**#1**

**Interviewee: Elda Del Bino Willitts  
Date of Birth: April 28, 1911  
Date of Interview: November 9, 1990  
Interviewer: Paul E. Sigrist, Jr.  
Immigrated from Lucca, Italy at Age 5 in 1916  
Ellis Island Collection: EI-8**

When I got on the boat, I was only five and this little, this gentleman who had been back and forth several times, and well my mother took a liking to him because he was so knowledgeable about it. He spoke Italian. And so he took me on a walk one day and he said, "You know what? When you get over to Ellis Island they're going to be examining your eyes with a hook," and he says, "Don't let them do it because you know what? They did it to me one eye fell in my pocket. (Paul laughs) So you can imagine how I entered this...So we get over there and everybody has to pass and I'm on the floor screaming. I passed without a physical. I passed the eye test because the other seven passed.

**-Why was Elda afraid of the eye exam? What would/could have happened if she actually took and failed the exam?**

**#2**

**Interviewee: Gertrude (Gudrun) Hildebrandt Moller  
Date of Birth: June 15, 1920  
Date of Interview: October 5, 1992  
Interviewer: Janet Levine, Ph.D  
Immigrated from Germany in 1929 at Age 9  
Ellis Island Collection: EI-222**

**Moller (Name Change in School):**  
  
I was born Gudrun Hildebrandt and married Moller, Mr. Moller, who was from Denmark. He immigrated here many years later and we met in New York. However when I started school in Chicago, where I grew up, needless to say, first of all, I couldn't speak a word of English, and I was the only child in the school that couldn't speak English. And (she laughs) it wasn't too happy the first couple of years but my mama said "Take heart because some day you're going to be able to speak two languages and all the ones that were teasing you will speak only one". And it was true. She was always right. So, my teacher suggested, since none of the children could pronounce Gudrun, which is an old Germanic-Scandinavian name, and a very beautiful name (I hear), she gave me a list of girls' names to choose from. So that all the kids could converse, you know, know what to call me. So I picked the name starting with a g, as with my name, and it was Gertrude. I'm not very happy with it, but it has stuck with me all of these years.

**Has anyone ever asked you to change or alter your name so it is easier for others to say? If they did, how would you respond?**

#3

**Sadie Frowne**

**Immigrated from Poland at age 13**

*We begin Sadie's story as she and her mother enter New York Harbor at the end of a twelve-day journey in steerage aboard a steamship:*

"We came by steerage on a steamship in a very dark place that smelt dreadfully. There were hundreds of other people packed in with us, men, women and children, and almost all of them were sick. It took us twelve days to cross the sea, and we thought we should die, but at last the voyage was over, and we came up and saw the beautiful bay and the big woman with the spikes on her head and the lamp that is lighted at night in her hand.

Aunt Fanny and her husband met us at the gate of this country and were very good to us, and soon I had a place to live out [Sadie is referring to becoming a live-in domestic servant] while my mother got work in a factory making white goods.”

**-Sadie mentions a, “big woman with the spikes on her head and the lamp that is lighted at night in her hand. “ What landmark is she referring to?**

**#4**

**Interviewee: Charles W. Beller (Kalman Bilchick)**Date of Birth: November 4, 1903  
Date of Interview: August 29, 1991  
Interviewer: Janet Levine, Ph.D.  
Immigrated from Russia at age 6 in 1910  
Ellis Island Collection: EI-82

Levine:  
Did your mother and father have the attitude that they wanted their children to become Americanized and they wanted them to hold on to the traditions of Jews in Russia?

Beller (Maintaining Cultural Identity):

“My father would want us to go to synagogue on the high holy days; and I always went with him. The other boys, they strayed away from the religious part of it. But I always went with him on every high holiday and the like. I went to Hebrew school. I had the rabbi come to the house for awhile. Then I went to the Rabbi's place in order to learn until I was thirteen years old. And after that I didn't care about that. I wanted to be Americanized. I want to be an American, and I want to accept my opportunities and take the, make the most of them. Take advantage of everything that I could learn. And I did just that.”

**Why do you think Beller’s father wanted him to go to the synagogue?**

**#5**

**Interview with Adario from Italy**

*Adario recalls arriving at Ellis Island*

ADARIO: The people, everybody seemed to be worried sick, you know. Huddling, huddling together, you know, wondering everybody, you know, talking with each other and some of them not talking at all. You just sit there waiting with the hope, you know. And then when you get in that line, you know, to be examined, it's really quite emotional and scary. Not understanding, you know, uh, what's going on, it's really hard. Not understanding the language, and the American language, it seems very harsh. It seems like people are yelling at you instead of, you know, talking. Like, uh, my father would ask directions to some policeman or something, and they'd go, "Whaaaaa!" You know, not look at you. It was really, uh, it's not an Italian way

**Why are the people at Ellis Island “worried sick.” What are they worried about.**

**#6**

**Interview with PAULINE LESZCZYNA BELECHICK from Poland.**

LEVINE: So do you remember when the ship came up to Ellis Island? Do you remember getting off at Ellis Island?

