**Janet:** This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I’m here in Naugatuck, Connecticut today. It’s October 19th 1995 and I’m here with Frank Szczesiul, who came from Poland. We’re not exactly sure what year but maybe this will come back as we’re talking about it. Mr. Szczesiul is 102 years old and we’re not sure exactly of his birth date but we’ll fill that in later. Tell me where in Poland you were born.

**Frank:** In [unclear 00:00:53].

**Janet:** Did you live in [unclear 00:00:57] up until you left to come to America?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** Was it a big town? Was it a city?

**Frank:** A town, not town. It’s a village.

**Janet:** Can you describe it? What was it like?

**Frank:** People lived [unclear 00:01:38].

**Janet:** When you went out on the street were there any shops?

**Frank:** No.

**Janet:** No stores? Was there a bakery?

**Frank:** Bakery yes.

**Janet:** Do you remember going to the bakery?

**Frank:** I went there to buy bread.

**Janet:** You went to get the bread? Was there any other store besides the bakery?

**Frank:** No.

**Janet:** Do you remember clothing? How did you get your clothing? Where did you go to get…?

**Frank:** I went to the town.

**Janet:** Do you know what the nearest town was?

**Frank:** Sokolka. I got sick. I don’t remember anything.

**Janet:** You got sick? When?

**Frank:** About a year ago [unclear 00:03:30].

**Janet:** Let’s talk first about when you were a little boy. When you were a little boy what did you do when you were in Poland?

**Frank:** I can’t say.

**Janet:** Did you have any jobs? Did you have anything you did for work when you were in Poland?

**Frank:** I take care of the cattle.

**Janet:** Whose cattle was it?

**Frank:** Ours.

**Janet:** Your father and your family had cattle?

**Frank:** Horses.

**Janet:** What would you do? Describe a day, you get up in the morning and what would you go and do?

**Frank:** Wake up find them pasture, [inaudible 00:05:15] where I would lock them up.

**Janet:** You would unlock the gate or lock the gate?

**Frank:** Night.

**Janet:** At night?

**Frank:** About five o’clock.

**Janet:** That’s when you would bring them back?

**Frank:** Yes. I milked the cows.

**Janet:** You milked them?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** In the morning and then you took them out to pastures?

**Frank:** I would lock them before go.

**Janet:** Then where would you take them?

**Frank:** To pasture.

**Janet:** Roaming around?

**Frank:** I do nothing.

**Janet:** You didn’t do anything?

**Frank:** That’s all we care. To go out to rye, oat and wheat.

**Janet:** The rye and the oat, were they growing or were they already cut?

**Frank:** They grow.

**Janet:** There were grains on the rye and the oats?

**Frank:** Yes, they grow.

**Janet:** How many heads of cattle did you take out to pasture?

**Frank:** I take care of my own couple of cows.

**Janet:** In other words your family had a couple of cows?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** Would you take other people’s cows too?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** All together how many cows would you be taking out?

**Frank:** That’s all. Four, two and three [inaudible 00:07:59].

**Janet:** You’d take up your cows and a couple of neighbors’ cows?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** You would be there all day, was that fun for you or was it boring?

**Frank:** They pay so much a year.

**Janet:** They pay that to you?

**Frank:** They paid father.

**Janet:** They paid your father. What was your father’s name?

**Frank:** Joseph.

**Janet:** And your mother’s name?

**Frank:** Anna.

**Janet:** Do you by any chance remember her maiden name? Her name before she married your father, her last name?

**Frank:** Saviski.

**Janet:** Anna Saviski was your mother’s maiden name?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** What was your mother like? How do you remember your mother from when you were a little boy?

**Frank:** Not much I could say about [unclear 00:09:53].

**Janet:** This is your mother?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** Did your mother have a lot of brothers and sisters?

**Frank:** [unclear 00:10:56].

**Janet:** Do you remember any of them? Did they live nearby?

**Frank:** I can’t tell you anything. I forgot, when you’re sick you forget.

**Janet:** Sometimes when you start talking about it things come back and you can recall the old days and what things were like back then.

**Frank:** I said before I got [unclear 00:11:35].

**Janet:** This may help you. If you can shake up your memory a little bit it may make you feel better. How about grandparents? Do you remember any grandmothers or grandfathers?

**Frank:** [unclear 00:11:54].We have same name. [Unclear 00:12:12].

**Janet:** That was your grandmother’s?

**Frank:** My grandfather.

**Janet:** That was his first name? [Unclear 00:12:43]?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** What did he do? Do you remember what he did for work?

