the morning, the windows were broken, glass all over, the doors were broken. They did make a terrible mess. Nobody was killed and nobody was hurt. Whole town knew because my father told them.

We were ashamed, my mother and [inaudible 00:23:26] were ashamed that they didn’t open our store. We were the only one not touched. My father was a very honest person and he treated the people very nicely. That’s why we couldn’t figure out why that should happen. Maybe they didn’t need pots and pans, who knows?

My mother went in and took the biggest pots and cooked for the whole town. Every child in town we brought in and my mother fed them. We helped all our neighbors to clean up and to straighten up, but for four weeks we didn’t sleep at home.

**Janet:** For fear you mean that they would come back?

**Helen:** There was big unrest.

**Janet:** Who was doing this? Who did you think were the people responsible for the?

**Helen:** It’s hard to figure out. There were some of them who had guns, those young men who came back from the war. Those young man had been unrest, it was and whenever there is something like that, they felt that Jews -It was just that way. I don’t know why, but that’s the way it was.

**Janet:** Was it after that incident that you wanted to leave and go to Belgium.

**Helen:** After that incident the next Monday that we went to school, that incident happened. People that I grew up with, people that I knew from the first grade, children we played together. I thought they were my friends.

I was a Polish, I knew all the kings, I knew all the history of Poland, I was a Polish person. I was person and surely I was Jewish, we had a different religion but that didn’t mean that we were different in any other way.

We lived there. My great-grandparents and great-grandparents lived there. We came at the time from Spain, King Sobieski, I learned the Polish history. He that was King of Polish was cruel Sobieski. I speak a good Polish. I still remember the language very well.

He asked the Jewish people to come into Poland because he needed the commerce. Jewish people were good at that. That was beginning of Jewish people coming into Poland. When we heard that as a child, I am 80 years old, its 70 years ago, I’ve never forgotten that. I’m talking to you like I’m telling you a story, it’s not a book story, it’s a story of a life. That’s what it is.

**Janet:** That put in your mind to go Israel?

**Helen:** I wanted to go to Israel.

**Janet:** You started out …

**Helen:** My mother said, “I’ll die if you go to Israel.” That was at that time was Palestine, it was very hard life there. She says, “You’re going to split axe in Israel? I did not bring up a child of mine to go and split.” I said, “Mother I’ll be a free person there.” She couldn’t understand it, so I went to Belgium.

**Janet:** How old were you when you left for Belgium?

**Helen:** 20.

**Janet:** Did you expect to stay in Belgium?

**Helen:** I had already a boyfriend in Poland. This boyfriend of mine did not live in our town. He came about 18 and a half, I must have been 18, 18 and a half to visit his sister who lived in Poland. His sister and her husband they had a drug store in our town.

His sister was very lonesome because they were not religious and religious people didn’t accept the no-religious Jewish people. I became friendly with her, and I used to come to her, I used to invite her for coffee to our house. My mother was too good not to be nice to her.

Then her brother came for vacation and we met. Then we used to go out together during the summer, not much because it wasn’t permitted to, so we became engaged.

He studied in Prague in Czechoslovakia. He had already at that time two and a half years of college or university actually. I said, “I’m going to Belgium and I’m going to leave and I’ll go to Belgium.” He says, “Okay I’ll try to come to Brussels and study there.”

**Janet:** Mrs. Rosenthal, let’s pause here so that we can turn over the tape. Let’s take up where we left off on the other side, which is where you were engaged and you said you were going to Belgium.

**Helen:** Yeah and we travelled together. I went, I stopped off in Vienna. I had cousins live in Vienna, so I stopped off there. Then he went to Prague to finish that year off. He was going to make applications to Brussels to come and study.

But Brussels did not accept him, they wouldn’t let him go into the third year, he would have to start from the beginning. He says, “I can’t do that to my parents.” It wasn’t easy and it wasn’t cheap to send a child out of the country to study because Poland had a quota, only three percent could go to college of Jewish people.

**Janet:** Could go in Poland College.

**Helen:** Who could go into Poland so those who didn’t make it they had to go out of town, [inaudible 00:30:53] not out of town, out of the country. He studied in Prague, so he tried to get to Belgium and he couldn’t.

