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Mrs. Genevieve Truskowski

[0:00:00]

Interviewer: My name is Angela Turochy. I live in New Castle, Delaware. I am going to interview Mrs. Genevieve Truskowski. Mrs. Truskowski, what is your name?

Mrs. Truskowski: My name is Genevieve Truskowski. I live at 1300 North Clayton, Wilmington, Delaware.

Interviewer: What is your birthdate and how old are you?

Mrs. Truskowski: My birthdate is October the 4th and I'm 64.

Interviewer: Where were you born?

Mrs. Truskowski: I was born in Warsaw, Poland.

Interviewer: Under what government control was Poland at that ...?

Mrs. Truskowski: Russia.

Interviewer: Tell me about your life in Poland?

Mrs. Truskowski: Well, my life in Poland, I don't remember too far because I was eight years old when I came to United States. My father left for United States when I was two years old which I didn't know him at all when I came to United States.

Interviewer: And what was your education like in Poland?

Mrs. Truskowski: When my education, that's no education at all. You only learned how to write your name and read a prayer book and that was all the education Polish could get because Russia wouldn't allow Polish people to learn in Polish. Only, they wanted them to learn in Russian. But Polish people rebelled against that so they got groups together and at homes and everywhere they could, they but books and they would learn their children to read and write in Polish.

And if you was caught, read, learning how to write and read in Polish, you are beaten up and your parents pay the fine.

Interviewer: Where did you learn? Who was ...?

Mrs. Truskowski: My oldest brother was learning Polish and Russian when -- before we came in a village because we lived in Warsaw before my father left for America. So my brother had something -- a little of education there in schools. And he had all the books. So after my father left and we came to live in a village, my brother used to teach us at home.

He used to give us lessons and make us study. And we had to close all the doors so nobody would find out that we were learning in Polish. And when one woman found out that we were learning in Polish, he want to pay my brother to learn her girl.

But my mother forbid it. She says, "My boy does not have the knowledge of teaching." And she was afraid so we just wouldn't let nobody in and we just told everybody that we weren't studying Polish.

Interviewer: Mrs. Truskowski, what motivated you to come to America? Tell me the story.

Mrs. Truskowski: Well, my uncle was in America and he was single so every time he make a little bit of money he used to come to Poland and he used to tell my father what a good life he has in America. And he asked my father if he wanted to go. But my father couldn't go because my father was married and my mother was against my father going to America.

So she used to put my uncle out and curse him and do everything, she says she's going to knock his head off if he comes again. But every time he came to Poland, he come to visit her, just the same. And after he left, my father told my mother, he said, "Don't be mad," he says, "but I have to go see America." Because he said that he thinks that he would have a better life in America. He's not sure. But he wants to see. And if he goes for six months he'll either send for her or he'll come back home.

So my mother let him go for six months but he never came back. He used to write letters to us and we didn't -- I didn't even know him but I knew I had a father in America.

So when we went to live in a village after my father left, my uncles were living there, my mother's brothers. And they took us to live over there because my mother couldn't support us. In Warsaw, everything, rents and everything was too high.

But in the village where we were staying at, there was a sugar refinery and everybody works there all with there because they were making sugar out of beets. And so my mother and my brother used to work there every winter. So my brother was writing letters to my father and -- because my mother didn't know how to read or write and he used write to him what he wanted to write. And he would read to my mother the letters back what he wanted my mother to know. But what he didn't want her to know he didn't tell her.

So he told my father when he was getting older, he told my father that ...

Interviewer: He wrote to your father.

[0:05:01]

Mrs. Truskowski: He wrote to my father that he wanted to go to America, but my father was given him all kinds of excuses and my brother was getting tired of it so he wrote to my father if you don't send the money for me to come to America, he says I work in the refinery, I'll save some money and I'll run away from home.

So my father didn't want to lose the boy so he sent him some money for him to come to America. When my mother saw that she carried on, she cried. But my brother says, you don't cry mom. He says, "When I go Papa is going to send for you and the kids."

Interviewer: You said that your brother went to America. And how did it happen that you people came later? How much later was it?