**Frank:** The farm.

**Janet:** He was on the farm too. On the farm was it always cattle or were you growing things too?

**Frank:** Rye and wheat, potatoes.

**Janet:** Do you remember any dishes that your mother or your grandmother made? Any kind of food that you used to like when you were a little boy?

**Frank:** I don’t know the name.

**Janet:** Do you remember what it was made out of?

**Frank:** Potatoes, onions, a lot of other things too.

**Janet:** What were some of the other things? Can you remember anything else that they might have put in that dish?

**Frank:** No.

**Janet:** Were you a religious family?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** What religion?

**Frank:** Catholic.

**Janet:** Was there a church in your village?

**Frank:** Yes, about three miles you go south.

**Janet:** You go south about three miles?

**Frank:** [inaudible 00:14:37].

**Janet:** Would you walk to church?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** Do you remember anything you passed along the way? When you left your house and you were leaving to go to church, what would you pass by on the way?

**Frank:** Passed stables.

**Janet:** Did you ever ride the horses?

**Frank:** Yes. [Unclear 00:15:21].

**Janet:** When would you ride them? Why would you ride the horse instead?

**Frank:** Sunday.

**Janet:** On Sunday you would ride the horse? To go to church?

**Frank:** Sometimes yes.

**Janet:** And other times just for enjoyment you would ride it?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** Did you have brothers and sisters?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** How many?

**Frank:** One brother and three sisters.

**Janet:** Where were you? Were you the oldest? Were you in the middle?

**Frank:** I’m the oldest.

**Janet:** Who came next?

**Frank:** Sister.

**Janet:** Who was the baby?

**Frank:** Sister was the baby.

**Janet:** What was that sister’s name?

**Frank:** Stella.

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

**Frank:** No.

**Janet:** Did all your sisters and your brother come to the United States too?

**Frank:** No.

**Janet:** Who came here?

**Frank:** Myself.

**Janet:** You came by yourself?

**Frank:** Yes, with other people.

**Janet:** Why was it that you came and none of the others?

**Frank:** To make money and help my father to live.

**Janet:** You came here to make money to help your father to live. You must have been already a young man by the time you left. Up until the time you left you were taking the cattle out to pasture, that was your job? How did you know about America? Who told you about it?

**Frank:** I just saw it in paper.

**Janet:** In the newspaper? Do you remember why you decided to come here?

**Frank:** It was my father. He give me money and I went.

**Janet:** Your father decided that you should go and he gave you the money to get the ticket?

**Frank:** I sent it back by letter.

**Janet:** You sent back by letter what he had loaned to you to come here. When you were leaving Poland, how did you get from your little town of [unclear 00:18:49] how did you get from there?

**Frank:** Has a hundred houses.

**Janet:** That was really a village. Do you remember the house you lived in?

**Frank:** Father would take the skin off.

**Janet:** Take the skin off?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** Are you talking about your house?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** What do you mean ‘take the skin off’? Was your house made out of stone or wood?

**Frank:** Made of wood.

**Janet:** Was everything on the same floor or did it had an upstairs?

**Frank:** They have upstairs.

**Janet:** Was there a basement? Was there a cellar?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** What was down in the cellar?

**Frank:** Potatoes.

**Janet:** That’s where you put the food for the winter?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** Were the bedrooms upstairs?

**Frank:** No, on one floor.

**Janet:** Do you remember the kitchen?

**Frank:** Brick wall.

**Janet:** Did you have a fireplace?

**Frank:** I did.

**Janet:** Do you remember how your mother did the wash?

**Frank:** Yes, with her hands.

**Janet:** Where did she get the water?

**Frank:** Mother went to the…

**Janet:** Did she have to go to a well or did she have to go the river?

**Frank:** Well. They have a pail.

**Janet:** They have a pail and you put the pail down in the well.

**Frank:** That’s it.

**Janet:** Would you turn a handle?

**Frank:** No.

**Janet:** Just lower it on the rope?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** That must have been a lot of hard work for your mother.

**Frank:** We used to bring water to the house.

**Janet:** Who would bring water to the house?

**Frank:** [inaudible 00:22:20].

**Janet:** Sometimes would you bring the water and sometimes somebody else would bring it?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** Did you ever go anywhere with your mother or father that you can remember?

**Frank:** I went to buy shopping. Buy salt, pepper…

**Janet:** You went shopping, like to market?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** That was in another town?