He said, “What are you going to do when I finish now? Are we going to get together and go to Poland to live? That’s where I have my parent and that’s why I want to go back.” I said, “Lanick, that’s not for me. I will never go back to live in Poland, either you come to Belgium or we’re going to go to Israel.” He said, “No, I have promised my parents that I come back.” I send him back my ring and I said, “Forget it.”

**Janet:** Let’s continue the story on from when you decided to come to the United States.

**Helen:** We lived in Belgium. I lived with my sister for two and a half years there. I worked at my brother-in-law’s office. I was an accountant and carried on the books and I met my husband then and become engaged in 1936 and we got married.

**Janet:** Then when did you decide to come to the US?

**Helen:** I think that I had a radar in me, I had a feeling all of a sudden that the war is coming closer to Belgium and that the Germans will have to go through Belgium to go to France. I kept on saying to my husband, we were married at that time four years, “We have to leave.”

We tried to go to Israel, we couldn’t get papers. My cousins from Vienna came to Belgium and they told us the atrocities that they put them through. I said to Paul, “Send money to the United States,” I said to my sister, “We got to go, we got to make the men come.”

They said, “Take the children and you go, we’ll come later.” I said, “Never mind, you come with me or I’m not going.” I had one child, my son, first born.

Then I kept on crying, screaming, he sent money to the United States. I don’t remember how much he sent, I just never was that interested in money, I just don’t remember. I was thinking about that, I never asked my husband, it went by.

He says, “You want me to send money, you want me to -But where I am going to do?” I say, “It’s not important we got to leave here.” One day he came home he says, “A man came and said that we could buy passports to Haiti.” I said, “Go ahead, buy them.”

We got together, my sister, my brother. The youngest brother was also just married and he had no money. We told him, we’ll get together and we’ll buy you the passports. He says, “I don’t want charity and I don’t want to take it.” He never bought it.

My sister, her husband two children, my brother, his wife and two children and we, we all got the passports. We sat there, we didn’t leave. The war broke out, we hired a bus and we were going to France.

French government said, “All the diamond dealers,” my husband was in the diamond business and my brother-in-law was in diamond and my brother was in the diamond business, “You all can come into France, we’ll take you in.”

They did take us in but by the time we got there and by the time we were there, the Germans came around the other way. We had nowhere to go.

**Janet:** Then you were …

**Helen:** We were put in France in a small town down not far from Dunkirk. The Germans made us go back and we had to hire a man with a car, it was a Swiss man who took us back to Belgium. We went back home.

**Janet:** Then how did you get to leave from Lisbon?

**Helen:** We had the passports, so then we found out that with those passports we can leave. A Paraguay attaché in Belgium said that he’s going to take us across France to Spain and from Spain we can get to Portugal anyway.

My sister went first with her husband, two children and their partner. Then as he came back, my sister wrote me a letter in Polish. I knew her handwriting, “Everything is fine and we are across the border.”

Then this [inaudible 00:37:27] it came to load the car, only one beliz went in, there are a lot beliz we left standing. I closed my apartment, I had this beautiful -I don’t want to talk about it, doesn’t matter.

**Janet:** You left almost everything …

**Helen:** Left everything standing there and going with nothing. We were four years married, we just had organized our home in the way I liked it, that’s not important.

Left the beliz standing. I didn’t know whether I had a suit for my husband but I had a dress for my -But it was one or the other.

We went through we came to Perpignan in France on the Spanish border. It was right on the border of the Spanish. We got all the visas, everything was organized and he took us to the border of the Spanish.

The Germans stood there and they said, “You need an outgoing visa from France. You can’t go out without a visa.” We had to go back. We went back to Perpignan, stood in line, got the outgoing the visa. Called the man, he says, “My car broke down and I can’t take you, but I’m going to arrange for you to go by train.”

We were now two families, my brother with his wife and two children. The voyage on the little boat, I’ll talk you later about that. I’m jumping the gun so that was …

**Janet:** The train ride then you had.

**Helen:** We went back and he made arrangements. He even gave us, each family permission to take a thousand dollars with us. We had $12,000 in money and diamonds with us. He said he’s going to bring that when his car will get -You didn’t see him, we didn’t see him.