Mrs. Truskowski: Well, when my father sent money to my brother, my brother went to America. He went to America on a sly. He didn't have no passport. He just went with a bunch of boys that want to run away from the Russian army.

And he knew that the group was forming to go to America so he had the money so he went with them and everything was fine. He crossed the border and then he came to America. He wrote us a letter that he got over here well. That he wasn't sick at the -- on the ship.

And then in six months he wrote a letter to my mother and he told my mother to get the kids together he says because Papa's going to send you some money so whatever you have, he says, sell it or give it away he says because when he send you the money, you won't have much time to get rid of it.

Interviewer: How did your brother and your father live in America today?

Mrs. Truskowski: My brother -- my father was boarding with some Polish people and my brother was boarding with him. But they didn't like the meals. They didn't like the overcrowded boarders because there are so many people living in one home and my father was complaining to my brother.

So my brother says to him, "Why don't you get mom and the kids over here and we'll have our own home and we'll live like a family. All then years you've been living here on board." So then my father thought about it and then he said, when the children are getting bigger, he says, they can go to school and my -- the sister that was old enough, Mary, she went to work. And my father decided that it would be better to have his family back with him.

Interviewer: So finally, your father sent the money.

Mrs. Truskowski: Yeah, my father sent.

Interviewer: And you mother and you and the rest of the family left. What year was it Mrs. Truskowski?

Mrs. Truskowski: That was in 1913.

Interviewer: How old were you?

Mrs. Truskowski: I was eight years old.

Interviewer: Now, tell me how -- what happened after you left the village and how you got to the port and did you have a passport and any official procedure?

Mrs. Truskowski: Well, when my brother wrote mother that he were came here through with no passport and he got over the boarder so quick my mother decided to do the same.

So she knew about a man in the little village that he was interested in that business. So she went to him -- and she went to he told her she give him 50 rubles in Russian money that he would take her and the children over the border, he would make arrangements.

So Mama gave him the money and we sold everything we had and what we didn't -- couldn't sell we gave it away to friends. And we went for the border.

And when we got there we went together -- then we travel by cart, driven by horse. And we travelled all day Sunday. We went on a train halfway and then the -- we were met at the train with this man. And he took us and we travelled all day Sunday and all night to Monday till we arrived in the border. And we stayed there for three days at that house.

Interviewer: Why did you have to stay?

Mrs. Truskowski: We had to stay undercover. So in the night, the third night, and the night they got -- there was more people than us. There was a lot of people. There was -- and the village, there was a lot of people in the homes hidden undercover.

There was three loads of us, then great -- then bigger wooden wagons. And in the night, they got us all up and undercover and there were blankets and with quills and everything, they covered us up and they took us to the border. And we stayed at the border for about an hour. They said the border was only about maybe 100 feet from where we were told to get off.

And when we got off, it was cold November.

Interviewer: During the night, I suppose.

Mrs. Truskowski: Yes, and then the -- some men went to find out if the patrol was gone because there was a patrol at the border. And when they came back and they told us that we could all go now, that the patrol went different direction.

[0:10:07]

But when we got to the border, the patrol came and caught us and we were all caught. So then they came and they put us -- they drive because the wagons went back. The wagons wouldn't want to get caught. Well, they didn't care that we were caught.

So they took us and they marched us for about two to three hours to a place where they had like huts and little bungalows and cottages and they put us in there. There was no carts and no chairs in there. We had to sit on the bare floor, not a floor even -- dirt. There was no floor.

And then in the morning, they drove us further to a county seat. Well, they've got some wagons then because a lot of the people had baggage

so they got us wagons and put the baggage on the wagons and they put the kids on top of the baggage. So I got a ride to the county.

And when they got us into the county and the people that -- I don't know, they were more times in America. They were more wiser. They told my mother, they said, "If you have any money on you, hide it, because if the Russians take it you'll never see it and you won't have no money. And hide your passage for the ship because if they catch that you won't get it."

