**Janet:** Today is October 8th 1995 and I’m here on Grand Street in the Lower East side of New York at the home of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Schwartz. I’ll be talking today with Mr. Schwartz who came from Poland in 1921 when he was five years of age soon to turn six years old.

I want to say I’m looking forward to anything you remember about Poland, and then as much as you can remember about the Lower East Side because you’ve really seen it all here. Let’s start at the beginning Mr. Schwartz would you say your birth date?

**Joseph:** September 16th 1916.

**Janet:** Where in Poland where you born?

**Joseph:** Warsaw.

**Janet:** Did you live in Warsaw up until the time you left for the United States?

**Joseph:** Just about two weeks before because we went to Belgium. That was the route in those days, you couldn’t -Very difficult to get out but we managed to go.

**Janet:** Did you have grandparents living in Poland whom you remember?

**Joseph:** No, I don’t remember them.

**Janet:** Who were your family members when you were a little boy in Poland?

**Joseph:** My mother and my brother.

**Janet:** Your mother’s name?

**Joseph:** Hanna.

**Janet:** Her maiden name?

**Joseph:** Becker.

**Janet:** Your brother’s name?

**Joseph:** Lawrence.

**Janet:** Your father’s name?

**Joseph:** Louis.

**Janet:** Why don’t you tell the story of how your father came earlier than the rest of the family?

**Joseph:** My uncle came here first. He was the senior member of his family. He opened a store, a dry-cleaning and pressing salon, on Forest Hills in Queens. He did very well and he devoted himself to bringing the rest of the family here.

He brought my father over. According to the legend I wasn’t here at the time. My father came over here one day and the next day he was working tailor shop, there was no break.

**Janet:** In Forest Hills?

**Joseph:** Yes, just for a short while then he went to work as a tailor man in a big shop.

**Janet:** Had your father worked as a tailor in Poland?

**Joseph:** Yes, he did.

**Janet:** Do you remember your father at all in Poland or had he left?

**Joseph:** No, he left I was a little nothing.

**Janet:** How many years before you, your mother and brother came did your father come?

**Joseph:** About five, six years.

**Janet:** You were a baby. Did you have aunts and uncles that you remember from Poland?

**Joseph:** No, I had aunts and uncles but I don’t remember them from Poland.

**Janet:** You were really just with your mother and brother when you were over there? That was the extent of your family when you were …

**Joseph:** That’s the extent of our immediate family there in Warsaw.

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

**Joseph:** Yes, it was on an apartment house that had about three sides and each side had a separate entrance [inaudible 00:03:37] come and park in there or a -No it wasn’t a park.

**Janet:** A courtyard?

**Joseph:** A courtyard, common courtyards, three entrances and three apartment houses.

**Janet:** Do you remember the inside of the house, the apartment?

**Joseph:** Very vaguely.

**Janet:** When you think of life in Poland when you were, up till you were five, what are the things you remember most about it?

**Joseph:** The things I remember most about it was playing with other children. I believe I was too young to realize that there was, as my mother told me many years after, the vein of anti-Semitism running through all of Poland.

**Janet:** You didn’t experience anything?

**Joseph:** No, because I didn’t realize, I think because I was too small.

**Janet:** Do you remember any of the games? Any of the things you played with your friends?

**Joseph:** No.

**Janet:** Lawrence, was he older or younger?

**Joseph:** Younger. Approximately three years younger than me.

**Janet:** Do you remember when he was born?

**Joseph:** No.

**Janet:** Was your mother religious in Poland?

**Joseph:** Yes in Poland and even here. Not deeply religious but fairly religious to carry out Jewish traditions. As far as the rest of it goes, I didn’t partake or I don’t remember.

**Janet:** Do you remember in Poland any religious observances when you were there?

**Joseph:** Yes, on the high Holy Days yes. I saw that everything stopped, in other words people weren’t rushing to go to work and so on and everyone was very fancily dressed. It was the extent of my remembrance as far as that phase goes.

**Janet:** Do you remember the cooking? Do you remember anything about the food there?

**Joseph:** The food would be the same thing that my mother used to serve here when we arrived right here.

**Janet:** Like what?

**Joseph:** In a way of practically, I tell you that diet was confined to about four, five different soups. May be the same thing in the way of second course, meat, dairy depending on what we were having. Of course you know that meat and dairy are separated. As I said, she was not deeply religious but quite religious. Whatever she served we ate and it was good. She was a fantastic cook.