**Janet:** You had $12,000 in dollars or in diamonds?

**Helen:** In dollars and diamonds. I don’t know how much the diamonds were worth. What we did before, when my sister went we divided up, they took half of ours and they left us half of theirs. We had half of our diamonds when we came. My sister came to America about two months before.

We went from Spain, we stayed there about three months, we couldn’t get a boat, we couldn’t get a plane, everybody was trying and everybody wanted to go.

**Janet:** You were staying there?

**Helen:** It was a hard time. We stayed in Portugal almost three months.

**Janet:** What town were you in there?

**Helen:** In Lisbon.

**Janet:** You stayed in a hotel or …?

**Helen:** First we went to a hotel but it was too expensive. Then we went into a boarding house where it was cheaper because we only had $1,000 with us, these man never came.

**Janet:** It was you and your husband at this point?

**Helen:** Me, my husband and my child, my son, he was three years old. My brother and my sister-in-law and their two children, they had a daughter of five and a son of one and a half.

**Janet:** What was it like every day? Did you go down to the docks to see about getting a boat?

**Helen:** My husband and my brother were there every day trying to find a plane or anything. One day they found there was a boat that was going to leave in 10 days. We paid the passage, but I don’t know how what -Anyway the boat didn’t leave, what happened? Germany invasion, he couldn’t go.

We didn’t have any more money and they didn’t invade, till we got back the money they didn’t. It was a problem. We sent a telegram to my sister who was already. We had money in America, they knew it, so they sent us the money.

Finally we got a boat for seven people, four grownups and three children in one boat. We went on that boat.

**Janet:** What was the name of that ship?

**Helen:** [Inaudible 00:43:09], I have it on this paper I think somewhere, it’s there.

**Janet:** Yes you wrote it down.

**Helen:** It was a small boat, must have been a cattle boat, they just put the paint over it and that was it. One meal I ate on that boat the first night and after that. It was very hot, but we traveled for 12 days with small children.

My son ran around, he didn’t throw up, he was fine. I couldn’t eat no more but we lived through it because the boat went on the edges. It was afraid to go through the middle of the water because of mines, water mines, it was during the war.

**Janet:** Can you remember that voyage, what you were thinking about, what was on your mind?

**Helen:** Only to survive the day, that’s it, nothing else mattered. To survive the day and survive the voyage, nothing else. I didn’t cry for what I lost, I didn’t cry for what I hadn’t gotten. I didn’t care to wash my face, to wash my hands, to keep the child going and to be well, that’s all.

The food was okay, but we couldn’t eat. First of all it was a nervous time. One day they set their mines, one day they sent a German boat pass by. We didn’t know whether we’d get there, but we got here.

**Janet:** Can you remember …?

**Helen:** How did we get here? The American counsel sent a telegram to Haiti to ask whether they will accept us, whether we are citizens and we paid for that telegram. It came back, “Yes, they are citizens and we accept them.” That was good.

**Janet:** Now can you remember …

**Helen:** I went up to the counsel. He gave us 24 hours to be in the United States. I begged him I said, “Have pity on us, we have three small children, we’re going to travel in the boat for such a long time. Give us three days at least to breathe free to go on another boat.” He wouldn’t give us 72 hours.

**Janet:** Within 24 hours, what did you have to do?

**Helen:** Take another boat to Haiti.

**Janet:** Can you remember first of all coming into the New York harbor?

**Helen:** Yes.

**Janet:** What was that like?

**Helen:** It was beautiful. We were so elated, we were so happy. When they landed they said, “What do you want, you want something to eat?” I say, “I want a good glass of milk.” That’s all I wanted. The milk tasted like cream, it was delicious, that’s all I remember.

**Janet:** Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

**Helen:** Yes, I remember. We stood all by the rail, and we were blessing, very glad that we could get there. We never thought that we’ll get here. It wasn’t an easy trip and it wasn’t a light trip but we got here.

**Janet:** Do you remember what people were doing on the ship when they came into the harbor and saw the statue?

**Helen:** They weren’t screaming, they were just acting –The elation came from the heart, you could see it on the faces. That’s all you could see, the face of the people. They were in awe, like we were saved. That’s all there was.

**Janet:** How about Ellis Island, do you remember the boat and coming here?

**Helen:** It was terrible that time for us. We didn’t expect to go to Ellis Island, why should they put us in jail? We didn’t do anything wrong, nothing we did. We lost most of our money that we had with us. We had only one beliz, nothing.