**Frank:** Town.

**Janet:** You’d get salt, pepper, what other kinds of things do you remember getting?

**Frank:** Flour.

**Janet:** Would your father sell people his wheat and oats?

**Frank:** Sell some.

**Janet:** He’d sell some of it and then the rest would be for the family?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** When you left town what did you pack to take with you to America?

**Frank:** I take some money for my passage.

**Janet:** Did you have clothes?

**Frank:** [unclear 00:24:15].

**Janet:** When you left town how did you get to the port that you took the ship from? How did you travel from your little village?

**Frank:** I forgot.

**Janet:** Would you know where you got the boat? Where you got the ship that brought you to America? Where you had to go for that?

**Frank:** No.

**Janet:** Do you remember getting on the ship?

**Frank:** Yes. Sokolka.

**Janet:** Can you spell it?

**Frank:** I can’t spell you nothing.

**Janet:** Say it again so I can catch it.

**Frank:** Sokolka.

**Janet:** That’s the name of the ship?

**Frank:** No, that’s the town I went to.

**Janet:** That’s where you went from [unclear 00:26:04]?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** From there you got a train?

**Frank:** No. It was couple miles away from there.

**Janet:** You went to a few towns before you arrived at the port, it sounds like. Were you with other people from your town?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** They were all travelling to America? How did you feel about leaving your town and your family?

**Frank:** I feel good.

**Janet:** Why did you feel good?

**Frank:** Well, I was figuring nothing at the house. I have to go to help make some money, send back to father.

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

**Frank:** [unclear 00:27:48] goodbye.

**Janet:** That’s how you say it in Polish?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** Can you spell that? How you say goodbye in Polish? Say it again let’s see if I can get it.

**Frank:** [unclear 00:28:33].

**Janet:** How about your mother? Do you remember saying goodbye to her?

**Frank:** [unclear 00:28:50].

**Janet:** You said the same thing. When you got to the ship, do you remember anything about the ship?

**Frank:** I don’t remember anything.

**Janet:** How about the voyage? Was it a rough voyage?

**Frank:** Water, sometimes there was high winds.

**Janet:** Sometimes there was high winds?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** Do you remember your sleeping?

**Frank:** We were sleep on a bed in a boat.

**Janet:** Like in a bunk bed?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** Were there lots of people where you were?

**Frank:** Yes, possible a couple thousand.

**Janet:** Did you go around the boat? Did you have any fun on the boat?

**Frank:** Once in a while I dance.

**Janet:** You went dancing on the boat. Did you know how to dance? Had you been dancing when you were still in Poland?

**Frank:** I dance Polish.

**Janet:** Polish dances. Did you have a girlfriend?

**Frank:** No, got when I came to United States.

**Janet:** That’s when you got a girlfriend. How about when the ship came into the New York Harbor, do you remember when the ship came in, what you saw?

**Frank:** I see the people.

**Janet:** What were they doing, the people?

**Frank:** Something [unclear 00:31:22].

**Janet:** You remember the Statue of Liberty?

**Frank:** No.

**Janet:** How about Ellis Island? Do you remember what your impression was of Ellis Island?

**Frank:** No, I can’t tell you nothing about it because I don’t know.

**Janet:** Did somebody meet you there?

**Frank:** With these people who we were with probably three or four was from my own village.

**Janet:** So the people from the village three or four friends of your own they came with you?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** Did somebody come and meet you?

**Frank:** On the boat.

**Janet:** When you left Ellis Island do you remember where you went?

**Frank:** I don’t remember the name of where I went to.

**Janet:** Was it in New York?

**Frank:** No. We went to New York, took a train. We take a boat from the big city but I can’t remember where we take.

**Janet:** Did you settle in Connecticut? Is that where you settled right from the beginning?

**Frank:** Downtown by the Jews.

**Janet:** Downtown?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** By the Jews?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** In New York? Lower East Side? Is that where you went?

**Frank:** Sokolka.

**Janet:** When you first got here did you start working right away?

**Frank:** Yes. I was making shoes, rubber.

**Janet:** Like the soles and the heels?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** Was this in a factory?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** Do you remember the name of the factory?

**Frank:** Goodrich.

**Janet:** You remember where that factory was?

**Frank:** I [unclear 00:34:40].

**Janet:** Did you stay working in the Goodrich factory for a long time?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** Did you ever leave there and take another job?

**Frank:** I came home. Once I’m at home I got sick, my head. I got sick [unclear 00:35:34].

**Janet:** How did you meet your wife?

**Frank:** When I came to the United States I meet a lady.

**Janet:** Where did you meet her?

**Frank:** Goodrich.

**Janet:** Did she work there too?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** Was she also working on the heels and soles?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** What was her name?