**Janet:** Did you have a favorite dish that you recall?

**Joseph:** In soups, I used to love boli and mushrooms, in meat, stuffed [inaudible 00:06:50] and duck. Duck was a staple diet there, like chicken here almost, much easier and less expensive than chickens. Of course the farmers used to keep the chickens for the eggs. Chicken lays eggs quite often, duck somewhat it’s a cycle that I know even from here.

**Janet:** It sounds like you were fairly comfortable in your life over there and that you weren’t very poor.

**Joseph:** No, I wouldn’t say very poor. We were not far from rich, but we were comfortable because my father used to send money from here United States to us over there.

**Janet:** Your mother never worked when you were over in Poland [inaudible 00:07:46]?

**Joseph:** I don’t remember if she did or not.

**Janet:** Do you remember anything about what your father said about the United States in letters or anything you thought about the United States before you actually got here?

**Joseph:** I was too young to read and my mother used to read letters from him. Then she tried to give us a few [inaudible 00:08:11] of what was in the letter, which I’ll tell you the truth I don’t remember any part of [inaudible 00:08:18] …

**Janet:** What was her attitude about coming to this country?

**Joseph:** She wanted to because her husband was here, very much.

**Janet:** She didn’t have relatives over there?

**Joseph:** Yes.

**Janet:** Did she have family there?

**Joseph:** Yes, she had family in Poland. As a matter of fact we very often get [inaudible 00:08:41].

**Janet:** You remember her family in Poland?

**Joseph:** Not in Poland no, but when I came here and came almost to a major realization perhaps 10, 11, 12. I knew we used to go to visit them and they came to visit us. I knew who they were, not as deeply as you’d probably like to know [inaudible 00:09:07].

**Janet:** Did you go to school in Poland?

**Joseph:** In Poland, no.

**Janet:** You were too young?

**Joseph:** I don’t say I did but if anything we’d go to a Hebrew school. The attitude of the Polish people towards the Jewish people was not the best. Even if I were at an age where I could attend the school, they wouldn’t want me.

**Janet:** In your apartment complex, were there all Jewish people living there?

**Joseph:** I don’t recall that.

**Janet:** Do you remember market day or do you remember anything about the community, shops or any of that kind of thing?

**Joseph:** No, at six you don’t pay attention to those things.

**Janet:** Is there anything else you can think of before you were getting ready to leave, anything about Poland, anything about the community, the family life?

**Joseph:** At six year old, even if they said wouldn’t interest me. My interest was my little friends there and that’s it.

**Janet:** Do you remember your mother preparing to come to America?

**Joseph:** Yes vaguely. Giving away things to certain people and packing whatever she thought was absolutely necessary particularly for the voyage.

**Janet:** Do you remember what she took for the voyage?

**Joseph:** Yes, the clothing because we’d be on the ocean and she was very careful with that.

**Janet:** Do you remember anything that either you brought with you or your mother brought with you to this country?

**Joseph:** No.

**Janet:** You have some vague memory of leaving Warsaw and going to Belgium?

**Joseph:** Right.

**Janet:** Do you remember anything about that little leg of [inaudible 00:11:20]?

**Joseph:** It was a train which went to Belgium, very close to the docks where we stay there for a day or two as I recall. Then we went to the ship.

**Janet:** The name of the ship?

**Joseph:** SS Samland, imagine that.

**Janet:** What do you remember about that voyage on the Samland?

**Joseph:** Throwing up a few times, the fact that we slept on bunk beds about three, four floors high. I was lucky I was up on the fourth floor because everybody who got sick. We used to go up on deck.

**Janet:** You go up on deck sometimes?

**Joseph:** We go up on deck, my mother held my brother in one hand and me in the other. We dared to go over to the railing. She mentioned that my father, I remember a couple of days after we arrived there [inaudible 00:12:35]. Telling him about the nerve we had to walk to the railing, she stood back. She came forward because she had to hold on to us.

The voyage itself, the ship was not a luxurious ship, as a matter of fact we down in what I now I realize what they called a hold literally. Because it went for as little as possible as far as the fare went.

**Janet:** Do you remember the food at all?

**Joseph:** Not particularly, I don’t think there was anything about it to remember.

**Janet:** Do you remember the boat coming into the New York harbor?

**Joseph:** Yes, that’s when I wrote here, I think I pointed out, my mother said, “That’s the Statue of Liberty.” We came into Ellis Island, I think we slept also, the Great Hall used to be sleeping area.

**Janet:** There’s a dormitory area up on the third.

**Joseph:** Right, same idea as the ship but it didn’t rock.

**Janet:** You stayed overnight?

**Joseph:** Yes, one night, came in kind of late and I suppose whatever. The next day we took smaller boats, took us into Battery Park.

