DP-20
WILLIAM NICKINOVICH
BIRTHDATE: MARCH 15, 1913
INTERVIEW DATE: APRIL 13, 1989
RUNNING TIME: 2:00:00
INTERVIEWER: NANCY DALLETT
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YUGOSLAVIA, 1920
AGE 7
PASSAGE ON "THE PANNONIA"

DALLETT: This the beginning of interview number [DP-20] for the Ellis Island Oral History project. My name is Nancy Dallett and I'm here with Mr. William Nickinovich. We are at his home in, where are we this morning, we're in southwest Seattle, is it? No.

NICKINOVICH: We're kind of northern.

DALLETT: Northern.

NICKINOVICH: Yeah.

DALLETT: Okay. We're in northern Seattle, Washington overlooking...

NICKINOVICH: The sound. Elliot Bay.

DALLETT: Elliot Bay. Beautiful view we have here. And it is Thursday morning, April 13, 1989 and we're starting this interview at 11:00 a.m. Let's start at the beginning of your story. Could you tell me where and when you were born?

NICKINOVICH: I was born on the 15th of March 1913 in Lubotinj, Montenegro, called (?).

DALLETT: Can you help me spell that one?

NICKINOVICH: I'll spell it later.

DALLETT: Okay. We'll look it up on the map here. We have a map of the coastline of Yugoslavia in front of us. And you pointed out earlier that it was south about eighty miles from Dubrovnik. Is that right?

NICKINOVICH: Yes, yes. Uh-huh.

DALLETT: Tell me what your remember of your childhood

growing up there.

NICKINOVICH: Well, uh, some of the earliest memories of my childhood was during World War One when I was left with my mother in Lubotinj, because my father had left right after the Balkan War of 1912 and 1913 for the United States, hoping to make enough money to bring us back over to the United States. But World War One started, so we were left there. My earliest recollection was when, during World War One, when the Austrian patrols came through the village for purpose of inspecting all of the villages, their housing, for purpose of determining where the menfolk were. And, uh, all the women in the village used to put out tables of food for the soldiers as an act of hospitality. And fortunately the Austrian soldiers and their officers could understand the Serbian language, so we were able to converse with them. And one of my earliest recollections was when I was probably a year and a half, or thereabouts, and my mother had put out this table for the soldiers and I looked up, my eye level was just at the top of the, to the the table, and my mother admonished me not to eat the food until

the soldiers were through eating. They came through the house, our house, and saw my father's rifle hanging on the wall, and they immediately suspected that my father was still somewhere in the vicinity. And when my mother insisted that he was in the United States and the reason for his departure, they didn't believe her. So they took her to the mayor of the town, of the village, who was an interpreter, an elderly man. The mayor of the village happened to be my mother's first cousin. He also was the schoolteacher. And, of course, in questioning him, he collaborated not only by his own statements, but by the fact that, that the records of the village indicated as to when each person within the village had left, got married, or left the country. And the notation was that my father had left the village for the United States. That was my first recollection.

DALLETT: Had your father served in the army before he left?

NICKINOVICH: Yes. My father had served in the Montenegran Army during the Balkan War. He was an officer in

the artillery. And, of course, after the end of World War, the end of the Balkan War, he left his rifle there hanging on the wall as a souvenir. One of the other recollections, I was quite a youngster, before World War One, was that my mother's sister had married into the royal family of King Nicholas of Montenegro. And she used to come occasionally into the village from Cetinje, which some twelve kilometers away from Lubotinj, where I was born. And with her always was two soldiers on horses. And I, I got quite a thrill of it because I always featured myself on one of those horses.

DALLETT: Was it possible for you to, did you ever get on one of those horse when she would come to visit?

NICKINOVICH: No. (he laughs) Actually, later on, I got on a donkey which I could tell you about because during World War One my father, of course, couldn't send any money to us. But we were left with our house with some chickens and some pigs. We had a cow. We had a large garden. And had a donkey. And my mother used to take the, oh, sometimes the hams and the vegetables from the

garden and put them on these two baskets on each side of the donkey. And she used to go to the flour mill, which was about, oh, six kilometers away in trading the produce and hams, probably, whatever she could get, for flour so she could make her bread and pastries. And other times, which was quite eventful to me, was going to Cetinje, in the capital of Montenegro about, as I said, twelve kilometers away. And my mother used to gather the various things from her garden including the chickens, the eggs, and even hams and put them in the two baskets. And we would journey to Cetinje. Not, by regular path that was made by people traveling by foot or horseback. There were very little roads at that time anyway. And I remember it so vividly because I had to walk alongside the donkey with my mother all the way into Cetinje. And then when she was able to trade at the open market for the goods that she had, many times for clothing, many times for things that we couldn't get. Jellies of some nature, different fruits that we didn't have. It always ended up with those goods in only one basket. And so I always rode back on the other basket. And I remember having,

questioning my mother so many times as to when we would be going back to Cetinje. But as it developed, as my recollection is that we actually went maybe once a month into Cetinje for the purpose of trading our goods for those that my mother felt she needed.

DALLETT: You have a picture here of the house where you were born. Can you describe that one to us, what the house was like and ground around it.

NICKINOVICH: Yes. The ground and the house, as you can see, the hilly area of Montenegro, which is quite rocky, and below it you can see the little bit of a shelter that is put up for the donkey.

DALLETT: It was a stone house, is that right?

NICKINOVICH: Yes, yes.

DALLETT: Do you know who built this house?

NICKINOVICH: My father built this house. He was also a stone mason as a trade in the old country. He built it himself before he left. And before he was

married actually, he had had a big what you might call an opening or a basement inside where all the livestock, during the winter, would gather sometimes and we lived upstairs with an open fireplace inside. We also had bees and an orchard that you might see just on the other side there. We had fruit trees, grapes, and watermelon that I remember. The area of, that I was born in, in terms of climate, is quite similar to northern California.

DALLETT: Did your grandparents live near here?

NICKINOVICH: Uh, no, no. It was just my father's house. My, when we left for the United States after World War One, the house was given to my father's sister and her family, who also lived in the village of Lubotinj.

DALLETT: So when World War One broke out would the Austrian soldiers, did they actually come and take over the house in any way?

NICKINOVICH: No. They never actually took over the house. Their purpose, primary purpose, was to inspect

and make a determination that there were no menfolks serving as guerrillas, you know, that would be a hinderance to them and their occupation. So they were continuously coming in making certain that the information that they had was actual, or that people were not telling them something that was not truthful. Although there were many of the villagers, menfolk in the village, that did actually hide out and fought them whenever they could.

DALLETT: Now, in this photo there are no other structures around. Did you go to school?

NICKINOVICH: No. I did not go to school, although I was seven years old when I came to this country. And the reason I didn't go to school is that at the end of the war I was just, uh, a little over four years old, and therefore I wasn't eligible for school. But by the same token my father had written after the World War One and said that he was going to bring us over as soon as he could get clearance on the immigration quota and other matters that needed to be taken care of. So I always felt that I'd be going, or my mother at

least did, that we're going very shortly, so we, I did not go to school there at all.

