DP-19
MAX SEDENKO
BIRTHDATE: 1912
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RUNNING TIME: 1:00:00
INTERVIEWER: NANCY DALLETT
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THE UKRAINE, 1923
AGE 11
PASSAGE ON THE ***CONSTANTINOPLE***

DALLETT: This is interview number [DP-19] for the Ellis Island Oral History Project. I'm Nancy Dallett, and I'm with Mr. Max Sedenko who lives on Deer Harbor in Washington, but today he's at the Veteran's Administration Hospital in Seattle. They are checking out his eyes, so we're meeting here in the V.A. Hospital. And it is April 12, 1989. It's about four o'clock in the afternoon and we're beginning [DP-19]. Mr. Sedenko came from the Ukraine in 1923, through Ellis Island. Okay, let's start your story. Tell me...

SEDENKO: Well, I was born in 1912 in a town named Pochapinche [PH] in Ukraine. It's north, south of Kiev about twenty-five miles. The, uh, my dad came to this country in 1913, late 1913, or about early 1914, and he came to Canada and he started working there on the railroad, then the railroads shut down for the winter, so he came to North Dakota, western North Dakota. And he couldn't get the job so he, my dad and my uncle and one of the other fellows. Anyway, they came to western North Dakota, land in wintertime in North Dakota even rabbits don't live, they leave the country. (he laughs) So he worked for one German family taking care of, they had quite a few cattle and horses, for just room and board that winter. And then the spring he took he went to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania and worked in a coal mine that one year. And that just got too much for him, so he went and worked in the foundry, an that was even worse. So he was farmer for, well, he was farmer for many years, all these years, so he went back to North Dakota and worked on the farm for a couple of brothers. Then the two brothers, they were city farmers, so they went broke. So Dad, he got four horses from them so that's when he started out farming and then he sent for Mother and me. And when we were there, the Revolution started, so we couldn't get out.

He was going to send for us in a year or so, but the Revolution started. And I seen the Revolution. It's something, I'd hate to go through it again. I've seen the grave. In my time, I was only nine years old, they had a ditch dug, and they threw in three hundred dead soldiers and just covered them up. And we never know who's coming. One army come in, and they'll leave, and then another army come in, and they leave. You don't know who they are, what they do, and my uncle had a beautiful pari of horses. And they stopped, and they took a saddle off of their horses and put on his horses and took off and left him skinny, just about half dead horses. He doctored them for about six months before he got them so he could even use them. That's the way, it just was. There was not system of any kind, just terrible. So anyway, Dad finally sent us money and we started out for this country. We got to Odessa from, I can't think of the town, but I know we caught the train twenty miles from where we lived, we caught the train. We got to Odessa, and we stayed. Odessa's a beautiful town, streets stretched about a quarter mile wide. Big, wide streets and beautiful stone buildings, really. And clean! Not like in this country you see papers flying around. Not up there. People go in the with brooms made of twigs, and they'll sweep everything up just as clean as can be. So we stayed there two weeks, and we boarded a Russian boat and we got to, not quite to Constantinople, and to kind of an island there, and they kept us for a week. That was for the examination, you know, see if you had any sickness or anything like that. They took us off our boat and put us on this island and took us, we were supposed to take our clothes off and then bundle it, and they'd run it through the steam. Well, if you had anything woolen, you know what happened to that. And some people went and they wrapped their shoes in that, and the shoes were about that big. (he gestures) So, uh, anyway, after they did that then they, couple of days later they run a boat to Constantinople right out to pier, not to pier, parked it in the middle. And they had the wooden boats where the one fellow would be rowing and they unloading us at night. I don't know why we didn't get drowned. They put in just as many as they could get in that small boat and the fellow was running. And he had boats running back and forth, and that boat was going, I don't know. I think angel was with us, because we would have never made it otherwise. So we got to the shore, and then the big warehouse, and they separated us, some go here, some go there. They took us to a hotel. I don't remember what name of hotel. We stayed on the fourth floor. And down below there was a bar, and that piano was tinkling, that piano, twenty-four hours a day somebody was playing that thing. Boy, after that I hated to hear piano. And, uh, anyway, after two weeks we got on a boat, a Greek boat named Constantinople. I don't know why, but that's the way it is. And we went, we went to

Constantinople, quite a ways. We went on like a cable car or something like that. It's underground. You go to the top because you had to take this, I don't know what they call them, the train now that goes underground.

DALLETT: A subway?

