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[I Sell Fish]

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Place of origin Chicago, Illinois Date 6/22/39

Project worker Hilda Polacheck

Project editor

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Remarks

W3650

FORM B

Personal History of Informant

FOLKLORE

CHICAGO

STATE

NAME OF WORKER Hilda Polacheck

ADDRESS 1410 East 57th Street

DATE June 22, 1939

SUBJECT American Lives "I Sell Fish."

NAME OF INFORMANT Louis F

1. Ancestry Polish-Jewish.
2. Place and date of birth Gonitz, Poland, February 24, 1899.
3. Family Wife and one daughter
4. Places lived in, with dates Gonitz, Poland from 1899 to 1921. In Cuba from February 1st to March 15th, 1921.
5. Education, with dates None.

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6. Occupations and accomplishments, with dates

Has been selling fish since he arrived in Chicago.

7. Special skills and interests None

8. Community and religious activities

None

9. Description of informant Five feet, five inches in height. Slightly bald-headed. Sallow complexion.

10. Other Points gained in interview

FORM C

Text of Interview (Unedited)

FOLKLORE

CHICAGO

STATE Illinois

NAME OF WORKER Hilda Polacheck

ADDRESS 1410 East 57th Street

DATE June 22, 1939

SUBJECT "I Sell Fish."

NAME OF INFORMANT Louis T.

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You wanna know what I do? I sell fish. I begin to sell fish the day I come to Chicago. And I still sell fish. Yes, I had plenty of excitement before I come to Chicago. You want me I should tell you about it? All right; why not?

Where was I born? In a small town in Poland, called Gonitz. I got married when I was nineteen. When I was twenty-one, I had two children. It was two years after the World War, and I found out that I would be called to be a soldier. My wife said she did not want me to be a soldier in the Polish Army. She said better I should try to go to America. I could not get a passport, because I was running away from militaire. (military service) I knew a feller what used to take people across the border. So I fixed it up with him that he should take me. This feller had two other man that wanted to go to America, so two o'clock in the morning, it was January, and it was cold, we all met and we walked through a wald (forest) about a mile and we were in Germany. I paid the feller fifteen marks. The other fellers each paid fifteen marks. The three of us then waited till morning and we hired a wagon and drove to Berlin. In Berlin, we took train for Amsterdam, Holland. Then we took the boat for Cuba.

Now, in Cuba, the excitement started, I found a boarding house where I shared a room with two fellers. I wanted to get to Chicago, where I had three brothers and many uncles and aunts. The only way that I could go to Chicago, was to be smuggled into America. After six weeks, I met a feller who said he would take me to America for \$150.00. I had enough money to pay this, so I told him: all right.

One very hot night in March, this feller who said he could take me to America, came to the boarding house and told me to get ready. He said I could not take anything. That it would take all night and all next day, and that I would have nothing to eat and nothing to drink. Not even a drink of water. Well, I did not want to stay in Cuba, so I went with him. He told me to walk a few steps behind him, and not to talk. He said he must get some more fellers who wanted to go to America. If I saw him go into a house, I should follow. I do as he say. He stopped in twelve houses. And soon thirteen fellers was following him. We came to

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the yam. (ocean) It was a very dark night. But the feller who had the boat must have cat's eyes. He took our hands, one at a time, and put us in a small boat. Maybe there was place for four men, and he put thirteen in and he was fourteen. We lay in the boat like herring in a barrel. Because we had no water, we all got thirsty. It was very hot and the heat from our bodies, made it hotter. We were not allowed to talk. We were not allowed to take off our clothes. There was no room to move even an inch. The only sound was the noise from the engine of the small boat. We travelled like this all night. The next day, we travelled all day. The sun made it hotter. The feller who was taking us went the longest way, so we did not meet any boats. That day was the worst day I ever spent in my life. I am ready to go to hell, if I have to. It cannot be any worse than was that day in the boat. Well, about nine o'clock in the evening, we got to Key West, Florida. The man pulled us out of the boat. We were more dead than alive. He laid us on the shore and washed our faces with the cool water. Then he gave us a little water to drink. He took us to a dirty boarding house near the yam. There we got something to eat. But I could not eat. I only drank water. We slept on the floor. But the floor was Heaven because we could move our arms and legs.

Well, the next day we took a train for Jacksonville, Florida. We waited there six hours and then we took the train for Chicago. I'm telling you, when I saw my brothers and uncles when I got off the train in Chicago, I cried like a baby.

Well, maybe you think my troubles was over? No, my troubles was just beginning. I found out that I could not become a citizen, and so I could not bring mine wife and the children to Chicago.

Well, the first thing was to make a living. One of my brothers had a fish market. So he gave me a basket of fish and told me where to go to sell them. The first day, I made two dollars. When I could speak a little English, I peddled fish in the high-toned places, and I could charge a little more and I made a pretty good living.

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My wife was writing me letters how terrible it was in Poland. I sent her money every month. But it was terrible to have to keep quiet about being in Chicago. I could not get citizenship papers, because I was smuggled in. And without citizenship papers I could not bring my family to Chicago. Then my wife wrote me a letter that one of our children died. I had plenty troubles. I couldn't go back to Poland and I could not bring my family to Chicago. I didn't wanna go back to Poland. But I did want my family.

Well, then a law was passed that all people who came to America in 1921 and before could get their citizenship papers. Well, I can tell you I got my papers as soon as I could. Then I brought my wife and my daughter to Chicago. And you can see, I still sell fish.