



EI-716/LUSSIER

EI-716

MARGARITE BLEICHER LUSSIER

BIRTHDATE: 1909

INTERVIEW DATE: NOVEMBER 9, 1995

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 86

RUNNING TIME:

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: KIMBERLY MAIER

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: IRV SILBERG

FRANCE, 1914

AGE: 5

SHIP: SAVOY"

PORT:

RESIDENCES:

- _ FRANCE: ROUGEGOUTE, ALSACE LORRAINE
- _ US: NEW BEDFORD, MA

LEVINE: Today is November 9, 1995. I'm here in New Bedford, Massachusetts in the apartment of Margarite Lussier. And Margarite came from France in 1914 when she was five years of age. And I want to say I'm delighted to be here and I hope you will say everything that happened to you [Both laugh] when you came to Ellis Island.

LUSSIER: You asked me over the phone if I could remember. Oh, yes! I remember.

LEVINE: Good. Okay. Well, if you would start with giving your birth date and where in France you were born.





LUSSIER: Well, I was born in a little village outside of Belfort. It's called Rougegoute, which means in English, "red drop". You want me to --- it was situated about fifteen or twenty minutes from French Swiss, and about an hour's drive to the German borderline.

LEVINE: And it was in Alsace?

LUSSIER: The Alsatian part of France, yes. My father was born when it was, you know, if you, I don't know if you know the history but there was always a fight between France and Germany for Alsace-Lorraine. And when, when they, when my father was born it belonged to France so all the German books were thrown out of school and the French books went in. When his older brother and sister were born it belonged to Germany, it was German books and they spoke German and Alsatian. Alsatian is a sort of patois of your own, you know. But then when my father was born, it, it, whoever won the war, won that section. This was the story behind it. So my father, when he was born, it belonged to France.

LEVINE: I see.

LUSSIER: And, it was, I heard the history from him, you know. And, but he didn't remember any Alsatian at all. Just a few little words because he never learned it really.

LEVINE: I see. What was your father's name?

LUSSIER: Francois which is French for Francis. And in those days, in that custom, if you, if you named a boy Francois you always, Xavier. Francis Xavier after the saint. Francis Xavier.

LEVINE: I see. And his last name, your maiden name?

LUSSIER: Bleicher.





LEVINE: And that's?

LUSSIER: B-L-E-I-C-H-E-R, yeahs.

LEVINE: Okay. And your mother. What was her name?

LUSSIER: Her name was Eugenie Miclo, M-I-C-L-O.

LEVINE: And ...

LUSSIER: She wasn't Alsatian. She didn't come from ---- they met when, when my father was in the military and he went into that village. He was stationed in a village. You're going to laugh when I tell you this, but it's true because they always mentioned it. The fellas used to go through and where there was ---- it was country --- and wherever there was a big pile of manure, they always said, there's all pretty girls. They were going to look for the girls where there's a big pile of manure.

LEVINE: So there was a big pile of manure in your mother's village.

LUSSIER: (laughing) Big pile of manure.

LEVINE: So your mother was also from France.

LUSSIER: Yeah.

LEVINE: But just from a different part.

LUSSIER: A different section, yeah.

LEVINE: I see. Now, you were five years old, but do you remember life in Rougegoute?

LUSSIER: Oh, yes.





LEVINE: What do you remember?

LUSSIER: I don't remember a lot like my older sister, but I remember a lot of things. I -- I didn't, I hadn't gone to school. I was ready to go to school in September when my mother --- my mother was here. My parents were here.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, you...

LUSSIER: You want me to start from the beginning.

LEVINE: Yes.

LUSSIER: Well, my father ---- you know there was a cotton mill in the town, in the village and some of the men decided they wanted to go to America. The streets supposedly were paved with gold. And so, finally, my father talked my mother into letting him come alone. He came with some other men. And at the time, there were a lot of strikes in cotton mills and one thing and another. And he was only a young man. He was in his early thirties. And men don't have the stamina that women do, to persevere. And after a while, of being here a few months, and I suppose being lonesome, and the mills going on strike. And I think he went to some other city in -- in Massachusetts to work, he decided to come back home. And guess who came af--- nine months after? Me. There was only three girls.

LEVINE: You were the oldest?

LUSSIER: No, I was the youngest. I was the youngest. By the way I have, the first baby was a boy. He died at three months. He was buried there so we never... And after that, there were four girls. So there were three girls. When my father came here alone, my mother had three girls. Lucy, Suzanne and Jean. And then, when he went back, nine months after along came me. I bet they wish they'd left me behind, you know. And when I was nine months old, my father talked my mother into coming to America with him. He said, if you come with me, we can both work together and when we get enough money we'll send for





the children. But if we take the children and you won't be able to work. I was only nine months old and my other sister was only twenty months older than I. There was only twenty months between all of us, you know. So he talked my mother into it. And she came with him. I don't fault my parents. They did what they felt was best for us. But it must have been heartbreaking for her to leave four little children. Lucy was only six and a half. So she remembered my mother. What do I know at nine months?

