

DP-43
MELA MEISNER LINDSAY
BIRTH DATE: 1903
INTERVIEW DATE: AUGUST 29, 1989
RUNNING TIME: 1:20:00
INTERVIEWER: ANDREW PHILLIPS
RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME
INTERVIEW LOCATION: DENVER, CO
TRANSCRIPT ORIGINALLY PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 1989
TRANSCRIPT RECONCEIVED BY: CHICK LEMONICK. 2/1996
TRANSCRIPT NOT REVIEWED

RUSSIA, 1905
AGE 2
SHIP NAME NOT RECALLED

PHILLIPS: Okay. This is Interview Number 417 [DP-43] with--

LINDSAY: 417? [DP-43].

PHILLIPS: Yes.

LINDSAY: Oh, my.

PHILLIPS: We're with Mela Lindsay Meisner.

LINDSAY: Meisner Lindsay.

PHILLIPS: Meisner Lindsay.

LINDSAY: Yes.

PHILLIPS: With Mela Lindsay, sorry, Mela Meisner Lindsay. It's Interview

Number 417 [DP-43]. This Andrew Phillips. It's the 29th of August, 1989. This interview is beginning at 1:30. And you are from, what country are you from originally?

LINDSAY: Oh, I was born in Russia, in Kindsvater Kutter, down between the Don and the Volga.

PHILLIPS: All right. and your, what year did you immigrate to the United States?

LINDSAY: We came in the spring of 1905.

PHILLIPS: And what year were you born?

LINDSAY: I was born in 1903.

PHILLIPS: Okay. Um, okay. So let's just start, perhaps you could start by, when necessary we can spell some of these names, for instance could you spell the name of the place you were born in?

LINDSAY: Uh, spell the name of Kindsvater Kutter? Yeah. It really means "Child's Father". It was named perhaps, after a man who probably engineered the place a little bit and, well, I shouldn't have said that. But anyway, spell it K-I-N-D-S-V-A-T-E-R. Kindsvater Kutter. And that would be for a village.

PHILLIPS: All right. Could you start by telling us a little bit about the place you were born in, by telling us about the kind of house you lived in, what was that like?

LINDSAY: Oh, the houses were very, very, well, plain, I would have to say, because many of the people made their own brick. I remember papa saying they used to go down to the river and bring clay home, you know, and mix it with straw. And we even used to do that some in Kansas, after we came to Kansas. And they made their bricks, dried them, and built their houses. Many houses only had straw roofs.

PHILLIPS: Tell me what your father did for a living?

LINDSAY: My father was a teacher. His father and grandfather before him, they taught the German and the Russian language. And papa was born in Tscherbokowka.

PHILLIPS: Can you spell that?

LINDSAY: Tscherbokowka? (She laughs.) Okay. S-- (She laughs.) I could spell it, but I'm excited. Just a minute and I'll find it here.

PHILLIPS: Well, maybe-- Okay. (Break in tape.) Okay. Continue with the spelling of the name where your father was born.

LINDSAY: All right. The town is Tscherbokowka. You will find several spellings on different maps, but this is the way papa spelled it. T-S-C-H-E-R-B-O-K-O-W-K-A. Tscherbokowka. And it's down close to the Volga River.

PHILLIPS: All right. Give us a sense, tell us a little bit about your early life as a young girl growing up in this Russian village.

LINDSAY: Well, I was just very small then, but when I tell these stories

it's what I remember because my folks reminisced so much after we came to Kansas and I fell like I know it all. Well, as it was when our people came into Russia during, because of Catherine the Great asking them to come over and plow her land, villages were made.

PHILLIPS: To come over from where?

LINDSAY: Oh, we--

PHILLIPS: To come over from Germany?

LINDSAY: We came from Germany, yes. Yes, we cam from Germany. Catherine the Great was a princess, a German princess, and she had gone over to Russia to visit her relatives. You know, royal people, they were all related, even, with England, you know. All right, and, um, because of that she finally did marry one of the czar's sons, and now she was the empress. And when she saw her land between the Don and the Volga, so to speak, lying idle, overrun by Tartars and (?), she asked some of the German people to come over and plow her land. And at that time she gave them military freedom which, of course, didn't last after different czars came to rule. Why, people rebelled, of course. That was taken away. All right. Now I forgot your question.