**Janet:** Did your father meet you at Ellis Island?

**Joseph:** No, he met us on Battery Park. There was a place there, eventually became aquarium called Castle Garden. I remember that because he took us in there to show us the -At that time was an aquarium while we were waiting for my uncle. We went in there, we walked around that place. It was very -To this day I remember it.

**Janet:** Do you remember what it was like to see your father for the first time?

**Joseph:** Very touching experience, he was a great man.

**Janet:** Then your uncle came?

**Joseph:** No, he was there waiting for us with a car. He took us to Queens, to his house where we stayed for a couple of days. Then we went back to the Lower East Side, of course that’s where most of the tailor shops were.

**Janet:** What was this uncle’s name?

**Joseph:** Also Louis. They used Louis because we weren’t given English names. They were given their names in Hebrew. There’s two ways to spell Louis, his was one way and my father was the other way.

He came over virtually every day to check on us. We got an apartment right away. It wasn’t like today how difficult it is to get apartments. First apartment I remember was three rooms.

**Janet:** Do you remember where it was?

**Joseph:** Yeah on Allen Street. This was not like it is today where there’s a parkway on Allen Street. The elevators were on the Second Avenue El, used to come right under our window. We got used to the noise.

Then it turned off to the Second Avenue, went up straight to Second Avenue. The house was [inaudible 00:16:45] but that’s ancient history because I don’t think we were here many length of time before they actually started to tear down the elevator, Second Avenue El.

**Janet:** Can you recall any other things that struck you as new and different when you got here that you never saw before?

**Joseph:** Other than the elevator? Apartments with running water, in Warsaw, I had to go with a pale and bring in water. Certain water for washing and certain water for drinking, they were separate.

**Janet:** Where did you go for it?

**Joseph:** Right in the courtyard.

**Janet:** Like a pump, was there a pump there or [inaudible 00:17:36] …?

**Joseph:** It was like running water so all you did was put your bucket or whatever you were filling up under it and brought it up to the house. That apartment I don’t remember, I think I wiped it out.

**Janet:** You stayed right where the elevator train went by the window for a short time?

**Joseph:** That was Allen Street. The Second Avenue El came from South Ferry somewhere and went to Houston Street, turned west to Second Avenue, then continued up Second Avenue. That’s why it was called the Second Avenue El. The one that went by me was the Second Avenue El going by but this was not Second Avenue.

**Janet:** Did you stay there a long time or did you move?

**Joseph:** The time element I can’t remember. We did move to a little more spacious quarters, four rooms. It was a little easier because my brother and subsequently my other brother -No I slept in one room, my parents in another room. There was the living room and the kitchen and bathroom.

No bathroom, excuse me, bathroom was in the hallway. Used by all, I think we were four families on the floor as I remember and the bathroom was central. Actually I think they were two I can’t recall, but there was a bathroom out in the hallway.

If you got up during the night you had to do something you went out in the hallway. It was a very common thing to try to the door and it’s closed so you went back and stood by the door. Then when you heard the door you went out, the door of the bathroom open, you went out. That’s what you had to.

**Janet:** Your father had a little shop here in the Lower East Side?

**Joseph:** That’s subsequently, at that time he was working as a tailor.

**Janet:** He was working in a tailor shop in the Lower East Side at that time?

**Joseph:** On the Lower East Side. One day, this is going into two, three years after we arrived. My parents told me the story, my mother was walking on Allen Street and she saw this one store that had comforters and pillows.

She also noticed that the comforter was what was very popular then but isn’t today because the cost of labor is high. A handmade quilt in the window, this is what she used to work at occasionally back in Warsaw.

She walked up and she walked up to the man she said she could do that kind of work. He says, “I don’t make this.” I remember his name was Joe Gustine. He said, “I don’t make this. I give the material and the filling and the people have a shop a few blocks away and they make the handmade quilts.” She said, “You know I can do that too.” He said, “Well if you do come in to see me and I’ll give you some work.”

She had a frame built, a wooden frame. As I said to the people, you probably can hear it on that other thing. My father came home from the shop they put up the frame, all the furniture went on this side and they put out the frame in the wall. He put out the material in the wall. He got to learn how to do the mocking of the design because nobody can do that free hand.

She used to make the quilts, the first quilt she made she went down to this Joe Gustine, he looked at it says, “Very nice, “ he says, “You need a little bit this and that,” because he had a lot of experience not by the handwork himself but how he’s seen it.