DALLETT: Did your, did your mother ever tell you what, did she read the letters to you, did you get an idea?

NICKINOVICH: Well, my mother actually could not read. In those countries women were, were not entered in school. They felt that the women tended to the household, the gardens, the children, and the menfolks would be the protectors of the family and the breadwinners, but insofar as requiring them to be able to read and write the language, no. So she did not, as many other women in that, in that culture, uh, were not allowed to go to school, in fact.

DALLETT: So how would, how would she be able to hear from your father?

NICKINOVICH: Whenever she got a letter from my father, she would go to her cousin, Niko (?), who not only was the mayor of the village, but also the teacher at school. And he would interpret the letters for her, at least read the letters over

for her, and every one that my father sent.

DALLETT: Do you remember her relaying to you information that was in the letter?

NICKINOVICH: Well, I always went with her. Wherever she went I was alongside of here. So I knew firsthand, of course. And many times I would even question the things that were said in the letter that I didn't quite understand. So I knew firsthand. But she kept assuring me all the time that we would be going to the United States very shortly, after World War, the end of World War One.

DALLETT: And where were the letters coming from? Where was your father?

NICKINOVICH: Well, my father came to Butte, Montana and worked in the mines in Butte, Montana. And, uh, shortly after, apparently there was a strike in there in Butte, Montana in 1917, and after staying there and serving on the picket line for a number of months, he then migrated to Juneau, Alaska. Another gold mine, in Juneau, also a capital of the territory, at that time, of Alaska. And that

is where he worked, and that is where he brought us.

DALLETT: Did he tell you about the strike in 1917?

NICKINOVICH: Uh, to some degree. Although, my dad was not a very, a person that told things that were not pleasant things. He would tell things that were more pleasant to us, and the strike was not a very pleasant one. And I learned it only from my uncles who also were in Butte, Montana. I learned more of the strike, the reasoning and the final solution to the strike from them than I did from my father.

DALLETT: Can you tell me a bit about it that you learned from your uncle?

NICKINOVICH: Well, uh, from what I remember being told about the strike in Butte, Montana was that they were striking for shorter hours, they were striking for more money. And this happened in 1917. Apparently they were getting about three dollars an hour, a shift, I beg your pardon, not an hour, a shift. And a shift actually meant a minimum of

ten hours, and sometimes longer, because they had to be on the job with their pick in their hand when the time started and also eventually they wanted some recognition as workers in the mine. Recognition to the extent that somebody could talk for them to get benefits outside of the daily wages.

DALLETT: Such as a union.

NICKINOVICH: Yes. This was the union, correct. And they did form a union there. And they finally won the strike and came back to work, both my uncles and my cousin. Apparently, the strike must have lasted at least nine months, from what I understand.

DALLETT: And was it as a result of the strike that your father left Butte for Juneau?

NICKINOVICH: Yes, yes. It was because of the strike, although he stayed there for a period of time of several months. But his intention was to get as much money as quickly as he could to bring us back to this country. So he searched other areas that he

could find more steady employment, and he determined that Juneau, Alaska was one area, and that's where he went.

DALLETT: Did he tell you about what he did in Juneau, Alaska?

NICKINOVICH: Yes, he did. He, he, uh, became a, because of the fact that he was a miner, rated as a miner in Butte, Montana, he immediately get a job as a miner, running one of the drills inside of the mine, that punched holes in the, in the rock in. And they blasted out where they could get the ore out that was covered with gold. This was a gold mine. And he eventually became a foreman in the mine. So it took him, oh, a little over two and a half years to become a foreman. He was a very good worker, from what the other fellows told me and the many boarders that my mother, uh, had in the boarding house, see, in Juneau.

DALLETT: Okay. Let's drop back a little bit. And now your father's in Juneau.

NICKINOVICH: Yes.

DALLETT: He's come through Butte. He's, he's left that area in order to take advantage of an opportunity in Juneau. And you are awaiting word from him when you can come through.

NICKINOVICH: Right.

DALLETT: You're also waiting for the quota laws to enable you to come. Is that right?

NICKINOVICH: Yes. That's right. That's right. And that came about, that worked with the, came in the summer of 1920. And, uh, we had to get our passport. We had to journey to Belgrade, Belgrade, which was then a part of Yugoslavia because all of the independent countries formed Yugoslavia after World War One in 1918. And Cetinje was no longer a capital, which was the capital of Montenegro. Therefore Belgrade became the capital of Yugoslavia. And we had to journey by train from Cetinje to Belgrade. And, uh, my mother, not knowing how to read or write the language, her first cousin, Niko Dobtovitch the school teacher and the mayor, accompanied us to Belgrade.

DALLETT: How long of a journey would that be?

NICKINOVICH: It's kind of hard for me to remember but I would, it was a days' journey to get there by train.

DALLETT: So this is the farthest journey you had made.

NICKINOVICH: Oh, the furthest that we'd ever been away from home. Actually, I enjoyed the train trip and I remember opening the windows and I was admonished for doing this because of the smell of the coal smell of the exhaust of these trains. But to me it was kind of refreshing, and I still, in my own nostrils, I can still smell that smoke. (he laughs) Anyway, we went to Belgrade and with the help of my mother cousin we were able to get the clearance of the passport. And then we came back to our village in Lubotinj, and then, uh, arranged for passage to get to, which my father had already arranged. He had sent us all of the tickets, and a sufficient amount of money, and a change of clothing for myself and my mother.

DALLETT: When you say change of clothing, what do you mean

by that?

NICKINOVICH: Well, my mother had her regular old country costume.

DALLETT: Can you describe that?

NICKINOVICH: Pardon?

DALLETT: Can you describe that? You have a photograph here.

NICKINOVICH: Yes. They, uh, they were, she had a blouse with, a silk blouse with stitches. The blouse was in a velvety type of blue with gold type of stitching and gold buttons down the front. And it was long-sleeved, that fit her tightly around the wrist. And then she had a red velvet, uh, jacket that she put over that. Had a black skirt that, and a cover or a, uh, a, I don't know how to, how I would describe it other that to say that it was an outer coat that she put on that was also in blue, light blue velvet with gold trim all the way down below her knees. And that was her costume, and that's what she wore. Now, she

didn't always wear that, and she was married in that costume, she didn't always wear that when we went to Cetinje marketing. She had other clothes which she had working outside. But that was her clothes. That was her Sunday clothes, and that was her wedding clothes. My father knew this, so therefore he sent her more modern, Western-type of clothes. The shoes that he sent her were, she had sandals that, uh, and I did too. She had sandals that kind of tipped on the corners of the toes. But when my father sent her the clothes, for some reason or other the shoes he sent as a Ma Yokum type of shoe. By that I mean that they were very pointed, had buttons all the way up, most of the way up to the ankle, and the shoes were quite tight, but she felt that she just had to get into them, and that's what she wore as shoes with the rest of her. I had, uh, a slipper type of a shoe with one button across. I had knickers, he sent me knickers, that to the knee, with long stockings. And, uh, a little jacket and a shirt.