So my mother took lining from her -- ripped her lining from her coat and she put her papers in her lining and her coat and she sewed it up and what money she had she divided in her sleeve or in one of our coats. She sewed it into the lining and then found -- and after she put her coat on she found out she had some loose change. I don't know how much loose change she had because I didn't know money then.

And she didn't know what to do there because they were coming after us already. And so she grabbed that change and she gave it to me. She says, you keep it. Don't let them take it away from you.

When she gave it to me in my hand, I held it in my hand. So when they took her over there, they asked her where she was going. She says she was going to Germany after a job. Why don't you want to live in Poland? And she say, well, she says, my husband ran away and left me three kids. I can't make out. She says, I can't feed them so I have to look out for my children, she says. So I'm going to Germany where I heard the wages were better and the living was better. So that's what's her excuse.

And he said, maybe your husband is in America. She's I don't know. Maybe he is but he never writes to me. I don't know where he is. So they searched her. And they said, you don't have no money, you go? She says, well that's why I wanted to cross the border because I don't have no money. And that's -- she said over and over the same thing.

And she told to say that we don't know where our father is. She educated us before they got a hold of us. And then they said, you don't have no money? And they took all our clothes off. They made us take our clothes off and they searched after the clothes and everything. But there was no money, no jingling of money and was sewed up she sewed it up goods and it won't move while they were throwing it around.

And they told me to undress and took my coat off. I left it but I still have hold of the change in my hand. And when they searched for me they told

to take my clothes off. I took my clothes off but I still have the money in my hand. Then after when we all got together, my mother said, where is the change I gave you? [Laughter]

Interviewer: No, they took us to the county seat. They put us in jail and my mother had to pay a fine and she told them she didn't have no money. So she called -- she told them that my uncle was living in the same county because we had to go to the county of my father's. See, my mother was from one county and my father was from another county. But my mother's county didn't count.

Well, you had to be registered in your father's county. You had to be registered as married and you had to register every child that was born because if you didn't register them in your father's county that child was a liegeman child. So she got in touch with my uncle and my uncle came with some money and they took us out and my mother gave him back the money after because she didn't want them to know that she had money.

So after that, my mother went and she got a passport over for the border and we all went back afterwards on the train across the border.

[0:15:00]

Interviewer: So this time, you left Poland with a passport and you travelled by railroad as you said. To what city did you travel? To what port?

Mrs. Truskowski: We came to Bremen in Germany.

Interviewer: Exactly, what date was it? Do you remember whether it was -- what month at least? What month?

Mrs. Truskowski: It was in November. It was chilly, dreary days.

Interviewer: November. Now, what's the name of the ship that you were put on?

Mrs. Truskowski: It was Northern Yuster Loyal Bremen *[phonetic]* **[0:15:30]**.

Interviewer: How many travelled with you? You spoke about your mother. Who else travelled with you and your mother that time?

Mrs. Truskowski: My mother, my sister and my brother and I.

Interviewer: And now, tell me about the trip on the ship. Did you enjoy it? Was anybody sick and everything else, about the meals and about sleeping.

Mrs. Truskowski: Well, at the ship my mother from the first day, she went down. She started having a headache. And my sister took sick the next day. And they were both sick. We travelled 13 days and they were both sick. When they were fumigating the cabins, well that was all one and three-decker sleep and beds.

So when they were fumigating that because so many people was sick and my mother couldn't get up, they had to carry her out on the deck and -- while they were doing that. So they carried her I think two or three times outside because she couldn't make it on her own.

But my brother and I, we had a good time. We ran all over the ship while my mother was sick. She used to tell us, don't do this and don't do that. But when she wasn't around we did what we wanted. So we went everywhere, everywhere they'd let us in.

And the meals, the meals for me, the meals were good. I was young and I was hungry. So everything tasted good. I like the rolls with butter. I like rolls with jam. I like everything that they gave because I was hungry. So when we saw something on the platter, the people are carrying, everybody had a go and get their own. They give you a dish when you came up there in a cup and you had to take care of it because them days they were hard on dishes and they didn't have no paper plates.