BELCHICK: Yeah, I remember getting off.

LEVINE: And what was that like? What was your impression of Ellis Island?

BELCHICK: Well, everything was so big. It was new and big to me, you know.

LEVINE: Were there lots of people there?

BELCHICK: Oh, there was loads and loads of people, yeah.

LEVINE: And do you remember the examination?

BELCHICK: They put you all in one room, all naked, women and children, before you got off, yeah. LEVINE: And did you have to, like, go thorough showers and stuff like that?

BELCHICK: Yes, we did.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember anything specific?

BELCHICK: But there was nothing wrong with my mother or me, you know. We were perfect, thank God. LEVINE: So how long did it take you? Do you remember?

BELCHICK: No, I don't remember how long we were there. But after, when we got from that ladies room, a man put us on a train and they gave us breakfast

**-How would you feel if you were placed in a room, stripped down, and examined for entry into the country?**

**#7**

**Directions for Medical Examination at Ellis Island by Dr. Allan McLaughlin, U. S. Public Health and Marine Hospital Service.**The medical examination at Ellis Island is conducted according to a system which is the result of many years of development. The doctors work in pairs, and divide the inspection between them. The immigrants, coming in single file, are examined for certain defects by the first doctor. who detains each one long enough to keep a space of ten to fifteen feet between the immigrants.

The second doctor, placed about thirty feet from the first, disregards that part of the examination entrusted to his colleague and confines his examination to such defects as are not looked for by the first doctor. The file of immigrants makes a right-angle turn just as it reaches the second doctor and this enables the examiner to observe the side and back of the passenger in the shortest time possible.

The examiners follow a routine in this examination, and the scrutiny begins at the approaching passenger's feet, before he comes within fifteen feet of the examiner. The examiner's scrutiny beginning at the feet travels upward, and the eyes are the last to be inspected. In this way, lameness, deformity, defective eyesight (through efforts to adjust his vision, after making the turn, to a new course) are detected.

The gait and general appearance suggest health or disease to the practiced eye, and aliens who do not appear normal are turned aside, with those who are palpably defective, and more thoroughly examined later.

The medical examiners must ever be on the alert for deception. The nonchalant individual with an overcoat on his arm is probably concealing an artificial arm; the child strapped to its mother's back, and who appears old enough to walk alone, may be unable to walk because of infantile paralysis; a case of favus may be so skillfully prepared for inspection that close scrutiny is required to detect the evidences of recent cleansing, and a bad case of trachoma may show no external evidence and be detected only upon inverting the eyelid.

After the last alien in line has passed the doctor, the suspected ones turned aside are thoroughly examined, idiots and those suffering with a loathsome or dangerous contagious disease are certified and sent to the board of special inquiry. Cases not deemed fit to travel are sent to the hospital, and cases with some disability likely to make them a public charge are certified accordingly and also sent to the board of special inquiry.

Minor defects, such as anemia, loss of an eye, loss of a finger, poor physique, low stature, etc., are recorded on the alien's card and he is allowed to go to the registry clerk and immigrant inspector in charge of the manifest, who takes the defect into consideration as contributory evidence, and may or may not send him to the board

**-Does anything surprise you about these directions?**

**#8**

**Interview with Josephine Cattali;**

**Immigrated to US from Italy at age 9**

….on the boat they, uh, before we arrived, the nurses and doctors were there, and they all came in, and they had us all, told us to get in line, and when we got in line they were starting to vaccinate us. And so my mother said, uh, "What's that?" And they says, "Well, she's got to, well, you've got to get vaccinated, both of you, you know, before you enter the States." And, uh, so my mother says, "Oh." So after they got through with me, no sooner had they gotten through giving me the needle, and she rubbed it, she says, "I don't want . . ." No, the lady, one of the nurses, I guess, or the lady that were there helping out said, "What are you doing that for?" She says, "Oh, I don't want her to have a temperature when I arrive. I don't want her sick. You know, she's been healthy all this time." She says, "I don't want her sick." So she rubbed it off, but then they gave me another one. ( she laughs ) And that one had to stay. "No, she won't. She'll be all right. She'll be all right." I only had a slight temperature, not much. It didn't bother me as much. Because, you know, an arm can swell, and that's what she was afraid of, that it would give her trouble, and me trouble. And, uh, then they, uh, they said, "Now we have to check your hair." And she says, "You know, lady." She said, "I cannot check her hair, because it's too long. We're checking for, you know, different things that we have to look for, so we have to cut it." "You have to cut her hair?" she said. "Yeah." So they cut my hair. And then they messed it all up looking through it, you know.