SEDENKO: Yeah, yeah, yeah. We had to take that to go up the hill, and we'd shop around. We didn't have too much money. Mostly we looked. Then we went across the bridge to a mosque. We were going to go in there, but you had to take your shoes off. So Mother, she's quite religious, but she says I'm not taking the shoes off to go in. Then we just, there was a Russian church there, so we went to church every Sunday, I mean, to the service during the week. Then we got on this boat, uh, it was a Greek boat named Constantinople. We came to, they stopped at Greece and they loaded big chunks of granite, some red and some gray. They were about, I'd say about a foot thick, two foot wide, and eight foot long, and they loaded that on the boat, put on the bottom of the boat. And then we stopped another placer and they loaded raisins, bags, just small bags about this big. (he gestures) They kept loading them raisins for a whole day long, onto the boat. After we started going to New York, we hit the storm. Well, first we, I saw first whale coming through. I didn't know what it was, but that was first. Then there was the dolphins were jumping in front of the boat for quite a while. Anyway, we hit the storm, and we were about five days out of New York yet when we hit that big storm, and all that granite shifted to one side. So the boat was going, instead of going straight like that (he gestures), it was going like that (he gestures) on the side the rest of the way to New York. Well, anyway, when we got to New York they took us off of the boat and put on the little, on like a ferry, or some kind of a boat. And that took us to Ellis Island. Well, we stayed there almost three weeks. The reason was that agent, his name Konichevsky. Instead of, Dad paid our fare from Odessa clear to Hillsboro, North Dakota. And it was two hundred, for Mother and me, was two hundred eighty-eight dollars. And, uh, this Konichevsky, for, he left the tickets for boats, but he tore the ticket off for train from New York to Buxton, was eighty-eight dollars. And he tore that ticket up and kept the money. So that's the reason why we stayed on Ellis Island for two weeks, three weeks, just about. Anyway, when we got there, they looked at our papers, and there were not tickets for us to get on a train. So, uh, the Konichevsky, or somebody, wrote Dad and said, "You better send more money. You don't have enough. You're eighty-eight dollars short." Well, in 1923, eighty-eight dollars, that's quite a bit of money, when people worked for a dollar a day, you know, that's a lot of money. Well, Dad was lucky. He didn't pay in cash.

He got it at bank draft that he sent. So he went to the bank and banker, he took, he had the number of the draft check and everything, and sent it to Ellis Island. And the next day we were called up for our train that took off for Buxton, uh, Hillsboro. Anyway, when we got there in November, I mean, last of October, and I started school, uh, I went to school for two years in Russia before we left, and then I started school here. That was tough. I started first grade. And, of course, first and second grade I stayed, but when I got to third and fourth grade I skipped third and went into the fourth. But we were poor. Dad couldn't afford to hire a man, so I had to do most of the work. I was only twelve years old and I drove seven horses on the plow, believe it or not. That's honest. Well, they were gently horses. If they wanted to run away, I could have never stopped them. It's just like pushing that wall. But they were gently, and I got along good. So my schooling, after I got out of fourth grade, my schooling was, I never started school, well, I started the first week, when school started, and then Dad will take me off to work on the farm, and I didn't start the school again till the ground froze. And that would be, if I'm lucky I might start before Thanksgiving. And then I'll go till Spring work opens up, and I was out of school. In those days they didn't care. So I was out of school when the spring work started, and then, he was good. The school always had, the last day of school they had the picnic, he let me go to the picnic. Anyway, that's the way my schooling was, all the way through. I went as far as the seventh grade and my gosh, you know, no matter how smart you are, when you miss all that time, I'd just mostly catch up, then I'd have to get out. Same way again next year, same thing again. So I got as far as seventh grade and I said, "Forget it, Dad. I'm not going to school." Well, he didn't care if I went to school or not. And, anyway, the place where we lived, it was not too good a place so he, we moved closer to Hillsboro, and next, a year later I had a sister. She's living in Ukiah, California now, and a sister. That's all. There are just two of us. And, uh, anyway, I stayed with him, farmed together. We farmed quite a bit of land. Then when World War Two broke out they, uh, I didn't have to go. We had rural farm, plenty of land, I could have stayed out of the service. But I just got disgusted with farming, so I went in the service. I served two years in the army. I was overseas, down towards northern France. That's where I served. I was, I hit the front line. I was with anti-aircraft first, and then they broke up anti-aircraft after our army got as far as Paris, they didn't need so much anti-aircraft then because Germany was pushing everybody to the Russian front, so we didn't have too much over here. So that took us, six hundred of us they took out of anti-aircraft and gave us rifles and put a target up there. I don't know if I hit the