He says, “I’ll give you some material and some wool you can make one for me, let’s see what it looks like.” He gave her the material and the wool and [inaudible 00:22:09] standing bit that my mother told me was that she took out a pocketbook and she says, “How much do you want?” she says, “I don’t want anything, why?”

She says, “Well in Europe if I went to do this if I didn’t have a frame people who did it used to leave the money with the person who gave the material almost equal to the value of the material. I was going to do the same thing.” “Go take the material and go.”

She did quite well, [inaudible 00:22:43] working alone it used to take her about two three days to make a comforter. She brought it back to him and paid her, very satisfied, gave her all the material. He did nice business down there.

Eventually his family and our family got to be friendly because we were only about a half a block away out when we opened up a store on Allen Street. It got to be awkward, this business of constantly changing from a living room to a shop.

He went looking and he found a place on 84 Orchard Street. Orchard Street you know where it is I’m sure. Two floors up became a shop, but it was small so we had the one frame there. A couple of years went by and the business picked up more and more business.

He went looking and we found the place, that time I was capable of going with him, on 274 Grand Street. That’s about four, five blocks from where we were on Orchard Street. This was a larger place. He was able to work two frames.

He got a couple of girls, my uncle brought over like his niece I think because it was his wife’s side of the family and put her up to work. She worked [inaudible 00:24:16] and put up two frames and when they were working on this, he was setting up the other one. When they finished the other one, he took it off. Then when they finished and started to work on that and they went to work on this. They either stepped five steps away.

**Janet:** Was your mother still making the quilt?

**Joseph:** Yes she was working, she worked all her life.

**Janet:** Your father was setting them up?

**Joseph:** Yeah.

**Janet:** Was he a tailor, the clothing at all?

**Joseph:** No, he’s out of a tailor because …

**Janet:** This seemed to be a good idea.

**Joseph:** Yeah. That went on until where an opportunity presented itself to open a store back on Allen Street. About a block away from this fellow I just mentioned who put my mother in the business.

We opened our own business and that’s where we were until we closed except that we had expanded from that one store to another store that opened in the same building and a bigger store that opened up in the next building. We ended up with three stores.

**Janet:** For the quilts?

**Joseph:** Yeah.

**Janet:** Made it all for quilts?

**Joseph:** Wait, then we were doing already wholesale and things like that. Whatever happened?

**Janet:** We’re talking about the family business of quilts and pillows. You were saying you got feathers from Europe and …

**Joseph:** For the pillows and the down for the comforters and down for the pillows when you made a mixture.

**Janet:** Why was that?

**Joseph:** Because very little geese are consumed here so you can’t get the feathers. In the summer time, the women used to take the geese and pull the down out from the underbelly of the goose. By the time the winter came around the down had grown back so they were [inaudible 00:26:31]. That was the reason.

The down was then put up in bales of about 200, 300 pounds, with a covering on the outside [inaudible 00:26:52]. Shipped over here to the United States for people who processed them, because in New York the state requires certain process before you can sell it. You can’t sell it right from the goose, you got to wash, clean and sterilize.

**Janet:** Did you do that?

**Joseph:** No, that was done by a very large process with all kinds of machinery. We didn’t have space for it. I wouldn’t have done it anyhow because the difference between buying the readymade down, already cleaned down against the raw is you lose it. Some in the weight but you can’t help, that’s part of the process. It was all figured in the price and that’s it.

**Janet:** The women in Poland would take the down?

**Joseph:** Yes, they would do all those things. They would wash it in a nice day in the summer when there was no breeze. They plucked the geese and then they let the goose continue living. They start on their process which was washing it in their own wash, wherever they washed, and clean it, they didn’t bother sterilizing because it wasn’t required.

Then they made feather beds, which incidentally when we came off the ship, in those days if you ever see films you’ll see people with big bundles. A woman or a man carrying a big bundle over his shoulder, that is usually pillows and quilts.

Because in those days there was no steam heat in the type of quarters that we could afford. They needed as much warmth as they can get and you can’t get more warmth that you can out of a down comforter. Nothing else, you can use wool, we use a little wool, we use cotton, we use [inaudible 00:29:01]. That’s it but the greatest was down, till today.

**Janet:** When did you go into the business?

**Joseph:** I might have been 10 years old at the time. Just whatever little dirt I could sweep up literally and continued progress and then we opened up two other stores and we expanded.