PHILLIPS: Well, I was just asking you to give me, and you're doing that, some of the background.

LINDSAY: Yes, yes. And when the people came then to Russia, being wild, they had to be engineered, so to say, to speak, out into the country, and villages were mad up. And being a dangerous time, many villages at first had walls around it and therefore that made it so farming, when farming was done, you had to go out into the fields, back and forth to the fields. And, um, this is what I've

always heard when I was child, you went back and forth. Womenfolk and children would also go. You brought your cooking things with you. You lived in tents and so forth.

PHILLIPS: Your father actually had to do that himself, and your mother.

LINDSAY: Um, yes. We did that later. Papa at first was a teacher before he was married. He taught the German and the Russian languages, and this is how they met. And when he came to Kratzke, where mama lived, and got married, and then of course life was different. And, uh, we planned on coming to America, but the Japanese War broke out and papa, having had his training down in Odessa, and Rostov-on-the-Don, he had to go to war.

PHILLIPS: Excuse me, whereabouts on the Don? What was the name of that place?

LINDSAY: Oh, um, he went to Odessa and Rostov-on-the-Don. That was the name of the town. It means exactly what it is. Rostov-on-the-Don.

PHILLIPS: Again, could you spell that for me, please?

LINDSAY: Oh. Well, Rostov. Oh, boy. Yeah. R-O-S-T-O-V, Rostov, on the Don, meaning this little place, army place, was on the Don River. Uh-huh.

PHILLIPS: Okay. When, what year was it that you're referring to when the Japanese Russian war broke out?

LINDSAY: Uh, papa, I don't remember.

PHILLIPS: Give us a rough sense of that.

LINDSAY: Well, we came to America in 1905, but he went before this, so it had to be several years before this when he, uh, left, and was sent to Manchuria.

PHILLIPS: Did he tell you stories about that?

LINDSAY: It was, um, yes, it was pretty wild. You see, Russia had so many different men in the army, so many different nationalities, many of them did not know what the war was all about. So their heart wasn't in it. There were many of them that, uh, I don't know what the word would be, but anyway they ran away, deserted. They deserted. It was quite rough. Uh-huh.

PHILLIPS: Did your father tell you much about the war?

LINDSAY: No. Not too much about it but, uh, I know he had terrific training. He would do some of his training acts for us kids, you know, make us laugh and all. He would get down on his knees like the Don Cossack used to dance. They would, um, get down and jump around on their, uh, kick one leg out and shift and of course they had their rifles in their hands and he used to do those little maneuvers for us, as we were children.

PHILLIPS: What did you refer to those people as? We think of those people as the Cossacks, don't we?

LINDSAY: Huh?

PHILLIPS: We think of those people as the Cossacks, don't we?

LINDSAY: Uh-huh.

PHILLIPS: You had another name for them. What was it? Don Cossack?

LINDSAY: Oh, well, they were known as the Don Cossack, Cossaka, and we said Cossaka.

PHILLIPS: Oh, Don Cossaka.

LINDSAY: Yes. The Don River was, when you spoke of them, you always put the Don part, Don Cossack. Like a Denver man or New York fellow, you know. (She laughs.)

PHILLIPS: Did you ever see any of those Don Cossack people yourself? Or could you remember? Of course you were very young.

LINDSAY: No. I don't remember but I can see them in my mind just because when, you know, when we came to Kansas and, like I always tell people, people always say to me, well, "How did you find all this out to write your book?" And I said, "Look, I have it in my blood." Because when we lived in Kansas we were sixteen miles out in the country. Our church was nine miles out of town, and that, we were pretty far out. Every Sunday when we went to church, mama would cook soup or something incase she asked people to come for dinner. Of course, it was horse and buggy days. And--

PHILLIPS: Before we get to your experience in Kansas, I'd like to just finish with some of your life experience in Russia. I mean, sort of chronologically take us to your immigration, immigrating to the United States and out to Kansas. Before we get there, though, could you perhaps tell me a little bit more about as you recall those stories that

your parents told you about your life in Russia about, for instance, the day-to-day activities in the house. Your house, you said, has a straw roof. The family had to go out and work in the fields--

LINDSAY: Uh-huh.