So we saw what we thought we'd like, we'd get one dish for my mother and one dish for my sister and one for each of my brother and I. When we brought it over to my mother we'd ask her to eat or something. She wouldn't eat any. So after we finish our dish, we'd eat hers.

Interviewer: What sort of weather was it when you were travelling?

Mrs. Truskowski: The weather was fine at first, the weather was very good. But then we sprang the leak in the ship. And one time I was on the upper deck I heard this woowoowo. I thought it was another ship. I looked around. There wasn't another ship.

And my brother was crying. Everybody was told already that they had to put the lifeguards on. That we were going to abandon the ship. And my mother asked for my brother where I was and he said, he didn't know so she told him to go and look for me.

And he was running. He was half crying *[inaudible]* **[0:18:29]** his head off. But I didn't hear him that time. I don't know where I was. And then when

he found me he told me about that. I said, I don't believe. You didn't believe it. Didn't you hear that sound? I said, "Yeah, I heard it. But I thought it was another ship.

He said, "No, we have to get off." But they fixed the leak. And he they told everybody to keep quiet and go back to their places. That was about three days off from the shore. We still travelled about three days.

Interviewer: You talk so much about your brother. I wonder, was your brother younger or older?

Mrs. Truskowski: My brother was older. I was the youngest of the four.

Interviewer: What language was spoken on the ship?

Mrs. Truskowski: German.

Interviewer: How many days did you -- did it take you to cross the ocean?

Mrs. Truskowski: Thirteen days.

Interviewer: And where did you land? What city?

Mrs. Truskowski: We landed in New York City, in *[inaudible]* [0:19:18].

Interviewer: Did your father and your brother meet you in New York?

Mrs. Truskowski: No, when we came to New York everybody had to stand in line and everybody had to tell them their name and who they're coming to live with. Well, my mother said that we're coming to live with my father. And they asked her how much money she had. Well, she had to tell them how much money she had because it was different over here than in Russia.

So she told them she -- I don't know how much money she had. My father sent her money for passage but I guess she spent some of it and she didn't have as much as the quarter allowed. So when she told her how much money she had they said that she didn't have enough to go on her own to my father.

[0:20:02]

Then my father would have to either send her money or come and pick her up. So she wrote a telegram to my father and my father sent some money by telegram. And then we came on our own. They let us go.

Interviewer: Where did you travel from New York to what city?

Mrs. Truskowski: We travelled from New York to Springfield, Massachusetts.

Interviewer: By railroad?

Mrs. Truskowski: By railroad.

Interviewer: And then in Springfield, anybody met you there?

Mrs. Truskowski: No, we had to take another train and we came to Gilbertville, Massachusetts. That was a small village.

Interviewer: And finally, it was ...

Mrs. Truskowski: My father -- that's where my father was living.

Interviewer: And finally your whole family was together. Was that the entire family?

Mrs. Truskowski: That's right. That's right.

Interviewer: And when your father and your brother met your mother and the other brother, did they have a home to go to? Where were they living at that time?

Mrs. Truskowski: Yeah. Well, my father was living, boarding at some place. But they didn't have no room for us. But this man was living with two children. His wife was *[inaudible]* **[0:21:03]**. And he had more than enough room. So my father told him, made arrangements with him. He said if he would let us live there for a short time till my father would get something else for us.

So the man agreed and we went to live with him in his house. We lived there I think two months before my father got a house of his own.

Interviewer: You were still a young girl when you came. I suppose when you got into the city, you had to go to school. How long was it before you went to school? And how was it trying to talk English?

Mrs. Truskowski: Well, we came to United States the 21st of December, to my father's village. That was on a Sunday. And Christmas was on the following Thursday. So when we came for Christmas -- well, I don't know what day after Christmas. It must have been Sunday after Christmas. My father took us to the Catholic Church Rectory and he signed us for school.

Because after the Christmas holiday, we went to school, my brother and I.

Interviewer: This place that you said, you said Catholic School. Was it a Polish speaking or not?

Mrs. Truskowski: No, no, it was Saint Aloysius Catholic School.

Interviewer: But it was not Polish.