So, they came here. And it took five years, almost, before they accumulated enough money. Don't forget, in those days, you didn't fly, you sailed, you know. And, every year, they would send money to have my ----- a portrait taken. So they'd know what we looked like. And, so, that, that's what happened. And when I was, like I said, in July, she came. She alone came. You couldn't afford both. My father had to work anyway, you know. And she came to get us. Now, I didn't know any of this. Everything was kept from me. I wouldn't have understood. Because the woman that brought me up in the village, two of us --- three -----Lucy, Suzanne, and I, the youngest. They couldn't take Jean because there were too many small ones there. But she stayed in the village with an aunt. I didn't even know I had another sister. 'Cause at that age, you don't go walking around outside. So the mother, I called her my mother ---- and there were a lot of families here by that name, but they're all gone ----- Reiniche was their last name. Well, in French I used to call her Mama Reiniche, which meant -- see, I couldn't just say Mama, so Mama Reiniche. So naturally this is what caused the trouble at Ellis Island. You know.

LEVINE: I see. Well now, how do you spell Reiniche?

LUSSIER: R-E-I-N-I-C-H-E.

LEVINE: And how was it that this woman, Mama Reiniche, how was it that she came to take care of you and your sisters.

LUSSIER: Well, my mother had to find a home for some ---. When she came with my





father, they had to find a home for us. And these people lived right across from my godfather, incidentally, and they had a farm. And so, of course they took it, in other words, to make money, too. My parents would send the board. Board money, you know. And the reason is, I said, they didn't take Jean because they had small ones of their own and there was only twenty months difference between Jean and I --- my third sister. And so that's how they came. Well when my mother when --- came for us, my sister kept saying, my sister Lucy, the oldest, said ----- oh, wait. This woman came in the house, you know. I said, this woman, my biological mother. And I still can see her. She had, you know they had shoes the color like oxblood? [Soft response] Right. And I remember --- and of course, my first pair of shoes --- by the way, was when I came to America. We had wooden shoes. We lived with wooden shoes. And I remember seeing those shoes and, incidentally, they had no closets in the home. They had big, like bureaus, you know, where they put. So I remember seeing those shoes. And I didn't like this woman. And my sister Lucy kept saying, this is your new mother. Well, we never bonded, really, you know. So one day I walked all over her shoes with my wooden shoes. Of course, that didn't endear me to her, you know. And all -- everything was done so I wasn't aware that I was going to be taken away.

LEVINE: Hmm. Well, before we talk about your going to America with your mother and sisters, tell me about Mama.

LUSSIER: Reiniche.

LEVINE: Reiniche. What was she like? What do you remember about her?

LUSSIER: To me, from my point of view, she was an angel. She was, she was a martyr with her husband. He was a drunk and he was mean. I don't know. I can't remember ---- my sister Lucy, they used to get punished if they did anything wrong. And she said, (laughing), Lucy said I used to squeal. So they'd get punished. But Lucy remembered that he was very mean to her. And as I grew older and I went back to France quite a few times when my mother ---- they verified that, the neighbors, that she was a martyr. And he had a farm.





Cows. Do you know he wouldn't ---- he sold, he sold the milk. He would not let his children drink it. And the two youngest died --- TB. And, but they had to be careful with us because there would be neighbors that would write to my mother.

But she was an angel. If she went to town, to the city to cash the check, whatever my mother, how she sent it, she always brought candy back, and she had to hide it. She had to tell us, don't show it to him. You know. But I don't remember the meanness there, you know. All I know, I cried for that woman for years. I cried. I just cried. Even today, I think about her, you know. And, I guess we went for passport pictures, but you know, I --- I remember I got --- I got a pair of shoes. My first pair of shoes.

LEVINE: Do you remember the house you lived in with Mama Reiniche?

LUSSIER: Oh, yes! Yes.

LEVINE: What was that like?

LUSSIER: Right next door to this one!

LEVINE: Oh.

LUSSIER: Right next door. Yeah. Well, it was, well, in those days, it was a farmhouse. It was not rich. You know, they were just poor peasants. And, they had two older children and then the two younger ones that died young. I think they died after we came to America. And, that was, I remember she was washing me one day and she stood me on a chair. Well, she brought me a doll from America. And, she stood me on a chair and I can see this big bucket of water. And she washed me and then she put me on a chair and dressed me up. Put my shoes and when her back was turned, I jumped in the water with my shoes.

LEVINE: This was your first pair of shoes?