DALLETT: What did both of you thing of these things that had arrived from your father?

NICKINOVICH: Well, we really didn't think much of it. We thought it was different, but we thought, well, this was the way everybody dressed, and this is what you do. You, in those days you never questioned the reason why, you know. You just did what people said you were supposed to do.

DALLETT: And your mother, I see here she had some, uh, some headgear, also, that she wore. Can you describe that?

NICKINOVICH: My mother braided her hair all the time, and she put, braided her hair on top of her head, and then she had a veil that was part of the costume, and this veil went down nearly to her hip. The veil was a kind of wine-ish colored, dark wine-ish colored, it was quite large, and she would tie it somewhat in the back of her neck and it would flow down.

DALLETT: And did the wine color signify that she was a married woman or anything like that, or, or no?

NICKINOVICH: Well, I'm not certain. I do know one thing, that

so many of them wore that wine-colored, because of the fact, to symbolize the Battle of Kosovo, which was a battle in the eighteenth century between the Serbian armies, the armies of Serbia and nations within Serbia and the Turkish, in the Battle of Kosovo. And because of so much blood being shed by the youth of our country. (he pauses) For that as a symbol.

DALLETT: We're going to pause here. This is the end of side one of interview number [DP-20] with William Nickinovich.

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE
BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

DALLETT: This is the beginning of side two of interview number [DP-20] with Mr. William Nickinovich. We were just at the point where you were talking about, uh, being prepared to come to this country and your father had arranged your tickets and sent you money and clothes and so on. That's where we pick up.

NICKINOVICH: We had to take a boat from Kotor, and that's

spelled K-O-T-O-R. It's a seaport on the Adriatic Coast of Yugoslavia. And we were taken there by a couple of donkeys with my, my father's cousin with us to make sure that we boarded the ferry. We boarded the ferry to go to Salonica, Greece to board the ship on which we had passage. That steamer was Poninia [sic, Pannonia], P-O-N-I-N-I-A [sic, Pannonia], a ship of the Cunard Line fleet. We, the ferry did not go entirely to Salonica, but stopped at some port as its termination, which I don't recall the name of it. And from that small port we took a train into Salonica to catch the, the steamer. One instance that is kind of, uh, in my memory, and still a funny one, was when we were on this small ferry going towards Salonica, and we came to a very narrow passage. And across this passage we could see, because we were on deck of the ferry, we could see a suspension bridge under which we were to cross, or go under, should I say. And we saw a man about midway leading a donkey on this suspension bridge. And as the ferry came close, I guess it was their custom to blow a whistle. And they did blow the whistle and the donkey sat on its haunches, and the man started pulling the

donkey and we went under the suspension bridge. And as far as I could see, I kept looking back and that donkey was still on its haunches with the man pulling with all his might. And I wondered, in years afterwards, when he would, was able to get the donkey to get up and go across that suspension bridge. We got into this other seaport where the ferry had docked and got on the train, another train ride that was memorable to me only to the degree that I could always smell that coal and wood smoke exhausting from the train. But the countryside was so different that the hilly country of Montenegro that I just was sort of drinking the view in as, and the time spent was very short because the view was so pretty. We boarded the ship, Poninia [sic, Pannonia], showed our passports, our tickets, and everything, and we were assigned a berth in steerage. My, my mother and I had adjoining berths. And the first night out I was asleep and apparently some crew member came by and lifted me out of the berth and put me into another berth with a youngster, my age, and the berth that I had vacated was given to another lady, because apparently the ship was overbooked. Sometime

later during the night my mother woke up and I guess always to check on me, and finding that I was not there she started shouting and talking in Serbian as loud as she could. She made such a disturbance that one of the crew members had to come down to try to determine what was wrong. And she explained, to the best of her ability, about the transfer, or where I'd been taken, ill, or what may have happened to me. He finally led her to the place where I was being berthed with this other youngster, and she took me in her arms and brought me back to her berth where I slept in her berth all the way into New York. Now, I might say that after relating this experience to my father, when we came to the United States, he had paid fare for first class passage and first class meals. And I took him well over three years, with an aid of an attorney, to get the difference in the fare from the Cunard Line. And I've often wondered in my own mind how many other people were in that same category, and some of them not even knowing that that was the proper fare that was paid for the berth in steerage that they had. The other vivid experience that I had on the ship while we were still in the

Mediterranean, and before we came into the Atlantic Ocean was that the steamer, or ship, would stop at smaller, uh, locations that were not, that the harbor was not sufficient for them to anchor, so they would anchor outside the harbor and the passengers would be ferried over to the boat. We, of course, never were permitted to leave the boat, because the boat only took passengers to the United States, nowhere else. And as the boat anchored, these gondolas with people on board, having various wares in the hole of this gondola, would come alongside the boat. They had vegetables, they had fruit, they had candies, they had folding chairs for the deck. And on the deck of the, of our ship, were big baskets with a rope attached and you, uh, put the money in the basket, you lowered the basket down to the gondola that you felt had the goods or the things that you wanted, and you kept pointing to that particular thing until the man would go back and forth and back and forth, pointing to various times till he pointed to the one that you wanted. He then would put it in the basket, and you would then draw it up, sometimes not knowing if the money was too much, or what, but at least we

were thankful to get the goods that we wanted. And that was my first experience with aplets [PH], and that was a product of Greece. I thought they were so wonderful that even in the later stops of the, uh, of the ship, I tried to get them, but as we'd get closer to the Atlantic we, that particular item was no longer available by the vendors. And as we were several days into the Atlantic, one of the boilers blew up on the ship. And it took us as we were told, twenty-eight days to cross the Atlantic to reach New York City. Many, many days, while the weather was permitable, the womenfolks that shared the same facilities as we did in steerage, would come up on deck to wash their hair. It seemed like they did it every day. And my mother did the same thing. And I often questioned her why they have to wash their hair every day. And she said to me that if the inspectors found even lice in their hair, that they would be turned back. And I then found out that that was one of the reasons that I had a butch haircut when I first started. So our...

DALLETT: Did you get to see the, uh, first class at all?

NICKINOVICH: Did I...

DALLETT: Did you even get to see what it was like on first class to see the difference between what your father had paid for?

NICKINOVICH: Oh, no, no. Even if we did, we wouldn't know. No, no, we didn't. Oh, you mean, afterwards, you mean?

DALLETT: No, at the time. You were told that your berth was in steerage.

NICKINOVICH: Yes, yes.

DALLETT: When you came up on deck did you see, you saw other people who...