Yes I had a winter coat made for myself because I didn’t have. I knew we came in in December. I don’t know, it was such a letdown that I felt like just lying down and screaming and crying.

**Janet:** What did you know about Ellis Island before you actually got …?

**Helen:** Nothing, we didn’t know, they just wouldn’t let us off.

**Janet:** You just didn’t know that that place existed and all of a sudden …

**Helen:** I don’t know why, we didn’t know what it is. We didn’t know it existed until Ellis Island.

**Janet:** Then what happened?

**Helen:** They just said, “Something came up and you can’t get off the boat, you have to go to this place.” Examination or something, that kind of a rule, but we didn’t know it. We didn’t know why we weren’t explained.

I didn’t know a word of English no, neither did my husband. I spoke German, French, Flemish, Yiddish, Hebrew and Polish of course. Not one word of English.

**Janet:** What was explained to you when you did …?

**Helen:** Nothing was explained to us, nothing.

**Janet:** You thought you had to be in Haiti by 72 -For 24 …?

**Helen:** No, there was no time. We didn’t know why they didn’t let us off. Nobody knew, not my brother, not my husband, not my sister-in-law. We weren’t told anything.

In Ellis Island, this tremendous room, one room you never saw it probably before that. It doesn’t exist now. There were maybe between three to four hundred people in that room, all day from seven to seven. I had such a headache, I couldn’t breathe. It was a very hard time.

**Janet:** Do you remember what kinds of people were in that room?

**Helen:** Yeah, there were a lot of time the people who came from Belgium here and there were a lot of Jewish people. My husband, I’ll tell you about that, it’s a funny story. My husband slept with men in a separate room. Every evening at seven o’clock you had to take everything up with you and go upstairs. The beds were very clean and nice, the rooms were clean and you slept in the bed, it was fresh sheets every night, really clean.

The men slept separate and the women slept with their children separate. We were about six beds in the room. All these didn’t bother us because you felt it’s all only for a little while, it will get over.

I had two suits for my son, he was three years old. They both were white linen, every day I washed a suit, hanged it up overnight and every morning I put him in a clean suit, that and his underwear, everything.

I had nothing to change. I wore a blouse and a skirt and I didn’t care. My husband slept with men and one man was there who was a young man alone. He said in Polish, “You may understand me.” Paul tried to talk to him.

He was a sailor from a boat that got sick and they took him off his boat from Czechoslovakia or from, I don’t remember either Yugoslavia or Czechoslovakia. He talked to Paul and Paul talked to him in Polish and they understood each other.

There was a one police man at the door that was Jewish. He spoke Yiddish and he spoke English of course. When he wanted some fruit or he wanted something to buy, he gave me the money and the policeman the next day brought it.

This sailor ask him also for the things and Paul did give it to this policeman and they brought it for him. One day he comes to Paul and he says, “I would like you to do me a big favor.” He says, “What favor?”

“I want you to write a letter to the President Roosevelt for me, that I’m not sick anymore, I’d like to go back with my boat to my country. I don’t want to stay here.” Paul says, “I don’t know how to write English, I can’t write an English letter.”

He says, “How do you talk to this policeman if you cannot write English?” He did not know [inaudible 00:54:37] is or Jew is or anything. He says, “I can’t understand you, you’re lying to me.” Paul says, “Why should I lie to you? If I could write a letter for you I would do it gladly, but I can’t write in English.”

He didn’t understand that he could talk to this man who was policeman in America and only speaks English. This man spoke Yiddish and Paul talked to him in Yiddish. That is things that I remember. There was some other incident on Christmas time that I was here. We were seven weeks here in Ellis Island …

**Janet:** Long time.

**Helen:** Took so long. Two of the ladies, I don’t think they were Jewish, but before Christmas they came probably to Ellis Island to help out people. They came and we stood in line, we went over. She says, “What do you need?” I say, “I need nothing.” “How can we help you?” “The only thing you can help me is if I could get out of here.”

She spoke French a little. I said, “I’ll thank you.” She says, “I’d like to give you something.” I said, “What can you give me, I don’t need it, I really don’t need anything.”

