

My name is Seymour Reichzeit and I was born in Łódź, Poland, in 1912. My family is Jewish, and I first began singing in our temple. By the time I was four, I was called *wunderkind*, or wonder child in English. Soon I was singing in concerts all over Poland.

My family decided that I

5 should come to America, where there would be more opportunities for me. World War I had just ended, and it was a bad time in Europe. I had an uncle in  
10 America, and he sent two tickets for my father and me. The rest of my family stayed in Poland. The plan was that my father and I would make enough money to bring them to America, too.

15 In Danzig, now known as "Gdansk", we boarded a ship called *The Lapland*. It was 1920, and I was on my way to America.

20 Riding on a big boat across the Atlantic Ocean may sound like

fun, but it wasn't. The two-week trip was miserable! Our room was in steerage, way down in the bottom of the boat. It was lined with bunks, one on top of the other. It was uncomfortable and crowded.

I went up on deck all the time, just to have room to move around.

25 We hit many bad storms at sea. It rained hard, and I was wet and shivering. By the time we sailed into New York Harbor past the Statue of Liberty, I had a very bad cold. Still, I was up on deck, in my good white suit, cheering along with everyone else at the awesome sight of the statue.

Back then, immigrants had to pass a medical examination to be allowed to enter the country.

30 Many people were sent back to where they came from. I was eight years old and I was ill. I didn't know what was going to happen to me in America.

At Ellis Island, my father, who was not sick, had to leave the ship. He stood in long lines and officials asked him lots of questions about where he came from, what he did for a living back in Poland, and what his plans were in America. All newcomers had to answer those questions. Only then could you leave Ellis Island and take a ferry to New York – and finally step foot in America.

35 When the doctor examined me, he discovered I had a cold. He said I could not go with my father. I cried and begged. I was terrified to be all alone in this strange place.

I stayed on Ellis Island for a few days, until I was feeling better. I had no toys with me. I didn't know of such things. But there were other sick boys to keep me company. Some of them spoke Yiddish, my language. We ate in a huge dining room. The food was different – it was American style. But it was good, especially the milk.

40 There was a long gate that led to the boats that took people off the island, across New York Harbor, to the city. Every day, we boys would walk to the gate and look out over the water. We wanted to see America. It was like being in a jail. We felt sad and wondered if we would ever get through that gate and onto a boat for that final journey to our new country, the United States.

45 My cold went away, and soon the officials told me that my father and uncle were coming to get me.

As I stepped off the boat from Ellis Island, I felt a rush of joy. All around me were hundreds of families greeting their relatives, welcoming them to America.



In America, Seymour Reichzeit became a childstar of the vaudeville (variety entertainment consisting of short acts such as acrobatic turns, songs and dance routines, animal acts etc.). He made enough money to bring the rest of his family from Poland. Seymour made a lot of records, appeared on stage and became a well-known figure in the Yiddish theatre. He married Miriam Kressyn, a singer whose family had also gone through Ellis Island.