LUSSIER: My first pair of shoes. Five years old. What do you expect? And then on top of that, in my childish mind, I must have sensed something. You know? And my sister kept saying, I kept calling to my other mother. Mama. And she kept saying, this is your real mother. She kept pounding that into me. And I guess at five years old, the more you pound it into a child then you have to realize that out of the four of us, I was the odd one. I was more like my father, you know.

LEVINE: What was your father like?

LUSSIER: My father was --- my mother was very serious. She had had a hard life. You know. Very hard life taking care of all her sisters and brothers. And her mother died when she was young. Eighteen, nineteen. And she had four sisters to take care of. By the way, her father – my grandfather – was burned alive by the Germans and thrown in a grave. She found that out after World War I. And I remember saying to her, what do you want to go wear black for? He was no good. Oh, God. You don't tell that to your parents in those days, you know. However...

LEVINE: Why did you say that ---- he was no good?

LUSSIER: Because he deserted his w—his family. He deserted and left his wife with four, five children. And one of them was retarded. And went to live in the Alsatian hills with a maiden aunt who had money. And then, when my, my grandmother died, my mother was left with all those to bring up. And she found out after the war, that, I guess when the Germans took over that village – this was World War I – , I guess she ---- he was as nasty to the Germans at the village. And you don't bug the enemy. And he was a drunk. So one day, this ----- they dug a hole and they set him on fire and they threw him in. She got that out, when the war was over. So that was how we had our picture taken. And I was not told, you know. I didn't get a chance to --- they didn't let me know. It was like I was going on a little trip. You know. And we went on the ---- the Savoy. Well, it took ten days. And ----





LEVINE: Do you remember saying good bye to your, to the?

LUSSIER: No. I don't remember that. But I do remember that sh--- that woman cried forever after. And she said, that she would never. We saw her back again. My mother took me when we were eighteen, when I was eighteen. She said she wouldn't, wouldn't take any other children again. It, it broke her heart too much to let them go. And probably she was more attached to me than the others because she took me as a baby. You know. And, the more my sister kept saying, this is your new mother, the more I kept saying, I don't want my new mother!

LEVINE: Do you have any memories before your mother came back to take you and your sisters? Do you have any memories of things you did?

LUSSIER: Yes. I remember, you know, in France, we don't ---- Halloween is not a holiday. And even up 'til I got married and left home, we were not allowed Halloween at home. To us, it's the day ----- I don't know if you know anything about the Catholic religion.

LEVINE: A little bit.

LUSSIER: All right. Okay. All Saints Day is the first of November. So the day before, which is Halloween here, even people that never go to church much, the day before they prepare for All Saints Day. They go to church, they go to confession, they go ---- it's their Memorial Day. Our 30th of May is their November 1st., All Saints Day. Which, by the way, I moved in here November the first. Yeah. So the day before is spent in preparation. So I remember being outside, but they --- it's Shrove Tuesday that they dress Halloween. Just before Easter.

LEVINE: And what do they do on Shrove Tuesday?

LUSSIER: Well, they dress like, like Halloween. And I remember in the cemetery seeing





all these faces, you know, little kids in the village doing that. So I remember that. I remember walking around, I remember oh, yes, these people had a dog. And, (laughs), I laugh now. They -- I used to do that and it reminded me of it. And every once in a while I'd play with them. The dog's name was Medor. M-E-D-O-R. I don't know why they called him that. And they said I used to go look under him and I'd say, do you have diarrhea, Medor? I'd say it in French. Oh, they never let me forget that. Do you have diarrhea? Oh, God. (Laughing) And, little things like that. And I was just going to be ready to go to school. Like, my three sisters were in school. My two older sisters knew that we had a ---- that sister Jean. 'Cause there was only one school in the village and she was in school with them. By the way, my father went to school with ---- what's that? (Pauses) Oh well, it will come to me. That big scientist.

LEVINE: Hm.

LUSSIER: [Pause] He had a German or Jewish name. It'll come to me. Because there was only one school in the village where --- he was born in Keisburg, Keisberg, Alsatian part of France. And, ---- there was only one school there. And I checked the name, the age, they must have been in the same school together. So if you want to check your records, that would be in well, let's see...

LEVINE: Well it would be 1870?

LUSSIER: My father was --- died in '48. He was 48 and he died in '20 ---- 1925. So. Oh, the name is at the tip of my tongue. He was a big scientist.

LEVINE: Hm. And this probably was like 1890 or something like that.

LUSSIER: So that's why I didn't know I had a sister Jean, because I hadn't, I was just going to get ready to start school when my mother came to get us.

LEVINE: Well, now, do you remember leaving? Do you remember?





LUSSIER: I remember bein' on a train. I remember that. And, I remember going on the boat, on the ship. I'm sorry. It's a ship. All I can remember, I keep crying, I want to go back home, to my mother.

LEVINE: Did you take anything with you?