They gave us good food, the HIAS, this is a Jewish organization send in our kosher food and we ate well. We were treated well, but we like to get out, that’s another story. She says, “That I can’t help you.”

She says, “Would you like to make an apron while you’re here?” I say, “I haven’t got much time.” She says, “What do you do with your time?” I say, “All I do is running up with my son.” Between so many people, he was wild.

She says, “I’ll give you a piece of material.” I say, “I haven’t got the needle, I haven’t got the scissors. I haven’t got anything.” She says, “I’ll give you all that, I’ll give you thread, I’ll give you scissors and I’ll give you the material. Will you make an apron?” I say, “Maybe I’ll try.”

That’s the incident. I kept that apron for many years, but all of a sudden it disappeared somewhere, I don’t know where. I wanted to show it later on to my children, but I didn’t need it. It wasn’t a very nice looking apron.

**Janet:** Do you remember what it looked like?

**Helen:** Yeah, it was round and it had stripes. Then I made a little bit like a bip up here with strings attached. I wasn’t very good at it and I had to do it all by hand.

**Janet:** Was it an apron that you used then?

**Helen:** No.

**Janet:** Later? You just saved it for a while?

**Helen:** I never used it. I just saved it as a memento, but it was …

**Janet:** Do you remember then when you got word that you would actually be able to leave Ellis Island?

**Helen:** Why it happened, we [inaudible 00:58:06] we were kept here till that mystery cleared up. My brother-in-law, my sister’s husband gave the money for the passage for all seven people on the boat that should go to Haiti, to the lawyer. The lawyer’s name is Ian Holm, he was a Jewish man. He took the money and he gave his check to cook the …

**Janet:** Travel agency.

**Helen:** The travel agent and his check bounced. We didn’t know it. They kept on asking us why we are not going. They said, “You didn’t pay the passage.” We didn’t know the telephone to my sister’s, we were in jail.

**Janet:** This is an important point. Let’s stop here so we can get another tape on and continue. We were talking about that you didn’t know why you were being retained here at Ellis Island. Then what happened, how did you come to find out and what happened?

**Helen:** Paul and Aaron, that’s my brother, he’s my oldest brother. They called to came in and they were six men in uniforms. He didn’t explain what kind. He didn’t realize what it was American men in uniforms.

They asked them questions, “How did you get the passports, how did you?” They said plain and simple, “We paid for it.” That’s all they did. He says, “It’s legal,” he says, “It was legal because the American counsel has made us pay for a telegram to Haiti and they said they accept us.”

They asked, “Why didn’t you go?” Says, “You brought me here and I don’t know why.” They said, “You’re lying.” He says, “What do I lie? What can I lie? I told you the story, I told you the truth. That’s what it is.”

We have money here in the bank, but as Roosevelt was smart, he blocked all the monies that came in from Europe because otherwise the Germans would hurt the people in order to bring it back. To safe guard those people, they blocked all the money.

“I can go to the bank and I can bring you the receipt.” They sent the policeman with my brother and my husband to the bank. Would you believe that?

**Janet:** You mean to a New York bank?

**Helen:** To a New York bank. They came back, they said, “Why didn’t you pay your passage?” Paul translated they had to a translator, they had a Jewish translator. I’ll tell you another story with that Jewish translator.

He says, “It was paid by my brother-in-law.” “He says it was paid by your brother-in-law.” Cooke said they didn’t receive any payment, the check bounced. Now he says, “I have to get in touch with my brother-in-law find out what happened.

They let him call my brother-in-law and he called. My brother-in-law says, “I have the receipt, I gave the money to the lawyer. The lawyer was going to go there and pay for the passage.” It was true, the lawyer’s check bounced.

They said, “You will have to put that lawyer into jail when you get in.” After that, they let us out. It took seven weeks to find that out, why we are here. Would you believe that?

**Janet:** Then what did you do when you left?

**Helen:** They let us go. We took another lawyer and he wrote a letter to the government that we have money here and we got to get the money out. We can’t go to Haiti without money, we have no money. How can you go to a strange country where you’re a stranger, we knew French?

It was in diamond and that my husband was in diamond business, he would have nothing to do in Haiti with his business anyway that started [inaudible 01:04:06] every four weeks we had to write a letter. The money didn’t get unblocked till one year. We kept on borrowing money from people in order to live on.