PHILLIPS: --although your father had been a teacher as a younger man before he was married.

LINDSAY: Yes.

PHILLIPS: Is that true that they also had to work in the fields, your parents?

LINDSAY: Oh, yes, yes. Later, are you taping it now, yes, papa
and mama, they worked, mama especially, worked in the field.
After papa, after they got married, soon after papa got the, to be sort of a supervisor for one man who had extra fields, and papa would go back and forth and see that everybody was doing things, you know, the way it should be done. And then there wasn't too much for that time, because papa then was called into the war and we did the farming when we came to Kansas, and that's where I can tell you about how it was to be out in the field.

PHILLIPS: Why, why did you decide? How was it that your family decided to leave Russia?

LINDSAY: Well, a friend, you see, there was trouble with, um, the war started really because Russia had trouble with Japan.

They was, uh, well, oh, I'm going to-- Stop it.

PHILLIPS: That's all right. You can just continue.

LINDSAY: Well, see, I don't know all the names of this, but anyway Russia had a water route up on the ocean off Japan and they had difficulty with their routes and because of that they, Russia and Japan, didn't get along, and the Russo-Japan War broke out, and papa was called to war because of that. I'm saying it badly, I'm sorry.

PHILLIPS: That's all right. I understand that background, but at some point your father, with your family, decided they were going to leave Russia and travel to America. How did they make that decision, and why did they make that decision?

LINDSAY: Well, papa had thought of coming. Well, all right. Being a teacher, I know that he knew about America. He knew so much about America that the young boys used to get excited about, oh, he would tell them about the Statue of Liberty and other things, you know. And so the young boys really thought, "Hey, maybe someday I'll go." And there were many people that had already come to Kansas. And you'll wonder why I say Kansas, because you have to think that our people were farmers over there. I've already stated that. And when you come to a strange land, you have to do the work that you are acquainted with. You don't know the language and so when our people start coming over to America, why they chose countries like Kansas and Nebraska and the Dakotas or whatever. And once one gets settled, why, the relatives usually this is where they go because you, it's all you know about, and our people came to Kansas. So mama and papa both knew about Kansas, because mama's, some of mama's family were in Kansas. All right, now papa thought about leaving Russia and coming to Kansas, and then he got caught in the war. And mama's brother, Uncle Fritz, left. He was married, they had three or four children, and they were going to America to Kansas and mama said, "Fritz, see if you can borrow money so we can go, too." And Uncle Fritz promised. He said he would try. And it took him two years. And

LINDSAY: Well, I think I do because, like I said, my folks, we talked about it all the time. It was just, if there was any company, or evenings if you sat, why, you listened. Now, there are families that say, well, we asked questions, but the folks said, "Don't bother us." But at our house it was different, and so I feel I have lived all this and your question was what?

PHILLIPS: The question was do you have any recollections of actually sailing?

LINDSAY: Oh, well, on the railcar I remember feeling how frightened I was when this monster, this train, came. I had never seen a train, never seen anything that ran by motor. All right, when the train came, I was terribly frightened. I grabbed mama's shawl, 'course she only had a shawl, and buried my face in it because I thought this thing was going to run us over, and then that wasn't safe enough and I ran and hid my face in papa's coat. He had a long-haired fur coat on. And well, anyway, this train finally came and going in the train, stumbling up those steps, and there were no seats on the train. Everybody had to sit on their bundles. And there was such a mob of people going, because this unrest in Russia where people were fleeing. And luckily we got close to a window where I could look out. You saw the villages fly by and stuff like that. I'm not telling a very good story I don't think. (She laughs.) But I remember how it was in the depots. Little, shabby little places. People sat on their bundles and so many of them, you've heard of the samovar. That's a teakettle, you know, they heat with charcoal. People were always making a tea or a hot drink, and eating their bread and drinking their tea. It was pretty bad.