LUSSIER: Yes. My mother took quite a few things with her. As much as she could. Well she had taken it before. When she came when my father, because they had broken up their home. I remember I had that doll. I still had the one pair of shoes; they must have been dried up by then. And ---

LEVINE: Now what was the doll like, do you remember?

LUSSIER: It was quite a big doll. And I guess it's the first doll I ever had. And I, you know, as the years, as I got married and I had children of my own, I realized what my mother went through. Leaving these children behind must have broken her heart. And, then, on top of that, when we, she got it back here, there she was with four children, that she really didn't know. With having been with my father for almost five years, just the two of them alone. And it mustn't have been easy. And my two older sisters bore the brunt of doing the work with her, you know. I didn't. I was more of a handicap than anything else. [Laughs]

LEVINE: What do you remember about the passage on the Savoy?

LUSSIER: Ah! Savoy. My sister always said we came in the cattle boat. Probably we did. It was rocky. It was --- they weren't as stabilized as the others, you know. And we were ten days, and from the day I got on that ship, I was seasick. And plus the cryin', and the l-- for my mother. The mother I, Mama Reiniche, that I only knew. I got ---- I got so seasick. I didn't know but my older sister told me that, that the purser told my mother that I wouldn't survive the trip cause I was so sick. And I was just a tiny little thing. And I remember my mother setting me on her lap. And the steward sittin' in front of me, trying to feed me with a





spoon. And you know how children are where they don't want to eat. They go (demonstrates) like this. I went like this and I don't, I guess it threw the bowl down. And he looked at me. I still can remember his words. You do that again, I'm going to throw you in the ocean. To a little kid who's sick. When we walked off that ship, I couldn't walk. They had to carry me. I was so weak. And went through the ten days. Now we get to Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Now do you remember when the ship came into the harbor, New York Harbor?

LUSSIER: yes. I asked my mother what that was --- that Statue of Liberty. And I remember asking her what it meant. Well, I forgot what answer she gave me. She probably didn't know that much either, you know. And I remember thinking it was so impressive when I saw the Statue of Liberty, every time I see it I think about landing there. And then we got off there. Once we got off the ship I was still very weak. I remember they had to carry me. I -- I couldn't... And then now, you pass through, you get in Ellis Island to be, to get, before you get on land. You know that. Now that --- that's the fun part of it. You want me to keep on...

LEVINE: I want you to.----- In as much detail as you can.

LUSSIER: I remember we got there. And, oh, by the way, I had an aunt. She died since. And they lived in the city too, but they're all gone. She came over with my mother. When my mother came for us, my aunt had never come to America. And she had four children, four children and the youngest was my age and he was Down Syndrome.

LEVINE: Now she came with you?

LUSSIER: She came, when my mother came back. Yeah. She came with us. So now we're at Ellis Island and, we're going to be on land. So they put my aunt standing there, and all her children by age and Camille, the Down Syndrome, was the last. There was my mother, with Lucy, Suzanne, Jean and me. Now





they start like they do at the police. What is your name? So they get to --- first they get to my aunt and they get down to Camille. Now, Camille talked very little. You know how he got on land? An apple saved him. He had an apple in his hand. When they got to him and they asked his name, he didn't answer. He grunted. And the ---- whoever did the questioning looked at my aunt. He doesn't speak? She said, of course he speaks. He asked again. Camille didn't answer. Finally, the third time – now don't forget they would have sent him back to France. Finally he said, give me, bite, of ---- give me your apple. He went, no! It sounded like, no. They were let go. They came to America. And I ca --- they get off. Can you imagine my aunt, who had never been to America. My mother had been. Coming back alone. So now they started with my mother. You want me to repeat what I said there?

LEVINE: Absolutely.

LUSSIER: All right. So they asked my mother her name. Then they asked Lucy her name. She gave her name. Suzanne gave her name. First name, last name. Jean gave here name. And then when they got to me, and what is your name? I says, Margarite Reiniche. Looked at my mother, that's not your daughter. Of course, that's my daughter! She doesn't have your same last name. Did you adopt her? I have enough. Why should I adopt her? No. She's my daughter. So he starts all over again. And my sister had said to me before, Lucy, remember this is your mother. This is your new mother. She kept emphasizing new mother. I didn't want a new mother. I loved my old mother.

So they started second time. I gave the same last name. Again, he questioned my mother. And then the third time, he went through the third time. And when it got to me and I gave the last name, he said, you cannot disembark. We're going to send for your husband. We don't think this is your daughter. No matter what my mother said. I screwed the works. And ----- but you know, when you think of it, through the years, I, oh, I --- my sisters never let me forget what we went through at Ellis Island. So we had to stay there. Well, we slept. We were there three days. In the meantime, my poor aunt,





with all those children, not knowing a word of English, not ever been to America. But people were pretty hardy in those days. They --- and so, we slept that one big room down, where we [not understood] with nothing like it is now.