**Janet:** You were staying in New York at that time?

**Helen:** We were staying in New York. We were staying first at a boarding house in [inaudible 01:04:34] Park on 122nd Street there. Then we decided we’ll take an apartment in [inaudible 01:04:46] because we had no furniture.

We thought that the war will be over soon and we’ll go back to Belgium, we didn’t want to stay here. It was different because we didn’t go to Haiti.

After a year, we made an application that we want to stay here. We went out to Canada and came back with immigration, we worked out immigration papers. When we came back with immigration after five years we became citizens and we stayed here.

**Janet:** Now tell me about the fact that you came knowing no English and how did you come to learn English?

**Helen:** In Ellis Island there was a young doctor, a young man, he wasn’t married and he was friends with us. He came over and showed me the Life Magazine. He says, “Helen sit down, I want you to look at it and you see that you read, this is like French and this is like German and this is English. It’s very easy to learn English.” He said.

I started to read. I said, “What does that mean?” He says, “It’s laughing.” “Laughing? To me it looks like laughing. Laughing is laughing, what does laughing mean?” He explained it to me in French. I said, “That’s a funny language.”

I had a child and it wasn’t easy, but I started to get all the magazines and the little stories. Somehow I took a dictionnaire, I had a French-English, I had a German-English. I couldn’t get a Polish-English. That would have been the easiest for me.

I went to the library and one of the women said, “Did you read this?” I said, “No.” She says, “Try this.” Gone With the Wind. I read this book for a year with a dictionnaire. That’s how I learned how to read and also you going into the store, you’re going into their and the radio.

By then, my son went to kindergarten and my daughter was born. I learned with them, with my son I was afraid. I didn’t want him to have my accent, I was afraid to teach him but with my daughter I already felt better.

One day, she comes in, she was playing with three little girls, they said, “Mommy what’s an accent? They say you have an accent.” I sat her down and I explained it to her. She thought I have a disease. That’s another little thing you know, that’s an accent.

**Janet:** Let’s make clear here, your husband’s name was Paul? Your daughter and your son’s names are what?

**Helen:** My husband name was [Pinkas 01:09:03] when we came here. He changed it to Paul just like I changed mine to Helen. My son’s name is Leon. He was born in Belgium in Antwerp. My daughter’s name is Judy, she was born here. Now it’s Judy Kraushaar.

**Janet:** Could you spell that?

**Helen:** Yeah, K-R-A-U-S-H-A-A-R. She lives in Gillette, Wyoming. She has a husband who is psychologist there, has an office. She was teaching here for three years in Massachusetts when they lived there. Now in Wyoming, she’s doing his office completely.

They have two children, a son Steven who is now in college in Denver, Colorado. A daughter Deborah, who is in high school.

My son has three children, Leon, his wife is Linda [inaudible 01:10:23]. They have a son David who is in college in Albany. They have another son whose name is Pat and he is in college in Chicago University.

**Janet:** What made you decide to stay here when you -Essentially you [inaudible 01:10:51] …

**Helen:** Let me finish the children, I also have a granddaughter Leon's daughter and Linda’s. Her name is Robin and she’s also in high school. The girls are 16 years old and when they were 14 I took them both to Israel on a trip to Israel and to Egypt. They were very good girls and I liked it.

**Janet:** Let’s say why you decided to stay?

**Helen:** First of all, the war was on. My husband was doing work, he was a cleaver and he was doing work for the -There were diamonds that they used it for war production. To produce certain instruments, they needed a hard rake like a diamond.

He was splitting diamonds to make them to go into a machine to cut other things. What they make, I don’t know what, bombs or things like that. It was for war production, during the war, the whole time of the war he worked for this diamonds special.

Our money got freed after a while. It took almost more than a year. We rented an apartment in Kew Gardens in New York on the Island in Queens. Then my daughter was born, we needed another room. I got an apartment in Forest Hill, so I lived there for 29 years with my husband.

The last 10 years I live in [Nacho 01:13:14] Towers and that’s on Grand Central Parkway, one of those big buildings. It’s every comfortable there.

**Janet:** Then you were established here by the time the war was over and you were …?

**Helen:** By the time the war was over the children went to school. Then we didn’t stop and we didn’t think anymore of going back to Belgium.