Mrs. Truskowski: It was English. It was English.

Interviewer: English.

Mrs. Truskowski: No Polish at all.

Interviewer: And you were taught by the nuns.

Mrs. Truskowski: Yeah, we were taught by the nuns.

Interviewer: So you and your brother went to school. Tell me about the school life. How was it? Was it strange?

Mrs. Truskowski: No, my father told us to go. He showed us where because the priest took us around when my father signed us up and told us to come in here at 8 o'clock and that we would be taken care of. So my brother and I, we didn't live too far so my brother and I came.

We walked in where the priest told us to come and we walked into that classroom and I don't know whether the sisters knew about us or not but she motioned us to sit down. We sat down and then that was the wrong seat because the child was late and after a little girl came, I had to get up.

She told me to get up, but I didn't understand. I didn't know what she meant by getting up. So the sister said afterwards. She started talking to us. We didn't know nothing. So she called a Polish girl over and this girl told the sister, asked us who we were. And the sister asked us if we went to school and we couldn't tell her we went to school because we didn't go to school.

So the sister put on the blackboard, times table. And two times table, she put on the wall on the blackboard and she told us ...

Interviewer: Multiplication table you mean.

Mrs. Truskowski: Yes, and she told us to fill out the answers. So we wrote that because we knew that two time table. So she put three, we knew that. So she put four, we knew that. And when she put five, we knew that. She said, "You don't belong here."

She took us -- she sent us -- that was the first grade, you see. So she took us from there. She brought us into a third grade room. She says, "You stay in here."

Interviewer: Now, you mentioned to me the other day there arithmetic is the same whether it's Polish or English.

Mrs. Truskowski: Yeah, yeah, that's why. If it wasn't for that little bit of arithmetic that we knew, we had to -- we would have to start from the first grade. But that little bit of arithmetic helped us. We have *[inaudible]* **[0:24:21]** second grade. And then in the third grade what? In the third grade, we went after New Year's to school. That was half semester already. So we went June and in September, we went to fourth grade.

Interviewer: So, Mrs. Truskowski, you were telling that the following September after you came to this country you were placed in the fourth grade. So as far as education is concerned, we'll leave it off at this moment.

But I'm very interested about your family life, about your father, why did he like it in this country, why he never wanted to go back.

Mrs. Truskowski: Well, the reason my father didn't want to go back because my father wasn't a very healthy man. And he couldn't play -- he couldn't work in the fields. And in Warsaw, I don't know what kind of job he had but didn't like it. So that's why he wanted to make a change, he wanted to see what America was like.

And after he stayed here seven years, he didn't want to go back. He wanted for us to come over here. My father was working woolen mills. He was shaving the wool material. That was a very good job for him because he knew just how to set that and he knew -- he wasn't a drinking man. He didn't smoke, so they didn't have to be afraid that he would burn something or he would come home -- come to work drunk.

So nobody bothered him and he would do his job as he knew he should do it honestly. And everybody was satisfied with hi. My father could speak English before we came. So my father was getting along fine. And that's the way he wanted us to be. He told us that this country was much

better than over there and we didn't leave nothing behind. Because my father, what little bit he had of land, he gave it to his brother before he left and he had no intentions of going back ever.

Interviewer: I understand that your mother grieved very much about having left Poland and she was always wanting to go back. Tell me, did she ever go back and ...

Mrs. Truskowski: No, my mother never went back. She wanted to go back. She was needling my father, she was grieving him that she don't like United States, that she wants to go back. So when my father got tired of listening to that, he says he'll buy her a passage one way and send her back if she don't wanted to stay here.

But when he told her the children would have to stay with him, she gave up the idea of going back. And then when the First World War broke out, she was very glad that she didn't go back because she would have been all by herself back there.

Interviewer: So your mother and father both remained in this country?

Mrs. Truskowski: Yes.

Interviewer: Was there more children born to their marriage?

Mrs. Truskowski: Yes, there was two children born.

Interviewer: You stayed in school. We left off where you were in the fourth grade. How long did you stay in school in this country, how old were you when you got the job?