LEVINE: Were there benches in there then?

LUSSIER: I remember we were playing back and forth. It was, you know. And we slept on hammocks. Like this. And I remember, I -- where I slept, there was up above me, there was a big black woman. Whether she was white, or black or green or polka dot, didn't matter. She was big. And when she laid down at night, her behind would touch my face.

END SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

LEVINE: Was she in a hammock?

LUSSIER: Oh, yeah. Everybody in hammocks. There were no beds. We all slept in hammocks. I don't know how they ever got me up on a hammock but I was only a tiny little thing. She was above me. And when I lay down, there she was. Well, she couldn't help it either. What could she do? And in the morning she would, you know, you get up from a hammock you put your feet down, she would comb her hair and all the nits and bugs would fall on my head and my face. And, they would put out the food, and it was there on tables. Everything was in that big room down below. And they would put out the food and they would leave it on the table twenty minutes. And my mother was so busy trying to get some food in me, half of the time she didn't have time to eat because they took the food away. And then the rest of the time it was cleared up and we, we kids would play back and forth, you know. And then at night, there, you slept in those hammocks.

And so they sent for my father. But, you know, my father, coming from New Bedford, to get down there it was like going to China in those days. You know. And he didn't speak English. And of course he had to get away from





his work. And all because of me. And, so he got down there. We're waiting for your husband. So they do like they do at the police station. They don't say, "Come, come here and show, this is your daughter." They don't, didn't do it that way. They had my father upstairs near a door to look down, and there was a whole bunch of people down there. It was a community room. There were no bedrooms, you know.

And, they had, so they said to him, do you see any of your family there. I forgot what words they used. Well, then he saw his wife, my mother. They weren't interested in the other three but they didn't tell him that. Do you see any of the children? Well, one by one he said, that was Lucy. Yes. And Suzanne. Cause they don't care the h-- they're waiting for him to say it. And then Jean. Oh, you only have three daughters? Trying to catch him. He said, no. I have four daughters. Oh? What's the fourth one's name? That's when he said Margarite.

LEVINE: And he pointed you out?

LUSSIER: Yes. Do you see her? And this little p-, I was no bigger than a minute, you know. Running around. And he said, there she is. There. So they had given my mother a box. For fifty cents, a box of food to, for us to get to New Bedford. Because it was a long, you know, you didn't travel as fast as you did then. So they said, well, your husband is here. You don't need the food. They took the box away from her. And then we were, we were able to land. Now we got in the train, and it was always me that did these little... I was only five years old, [Laughs] what do you expect? And, you know, people don't realize you're not a neighbor's children.

You're going to take after one or the other. My mother was quiet and serious and my father, I guess, in his young days had been --- and he was more lively and this was me. You know. And I remember it ---- being in the train, I put my hand out. That was a new thing. And I remember the conductor coming, pfft, slap my hand. Cause I could have got hurt, you know. So that's how we got here to New Bedford.





LEVINE: Now, is there anything else about Ellis Island? Do you remember any examinations?

LUSSIER: Oh, yes. Yes. We were examined. And, as I said, you had to be out of that hammock at a certain time. I, when I was there, it was a year ago. I saw the hammocks lined up somewhere there. Yeah. And like I, as I said, there were no bedrooms, no private rooms. Everybody slept on these hammocks because everybody that went there went for a few hours. Then they were gone. There was only a few hardy souls like us, because of me that were kept three days.

LEVINE: Well, where did you aunt go? Did she have to stay?

LUSSIER: No.

LEVINE: Where did she go?

LUSSIER: Well, she had to come to New Bedford. And you know --- when you look back and think ---- how did she manage? My mother at least had been here almost five years, you know. And, but my aunt hadn't. And she was a timid soul. And she had a husband who drank and who was a, you know, not too good to the ----and then with this Down's Syndrome, it wasn't easy either. So by then she's on her way o New Bedford. And when she came for the purpose of coming with my mother. And we were held back because of me. And if Camille hadn't eaten that apple, th---they---- she would have been sent back.

LEVINE: Did she know that people were turned back at Ellis Island? Was she afraid for Camille?

LUSSIER: None of us were, no.

LEVINE: Nobody realized it.





LUSSIER: No, we had no... See, when my mother came, there wasn't any problem. She didn't have any children, you know. So there wasn't any problem. But children will complicate things. And, she didn't know that either. But every time I look at an apple, I think, I think of Camille. Because that apple, you went, no. – you know

LEVINE: Now, can you remember anything during those first few days or weeks when you were in this country that were new and different that struck you as--?