**Frank:** Her name was Stella.

**Janet:** Do you remember her maiden name? Her last name before she married you?

**Frank:** [unclear 00:37:20].

**Janet:** Was she also from Poland?

**Frank:** No.

**Janet:** Where was she from?

**Frank:** Born here.

**Janet:** Did you have children?

**Frank:** Yes.

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

**Frank:** Seven.

**Janet:** After you worked at Goodrich did you work anywhere else?

**Frank:** After I work at a barber shop.

**Janet:** Were you cutting hair?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** Did you study to learn that?

**Frank:** Yes I learn here.

**Janet:** Did you work for someone?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** Do you remember the name of the shop?

**Frank:** Private Barbershop.

**Janet:** Where was it located?

**Frank:** It was located here in Akron, Ohio.

**Janet:** Was that where the Goodrich place was?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** In other words after you got to United States you went to Ohio?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** And you worked for Goodrich. How did happen to go there? How did you know to go there?

**Frank:** Talk to the people you know where you can get a job any moment.

**Janet:** Some people told you you could find a job there and that’s why you went.

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** The barber shop, was that also in Ohio?

**Frank:** Yes. I worked there. I got sick. [Unclear 00:40:09].

**Janet:** How did you like being in the United States? When you first came and you started working did you like it or not?

**Frank:** I did.

**Janet:** What did you like about it?

**Frank:** Money, because I was making the money.

**Janet:** Was there anything you didn’t like about it?

**Frank:** I didn’t like work, make shoes, rubbers.

**Janet:** You didn’t like that?

**Frank:** Yes. I work for many years and I changed [unclear 00:41:20].

**Janet:** You worked so many years and then you changed what you were doing?

**Frank:** Yes, the barber shop.

**Janet:** You went to the barber shop because you didn’t want to stay working on the shoes.

**Frank:** I learn.

**Janet:** Did you like it? Working in the barber shop?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** What did you like about it?

**Frank:** [unclear 00:44:55]. No job, nothing having.

**Janet:** How were you affected by the Depression? Do you remember in the 30’s, the Great Depression? How did that affect you?

**Frank:** I worked in the Depression.

**Janet:** You still worked during the Depression?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** Do you think it made a big difference to you having come from Poland and spending the rest of your life in this country?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** What difference do you think it made in your life and in you?

**Frank:** Working in a shop.

**Janet:** In other words if you had been in Poland you would have probably been still working on the farm?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** But this way you were working in a shop?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** You sent money back to your father?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** Did any other members of your family come over here?

**Frank:** No.

**Janet:** Did you ever go back and visit them?

**Frank:** No.

**Janet:** Are you happy that you came to the United States?

**Frank:** Yes, there was job.

**Janet:** How about now? You’ve lived to be such a wonderful old age, 102. How do you feel about your life now?

**Frank:** I can’t explain to you.

**Janet:** You can’t explain it? You live here with your daughter Rita, right?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** You must have a lot of grandchildren and great grandchildren.

**Frank:** Yes. I don’t know how many I have.

**Janet:** What makes you feel satisfied that you’ve done in your lifetime? What is it that when you think about you feel good?

**Frank:** Better job, you work every day.

**Janet:** That makes you feel good, that you got that job and you worked every day?

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** Do you have any feelings about this country that you would mention?

**Frank:** [unclear 00:45:30].

**Janet:** Were you ever in the service, in the Army?

**Frank:** No. Rita, that’s my daughter has a home. She’s work with [unclear 00:46:20] America. She got another house. She lives upstairs.

**Janet:** She has another house?

**Frank:** Yes. [Inaudible 00:46:51] son-in-law.

**Janet:** Your son-in-law, that’s Rita’s husband.

**Frank:** Yes.

**Janet:** Before we close, is there anything you can think of more about Poland that maybe we didn’t mention? Anything that you remember when you think back to the days before you came to this country that you think of?

**Frank:** What would help you?

**Janet:** What would help me? Just any kinds of things that you did there, things that you remember about what life was like before you came here and then what life was like after you came here, the differences.

**Frank:** That’s all I could do.

**Janet:** I want to thank you very much for remembering as much as you did. We’ll put this tape in Ellis Island and we’ll have you on record there and whatever you remembered about coming from Poland to this country and working here.

This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and it’s October 19th 1995. I’ve been speaking with Frank Szczesiul who came from Poland and is 102 at the time of this interview and I’m signing off.