target or not, but I was number one infantry man. (he laughs) Anyway, I was, I got wounded first in November, first time. It wasn't too bad. I was gone only three weeks from the outfit, and after that I went back. But the last time I got wounded I was in that Belgian Bulge, maybe you heard about it. I was in that, and that was about the worst we ever run into. That of the whole war was the worst we ever got into. And so I got wounded pretty bad there. Well, I'll tell you how bad it was. It was three of us together. I got wounded pretty bad, and I had my left eardrum busted at the same time. But the other two guys, they were about, oh, about five feet from me, and they didn't even know what hit them. That's how close I was. Anyway, they took me to the hospital and I was there seven weeks. And after I got out of the hospital they re-classified me and I went into heavy auto maintenance in the garage. And, boy, that was a racket. If I was there from the beginning of the war, I think I would have stayed there yet. We stayed in Reims, France in kind of a stadium, you know, where they had played ball there, and they had car, bicycle races and everything. We stayed underneath, nice and warm, dry. Get up six o'clock, make our beds, breakfast ready on the table, we eat breakfast, get on the truck, they'd take us to the garage. ONly about five blocks, but we couldn't walk. They had to drive us to the garage. We'd get in the garage, check out our tools, start working on the trucks. And each one of us had the, it was about twelve of us, each one of us had two German prisoners working with us. We worked till twelve o'clock, twelve o'clock get on the truck, drive back, have our noon meal, and about an hour later we'd come back and do the same thing. Five o'clock, back on the truck, back to the stadium and eat supper, change your clothes, go to town. You got permanent pass, go to town anyplace you want in Reims, France. And Reims, France, pretty nice town. Pretty big. So, uh, that's end of my war was right there. And, uh, I got my discharge the day war ended in Europe. I got my papers to go home. Anyway, they want me to stay. Oh, there's something else I'll tell you, I forgot. We were staying in the stadium, the, kind of a grandstand. And right across the fence was a bunch of German prisoners that were the Russians, but when we took over they were our prisoners then. And I walked over there one day, and I only could talk English, and English captain was taking care, you know, directing them. And he didn't know a work of English, and one of the Russians knew English, so he had a Negro boy that was his driver, jeep driver. Well, this Negro, he knew a little German. It's funny. So this captain would tell the Negro boy, his drive, in English what he wants them to do. The Negro boy would tell one of the Russians boys, he knew a little German. Then he'd turn around and he'd tell the rest of us. And I'll tell you, when you start off from here, you end up, it's really funny.

And I was standing behind that jeep laughing like crazy. And they had our uniforms. They didn't know whether I was one of the Russians or one of the Americans of what. I was standing there laughing my head off, because I could understand Russian and I could understand English. And I knew a little bit German too. So finally I kept laughing and the captain, he kept looking back. Pretty soon he turn around, "What in the blankety-blank you laughing about?" (he laughs) I said, "Well, tell me what you want them to know," I said, "I'll tell them." "What?" I said, "Just go ahead." So he told me. I just turn around, told everybody what he told me, and then he turned around, tell me again. "Hey," he says, "I'm going to come and get you every time I need you." Well, I didn't say nothing. Anyway, three boys were in that outfit that came from town next to where I come from. Yeah. But I never got a chance to ask them anything, because they asked me everything, and I never got a chance to ask them anything. And that was, I didn't know that. But when I got back home and I was writing to my uncle and a cousin, my girl. She was only about a year and a half old when we left, when Mother and I left. It was a girls camp to, they were prisoner, you know, German prisoners, girls camp. And she was in that camp. I went over and visited one time, but, you know, when you don't know, you don't know. And my uncle, Mother's brother, and his son, they were in another men's camp. I knew the camp was there, but I didn't go there. You know, if I would have gone, I might have, that how close you got. While we were after I was, after we got pretty well beaten up in that Belgian Bulge, so we retreated about eight miles, a fellow was with me in the camp, and when I was taking basic training he was there, I walked right past him. I didn't know when he was. And the neighbor's boy that I went, was inducted with him together, when they got wiped, they practically got wiped off at that Belgian Bulge, we took over their area, and they were coming down on the left, and we were going up, and I didn't know he was there. After we got back, started talking, and telling what it was, where we were. And that, all this, Buckwald, his name. Well, he says, "That's my company, I'm wiped out." So it's really funny thing happened about the war. So, well, anyway, after I got discharged, I got my traveling papers the day war ended in Europe and that took me, jeep took me to Paris. I got to Paris, oh, my gosh, that was really a mess. The jeep had to drive two, about two blocks from, to go into the hotel where we were supposed to stay. I took him almost an hour. People just were nuts, just wild, climbing up the light poles, climbing up any rail or anything. They just went wild. Anyway, I stayed overnight, and the next morning I was supposed to catch a train and go to Le Havre to get back. They just gave me a bunch of papers,you go ahead. Get home however you can, don't make a difference to them. So

then, so anyway, I got on the subway, and no matter, I got on the subway about three times. And I couldn't read French. I didn't know where I was. I got out when subway gets to (?). I don't know where I'm at. I'm back on the subway, I go the other way. So finally one of the fellows got tired and he says, "Well, I'll take you in the jeep." He took, you seen that arc they have in (?). You know, arc, like this here, in France? you've seen these pictures all over. I went through that to get to the depot. Anyway, we got in the depot and I got on a train that evening. They've got funny trains. You get in from outside into the car, and they shut the door and you can't get out. That's two benches here, two benches here. Four people on each bench. Not so easy to travel then. You'll stay there. And anyway, we got to Le Havre and we were walking around there, and I was all alone, I don't know how to get to England. I had to get to England to get the boat to the United States. So there was a boat, one of these boat, what they do, that's the Americans. They load the trucks in England and they run this boat just like a ferry, out on there. Then overnight they'd come across the French side, and then run these trucks off, and then they'd bring the empty trucks around on the boat and then go back, back and forth. So the sailor was standing there and he, I started talking to him and I said, "Do I got a chance to get across to England?" "Well," he says, "the captain will be coming down. You talk to him." So I talked to him, and he said, "You got the papers?" I pulled out. "Sure." So he got me on the boat, and then I got to England, and then got to London. You want to stop? (break in tape)