**Janet:** I guess you then got word about your family who had been left in Poland?

**Helen:** By the time we found out, my mother and father were killed, all my cousins, the whole town. First of all, till 42 we still had mail from my mother and father. After 42 they evacuated and they took them out from their home and they send them to a big town.

There they became refugees. All the little towns were put into big towns. There was no space for anybody to get an apartment for anybody to live there. You had no money and they just had to live with one beliz, it was very hard. After that we didn’t hear from them.

I have a cousin who saw them in Auschwitz and they were put in the ovens. My husband, Paul, his whole family got killed. His father, mother, his two sisters, a brother who was married with a wife and two daughters, they all got killed in Poland. He was the only survivor.

**Janet:** Can you think of some things that your mother taught you, sort of ideas to live by that come from your mother or your father that you think of today?

**Helen:** I was in Israel and we were at Yad Vashem, you know what this is? Yad Vashem means the hand and the name. They built there a memory to the people who died.

Then I was there with two friends. In back of us stood a man, a young man and he asked my friend, “How do you feel now when you see that? Do you hate us?” My friend said, “I can’t answer you that but Helen will you answer this man?”

I looked at him, he must have been about 40, 45, I said, “I don’t hate you. My father and mother never taught me to hate. I didn’t teach my children to hate either. I pity you. I feel pity for you that you are the son of a people who made those atrocities. All those atrocities were done by people like you.

You probably weren’t alive then and maybe you were a child, but your father and mother, whether they did it themselves, were there when this was done and that I pity you that you have to live with that. That’s all I can tell you.”

If you hate, you lose yourself. There’s nothing left in this world after hate. I can’t hate, I’ve never been taught to hate. Even after [inaudible 01:18:05], after all that that happened in our town, my father tried to say, “They were poor, they didn’t have.” I said, at that time when I was 10 years old, I asked that question, “Why?” There was no answer to it, there still isn’t.

**Janet:** How about your being here, your decision to come and to stay here. What do you think about that now in retrospect?

**Helen:** I tell you when President Truman, President now, Bush, went on television, you may not have seen it and said, “Somebody told me that I hate Jews.” He was very angry, he didn’t want -I don’t know whether he will yet approve the loan for Israel. It’s only a loan they ask him to guarantee, no money from United States or anything.

I wrote a letter, but I didn’t send it. When he went on to the television now and he asked the United Nations for them to erase the thing that they said that Israel is like -Zionism is like Nazism. I wrote him a letter and thanked him for it.

I can only do good. I don’t feel that I want to tell people you’re hateful, I can’t do it. It isn’t in my makeup to tell people they’re bad. There are a lot of bad people. We don’t know from where they come, we don’t know why they are hateful. The only thing you can do is avoid them as much as you can.

Going on hating does not help anybody, it only makes you burn up, that’s what I say. My mother felt whatever she could share with anybody. She was there to do it. I’m trying to do the same whatever I can.

**Janet:** I think …

**Helen:** That’s all you can do in life, what else are we here for? Be good to your people, be good to your children and be good to people who haven’t got, share it with them. That’s all I can do and that’s what I try to do.

Because I don’t believe in hate and I’ll never be hateful and my children are just as good. I took a course in NYU at one time, literature. We took a book, *Catcher in the Rye*. The teacher asked me, “How do you feel Mrs. Rosenthal? Would you like your children to be *Catchers in the Rye*?”

I said, “It’s not that I would like, they are.” He says, “They are?” I said, “Yes, both my children are *Catchers in the Rye*, they don’t understand anything else.” They never went through anything bad in their life. The difference is that you grow up here, you can’t be hateful, it’s a good life. I had a very good life here, I had a good husband and we made the best of everything we had.

Now I’m well off. I don’t go around bragging it, I’m just telling you I have enough of everything I want and I’m fine. You have to know, I respect every person that I see, that is before me, that talks to me. I expect the same thing for myself and if I don’t get it I walk away, I say, “He’s ignorant. I pity him.” The person who hates I pity, that’s all I can say.

**Janet:** I think maybe that’s a good note we’ll end on. I thank you very much for being here.

**Helen:** I have not talked like that in long time.

**Janet:** I’ve been here with Helen Rosenthal. This is now Janet Levine signing off for the National Park Service.

**Helen:** Thank you.