**Janet:** Do you remember when you first went to school? Did you start school right after you got here?

**Joseph:** Yes.

**Janet:** What do you remember about that?

**Joseph:** The first school I went to was Public School 161 on the corner of Delancey and Ludlow, which wasn’t far from where we were living and finished public school there, that’s sixth grade or something like that, I don’t know how they work it today. I don’t even pay attention to it. I did when my children were going to school.

From there I went to Junior High School 20 which is on Rivington and Eldridge. Finished my junior school and I went to Seward Park High School which is here on Grand and Ludlow. My basic schooling was in the area.

**Janet:** Were you then working from the age of 10 after school?

**Joseph:** Yes, definitely after school I used to go sit do some homework for a while, if I had it, and then into the store.

**Janet:** Your brother too?

**Joseph:** Both my brothers, I had two brothers.

**Janet:** Do you remember when you started school, you didn’t know English when you first came, do you remember anything about that?

**Joseph:** No, you had got learn English, there were no such thing as they have today, bilingual teachers. There was no such thing.

**Janet:** Were there a lot of children in your class who also didn’t speak English?

**Joseph:** Yes there were quite a few. Not a lot, but they were not all Polish, they were Italians and other nationalities but it was not like today.

**Janet:** When you think of the Lower East Side when you first started school, can you say anything about it? What it was like coming to this community? Was it mostly Jewish when you living here?

**Joseph:** Yes to a great extent. I was [inaudible 00:32:00] at the same time as this, now that’s a notice for services. This time of the year, Rosh Hashanah Yom Kippur, that’s Yom Kippur but …

**Janet:** I found this thing where it’s like there was a synagogue on every block it seems?

**Joseph:** There are still synagogues on every block. In those days there were synagogues in the basement. What it actually was when my father came here and lived here in Manhattan as opposed to my uncle in Queens.

He found a small group of men from his town, [inaudible 00:32:41] they called it. They got together, they made a little society and had meetings, whatever they decided on, I don’t remember.

In addition to that, as they subsequently grew, as more and more came they found that they didn’t have enough space. Space was limited or too expensive if you wanted the larger, so they built synagogues.

Many of them started out in the basement of a lot of the buildings around here, there’s still some places. We lived in a building when we were forced out of our apartment. We had our own apartment and they were tearing that area down for projects. It was one the East River Drive, Houston Street.

We were living on Columbia Street which is only a few blocks away. We had a nice apartment because the mother of one of my wife’s dear friends owned the building. They were just remodeling one apartment, even better [inaudible 00:33:56] because it was a floor lower.

We moved into there, we lived there for quite a while until they decided to build more projects. Then we were forced to go into the project for a period of time till we found this co-op.

**Janet:** They would start these synagogues in the basement of a tenement where people were living above it?

**Joseph:** Yes definitely, I was about to say that’s the reason I went into that town. We had one in our basement, like a store, comparatively medium size store. They could get 40, 50 people in, that’s it. When they built a synagogue, it was here on Rivington Street, I didn’t take a picture of it, the rabbi’s son lives right below me. We moved into a –what was I saying? I lost my train of thought.

**Janet:** You were saying you lived in the building where the synagogue was in the basement.

**Joseph:** Eventually if they continued to expand and that was a time of expansion because that was a time of immigration. Not only in the Jewish faith, in the Catholic and so on, they were also coming from Italy and places like that. Even Polish Christians came over here. They did the same thing.

There are still today, there’s one on Second Avenue between 8th and 9th street which is a Hungarian. Every year we go to their festival because I feel close to food I knew you can buy there, I can’t buy any place else. I was used to that type of food also.

They also started out. You can see the basement, which is now they use it as a restaurant in the bottom of the building. Then there’s that flooded club and this and that. The whole building is filled with Hungarians, different kind doing different things.

**Janet:** These synagogues that were started, were they started by people who would have come from the same area in Europe?

**Joseph:** If they could yes. They are the ones who got together. As more came they couldn’t compress that close, they built or rented a bigger place. If you walk around as you do in this neighborhood you can still see the original synagogues and you’ll see the date on there.

There’s one right here on Norfolk Street that’s doing [inaudible 00:36:46] mystery, they’re all over the place. They built the synagogue and that’s where they had their meetings and that’s where they had their services, that’s where they [inaudible 00:36:57].

**Janet:** Was that the social, in other words the people that came from your father’s shuttle you said [inaudible 00:37:06], did they have their social club meetings in the synagogue?

**Joseph:** Yes, all activities. If you had a wedding, there were a couple of wedding halls in the neighborhood. I don’t even think there are any more of those. If you had a wedding and you wanted to perform properly you had it done in the synagogue.