DALLETT: Okay. We've just had a pause there, and we're going to come back from the war story you were telling us about and, uh...

SEDENKO: Well, this is going to go back to the Revolution. The army used to come in. They'd have all kinds of shell laying in the bottom of the wagon and rifles. Us kids used to steal the rifles and everything. So we didn't dare shoot the rifles, so we'd tie it to a tree and then put a string on it and shoot it that way. Then we'd take a shell and lay it on the rock and hit with the other rock. And that's the way we used to shoot them. You know, that bullet could have turned around and hit us. Nobody every got hurt. (he laughs) Just crazy kids. You hear kids doing crazy things. Well, I did it myself. Well, I don't know much more I could tell you about that it's about...

DALLETT: So that was a really rough period, then, for your mother, when you father had left.

SEDENKO: Yeah. And we had, this year before we left, they had awful starvation over there. It was just terrible. They didn't get any crop. They, uh, you know, these locust trees, locust, you know, they have big white

blossoms? They take the blossoms, dry them and grind them, and they were making bread out of that, anything. Whoever had the cow, they'd sell. And then, finally rye got ripe enough, and they ground the rye before even it was ready, and kids got eating that bread. Some of them ate so much that they just blew up and died, they starved so long. And you better shut her off. I don't have much to say right about that. So, I don't know what more I could tell you.

DALLETT: Tell me more about that period with, in the village. I'm sorry, what was the name of the town?

SEDENKO: Pochapinche [PH].

DALLETT: Pochapinche [PH].

SEDENKO: Uh-huh. And, uh...

DALLETT: How did your mother get through that period, you and your mother?

SEDENKO: Well, she, my grandfather, her father, he was pretty, he knew how to do things. He could do things. He managed pretty good. He didn't have too much trouble.

DALLETT: Did you live together with your grandfather?
SEDENKO: Well, we lived, we'd live, for a while we lived with Dad's folks, Dad's parents, you know. We lived with them. And then later on she moved over to her father and stayed with them, with him. He was, he was a real good man, but he was strict. Boy, you had to walk the straight line. No stepping aside. (he laughs) That's why I became good. So, uh, anyway...

DALLETT: When your father left, how did he get the chance to leave? Did he not have to go into the army?

SEDENKO: He was, you see, we had the sugar beet plant only about two miles from our little town. And he was coachman in the sugar beet plant. The railroad was twenty miles away. So some of these big shots, you know, and the mail, they had to go either Kiev or Germany or someplace, so he'll take them to the railroad and stay there overnight, and the next night he'll come back. They had the carriages with four horses, so that's what his job was. Finally he just got tired of it. He heard about America. First he was going to go to South America, and then he decided to come to this country. And when he went to, first he came to Canada, work on the railroad, then he came to North Dakota. And the, uh, he was going to go back to Canada, but you couldn't go back to Canada. You had to stay in North Dakota, because Canada wouldn't allow you. So, uh, well, anyway, after the war, I went in the hospital. I was in the hospital, that Fargo Veterans Hospital for seven weeks. Then I got out of the hospital and I took my

basic training in Camp Cal in San Diego, so I knew what California was a lot better than North Dakota. So my sister was driving a Greyhound bus in San Francisco, so I went to visit her, and that's where I met my wife. And I got married and we've been living now forty-one years to the year to March. And, uh, I don't know what more I could tell you.

DALLETT: Well, I'm going to, I'll ask you some more questions. We're going to turn the tape over now. That's the end of side one of interview number [DP-19] with Max Sedenko.

END OF SIDE OF ONE
BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

DALLETT: This is the beginning of side two of interview [DP-19] with Mr. Max Sedenko.

SEDENKO: Okay? Well, when we got to Ellis Island we stayed there, like I said, we stayed there over two weeks. And every night, first we'll have a meal there. There was a lot of people there, and most of them Italians, at that time.

DALLETT: What was the year, again, sorry?