PHILLIPS: So you, you were traveling on this train with the villages flying by, and eventually you finished where? Where did you eventually finish getting, where did you get to?

LINDSAY: Well, we came, we left many, many, many towns behind, because this took a week getting there. And one day papa had gone out to, you know, when the train stopped he would go out, and there would be a little shop maybe, close to the train and bring us milk. One time he brought us a little bucket of milk for my sister and I. And, oh, and I wanted to say this. One time he even brought a little bit of vodka, you know, vodka, Russian whiskey, and a little hot water because we kids had been freezing. See there was no heat in the trains and we didn't have a coat. We just had shawls to wrap around us. Okay. So he brought us this little bit of whiskey and hot water. Oh, it was a terrible taste but, oh, it was soothing and sleepy. We fell asleep. That's what he wanted us to do, have a good night of sleep. And one day he came in and we were getting pretty close to where we were to go, you know, the Baltic Sea. And he came and said, "Oh, I see water." And we all looked out, and sure enough there was the Baltic Sea. And that was one big step that we had finished out of Russia. We got on the ship. Like I said, we went through the, through the Kiel Canal, the Elbe River, and into Hamburg, Germany.

PHILLIPS: Then you crossed the Atlantic.

LINDSAY: Yeah. First we had to have the, uh, what is it you have to have, the inspection, you call it.

PHILLIPS: Quarantine?

LINDSAY: Quarantine. Yeah. (She laughs.) That was really something. They separated the men and the women--

PHILLIPS: Excuse me. Was this in Hamburg, or in Ellis Island?

LINDSAY: This was in the Baltic. Uh-huh. They separated, the men and boys

had to go one place and the women to the other. And, uh, okay, they had us undress and they took all our things and tied it on a sheet or bundle, whatever, and put it on a wooden paddle, and slid it into the fumigating oven. And when it came out guess what? The butter that mama had brought had melted all over. My little dress was so stiff I could hardly wear it. (She laughs.) But we made it. The biggest trouble for most people was really when we got Ellis Island because inspection was very, very strict there and many people were broken, families were broken up and had to come back, but we made it.

PHILLIPS: Could you tell us a little bit about, just one moment. I just want to move the microphone. Could you tell us about your actual, what you remember of your actual arrival at Ellis Island?

LINDSAY: At Ellis Island? I think, well, being down in third class steerage you can imagine the turmoil that would be down there because you had to, no, I'm not going to say about the smallpox vaccination. We came and had, the ship arrives, and we were about a mile, we'll say, out, when it stops, you know. Arriving in the evening, we had to wait until morning, you know, to come to Ellis Island. And is that what you had asked? And when the people marched into it, you came up sort of a, well, narrow lane. It was wire netting on the side and you come in into a big room and I remember large tables in the center with a lot of bread, bologna. That's what they call it, bologna, and cheeses, and the different things. And I remember papa having seventy cents left. And that was a very, a little bit of money, you know. But, and we still had about two hundred miles to go into the country that, to go to Kansas, and we had two stops, one at Chicago, and one at Kansas City, and he bought, with the seventy cents, he bought enough bread and a little bit of meat, to get us to Kansas. That's all we had. (She laughs.) But I was all right. I was, mama didn't fuss.

PHILLIPS: Tell me about the trip to Kansas.

LINDSAY: About the trip to Kansas? Oh, dear. What I remember about that, looking out. Now, it's getting the spring of the year and it was awfully windy. And, of course, we had thought of it being such a paradise, you know. All right. But you haven't been to Kansas. And in the spring of the year there's strong wind and there are thistles blowing, and sometimes dirt and everything. First we saw farmhouses, you know, cows and horses and the like, and that was nice. But the closer we came to Kansas, when here came the thistles blowing across and they would head right for the side of the train, and the train would run over them and we didn't see them being ground up, but you could imagine them being ground up under the wheels. And when we finally arrived Uncle Fritz was there to meet us, and that was wonderful. (She laughs.) It wasn't paradise exactly, but you were glad you had made it.

PHILLIPS: Tell me a little bit about your early life in Kansas.