NICKINOVICH: Oh, yes, yes. We saw all of the other people, and they looked down at us, by the way. The first class passengers were up above and they looked down on the steerage people that were laid out when the weather was permissible, because we wondered how come those people were up there in

those nice staterooms. We later found out, of course, that we were supposed to have one of those. (break in tape)

DALLETT: We paused for a minute there. You had us on the boat. People were looking down from first class into steerage.

NICKINOVICH: Oh, yeah, yeah. And then, uh, you know, I guess I wasn't too concerned about the people looking down upon us, but a lot of people had a lot of curiosity about it. Not that we could understand the language of the other nationalities that were involved in there. We could understand a little bit of the Russian. We could even understand a little bit of the Bulgarian. But enough, not enough to really converse with them at all. And it was always by sign language, a nod, or whatever. Uh, so we did know that there was better berths on that boat, than the one that we had down in the steerage. As we...

DALLETT: What were the conditions like in the steerage?

NICKINOVICH: Well, for one thing, uh, the, we had one large

bath area that was very minimal for the amount of people there. And there was one faucet, water faucet, that many, many times didn't work at all, and I recall one time when my mother was kind of seasick, and she wanted me to go up and get some water for her, and there wasn't any water at the faucet on that particular deck that we were, the lower deck of the ship. So I had to go way up on deck where we would be sunning ourselves on days that were permissible. I remember it was such a rough, uh, weather, and I had this little cup in my had, and I got it full as much as I could, and with the rolling of the boat and going down the various steps to the lowest level of the boat, I had very little water left. And I remember making about three trips that way. I wasn't the only one. There were other youngsters doing the same thing, and other people doing the same thing, and all lined up at that one faucet. The meals were very plain, uh, all a big long table, kind of family style. We had a knife and fork and you had to clean up your own dish and put it in a big tray at the end when you were through. The timing of the meal was, uh, limited. I mean, there wasn't any what you call leisure time of

eating. You were called to eat by a bell, and normally speaking you were finished by a bell. And those were the conditions that I remember. Now, it terms of our own berth, I suppose I took as much space as my mother, although the berth were very narrow, just sufficient enough for one person, there was no effort made whatsoever by the crew to locate that lady that took my berth into any other location. And she knew what happened, she was apologetic in her looks and her gestures. I don't know what nationality she was. She apparently was coming over by herself. And, as I said, we, our travel was limited because of the fact that there was a boiler blown out. It was an older ship, the Cunard Line, and we finally came to New York Harbor. It was still light, and we could see the silhouette of, of New York itself. It was a sight that, uh, when I say breathtaking, it was more that that. It was just something unbelievable that there could be a city this large in this location, and this is where we were going to go and we know we were going to get lost and how were we going to stick together. And my mother kept insisting to me all the time, "Don't leave me, don't stray at all. You hold my

had all the time." And then we saw all of those ships that were berthed at the harbor and we wondered where did they come from, because we didn't see any ships on all our journey coming over. We were finally berthed at the, one of the docks in New York Harbor and then we're, and a I was looking at the silhouette of the buildings of New York, we passed the Statue of Liberty. And, uh, again, not knowing the language, couldn't ask anybody any questions, we could see that everybody that could get on deck was on deck, including ourselves, and I was saying to my mother, why should a statue that size be away form the mainland? Because, therefore, it must have had some significance that we were not aware of. We passed it, we looked at it in, in extreme awe. And then when we were transported to this little ferry that took us over to Ellis Island, which we knew, which we knew later was called Ellis Island, we then knew what the significance of that statue was. And it's still impressed in my mind as if I see that statue today. You know, when we got off the boat this little ferry headed towards Ellis Island, we debarked on the side of the ferry and came up a wide stairwell. The

stairwell was so wide that numbers of people could be fitted across the one step. A number of steps going up, and as we came up to this big huge hall, appeared to be a hall, one floor, we could see all kinds of tables with uniformed people sitting on those tables with papers in front of them. And we knew then that that was where we were getting our final examination for clearance to the United States. And before we could get to these table we were herded, I shouldn't say herded, but I should say ushered, because everybody was very kindly and accommodating. Not knowing the language, they did it in a very polite way. We were taken into rooms, different rooms, for the purpose of examination. The, and that is the time we had, I had to get separated from my mother because the women and the girls were in one, went in the one section, and the boys and the men went to another section, and that's where we were given a, a casual, should I say, observant physical examination. They looked into your eyes, uh, your ears, uh, felt you body and after you put on your clothes you went outside, and that is when I waited for my mother. And we then stood there,

not knowing where to go. We say all of these tables. And there were a number of women, also with uniforms, that apparently were guiding these people to these different tables. So this on lady guided us to a table where a man was sitting. We gave him our passport, and on our, around our necks, we had a tag that, uh, indicated our name, what our destination and sponsor and the origination of our country. We, all we could do was pointed to it and give him the passport that my mother had, and he looked at that, asked questions that we knew nothing about, but apparently understood that we didn't know, and he kept writing. And, uh, finally he asked my mother how much money she had. And we didn't understand that, even, but he made attempt to, as money, and she knew what that meant. So she opened up her pocketbook and gave it to him, and he opened up the money that my father had sent, American money, and he looked at it, didn't count it at all, and closed it and, uh, filled out, finalized the application, and then asked my mother to sign it, made a motion for her to sing it, and gave her a pen. And, of course, she couldn't sign it because she didn't know how to

sign her name. (he laughs) So a lady that was with us, a customs lady, told her to "X". So my mother put an X, and the lady put her name alongside of it. That was how our, uh, application was approved. My father booked passage to, uh, Juneau, Alaska, through Canada. I never did know why, but I got the impression that the reason that he did, he wanted to stop off in Canada for at least a day to be able to pick up enough Canadian whiskey that was allowable. How we ever, to this day, I don't know how we were abler to get from New york City to the Canadian railroad, but people in those days were friendly. We gave, we showed this lady, this customs lady our ticket, and she wrote, she wrote something on a piece of paper, and directed us, when we got back on the ferry to New York Harbor, we were to show it. So we, uh, we showed it to the first person that looked like they had a uniform on. I really don't know that they were, uh, involved with the railroad, or policemen or who, but they directed us to the Canadian Railroad Line. And we got on the Canadian Line, the Canadian railroad, and started our journey across Canada to Vancouver, Canada.

DALLETT: I think we're going to pause here and use another tape. That's the end of side two interview number [DP-20] with Mr. William Nickinovich.

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE
BEGINNING OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

DALLETT: This is the beginning of tape number two of interview number [DP-20] for the Ellis Island Oral History Project. It's an interview with Mr. William Nickinovich, it's April 13, 1989. And we're beginning this about 12:45. Before I ask you to pick up the story, and you're about to get onto the Canadian railroad, I just wanted to go back to one thing, and that was when you came into the Harbor and, at that point it was very emotional, what you were talking about, and you mentioned that you knew what the significance of coming into the Harbor and the Statue of Liberty and that whole feeling at that moment, but it's not so clear what it was you were feeling.

NICKINOVICH: Well...