SEDENKO: '23, 1923. Then we'll, they'll take us to the big, uh, the great big room. And they had the tables, there must be about forty foot long, and finally they had a stack of plates like this (he gestures), here, land he start throwing the plates as you walk along. By the time you get to the end of the table, the first plate's still spinning around. Uh, then after we eat our supper, then we come back, then they gave us a pillow and a blanket and we'd go up, different room different times. I don't know what rooms. And we stayed overnight. And then the next morning we'd just leave the pillow and blanket there, we'd come down and wash up and everything, then we'd go and have breakfast. And the rest of the day we'd just walk around. There was nothing else to do. One Sunday they took us, let us out. You see, the building's clear around, and we were inside. There was no way for us to get out of there. But one sunday they let us outside, and we were right across from the Statue of Liberty. We could see the Statue of Liberty right across. That's, uh, well, I've seen the Statue of Liberty three times, so, oh, no, four times, actually. So, uh, and, uh, that's about all we'd been doing in there. There was nothing else to do. We've, some of the kids played games, and what they can. And some would fight. There was a lot of fighting, and uh, so, uh, then when we left there, that's about all I could tell you.

DALLETT: You had to wait there that whole time because you didn't have the train ticket to go?

SEDENKO: The train ticket, yeah. That's right. We could have got on the train the next day, but on account of that.

DALLETT: Did you have to go through medical examinations?

SEDENKO: Oh, yeah, yeah. I had, you see, the smallpox, you know, they make kind of a scar. Well, I wouldn't, I couldn't take. So they kept cutting me, every time we'd stop they'd cut me. But the darn thing wouldn't take, wouldn't show. So then they kept cutting me and cutting me to, because they didn't believe that I had the shop already, and heck, I think any port we stopped or any place we stopped, that's the first thing they did, the cutting, trying to make me take the smallpox. But it didn't work. So I finally got by. So, uh, well, I don't know what more I could tell you.

DALLETT: You speaking Russian, were there any Russians on Ellis Island at that time?

SEDENKO: No, no. There was only about six people, six Russians that were on the island, that came with us on the boat from Turkey. That wasn't many. One lady and a boy about my age, they came from Odessa, and here husband come and got here the same day because she was right there. And, uh, when we got to North Dakota, Mother, she gave us her address, and Mother used to write to here. Well, she got a couple of letters from her and, uh, after that Mother sent a letter, and a letter come back. She was one of these, uh, she wasn't satisfied with anything, so I think she went back. I'm pretty sure she did. So, uh...

DALLETT: Tell me about the trip, then, out to North Dakota.

SEDENKO: Well, we got ont he train and it wasn't too bad. We had to buy our food because at that time it wasn't, food didn't cost too much. And we got to North Dakota and the town, that Hillsboro, that's a county seat. But Dad, he lived eight miles further down in a little town, Buxton. So, the conductor, he let us off of the train and that all it is, just one little hotel, a couple of grain elevators, and couple of old shacks. That's a whole town. The post office was in the hotel. Well, we stood by the track. We didn't know what to do, where to go or anything. Dad knew we were coming, but he lived seven miles out in the country. So finally the hotel manager, he kind of heard that we were coming, so he came over and got us, and we went in the hotel and stayed there till Dad came and picked us up. He came with horses. He didn't come, we didn't have a car. He didn't buy a car until 1926. he finally bought the car, and before that he just used horse. So, uh...

DALLETT: You hadn't seen your father, then, since...

SEDENKO: No, I hadn't seen him. I didn't even know him.

DALLETT: So you were being introduced to your father. What was that like?

SEDENKO: Pardon?

DALLETT: So you were like being introduced to your father.

SEDENKO: Yeah, that's true. And, uh, I don't know what more I could tell you. After I got married we go, well, my wife, when was married before, just a tramp that she married, and they lived three years, and when had a little boy, and after I married her I adopted a little boy. He's a forty-four now, living in California. He's an insurance agent, making big money but spending faster, so. (he laughs) Anybody that can have two Continentals at one time, that's a little too much. They're twenty-two thousand dollars each, and that's what he's got. And he's got, we've go three grandchildren, two little, two girls the boy is eighteen, and one girl is seventeen, and the youngest girl, she's twelve. She got a chance to go from, four of them, from California, and she was one of them chosen, go to, uh, Georgia and Mrs. Reagan was there, you know, fighting about the drugs and everything, and she was one of them going over there. Oh, she was flying up in the air, you know, when she come back, And the first day, she come up to her dad, she said, "You know, Dad, they speak with an accent over there." And her father, Michael, his name, he figured that the school going to pay for that trip. No, he's stuck for $450. "Well, it's worth it," he says. "Holly had a good time." I get along a lot better with that adopted boy that I do with my own. My own lives in Queen Anne Hill here in Seattle, and I get along a lot better with that, with the one that's adopted. He's a real nice kid, except he don't save money. He just, easy come, easy go.

DALLETT: How about that first period when you first got, you had to get adjusted to live in North Dakota. It must have been so different.