Mrs. Truskowski: Well, the Polish people at that time didn't believe in educating their children especially girls. My father said if you know how to speak in English and read and write, then that's not for your – for education. So then I had to – when I was 14, I had to go to work.

Interviewer: And where did you first work?

Mrs. Truskowski: I worked in the *[inaudible]* [0:27:38] Gilbert woolen mills.

Interviewer: How long did you work there? About how many years or ...

Mrs. Truskowski: Well, I worked there till I was 18 and then I left. My sister was married. She came to Delaware. And see, every time she used to come over here,

she used to say "Leave the place." She says it's only a little village, one factory and if you don't have a job and that you don't have a job.

So and then work was getting scarce. We were only working two or three days. So then I decide I want to go. So my brother was coming on vacation over here, my older brother and he brought me with him.

Interviewer: So you moved to Wilmington. What year was it, do you remember?

Mrs. Truskowski: I came in 1924.

Interviewer: Where did you live, with your sister?

Mrs. Truskowski: I lived with my sister in *[inaudible]* [0:28:28].

Interviewer: What kind of job did you find here?

Mrs. Truskowski: I found a job in the cigar factory.

Interviewer: And were you long at that job?

Mrs. Truskowski: Well, I worked there till I was married a year later.

Interviewer: So you're married here in Wilmington? Who did you ...

Mrs. Truskowski: No, I didn't marry in Wilmington. I went back to Gilbertville, Massachusetts ...

Interviewer: For your wedding.

Mrs. Truskowski: ... to get married.

Interviewer: But you met a man from Wilmington?

Mrs. Truskowski: Yes, yes.

Interviewer: What's his name, Mrs. Truskowski?

Mrs. Truskowski: His name was Stanley Truskowski.

Interviewer: Mrs. Truskowski, you just told me that you married a man from Wilmington and his name was Stanley Truskowski, but you went back to Massachusetts to have your wedding over there. So you came back to live in Wilmington with your husband. So here you are, you and your

husband and your sister and her husband are already living in Wilmington. What happened to the rest of your family?

Mrs. Truskowski: Well, my brother, the one that came from Poland with us, he was living in Philadelphia at the time. And when I got married and I had a home after we bought a home and we had a seven-room house, he used to always come. And he used to say, "Well, this house is much too big for you. Suppose I get mom to come and live here with you." I said, "She won't agree." He says, "Well, she'll agree after a while."

So, I was married 1925 but my mother didn't come to live with me till after my father died. My father died in October 1925. And my mother came to live with us in 1929. And she stayed here till she died.

Interviewer: What about the oldest brother, the one who were -- sent the money along with your father to bring your people here?

Mrs. Truskowski: Well, he stayed in Worcester, Massachusetts till he died last February.

Interviewer: How many more members of your family are still living?

Mrs. Truskowski: Well, my brother, the one that came from Poland and my mother had two children when she came to United States, so they're living, a boy and a girl.

Interviewer: After you're settled in Wilmington, Mrs. Truskowski, did you ever think of becoming a citizen of this country and -- when did you get your citizenship papers, Mrs. Truskowski?

Mrs. Truskowski: I got my citizen papers in September, 1941. And I realized after I got them that I should have got them sooner. It was very foolish of me not to have them -- be a citizen all that time.

Interviewer: Mrs. Truskowski, is your husband still living?

Mrs. Truskowski: No, my husband died in 1967, December 18th of 1967.

Interviewer: How many children do you have of your marriage?

Mrs. Truskowski: I have three children living and one died.

Interviewer: Mrs. Truskowski, tell me some more about your life in Wilmington.

Mrs. Truskowski: Well, when the war broke out, my husband went – was working and then my husband start failing on his health. So in 1950, this man had a pool room for sale on 6th and Church and my children came home from – my boys came home from the army and they asked me to buy this pool room for them.

So that's how I got into business. It was a candy store in the front and a pool room on the side. So I was in business from 1950 to 1965. And now I'm retired.

Interviewer: Mrs. Truskowski, this will now conclude this interview and I want to ...

[0:31:41] End of Audio