DALLETT: Or what, later, you...

NICKINOVICH: Yeah. Uh, when we, you have to remember I was seven years old. The fact is, I was seven and a half years old, uh, and I can remember so clearly the events that happened in those years. And when the ferry started coming towards the Statue of Liberty, I then realized that that was liberty for us. Uh, but the Statue was placed in significance to the people, the immigrants, that came to the country where they would have some freedom of though and religion. That's what I thought. And it's hard to describe it in your own words, because I talked to my mother about it, the times that we had, and what was her feeling about it. And, of course, she was much more aware of it. We had no religious prosecution in our country, but we didn't have the economic liberty for growth and to better yourself such as this country gave us the opportunity to have. Even in our country, a monarchy at that time, you could say that travel was restricted, that you could only travel in those areas that were limited. You couldn't go into the, uh, high offices of the government

unless you were invited. You had to make sure that you had enough goods or money for taxes that came due when a man came around to collect them, and if you didn't have you were put in jail. Without that, this country gave us that sense of liberty to be able to make the kind of money that would be required of us to pay those taxes that were required without having some threat of having to be put in jail, because we had no means of acquiring that amount of goods or money that was acquire of us, and that's what it meant to us.

DALLETT: And as a seven and a half year old boy, when you came in, it was, with the lights and the harbor and the size of the city that...

NICKINOVICH: That's right. You know, you know, I still, I still remember those times. I mean, I remember that, it was so vivid. Young children of that age remember because something memorable happened at that particular time. And that was very memorable to me. It was the most memorable thing that happened in my life. So I, it's still in my memory. So that's really what the Statue of

Liberty mean to me, as I knew it then.

DALLETT: Okay. Sorry to make you digress, because you're telling such a wonderful, fluid story, but I just wanted to ask that one question. Uh, so this woman has helped to interpret for you, this guard who helped your mother to sign for the papers, and, was she actually interpreting the language, or was she just...

NICKINOVICH: No, no, she wasn't interpreting the language. All she was doing was trying to be helpful. She was trying to really ease our fear, because we were, we were kind of uptight and, uh, fearful that we would make the wrong turn, fearful that we would make the wrong gesture, that somebody would turn us back. And we were just so, uh, thankful that somebody would take the little time available just to give us that help. And I remember my mother thanking her so very well, not knowing, (he laughs). I remember my mother saying "fala" to her at least a dozen times. And I wonder to this day whether that lady knew what "fala" meant. I'm sure that she does, that "fala" means thank you.

DALLETT: Do you remember, at all, this woman? Do you think she was someone who was stationed on Ellis Island, or maybe was she like a Traveler's Aid sort of woman, or is it hard to tell?

NICKINOVICH: That was hard to tell. Uh, she had a uniform on, not entirely the same type of uniform as the men sitting behind the desk, and I'm not really sure. I never gave it much thought, even afterwards, who, actually, she was. I just assumed at the time that she was part of the government, or part of, you know, that she was very helpful. She was not the only one. There were several of them there, because there were so many lines of us and so many people coming in, quite a few hundred of us coming in at the same time.

DALLETT: I just wondered if maybe she was someone from an organization that was sent, sort of, to help people through the process, or, either way.

NICKINOVICH: That is very possible. I really don't know.

DALLETT: And how much time do you thing you spent on

Ellis?

NICKINOVICH: How much time? We, we probably, in total, we didn't spend more than the three hours. The time it took, and waiting in line, you know, wasn't any great, uh, problem to us. I mean, waiting in line was just something that you did. It wasn't an effort for us, and I, we were there at least three hours, that I can vividly recall, to tell you the truth.

DALLETT: And there was just a cursory examination that you went through, your medical examination.

NICKINOVICH: Right, right. Yeah. It might have been a half a day, it might have been between, in that area of time.

DALLETT: Okay. Take us back to where you were, now.

NICKINOVICH: Okay.

DALLETT: Was it at Ellis that you got to the terminal that was going to take you to the Canadian Railway?

NICKINOVICH: Yeah. We, uh, took the ferry back to New York Harbor and as soon as we got off the ferry and landed on, we kept showing this little slip of paper that this lady had given us, plus the tickets that we had, not really knowing. And we weren't aware that we were going to go across Canada. And, uh...

DALLETT: Did you have an idea of how long this journey was going to be ahead of you?

NICKINOVICH: No. No. We had not idea. We had no idea whatsoever. We thought it would be another journey as long as, you know, that we had the twenty-eight days already, and we figured, well, it's going to take another twenty-eight days, we'll get there. But we knew at end that my father would be waiting there for us. So we got on the Canadian Pacific Railroad, and the, uh, berths were, were quite stiff. They were, I don't remember much cushioning on them, but it was enjoyable. There weren't too very many people on board, and, uh, we kept going and figured that this train is going to take us where

we're going to go. And when it stops, that's probably where my father will be. Well, it wasn't quite like that because number one, we were getting a little hungry, and it was getting on in the, oh, it was getting on in the late evening. And, uh, there were no dining cars on that train whatsoever. And the first stop that we made we noticed some pushcarts being pushed by an individual with a little bit of a canvas top over them, and he had all kinds of good things. He had, we looked out the window, people would get out, looked out the window, and there were sandwiches and fruits and, uh, candies and other items, books. And we didn't know what this was about. So the train pulled out, and we didn't get anything. And I kept asking my mother, because I was getting hungry, and she said, "Well, we just have to wait, we just have to wait, we just have to wait." And we pacified ourselves that way. And it was, and finally I fell asleep. And it was early next morning I woke up with a real hunger, and we came to another stop, and the conductor was walking by through the train prior to this time. He kept motioning to my mother, putting his hand to his

mouth as if eating, and she kept nodding her head, and she was thinking that he had something for us to eat. Well, what he was inquiring about whether we had eaten, apparently. And we hadn't eaten. So at the next stop he came by and he, then again, I recall him putting his hand to his mouth, and my mother said yes, yes, yes, yes, and she opened up her purse immediately, and he took out some money that he thought was sufficient, not knowing what we wanted, he brought half a dozen sandwiches, some fruit and some milk, mild in a carton, in a bottle. I beg your pardon, it wasn't a carton, it was a bottle. Uh, and, uh, he even brought back the change and gave it to my mother. And we ate like starved animals. We had so much that it even took us to the next stop, but we thought we'd better load up on that stop, too. And then came a time when the train stopped. We had another conductor by that time because the came through the train and we could see it was to the same person. The train stopped, and everybody got off the train. And we didn't know what to do. So we stayed there. We stayed there and my mother, I asked my mother what we were supposed to do. And as far as I

could see, we could see these railroad cars, cars and tracks. And we appeared to be in the middle of them. And we didn't know whether we would take that train, that train or what. And finally, after a number of minutes, I don't know how long a period of time, a crew person came by. And he looked at us and he, we gave him the passport, my mother gave him the passport, and, oh, he immediately took the baggage that we had, and I also had a little wooden oxen cart that was made, hand made. Two wheels with a cart and this oxen. And the oxen had legs you could move, with a yoke on it and everything. And I had that and I carried it all the way over. And I made sure that I brought that with me the belongings, other belongings that we had. And he hurriedly got us all together, crossed several tracks, and put us on the right train that was headed towards Vancouver.