SEDENKO: It sure was different. Living out in the country, temperature gets down to thirty-five, forty below zero. (he laughs) And, uh, I had to go to school. It was two miles. One school, I stated the one school, and then the, it was sisters, two sister were teachers, and one lived next to us, and it was nice. I could ride with her to school and back again after school. But then the school was in different township than we were, so I had to change to another school. So I had to ride the horseback. And, I tell you, when it's thirty below zero and you get out on that horse, it's pretty cold. It's warm here, (he gestures to his posterior) and that's about the only place. And, uh, so, uh, then

that spring we moved to, uh, oh, about twenty miles, to another farm. And we, uh, we lived there. And it was nice, that school just was next to the farm, just about. And another thing...

DALLETT: Was it good land that your father had?

SEDENKO: Oh, yeah. That was good. We were renting, we didn't buy that. Anyway, I tell you another story about our coming from Ukraine. You see, back there we raised an awful lot of sugar beets. We had the sugar mill. We raised a lot of sugar beets. Great big ones. So when Dad wrote us before we left he says, "Will you please bring sugar beet seeds over here." So Mother, she, I don't know, maybe a dozen or so she picked up and brought it with her. Then when we were renting this farm, he was the governor of North Dakota for three terms, and then he had the bank in the town Hillsboro, and that was his farm we were renting from. So Dad, we had a little garden out in the field there, and Mother was raising carrots and stuff, and she sees these beets on one end. And, oh, she sees the beets on one end. And he happened to drive by and see these beets, and he said, "What is that, spinach?" Dad said, "No, sugar beets." He said, "I didn't know sugar beets could grow here." So, uh, he said, "I'd like to see some of them. When do you dig them?" Well, Dad said, well, "This fall." So he dug them up. They were about that big (he gestures), that long. Gave it to him...

DALLETT: Can you do that again? How big is that?

SEDENKO: Oh, about that big?
DALLETT: About eight inches around.

SEDENKO: They're about, oh, they're more than eight inches around. They're about eight inches across, the top, because it's really good land. So he took the beets and he talked around and everything else. Then, uh, next, two years later, he planted, he got seeds, Dad didn't know that you could get seed here, but southern states, you know, there is beets all along. So this, (?), he got the seed from south and brought it. He had a little farm, just a small, about forty acres. So he planted the beets, but in those days they didn't have machines. They had to have a Mexican to, you know, clean the weeds and, uh, plant them and dig them by hand with a spade. So he, he raised these beets. They were nice beets. But he had no way to get rid of them. He had to ship them clear south. I don't know where he, Louisiana or someplace, he shipped them. It cost too much. So he started working, and since he was the governor, you know, he got connection. So he started working, everything. So they finally built a sugar beet plant in Grand Forks, North Dakota. And now anybody want to raise beets, they have to get a lost, and the only way they can get on the list is if

somebody quits. Everybody wants to raise beets because it's a big money. So now, in a hundred mile area, they've got six sugar beet plants in that, uh, it's eastern North Dakota. It's only about ten miles from Red River, from Minnesota border. So everybody wants to raise, because it's a big money in it. One year, I worked in the sugar beet plant one year. I was making powdered sugar. And, uh, you know, powdered sugar has three percent starch? You know why? Keep it from hardening. I had to, when I was making this powdered sugar I'd take a sample and lab man, man from the lab come and he'd test it, and then he'd call me over loudspeaker, says either decrease the starch or increase starch, and I'll have to do that. It was pretty good job. I had a room a little bit bigger that this all by myself. I had to make at least sixty bags, sixty hundred-pound bags, grind them up real fine. Well, if I get the dry sugar, no problem. But if I get the fresh wet sugar, I'd have a hard time. So what I did, I had two records. One I kept for the company, and one I kept for myself. Some day I'd make more than I should, so I'd put them in the warehouse, I mean, in the little storeroom, and I'll have my list. When I'm short, I'd just take off of there and fill her up and foreman, he said, "You know, there's something fishy here. The fellow that's relieving you-" I'd work day shift, and he works swing shift, and a lot of times he'd be short when he'd get the wet sugar. "But," he said, "you're never short." He said, "I checked the warehouse after you left, there was the amount that you wrote on the list. How did you do it?" I never did talk till I quit that spring. He said, "You sneaky devil." (he laughs) And, of course, next spring, next fall, my wife and the boys, she came from California. So they wanted to go to California. So I, uh, I had the dairy farm. And I worked an iron range for three years. It was a pretty good job, but was too far from home, two miles from home. Anyway, after this, uh, sugar beet job, next year I worked, we had a big storm come through that area, a big tornado. And it just took about, outside about a mile and a half, just tore everything down. Big, uh, warehouse where the trucks, uh, was stopping over there. Big beams about that big, and just twisted them like they were little wire. And there was Catholic school there. Blowing the school, they found report cards form kids from that school thirty miles away. And blown, every building in that school was down, blown down to the ground. But a statue, the Holy Mary was still standing in the middle of the yard. That's all, this big statue about, I would say about seven foot tall, never touched it. That's what Catholics were bragging abut. They said that God's with us. (he laughs) So anyway, wife and kids they went to California and spent time with here parents. Her dad died, but her mother was still living. And then when they come back, they said California. We all want to go to California. And I