LUSSIER: Well, yes. I had never seen a wooden house. There are no wooden houses in France. They're stucco or brick. Because they've depleted their forests. My mother was livin' ---- my parents had this apartment down the south end of the city. And it was a third floor. There were two apartments on each floor. Third floor and when we stood there, my mother said, this is where we live and I looked up at this wooden house and I started to cry. I was always the one. (Laughs) The confu --- I started to cry and cry. And she asked me what I was crying for. Because the house is going to fall down on top of me. I had never seen a wooden house. You know. And, oh, yes. I remember that. And every time I go by that house, I always think, my first house in the United States. And, it was, there was a lot of things to get used to. Again, as I said, I was always the one. I was the one that was more adventuresome. The others, they never had childhood, my two older sisters. They had to help my mother [coughs] take care of me, and Jean and I. And, on top of that, (coughs) do the washin' --- and no washing machine. You know. So, I remember walking in one of the streets. Excuse me. (Sneezes) And the gypsies at the time (sneezes), oh, god. Gypsies at the time used to rent storefronts.

LEVINE: Here? In New Bedford?

LUSSIER: Yeah. And, they'd sit outside, you know, sewing. Whatever. And I remember walking and there was only about five minutes (coughing)...

LEVINE: Do you want to stop for a minute and get a drink or anything?





LUSSIER: No. I'm all right. So I sat and talked to the Gypsy. So she said, come here, I've got to go inside. And so, sure, I followed her inside. In the meantime, my sisters came looking for me. They couldn't find me. They went to the police station what was just a f --- everybody was looking for me. Finally, I came out of the Gypsy's and I went home. Where have you been? Oh, God. I was always in trouble.

LEVINE: Well, now. I never heard of Gypsies in this country. What else do you know about the gypsies that were here?

LUSSIER: They were fortunetellers, really. And then there was the sayin', you know, the whole sayin' --- that they kidnapped kids. Took them away. But they were, this was a young Gypsy. I remember. And I talked to her and went she went inside, I went inside with her. You know, in the storefront. In the meantime, they're looking for me up the street. And

LEVINE: What was it like having Jean for a sister? Someone you never even knew before?

LUSSIER: That's it. My other sisters knew her because she went to school. You know, she's the only one livin'. And she isn't well. She lives in the city, but I wo --- didn't have her here because half the time -- she's two years --- twenty months older. Her mind wanders and she isn't well. She wouldn't contribute anything. Um, somehow or other she always she always felt it through the years. If something went wrong, well, I was never with any of you or something like that. She --- well ---

LEVINE: Was she with the aunt that came with Camille?

LUSSIER: No. No. Another aunt. And so, as I said, I got to know them there. But, somehow or other, even through the years, there was always --- see that bondin' had never taken place. You know. And as I said, my parents did the best they could. We'd have gone through all the wars. And I ----Second World War, after the war was over, found out that two of my cousins were sent





to the gas chamber.

LEVINE: Well now, you came right at the start of World War I. 1914.

LUSSIER: Yeah.

LEVINE: So did you know that the war, well, you were too young I suppose. But did you know that war was imminent?

LUSSIER: Yes. Yes. Oh, I forgot to tell you this when you reminded me. When my mother came to get us, the police came. The police in town --- gendarmes, they call 'em. And they said to my mother, where's your husband? She said he didn't come with me. Why not? Well, we couldn't afford both going. He had to work. They didn't believe her. They watched. Until we left, they watched that house. If my father had come, they wouldn't have left him re-- let him return. He'd have had to serve in the service.

LEVINE: Now, when you got here you began school fairly soon after you left. What was that like for you?

LUSSIER: It ---

LEVINE: What do you remember about it?

LUSSIER: Oh, yes. I remember. I got another doll too, from a teacher there. It was kindergarten. And, it was one of the schools down south end of the city, where we were livin'. And I remember we put our coats outside. There were hooks that you just put your, sweater on. And,-- went -- the first time I was there, what did I know? I only spoke French. I couldn't find my sweater. And I went crying, up and down the aisle. I still remember that in French. My sweater! I can't find my sweater! I didn't dare go home without my sweater. And I remember the teacher came out and, finally, waited 'til everybody was gone and then I forgot where I --- I was lost. There was my one sweater, hanging on the hook.





I remember crying – scared to come home. You know. That would be another black mark against me. My father never lost patience with me, he didn't --- but my mother did. And that --- I remember that. I remember it was one Christmas and the teacher gave us all --- the little girls -- there weren't big classes there --- and I got a doll. I remember that. I also remember, I forgot what grade it was. She said ---- I want all --- all the French children to stand in line in the front here. Canadian, Parisian, French, whatever. She was teaching us how to pronounce our "h's" because there is no such thing in the French. And there's no "w" in the French alphabet, by the way. I remem --- she drilled that into us. Over and over again. I remember that. I remember it didn't take us long before we mastered English. Children learn fast.

LEVINE: There were a lot of French children then, in New Bedford.