DALLETT: Were you in Chicago, or...

NICKINOVICH: No, no, no. We were in Canada at that time.

DALLETT: Oh, you were in Canada.

NICKINOVICH: We were in Canada at that time. And, uh, and then the next time, then whenever we stopped for refreshments we knew what to do, although we never, uh, went there ourselves. We were always able to get the attention of one of the crew men to, uh, give him money for him to buy it because we were, I guess we were a little bit fearful of being able to tell the person what we wanted. We thought that maybe he would know more what we wanted than we did. And the next time that we had to make a, a car change, a railroad car change, was in a station. We came into this station. And the conductor that was on that train apparently had given out the information that somebody should be taking care of them because this, they were going to Vancouver, Canada. So when the train stopped in the station, one of the crew members took us out, took us out into the lobby, the station, and pointed us to the gate of the particular train we were supposed to take, and that's how we got on. And we did that maybe a couple of other times until we came to Vancouver, Canada. And we came into, we didn't know Vancouver, that we were in

Vancouver, Canada, but we were told that Vancouver was where we were supposed to go, we're supposed to be. Of course, we thought that Vancouver we could reach through the United States, you know, not knowing what route we were supposed to take. And when they announced, "Vancouver, Vancouver," my mother said, "This is where we get off." So we got off, and we didn't know what to do. We had our baggage. I had this little cart, and we looked around. And around our neck was our name. My mother always made sure that that was around my neck all the time. And pretty soon, as we were standing there and people were dispersing and going the various way that they wanted to go, we saw this lady coming up. She looked at our tag and she said, "Nickinovich," just like that. And my mother nodded her head, you know, being so grateful that somebody knew who we were, and she beckoned us to come with her. She put us in a car. We got in this car, she drove the car into the Vancouver Hotel in Vancouver, Washington. We found out, of course, that she was one of the customer service people, a very nice person who we dealt with in the three, four days that we were there. Anyway,

she put us up in a hotel room, a very nice room with two large double beds, and then after we were, she shoed us where the toilet was, how it worked, how you flush it, all the water, how the water is turned on in the bath and how the water is turned on in the sink. And where the towels were, where the soap was. And then, uh, she mentioned as if, were we hungry, and we said yes. So she said that she would be back. She apparently had something to do, if I recall, she was back in a very short period of time, and she took us to an elevator, and she pointed above the door to the number of our room. Well, (he laughs), that really didn't have any impression on us because we didn't know numbers. But when she took us to the elevator, I had the presence of mind to count the number of doors on the opposite side of the elevator, as to where that room was. She took us down the elevator, showed us how to punch the floor down to the lobby. And then she, we came down the lobby, and she took us into the dining room. Have you ever been in Vancouver? Well, I'll give you a little description of it. And she seated us a very nice table. And on this table, now, you have to

understand that Vancouver Hotel is run by the Canadian Pacific Railroad and is very British, very British in its decor and very British in its manner, its dress and everything else. We were dressed to the best that we had. But when we sat down at the table, we could see the string of silverware on each side. Not knowing what to order, she ordered for us. And I remember, I remember so clearly, it was steak that I hadn't had, I don't remember having a steak like that. We had steak and potatoes and corn that we loved so well and a salad and fruit and milk. And we let it sit there because we didn't want to get embarrassed by taking the wrong utensil. And my mother asked me, she said, "Where do we start?" And I said to her, the next table was a very elegantly dressed English, appeared to be an English, very elegantly dressed English man and, apparently, his wife. And I said to my mother, in our language, of course, "Well, let's just wait to see how they eat." So we did. We, of course, assumed that the idea was that you were supposed to take all of those, you know, and use all of the utensils that were there. But as we later found out, we didn't have to. But that's

what we did. We watched him and we took, off of this side, we took, for the salad we took the fork. We took the knife from the right side. We didn't take the little knife because we later found out that was for the butter that was set in front of us. And that's how come we found out. We finished the meal and, uh, we sat there because we were fearful of going up that elevator. We sat and sat and sat. And finally the lady came and, yeah, she said, she apparently had some other things to do, and she took us back up the elevator, showed us again how to punch the button on the elevator, and then instructed us, next morning you go down by yourself. She was saying, we got the impression that you do, you have to go the, okay. And you know, punch, punch this, all right. Well, the next morning we got up we decided we're not going to go down that elevator because we didn't know, we were afraid of what we were going to do. You know, it was a mechanical thing that we knew nothing about. So we decided that we were going to go down the steps. And we walked down these steps, and we walked down these steps. By the time we came down to the bottom on the lobby, I asked my

mother, "What floor do you think we're on?" And my mother said, "The fourth floor." And I said, "No, we're on the fifth floor." Well, anyway, after breakfast we sat down and we didn't know what to order for breakfast even. And the man, the waiter, wanted to know if we liked eggs, and we didn't even know what eggs were. Toast, what he was doing, he would point to somebody else on the table that had like things, oh, yeah, we would point the same way, and that's what he brought us. So when we, when we got through with the breakfast we waited and waited and waited, hoping that the lady would come for us, but she didn't. So we decided to go up the steps. We counted the steps till we thought it was the fourth floor, and it was to fourth floor. So I counted the rooms right from the, and I told my mother, no, it's the fifth floor. Well, we had a little bit of disagreement, but because my mother, uh, I always obeyed here, we decided we'd try the fourth floor. So we went to the room, the number of doors, four or five, if I recall correctly, it was. I'm not entirely sure. Away from the elevator, across from the elevator, we went to this room, we tried the key and

practically jammed it in there and it wouldn't open. So I told my mother no, we have to go another flight of steps, and we did, and that is where our room was. And that's how we found out. And from then on, of course, we knew it was the fifth floor, we knew how many steps to climb, and, uh, that's how we, we, uh, we were able to, uh, go up and down the, uh, floors of the Vancouver Hotel. The next day that we were there, the following day that we were there the lady, the same lady, came up to us in mid-afternoon, oh, mid-morning, I beg your pardon, shortly after breakfast, and beckoned us to come downstairs. So we went downstairs. She took us in the elevator this time. She didn't know that we were walking up the stairs all this time. She must have known because we didn't punch anything on that elevator. And she came down, went into her office, and there was a telephone there, one of these that you lift off the hook, you know, one of these upright, standing telephones. And she beckoned to my mother to lift it up. And, you know, lift it up. And my mother did. And she said, "Now say hello into the telephone." And my mother, in a very weak voice, said hello,

you know. And then all of a sudden she shouted. It was her brother, who had come up from Seattle to visit her, her older brother, Pero Dobtovitch, who did not have his citizenship, his American citizenship finalized, and could not cross into Canada, but had to be retained in Blaine. And they kept talking and talking and he wanted her to come over on the train to Blaine for a visit. The, he could talk English. The lady, of course, explained to him what she was going to do. Apparently that she was going to put us on the train, that he's to wait there until we come, and, uh, that we would, next following train, we would have to go back. So she put us on the train, the train from Vancouver to Seattle, that stops at Blaine, Washington. Of course, that's the immigration point. And, uh, she put us there instructing the, apparently instructing the conductor that we're to be returned on the following train that comes up from Seattle, which would have been somewhere in a four hour period of time. So we got into Blaine, got into the station, and there, in this immigration holding offices, apparently, was my uncle who I had never seen or remembered seeing, should I say, because