just got tired. I was making pretty good money by then. In wintertime, I could work a sugar beet plant. I got a steady job if I wanted to go back. And in the summertime I was farming and doing some contract work. So I didn't say a word. I went over to an auctioneer, and I said, "Carl, when do you have an open date for an auction?" He says, "Only open date I have is 24th of March." It's 1959. So I had an auction. And wife and kid didn't know anything till Auction Bill come out, you know, all over the country, to show the auction. So then we have a sale, we move to California, Ukiah, California, and I started working in the woods. It was good money in the woods, cutting redwoods. Good money, but in summertime you can't work in daytime on account of the fire. The last, uh, the last two weeks I worked, all we did, fight fires. You know, they got a stupid deal. They open deer season last of July and August in the hottest weather. Them guys walking around smoking cigarette, they just throw, first thing you know it's fire. So we kept fighting that fire for two weeks. That's all we did. I said to heck with this noise, I want a job with a, we got a paid when we was cutting, but when we were fighting fire we didn't get paid. So then I got a job at the masonite plant, you know, it's a hardboard. I got a job there. I got, first of October I got a job, and I worked there fifteen years and retired. That's what, I didn't, I was supposed to work twenty years but I couldn't do it, my asthma got so bad. So I got early retirement. Uh, I, I worked fifteen years, but I had to work till I was seventy-five, but I worked till seventy-two. Then we bought the lot in '69 over here on Orcas. And I bought the masonite back there at the plant, the boards, the nine foot high and four foot wide, and I got them for $1.62, but I had to haul them over here. When I went to Mount Vernon and I was short one board, went to Mount Vernon and that same board they wanted $14.95. So that's a savings. That's the reason we got the house built and paid for, because we, we sold the house in Ukiah before we moved over here and built here, so.

DALLETT: Tell me more about, uh, when you were cutting the redwoods in California.

SEDENKO: Yeah? Well, uh, you see, they got, the biggest we ever cut was 14'2". We had the seven foot saws, we had to cut from both ends, both sides before we cut it down. And one tree, it was just as straight as a string, branches on one side, perfect. And the boss come over and he says, "I want you to cut that tree down." And it was around four o'clock, or later that that. So I cut it down, I wedged it and everything cut it down, cut it clear through. And that tree stood just as straight as a string, won't fall over. (he laughs) And the fellow was riding the Caterpillar, he wanted to come and push it over with the Caterpillar. I said, "Don't you ever do it, because that tree, he'll start

pushing, it's liable to come right over, right over him on the Cat." I said, "Leave it alone." And the road was only about thirty feet from the tree and tree was at least seventy-five to one hundred feet tall. And on the bottom was about, oh, I'd say it was about fifty inches through on the bottom.

DALLETT: And how many men would saw through the base?

SEDENKO: Just me. Chainsaw, I had a seven foot bar chainsaw. No, I was all alone. And, uh, so boss came along and he says, "Well, I guess you're going to camp here overnight. If that tree don't fall over you can't leave." Well, I can't, because road was, people driving back and forth along the road. So he said, "Well, I'll go home." It was about forty miles to town. He said, "I'll go home and I'll bring this sleeping bag and some lunch for you." He says, "And you'll have to stay here all night and watch the traffic, you know, in case the tree come down." And he start walking to his pickup, and just about that time a little breeze came over and over that tree went. And you know where it went? Right over the road. (he laughs) Right across the road. So I took chainsaw and I cut the, just wide enough for cars to go through, and then took the Caterpillar. I run the Caterpillar too, because I was on the farm, I ran all kinds. So I took a Caterpillar, rolled out a chunk out of the way, and I went home. I slept in bed instead of on the rocky ground. I don't know more what I can tell you. I just about run out of talk.

DALLETT: No, I think you could talk forever. Let's just pause for a minute. (break in tape) You're going to tell me a little bit more about Pochapinche [PH].

SEDENKO: Yeah. They, uh, they have a kind of like a homestead there, a piece of land. Then they have fruit trees and garden in their home. But their land, what they raise, grain, on there, that is real grain. The soil back there, the black soil is six foot deep. The raise anything out there. So their land, what they raise grain, they'll have four different areas. This field, they'll seed, they'll raise winter wheat and winter rye. They'll seed either wheat or rye here. They'll plant oats or barley over there. And this millet, they go quite a bit for millet because they use that as a food. So they'll have millet here. And this field over here they call they'll plow in summer. They'll plow, oh, sometimes last of June, and then keep it back so the weeds, kill the weeds. The next year they'll seed the wheat over here and then just keep on going 'round. They don't seed same crop on same land. They just keep switching around. And the homes there, like I said, they had a garden, fruit trees, and they live in there. That's the way the town is. They don't, they don't count people in the town. They count homes.