**Why did they cut the girl’s hair?**

**#9**

**Interview with George Cromier**

**Immigrated to US from France at age 14**

LEVINE: But you don't remember eating at Ellis Island?

CROMIER: No.

LEVINE: And you didn't stay overnight? C

ROMIER: No, an hour-and-a-half, two hours tops. That's it, that was it. I made it fast. It wasn't, I was in order, you know, having my passport. Everything was fun.

LEVINE: Did you have a physical exam there

CROMIER: Yeah, very little, though, very little. Check your eyes, your mouth. They were very nice, no trouble whatsoever. Some had to stay a long time. I didn't.

**This immigrant had a trouble free time entering the United States. Check where he was from at the top of the excerpt. Why do you suspect his entry into the country was easy?**

**#10**

**Interview with Harold Donner**

**Immigrated to the US from Poland at age 10.**

SIGRIST: Do you remember where you ate here at Ellis?

DONNER: I remember it was a large community type of eating, but I don't recall the food or the exact place.

SIGRIST: Were you ever allowed to go outside?

DONNER: No, no. I was indoors.

SIGRIST: You stayed inside. Did you have any interaction with the medical staff at all?

DONNER: I remember being examined. They examined my eyes, they examined my heart, you know, with the stethoscope, and that's about it.

SIGRIST: But you were a healthy child.

DONNER: Yeah. I was healthy.

**This immigrant had a trouble free time entering the United States. Why do you suspect his entry into the country was easy?**

**#11**

**Interview with Leah Drachman**

**Immigrated to the US from Russia at age 16**

“When we arrived in Ellis Island everyone was nervous, and we passed through the lines and there were men on either side and on some of the people those men put chalk marks on their back. Of course, the people themselves did not know it, but the people in back of them could see it and were worried and wondering what it was all about. Only later we learned that those men noticed something unusual either physical or something else and they wanted to examine those people more thoroughly. Being a healthy young woman, I did not receive a check mark.”

**What did the check mark mean?**

**#12:**

**Interview with Katherine English**

**Immigrated to the US from Ireland at age 24**

SIGRIST: Can you describe Ellis Island to me? What did it look like to you?

ENGLISH: Well it, to me, it was like cages, you know, and they brought you in just like you see a bunch of cattle going. And they brought you in on those, I think they had like, must be iron bars or something and they might be the width of the kitchen and two could walk in. And then they put you, they had sections like for, for the different countries; the ones that could speak English and the one couldn't speak English. And they, they put them in there but I wasn't long in there at all then.

SIGRIST: How did you feel being an English speaking person with people who didn't speak English? ENGLISH: Oh, of course, I would feel sorry for them. I would feel so sorry for them and then the inspectors that I saw there, but this boat was a different boat than ours, the boat that brought us in from Ireland. As a matter of fact, we had no foreign people. The only foreign people we had was, I think, Hungarian. We had a few Hungarian people but they had to, they left from England. And then they came, the boat came around to Queenstown. But I, the, what I didn't like, I was listening, they would holler at them and, you know, that they weren't human beings. That I didn't like at all. So then they put us through, when I gave the papers that I took the test and everything. Then to see my vaccinations and all that stuff, they let me out and put me in a room and then they brought in my sisters

**Why did Katherine get through the line quicker than the other people at Ellis Island?**

**#13**

Antanas Laztauski, Lithuanian immigrant, autobiography

That first night we sat around in the house and they asked me, Well, why did you come? I told them about that first night and what the ugly shoemaker said about life, liberty and the getting of happiness. They all leaned back and laughed. What you need is money, they said It was all right at home. You wanted nothing. You ate your own meat and your own things on the farm. You made your own clothes and had your own leather. The other things you got at the Jew man's store and paid him with sacks of rye. But here you want a hundred things. Whenever you walk out you see new things you want, and you must have money to buy everything. . . . The next morning my friends woke me up at five o'clock and said, Now, if you want life, liberty and happiness, they laughed, you must push for yourself. You must get a job. Come with us.

**According to this excerpt, how is life in America different than life in Lithuania?**