I was only a few months old when he left for the United States from Lubotinj. And, of course, my mother was so joyous and thankful and they talked and talked and talked for hours as to what they were doing and what, where my father was. Of course, he was in Juneau, and he'd be coming down to visit her, to pick her up in Vancouver. And we spent nearly the four hours there talking about the relatives that were left in the old country.

DALLETT: Sorry to interrupt, but it's the end of [DP-20].

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO
BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE TWO

DALLETT: This is the beginning of side B of cassette number two of interview number [DP-20] with Mr. William Nickinovich. We were at the station.

NICKINOVICH: Yeah. After I visited with my mother's uncle we then returned to Vancouver under the direction of the conductor that was coming up from, uh, Seattle, Washington on the train. The following day my father arrived from Juneau, Alaska and,

uh, we were still sitting in the hotel room because we were afraid of going anywhere else, we might get lost. And my father came in. I had never seen him, or I never remembered seeing him because I was only a few months old. And, of course, it was quite, such a very joyous time and my mother cried so long. (he laughs) Because she hadn't seen him for seven years either. And we, of course, he related to us what we were going to do, that we were going to stay there another day and then take the, uh, one of the Princess Lines, the Canadian Princess Lines, back to Juneau, Alaska. And then looking at my shoes, which were oxfords that, well, girls used to wear so often, he said to me, "Well, we'll go downtown. I'm going to buy you some shoes." And, uh, and some other clothes that I needed. So we did. And the first place we went into was a shoe store in Vancouver, Canada. And this fellow kept trying on these oxford shoes on me and, to get the right fit, and I just kept shaking my head and I told my dad that I didn't want those shoes. And, (he laughs), he said, "Well, what kind of shoes do you want?" He was talking (?), I mean, he talking Serbian to me. And I said I wanted

shoes like my mother has, the Ma Yokum type of shoe. Well, he got the biggest charge out of that because, of course, they don't make those kind of shoes, nor had they made those king of shoes for years. And, uh, and will some reluctance, of course, they gave me the right fit. I was not happy about it, but the shoes fit quite well on me so I, I left with the shoes and a new pair of pants and new jacket, and even a new hat. And then, after my dad, I remember stocked up with some good Canadian whiskey, we boarded the boat to Juneau. Saying goodbye, most gratefully, to the hostess at the Vancouver Hotel. I might say too that, knowing that my older, our older son was married here about ten years ago. and because of the fact that he knew that we stayed, my mother and I stayed in Vancouver in the Vancouver Hotel, they held their honeymoon there. When we arrived in Juneau, which is the capital of Alaska, it wasn't but a few days, it was, of course, a town that was only about three thousand population at that tie. So it was easier for both my mother and I to adjust ourselves to that kind of environment. And it wasn't but a few days that my father decided he

was going to send me to school. Well, I was nearly three and half months out of school, since school started, should I say, and not knowing one word of English I was a little bit hesitant. But he talked to the principal, he talked to the teacher, and they felt that by my being in the class that I could absorb some of the, uh, atmosphere of being with children, which I hadn't been in all those years, very few. So they decided to leave me in school. They gave me books, which I knew nothing about. But I learned more from the children for a period of time than I did from anybody else. Because during this time, all the kids in that particular class felt a kind of an attachment to me because I didn't know what they were saying, they didn't know what I was saying, but they felt I was somewhat unique. So during recess, they used to gather around me and they would point to different articles on my clothes, like a button, and they would keep repeating that, "button, button, button, button, button," and "shoe, shoe, shoe, shoe," and ask me to repeat that same thing until my pronunciation was correct. Hat, hat, eyes, eyes, nose, nose, hands, hands. And you know I

used to go home and fall asleep repeating them. (he laughs) And that is you know, that is really the way that I first learned how to talk the English language. My mother, my father decided that he would hire a special instructor, and she came during the, oh, after school for an hour or so, I would stay after school for an hour or so. And then she would come on Saturdays, and also teach to reading and writing. And I became pretty adept. And, in fact, I graduated with he rest of the kids to the second grade and kept on. In the fourth grade, I was very athletic. My grandfather in the old country, during when they held Olympics in Montenegro, was a champion broad jumper. And I guess my father was quite athletic, too. And I guess from that stance I derived some of my athletic abilities. But I did everything. I played basketball, track, I even played baseball. I didn't particularly like it as much, but anyway, while we were in the fourth grade, I became a member of this basketball team. And we played other schools, even the Catholic schools and the one across the bay, one little town across the bay. So we were going to have a big tournament, and we were going to get our

pictures taken to be put, (he laughs) to put in the paper. So, uh, the coach or the principal or whoever it was that was coaching us, gave us a letter J, felt, both sides red. Red on both sides. And we all had white little T-shirts. And he told us, (he laughs), he told us to go home and have our mother sew those J's on our T-shirts. So I told my mother that's what we're supposed to do, I told her. And I'm supposed to go tomorrow, we're going to take our pictures, and we're going to have a big ball game. (he laughs) So my mother sewed thee J's on this T-shirt, white T-shirt, and, uh, nothing doing, we soon came in after school and we had to have our picture taken. And because I was probably one of the larger boys of the basketball team, I always stood in, was right in front. And after the picture was taken I was the only boy on that whole squad with the J turned the other way. (he laughs) And it was in the paper. And, you know, I, I had that, I would laugh at it so many times. I had that picture for many years until the slide of 1937 took or family home because of the rain on that particular winter day, winter night, should I say and the flume that was loaded with

water that fed the mill of this gold mine that my dad worked in, there was a big, hug rock slide that came down and broke this big huge flume with thousands and thousands of water, and came down into the town and took our house, completely buried it, demolished it completely, with all our belongings in it, and another house below. Fortunately that particular night we were invited to a dinner at another friend's house. So, so many of our belongings, so many of our records that we had, went in the slide. An we tried to unearth them as best we could, but it was buried so much that, that was one of the treasures that I had and that I wanted to keep with me. And, uh, so I don't have it with me now. I, of course, graduated from junior high school, was on the basketball team for four years as a, in high school, was on the track team. I graduated with a 3.8 average. And, uh, was accepted to got to Stanford University. I, my father had, there was eight children. And, of course, my father couldn't afford to send me to Stanford, so I had to work for a period of six months after school to get enough money for my tuition, and then hopefully I would get a job as a, some kind of a