LUSSIER: Oh, yes. A lot of Parisian French. Yeah. You know what? They all came and they came to New Bedford because there were cotton mills, from where they worked. That section. And they all moved into the same district, you know, more or less, so they all knew each other. You know. And, what else do I say about school? I learned – oh, yes. We'd come home and, we'd try our English at home. And my father would look. We speak French in this house! You know, he never learned English. He never wanted to. And that's why, when people talk about the Portuguese coming and don't want to learn the language, I can understand that. Because my own parents didn't either.

LEVINE: Why do you suppose it was that they wanted to continue with their own language and not become Americanized?

LUSSIER: Well, it wasn't like it is now. You know, and they, they all were in the same section of the city at that time. And I don't know what it is. Don't ask me. You don't question your parents, you know. And so we were not allowed to speak English in the house. So we only spoke it in school. And -- Then I, children learn very quickly. You know. Then when I was about eight, my father bought a house in the north end of the city, up that way. The fact that was, he wanted





to make his own wine. And if he owned his house, he could do it --- In the cellar. You could do it in those days. And that's why we moved to the north end of the city. But amazingly, if my father had lived longer, somehow or other I guess we -- he understood me.

LEVINE: What makes you say that, that he understood you?

LUSSIER: Because he used to say to me, when my mother wasn't there. She was out. Don't, don't argue with your mother. Let me take care of her. Don't argue with her. You know. And, so that was it. But of course as I've said, the main part, oh, through the years, whenever we had an argument, my older sister would say, because of you, we stayed at Ellis Island. Oh, when we got home from Ellis Island, my mother bought kerosene, and drenched our hair with kerosene. We were full of nits. Full. Four girls.

LEVINE: Where did you get the nits? On the boat?

LUSSIER: No. Ellis Island.

LEVINE: At Ellis Island.

LUSSIER: I told you that woman used to comb her hair and they'd fall and there was dirt. There was filth, you know.

LEVINE: You mentioned cockroaches.

LUSSIER: Oh, yes. Cockroaches. There was everything. It wasn't the cleanest of, of, of places. And, as I said, you lived in that one room. You slept. You ate. Y -- I guess they took the hammocks out, down at night or whatever they did, I don't know. But you could see from upstairs. And that's where my father had to look down 'n --- and find me -- to know I was the one.

LEVINE: What do you think, having come here as an immigrant when you were five years old, and your whole family coming, what effect do you think that had on





the kind of person you became?

LUSSIER: A lot.

LEVINE: In what way?

LUSSIER: A big effect --- you have two cultures. And I, I've never forgotten my birth country because I've been back there. My mother took us back. My father died when I was sixteen. When I was eighteen my mother took three of us back. Suzanne was married. So she couldn't come back. And we stayed there four months. And two years after she took us back again. And we stayed for ---- we stayed with family. So that, I remember a lot of it. And ...

LEVINE: So the fact that you came from that, you never forgot that other culture.

LUSSIER: No. I've never, I've always, I have never forgotten it. And then when I got married, oh, years after, I had the two girls, and a friend of mine that used to live here that got married before World War II and went, she had never lived in France. She was born here. But she met a chauffeur in Pa – in New York where she was working. He was French. He worked for rich people. And they got married and he wanted to go back to France. And, so Germaine, I went --- we were going to go. We had planned ---- my youngest daughter works-- is ---- has a doctorate in biochemistry with the National Institute of Health. And Nancy, and, so she was in her third, last year of college. And we figured --- we said that once she graduated from college and was on her own, that we would go to France, my husband and I. 'Cause, when he spoke, he didn't speak much French because he never learned. And when he did it was more or less Canadian French, but it was, he was a good guy.

And we were going to go to Germaine and her husband. Well, before that happened, my husband died and her husband died. My daughter ---- he died November, December the second ---- and she graduated from college in June. And I was still gonna go, and Germaine's husband died in France. So when she graduated from ---- when she got married, a year and a half after ---- I left





right after that, and sailed home to France and stayed with Germaine for a while. So I've been back quite a few times. The last time was four years ago. So France is very close to me because...

LEVINE: In what ways would you say you're French?

LUSSIER: I'm very French.

LEVINE: In what ways are you?

LUSSIER: In a lot of ways. I think like them.

LEVINE: Could you say how that is?

LUSSIER: Hm?

LEVINE: How is the French thinking different from American thinking?

LUSSIER: Our culture for one thing, of course, is different. Our way of eatin' is different. I eat like everybody else eat. I get Italian, German, Jews --- Jewish, whatever. You know. There's still some favorites. Special things. And they talk about -- like wine, I don't know if you've heard that wine is good for you. Well, when I was there, I was with family, I was not a tourist.----- children were never served wine. But also, they're not drin -- milk drinkers either. And lo and behold, you don't drink water cause it's going to corrode your pipes as they used to tell us. Children aren't misbehaved like they are here. And at the table, there's no such thing as, I don't want this and I don't want that. They don't have American breakfasts. When you eat down there, we had -- when they came here they said, oh, we're havin' an American breakfast! (Laughs) What they have is these long...