The basement part of the synagogue also had kitchenware. They set up tables and they either catered it in or they had a cook come in and cook everything there. I went to quite a few of them, as a youngster.

**Janet:** What else has changed a lot in the Lower East Side over your period of time here?

**Joseph:** As I was telling you right now we’re going through a metamorphosis on Grand Street .Where all the stores used to be interior decorators of one kind or another, drapery, sleep covers. Now I think there are two left, that’s only because they own the building.

The way I have been told by several, and we came out took a decision. Because of the situation in Singapore, in China, that the 1970 they’re going to take over -Supposed to take over Singapore, though I understand there are already radicals there.

The people who were there who were affluent to any degree; find it wiser to send their money over here to relatives. They go out and buy buildings, not as big as this, businesses. They’re in everything, banks, as I mentioned hardware, food. They’ve taken over the whole area, they have China town up.

**Janet:** What used to be Jewish is now Chinese a lot of the places?

**Joseph:** Changing, when you go to Bowery that’s as far as that ticket -No there’s a couple of them going across the street already. The Bowery was a separation line between the Jewish population and Italians.

The other side of the Bowery, Elizabeth Street, Mulberry Street, Mott Street, those three I’m sure you know what they are, were entirely occupied by Italian people. If you go there now you’ll see Chinese signs, restaurants or laundry what have you, all kinds of things.

The reason is because the money, the people who are in these places which were supposed to be taken over by China in 1970 or turned over to China. I don’t understand the whole thing, I didn’t go into it, it’s none of my business. Some of them have a lot of money and they send the money over here.

These people here buy what they feel, and whatever it is that’s how it goes. They buy it in their own name and probably eventually will or should turn it back to the people if and when they get here after 1970.

**Janet:** How is that different from the way it was when your father came and when the businesses were being started in the Lower East Side …

**Joseph:** They were …

**Janet:** By …

**Joseph:** Go ahead

**Janet:** By the Jewish people in the 20s?

**Joseph:** In those days there were plenty of stores available. I could move every three months without a lot of problems if I found anything available better but we never did.

They centered around the Lower East Side, they lived here. They wanted to go to work here if they could. If they didn’t, they used to open their own place if they could. For your own place you needed the space and the wherewithal and the knowledge.

**Janet:** They were living here and doing it rather than somebody sending in a …

**Joseph:** Now they’re getting out because the Hispanics are coming in on this building. No let’s leave that part out I think it’s better.

**Janet:** You finished school here and then you went into the business. How did you meet your wife?

**Joseph:** We, like the people before us in order for a social life, used to get together and open social clubs. A bunch of guys would lure each other from the street decide to get a social club. East Broadway you hear had every basement was a social club, every basement, they couldn’t do anything else with it I suppose so they rented to the social clubs.

I belong to one which was practically around the corner here on the second floor. We were about 20 guys. I still see one or two of them, a lot of them are gone. Gone from the neighborhood or gone all together.

We decided to open a social club too. We put a [inaudible 00:42:58] on the second floor of this particular building here on Suffolk Street, which is one block from Norfolk Street. We had a nice place, big, spacious.

We used to go to Seward Park High School which had a swimming pool. We paid very little in those days to go swimming, use the facilities, lockers. All you had to do was come with a little suitcase with a combination lock and you stuff a towel and everything in there. You put the towel in the locker so that when you came out you didn’t have to go digging. You put your suitcase in there, you turn the knob and you remember the numbers.

That was right here on Suffolk Street, the social club called, you’re ready? They’ve got all kinds of fancy names for them. Ours was called Club Moderne M-O-D-E-R-N-E. We eventually got a few more members but there was a lot of them so you had a choice.

We decided to build our own because we used to hang out on Norfolk and Broom, which is a block from the club. It’s convenient to where I lived here in this side the 383 Grand Street, was the original tenement with my parents.

**Janet:** What would you do when you hang out?

**Joseph:** We’d either hang out in the club, in the street on Norfolk and Broome there was a candy store there, it was called the Bug House. We used to come over there and talk and we knew the owners very well they never objected. They were happy to have us of course we spent money, very little but spent money.

**Janet:** You met your wife in the social …?

**Joseph:** In the club. She came up with one of her friends, I met her there, went out a few times and then I went into the service. When I came out I was driving around in my car with one of my friends who still works here on Orchard Street, we saw him a few weeks ago and his wife. He said, “Hi Joe there’s that girl you used to go with.” Pointed her out, lucky girl she looked at me, she laughed at me.