They had about two hundred forty homes int hat little town. And it was, uh, the country's kind of a rolly. And, uh, about two miles from us there was a big timber area, and that didn't belong to us. that belonged to some, I don't know, some prince or princess or something. And this land, what I said, they call a summer plow, what they plow in the summer. The kids, they'll herd the cattle or sheep up there. And if the animal ever, they got a ditch dug over, if an animal ever got across that ditch, don't even bother going and getting it because that belongs to, whoever woods that belongs to, it's theirs. It used to have been terrible over there. They, uh, well, you heard a lot of churches closed up there in Russia. You heard that. You know why? Well, I'll tell you why. Every church, they had so much land to it. And, uh, each priest, he had so much, so many cattle and so many horses. He had the people working. And he got, from government, he got five dollars a day. A lot of them, they didn't even like my dad when he was in the army. He was Czarina's guard in the army. They had to be six foot or over six foot tall. My dad was six foot two, so he was her army. Whenever she went, he went with here. You know, the whole battalion went with here. Anyway, they used to make them go to church, you know, on Sunday. So one Sunday Dad says, him and four other fellows, they were, uh, near Moscow there, and they told them they had to go to church. So they went to church, supposed to go into church, they just went over the dock and laid there in the sun. And they come back, oh, they were real religious, they were making the cross and everything. And sergeant came over and he says, "Where did you go to church?" "This little church over here." He says, "You bunch of liars." He says, "There's not even priest." The priest's living in German, and they have like deacon and guard watchman, they ring the bell every morning. They're great for bells in the Russian church. They ring the bell and, uh, just like they're going to have service, and that's all. There's nobody there. He made them scrub horses for two weeks, because they were cavalry, you see. And, uh, anyway, so all these churches, like our church in our town. We had a big church in our town. Dad even helped build it. He went and got a lot of big timber over to Siberia, you know, great big timbers for a church. He helped build, it was a real big one. And we didn't have, we didn't have any problem to keep our church going, because people would come and they were paid. Well, this church, like the one that I told you about that Dad went to, there was no people to it. So what are they gong to do? They had to close it. But in our town church was all the time, during the Revolution they still had the church there because people kept the priests going. When I was going to school they made us, they were pretty strong on religion then during the czar. This was still czar, when I. The priest come to school every

once a week. I think it was on Wednesday. And we had to learn Bible in Greek. It wasn't Russian, it was in Greek, Bible. I knew a little Greek then, but I forgot all about it. And he'll sit, you know, like desks, your kids sitting back here, and he'll sit on the front desk and he had the long hair, and he was old, heck, he must have been close to ninety. And he'd sit on the desk and he'd call on one of the kids to get in the front and recite, you know, what he learned. Well, kids get standing in the front and talking, and one kind behind the priest, he'll take one hair and pull, and the priest go (?), (he gestures) like that. (he laughs) And, you know, that kid in the front, he can't talk, he is just laughing, an the priest picks up the ruler, walks over there, whack, whack. So he never learned too much, actually, from him. It was terrible. Whenever he came, we might as well not even be in the class. Some of the kids, on purpose, they'll miss that day, because they couldn't learn nothing. They were afraid they were going to get a beating with that ruler. So, uh, well...

DALLETT: How did your father, then, he was in the army, how did he avoid, how was he able to leave Russia?

SEDENKO: After he, uh, after he served his term, his six years, after he served his term, then he was discharged. Then that's when he went to work for the sugar mill as coachman. And back then the army was, it was a good deal. After you serve your six years, you, uh, get out and any, any job you want, the government will give him a job. That is, if you can handle it. And that job is you lifetime, as long as you live, that your job. Unless you goof off, of course. But as long as you take care, my grandfather, Dad's father, when he was in the service, they had to serve twenty years, when he was. So when he got out, he didn't want a big job. He wanted a lazy job. He was a watchman on this, at this sugar mill. He was a watchman. He had, they have a great big gate and, uh, whenever this coachman come, they'll have a bell in the front, a tongue, you know, and that will ring. Whenever he hears that bell he gets up, open the gate. When they go through he close it. He might have to do that once in twelve hours. And then he had a little shack. He go in the shack and he'd sit there, or sleep, whatever he wants. When he hears that bell, come out. And he did that, oh, well, from the time he got discharged till the Revolution. He was a guard there nights. He took the nights (he laughs) And, uh, I don't know. He liked that job. And all the time he'd have Christmas and Easter off. It's the only days he has off. And he says, "I don't understand. Every time I go to church they either say Merry Christmas or Happy New Year, or Happy Easter." (he laughs)

DALLETT: Okay, we're going to pause here for a second. (break

in tape) Unfortunately, when we went off the tape to pause, it turned out that the people here at the Veteran's Administration Hospital needed to see Mr. Sedenko, so he's gone off now. That concludes interview number [DP-19] with Mr. Max Sedenko, and it is about 5:15.