LEVINE: Baguettes.

LUSSIER: Yeah. Baguette. And you see everybody going out in the morning to the





bakery with their big baguettes, you know. I got so I was doing that with Germaine. And my mother, to the day she died, that was her breakfast. With a big cup, a bowl of not coffee as you know it. They made it with chicory in those ---- strong. And she would dunk that in there. That was always her breakfast. And, they, I think to this day, the last time I was there. Somebody, oh, an American breakfast. I suppose certain places had them but not in the home. And, children, well, maybe lately, I don't know, it turned out like they do here, but parents ---- they have longer hours at school, by the way. They go to school on Saturday morning. But they have one half a day during the week. And they've got to learn two languages. It's a must. You have a choice in France of German or English.

And Germaine's grandchildren ---- 'course Germaine spoke both French and English, she was born here ---- grandson used to pick English and the granddaughter picked German. And her grandson used to say to her, you don't speak English the way I'm learnin' it! They spoke English English. Like they do in England. And she spoke American. Gee Grandma, you speak funny in English. She used to tell me that. But -- and their hours are longer. If there they --- and they're great for sports. But it's after school. It's not, it takes away nothing from their -- from the school. And they have, I don't know if you've read the paper but all outside the United States have longer hours of school.

LEVINE: Well now, do you, well, how did you meet your husband first?

LUSSIER: Over here.

LEVINE: Was there a social club? Was there....

LUSSIER: No. I had met him at work. I worked where the ---at the time was a cotton mill, but through the years I worked ---- I don't know if you've heard of Acushnet Company --- they make golf balls.

LEVINE: C-U-S-H? Cushna?





LUSSIER: Acushnet A-C-U-S-H-N-E-T. And they make golf balls and they make golf clubs.

LEVINE: And you were working there?

LUSSIER: Yeah. And, let's see now. Oh, when my first daughter was born, my husband said to me, I don't want you to speak English to her. I want her to learn your French. 'Cause he didn't speak French at home. His folks were descended from Canadian but they were brought up in Connecticut. So they never spoke. So I used to speak French to her. When I --- we'd go to my in-laws, my brother in law used to say, what's the matter with the kid? Can't she speak English? So when she went to school --- but it was okay because we lived right around the corner from St. Joseph's Church and School. So that was great cause she was only four and a half and she only had to cross one little street, you know, to go to school. So they spoke French there, French in the morning and English in the afternoon. To this day, she can't speak French at all. I think it's too bad. I wish she had kept it up.

LEVINE: Yeah. What was your husband's name?

LUSSIER: Arthur.

LEVINE: Arthur. And your children's names?

LUSSIER: Pauline was the oldest. , Nancy is the doctor, with the biochemistry. Those are, Pauline's four children. Nancy was a career girl, never wanted a family. And out of the four children, the oldest one, standing up there, died three years ago. They were brought up in East Bridgewater, in Bridgewater, by the way. My daughter moved to Bridgewater when she got married. And the boy in the middle is retarded from a near drowning accident. The girl lives in Delaware. And the one on the left is an attorney in New Hampshire. By the way, I went to the United States Supreme Court October the third.





LEVINE: Why was that?

LUSSIER: He had a client there. Representing a client. Was the thrill of a lifetime. Gins, Justice Ginsberg and O'Connor, they really questioned him. The reason they took his case, because it's a rare case. He won't know for a few months. Something about making some law uniform. Something about bankruptcy.

LEVINE: Uh huh. Well, we have just a few minutes left. Let me, what do you feel very proud of or satisfied with, that you've done in your life?

LUSSIER: What I feel proud? Well, I raised two daughters. I got my own education. I think I have done rather well. I'm independent. I take care of myself. And I have the culture of both worlds. I still feel a lot, oh, I'm very Americanized and don't mis --- make a mistake. If there was a ---- if I had to choose between the two countries, certainly I would be loyal to this country. 'Cause it was the country that brought me up and took care of me. You know, I ---- but I remember a lot of the things and they still stay with you. These things that you were brought up to think and feel.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, we're at the end of the tape. I want to thank you so much for a most interesting interview.

LUSSIER: It was nice having you.

LEVINE: Well, thank you. And I've been speaking with Margarite Lussier, who came from France when she was five years old, but has a wonderful memory of Ellis Island (laughs), and today she's, let's see, 86.

LUSSIER: But if you ever come here for a program you don't tell them my age.

LEVINE: Okay. I won't. I won't. Okay. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. It's November 9, 1995. I'm in New Bedford, Massachusetts and I'm signing off.

END INTERVIEW