**Janet:** Then you started seeing each other and you got married soon after?

**Joseph:** I don’t remember the time element, I’m trying to forget.

**Janet:** How many children did you have?

**Joseph:** Three.

**Janet:** Their names? First your wife’s name and maiden name.

**Joseph:** Etta?

**Etta:** Lehrer.

**Joseph:** She asked me.

**Janet:** L-A …

**Etta:** L-E-A …

**Joseph:** E-T-T-A L-E-H-R-E-R

**Janet:** Your children’s names?

**Joseph:** I have my oldest daughter whose name is Lori. My younger daughter who came next is Mercy, and my son who’s, after that we locked the door, Mitchell. You can see his picture right over there with my grandson, right against the wall, right against that [inaudible 00:46:34], that’s it. There are some pictures.

**Janet:** You went into the service, what service did you go into?

**Joseph:** Air Force.

**Janet:** When you got out you went back into the business?

**Joseph:** Yes, after a couple of six weeks in Florida. I went …

**Janet:** On vacation?

**Joseph:** Yeah definitely, not in the Air Force.

**Janet:** Do you think that the fact that you started out in Poland and you came here as a young child, do you think that influenced the way you were as a person? Do you think that had any effect on you in your personality?

**Joseph:** No, because in those days’ parents -My father said something or told me to do something I listened and I did. Today a lot of kids don’t even listen. I have two grandchildren, sometimes [inaudible 00:47:46] with my grandson, he’s two and a half three years old.

He’ll come over he’ll give me a kiss hello when I came there in their Connecticut. After that I barely see him, I see him dashing by. Like I told my wife yesterday he wears usually these Dutch balloon pants like. That’s all I see, a little rear end and those balloon pants.

He’ll come over, the other day our daughter called here and he got on the phone. My wife spoke to him first and he said he wanted to speak to me, “Hello grandpa how are you?” “Fine, what are you doing Michael?” “I’ll go see.” That’s the end of it.

**Janet:** What is it like for you to have been in this neighborhood so long and to have seen all these changes? How does it affect you?

**Joseph:** It was very fascinating. If I get together with somebody whom I haven’t seen for a long time or somebody new and they bring up the subject. I’m fully versed on whatever has happened in this neighborhood. All the way from, let’s say the worst East Broadway. You remember there was recently a movie called Crossing Delancey?

**Janet:** Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**Joseph:** At one time that was an adventure to people like me, because we lived on Broome Street which is one block from Delancey Parallel. I got in friendly with a doctor who had an office in the next building to where we lived. Which at that time was the family apartment 305 Broome Street. These things come back to you.

Got friendly with the doctor that used to watch us off as we went out or he sent me -The big deal was to go to [inaudible 00:49:46] and get him some sandwiches or some food. I had to cross Delancey. This was an adventure in my life also. To tell you the same thing that was big adventure then, believe me. I still feel …

**Janet:** What were you feeling crossing there? What did you think about crossing it off [inaudible 00:50:14]?

**Joseph:** You’d almost say in the sense of going to another country. It was quite an adventure then because very few kids did it. In those days the relationship been parents and children was different. If a father said to his child, “Don’t cross Delancey Street any time.” They would not cross Delancey Street, I didn’t.

I went because the doctor sent me and I used to hang out and get few cents at the end of the day for my free time. I used to read his books, medical books.

**Janet:** Do you remember the depression? How did that affect you and your family?

**Joseph:** Definitely, life for us during the depression turned a little bad, but not as bad as a lot of other people. My dad never had to stand on a corner and sell apples and he never had a pan handle or anything.

He and my mother were always capable of making a living with their hands, the handwork on the comforters. It wasn’t too bad. We ate well. I don’t remember ever having to be hungry, ever, although a lot of people were.

**Janet:** How about your mother, how did she adjust to being here?

**Joseph:** Very well, very easy. Once she came together with my father everything was fine. One the ship she used to go out and look everyday figuring, is this the day?

**Janet:** Do you remember any either customs or ways of doing things that either your mother or father brought from Poland and continued in this country?

**Joseph:** Frankly no, I can’t put my finger on anything. With you, you gave me idea what path we’re going but you notice I veered off every once in a while because the thought came to me and I thought it’s worthwhile for you to know so I did it. The only way you can do that is to keep questioning on certain topics and something may come up.

**Janet:** You had a bigger extended family once you got to this country than you had in Poland?

**Joseph:** Definitely.

**Janet:** Were they in the Lower East Side, a lot of them?

**Joseph:** A lot of them. We had a couple up in the Bronx, couple of families in Brooklyn, that was Staten Island, you went down to Bowery [inaudible 00:52:55].