job down there to finish off the school. Well, as it so happened, I did go to school. I played basketball the first year, at Stanford. And then when I came back to earn enough money that summer, it really wasn't enough money, but I went down anyway and I ran out of money and I worked as a busboy in a girls private school to earn enough money for my board and room. And then the following year this slide took all the possessions that my dad had, and that he'd worked for all his life. I decided then that because he was instrumental in bringing my mother and I over here and sometimes old country people didn't even do that, they left their families in the old country and never bothered about them, never even felt that they had them, I decided that I would work and get my father back on his feet. So I worked for nearly two and a half years and every single penny that I made every month, outside of just my own incidentals, I gave to him. And that's when he brought the family to Seattle, Washington, in 1938. Um, I never had any regrets about it because, you know, I've always wondered what if I didn't come to this country. What if he just left us over there, what would have

happened to me? With the turmoil in that country I am sure, I know for a while I would have been in the army. Whether I'd have been alive today or not is very questionable, to tell you truth. And the relatives I left over there, they're practically all gone because of the war and even starvation, to some degree. So I, I never felt any regret. In fact, to tell you the truth, I was most thankful that I could do that. But, you know, as I review all of this, my experience, my experience with the people that we were associated with, the strangers that we were associated with coming to this country, and all of them being so very helpful. You know, and I say to myself, that's what made this country so great, is that people will help each other, and by helping each other, they will certainly induce those to help others and make this America a better way of life. I don't know what else I can tell you. (break in tape)

DALLETT: Okay. We've had a little pause here to take a deep breath and we don't have a whole lot of time left but I wanted you to maybe, sort of condense what happened to you after that. During the

Depression, when you did go back to school, and what kind of work you did to get through that next phase in your life.

NICKINOVICH: Yeah. I graduated from high school in 1932, which was really the height of the Depression, and I wanted to go to school, as I was accepted by Stanford University. So I took six months working in the logging camp and some construction to get enough money to go to school. I remember one of the first jobs that I got on a construction job, and trying to earn enough money towards my schooling where you stood on a bank of a construction job in hopes that the foreman or the supervisor in charge would hire you for that day, for one hour or whatever length of time it took. And I was quite thin and tall, and I noticed that, that he always took the huskier guys. So when I went home I put on an awful lot of clothes underneath me and I came back looking much heavier and much huskier than I appeared to be, and I was hired digging. And that time, there was no mechanical equipment, and everything was dug, basements of big buildings, hospitals, dug by hand. And if you didn't keep up with the

pacemaker they had alongside of you, alongside the crew, you were given your time, whether it be you worked ten minutes, fifteen minutes an hour, whatever length of time. But I stuck through it throughout that time and throughout that whole summer and made enough money, because my father could not take, could not afford to send me to school with, as there were eight children in our family. I made enough money to go to Palo Alto to attend Stanford. Even, not having sufficient money for a full school term, I was able to get a job in a boarding house. The fact is, at a girls finishing school, as a busboy. And when I returned home I, again, worked for the same contractor who took me to another city. He liked my work so well that I became a foreman on the job. And we were making thirty cents an hour. And that was real hard work with pick and shovel. I then made enough money there to continue on to my second year and before I could even finish my second year I had to go to work again for a boarding house there to earn my board and room. When I came, when I left school again for the summer months and getting into the fall, I was trying to, I was having a hard time getting

another job because construction was down and for every job available there was at least ten, ten men waiting. And at that particular time, my father had a boarding house where my mother took in boarders, up to twenty boarders, to support, help support the family. She did all the work. She made all the meals. She made what she called buckets, meaning lunch pails for the men to take into the mine. And Dad finally hired somebody to help clean up the rooms and make the beds for her. And Dad then decided that was too much for my mother and he, instead of this big three story building, instead of making all these room for boarders he decided to make them into apartment houses. So he made apartments, six apartments out of them, and shortly after he did that, a slide came. He still owed money. He borrowed money from the bank to finish the building and shortly after that a slide came that was promoted by a rock slide above our house and a big huge flume, a water flume that was three feet deep and three feet across, full of water, that always fed the mill that tended the gold mine of that company. The rock slide came and demolished the house completely. All of the furnishings, all of

the possessions. Fortunately the family was invited out to the, another, friends of ours, for that evening, but three people who were renting the apartments were killed, were covered. And another house below us, with all the occupants in that house, were covered and killed. I then decided that I would go to work the first opportunity I had and make enough money so that my father could get back on his feet. And I worked for well over two years, nearly two and a half years in a gold mining, in a mill of a gold mining company on Chichagoff Island and gave every cent beside the incidentals, the few dollars incidentals that I may have had during the month, every cent to my father. On the basis of that saving for him he was able to bring the family to Seattle, Washington in 1938 to have a better life for the family and better opportunities for the children. While I was going to school I thought that I would take up mining engineering, but I decided that that was too confining an occupation, a profession, for me, because I enjoyed people and enjoyed talking to people. In fact, I enjoyed more helping people. So after I got through working in this

mine I came down knowing full well that I couldn't finish school, I came down and, into Seattle, and, uh, I went to work for one of the crafts in the metal trades here in Seattle, and was able to promote myself as a foreman on the job. And, uh, on the basis of that, uh, I was, uh, selected as an appointment to the Department of Labor and Industries of the State of Washington in the, first as a field representative for the State, and then in the mediation services of the State. And shortly thereafter, during the period of the Korean War, when the federal government had wage stabilization, the labor movement of the State of Washington had to select a representative, a full time representative to represent all the unions in the state before the national, before the wage stabilization board, if their wage requests beyond the allowable, and I was selected. And I served there for two years in the federal government. And an opportunity then came for me to, uh, for an appointment to the president of the International Printing Pressmen, an organization involved in the newspapers, all the newspapers in the country, uh, they printed

periodics, they printed magazines, anything of printed material, they were involved in. And because of my experience in mediation, my primary function was to assist the local unions in, uh, matters of interpretations of the contract, matters of the National Labor Relations Board, where I appeared before the National Labor Relations Board in all of this district that I had a responsibility to, of five states, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Montana and Alaska. Additionally, I assisted these local unions in negotiations in contracts where prior to an impasse or in instances where they were unable to reach an amicable result to their negotiations. I held that job for thirty-two years. I retired, I retired five years ago. I enjoyed it because of the fact that I always felt that I was able to help somebody that was not able to help themselves, and I got that personal satisfaction out of doing it.

DALLETT: Well, in our next oral history project on labor unions we'll come back for another few hours. (they laugh) But we're going to have to wrap up this one on the Ellis Island Project and, thank

you very much for everything. That's the end of interview, that's the end of side B of tape number two and the end of interview number [DP-20] with Mr. William Nickinovich.