**Janet:** Did you have family get-togethers?

**Joseph:** Yes, particularly if there was some occasion like a wedding or a confirmation.

**Janet:** How about the Italian children, were you friends with them? How did that work out because [inaudible 00:53:19 …]?

**Joseph:** In school we managed to get along. You had no choice you had to go to public school or junior high school or high school. They didn’t separate you by your background, they took where you belong and that’s it.

Kids today have it much better than we had as far as schooling goes, because today if a kid comes over from Poland or Italy whatever the case maybe. He goes into school and they always put him in a slot where the teacher speaks the same language as he does so that if he stumbles, she’ll correct him, which they didn’t do with me. We had to learn English.

**Janet:** Was that difficult for you do you remember?

**Joseph:** No it wasn’t because I was young enough, they got me young enough. I still remember there were difficult times particularly when I went to public school here on Delancey Street, there were difficult times.

90% of the teachers, as I recall now were of the Christian faith and some of them didn’t [inaudible 00:54:35] to us. You lived it. Very rarely that you ever got in a scuffle with a teacher because of that particular situation. Teachers were like gods then, a teacher was a god. Parents used to say to their daughters, “Teacher, teacher, teacher,” and they did. Son in Jewish tradition, you know what it was?

**Janet:** Doctor?

**Joseph:** Yes, if you’re a son you go for medicine, they had some for daughters, it will come to me. I had for a while I wanted to go. I still tell my friends when we get together and get in some type of conversation like this that I always wanted to be a doctor.

There were two difficulties, number one the money. I shouldn’t say number one, number one getting into a medical school. Right next to this Joe Gustine I mentioned before there was a mattress shop. He had four sons. One of them became a doctor. He had to go to Scotland to become a doctor into medical school here.

Unless you had well-off or wealthy Jewish parents, I’m speaking now of the Jewish faith. If you had parents who were well-off or wealthy would take a choice they could afford to buy your way into medical school.

**Janet:** This was just for the Jewish?

**Joseph:** No, it went for Italians too. How many Italian doctors do you know? You’d probably see today more Jewish doctors than Italian doctors. There are so many women doctors. There was no space for a woman doctor.

**Janet:** Did you ever encounter any other prejudice based on that kind of thing?

**Joseph:** School, yes, like I told you before, the Bowery was the dividing line between the Jewish community and the Italian community. If you went to the Italian community you took a chance, because if a gang of them [inaudible 00:57:11] sometimes. I got beat up once or twice, I don’t remember but I wiped it out.

**Janet:** Would Italian kids come into the Jewish side?

**Joseph:** Then? No they had the same dividing line. Because when you had the numbers, you had the power, if you didn’t have the numbers they didn’t have the power. They didn’t come here, we didn’t go there. If I had to go somewhere in the Bronx for instance I had to take the IRT and that was over on Spring Street that was way into the Italian section.

Imagine the Polish would be the same way. Imagine any other Christian faiths they may have been a dislike of you coming into their territory. You have it today with the blacks and the whites, that simple.

**Janet:** What language did your mother and father speak at home?

**Joseph:** At home they spoke Yiddish. They spoke some broken English and the secret language which was Polish.

**Janet:** Why was it secret?

**Joseph:** Because they only used that when they had to say something to each other that they didn’t want us to understand. Had I been in Poland till say age 10, I would be conversant. Although I do meet Polish people and I do understand some of the things they say.

My younger daughter works for Hewlett Packard. She’s head of a group of sales persons. In order to do that work and she gets paid quite well, she needed a nanny for my granddaughter at the time. Etta did Henretta ever have Michael?

**Etta:** Yes.

**Joseph:** He’s my grandson who’s the last one. He had this Polish woman and I started to speak to her the few words of Polish like greetings and [inaudible 00:59:38]. Her mouth dropped open that somebody else spoke Polish, the Jewish faith and she knew that I was Jewish. When I heard her name Henretta, but they had to dispose of her because she started to get a little high and mighty and my daughter wouldn’t take that.

**Janet:** We’re just about out of tape. How is this phase of your life now?

**Joseph:** How?

**Janet:** You’re retired

**Joseph:** A little boring, but not bad.

**Janet:** Is there anything else you’d like to say before the tape ends?

**Joseph:** I’ve nothing than what you would lead me into.

**Janet:** I want to thank you very much. It’s a very interesting interview.

**Joseph:** It’s a pleasure.

**Janet:** I’ve been speaking with Joseph Schwartz and its October 8th 1995. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I’m signing off.