LINDSAY: My early life in Kansas? Well, I remember school being the hardest. I loved school, but oh it was hard. Oh, I want to tell you about, all right. Here we were. Well, first I should say, when we came, when we arrived in Kansas, we had stayed in the town, first because this money Uncle Fritz had borrowed belonged to a man uptown, and he wanted papa to build, help build him a house. So first we stayed uptown and he helped build this house, and then we moved far out in the country, and we were going to talk about going to school, when we were sixteen miles out of town. And we went to a little town country, to a little country school. We didn't know one word of English. And we had an awful time learning.

PHILLIPS: When you say we, how many of you were there in your family?

LINDSAY: Well, there were my older, at first my older sister and I and then the next year another sister had been born in the meantime, so I'm speaking of two or three of us at this time. And I have to sort of explain this. Going to a country school, we had

to walk about two miles, and a country school was part of one of the farmer's pastures. He had given just the corner of his pasture for this schoolhouse. So there was a playground and to the back there were placed, there was a coal shed, for instance, and the restrooms, and to tie the horses, you know, children came, and horse and buggy were riding. All right. But I'm trying to explain what a time we had in learning it. All right. There was a farmer right in front of the door, and one to the side, and this was only a corner out of this farmer's pasture. All right. When we were outside playing on-- (Tape ends.)

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

PHILLIPS: I want to say that this is side two of our cassette, interview with Mrs. Lindsay, and it's Interview Number 417 [DP-43]. And you were telling me--

LINDSAY: Have you got another one in now?

PHILLIPS: Yes, I have.

LINDSAY: Oh, yeah. Well, I think you will like this one. Anyway, we were talking in German, naturally. We didn't know any better. And when we went back in the room, back to class, we didn't know beans. And this went on for a time. And you know papa being a teacher in the old country, and he was catching on, and he was on the school board. Now, of course, not knowing too much language, and he had to use his head mostly, you know. And he realized what was happening. Here we are playing, and talking German, and didn't learn. And so he made a ruling that when you were out on recess you talked English or you stayed in. And that was a terrible thing, we kids thought. But, you know, even kids can use their heads, and supposing we had a kid out there and he didn't know how to play "Last Couple Out," for instance, and you couldn't tell him in German how to do it, and

so, hey, we came up with this idea. If you pulled him under the wire into the pasture and told him in German, you weren't talking German on the playground. And we did. We'd pull him out there and say, "Now you do it this way or else." And bring him back, and, (she laughs) we got by with it, see. We weren't talking German on the playground. But learning was difficult. And later, several more years, and we moved up to a farm one mile out of town, and I went to town grade school, and there was the change of my life. We walked one mile into town, and when you got to the town you had the people, the poor people, living below the railroad tracks. They, these kids, became my friends. All right, there was the railroad track, and then the stores, and then came the houses and school was on the other, on the north end of town. And I always carried my lunch pail. It was a syrup bucket, you know. And I had maybe a boiled egg in or a pretzel, whatever. And coming home from school I would share this with these kids, these poor kids, below the track, and they were my friends. The others were too sophisticated. They thought I was nothing, you know. All right. Then came World War One. Well, we were called the dirty Russians.

PHILLIPS: By who? Who called you?

LINDSAY: By the school kids on the playground. We were the dirty Russians. And you know how that came. It wasn't that we were dirty people. But this being the farm country, you have to remember that somehow the Russian thistle, it was brought over by wheat, you know. They blamed it on us. And thistle was really something in Kansas. I tell you, we had a lot of them. So we were naturally called the dirty Russians because of the thistles. All right. But like I say, these kids were my friends. And then came World War One and all of a sudden we were called the German spies and the Huns. We were just nothing then. It was so terrible. Kids would spit on us, yank our hair and tear our clothes. And shall I tell you about how the teacher had us write a story? Okay.

And that changed my life. One day the teacher had us write a story. It was an assignment, and I didn't know how to write a story. I had an awful time to think, "What am I going to do?" And finally I remembered about our farmer neighbor out, sixteen miles out of town. He came to town by horse and buggy. One day he brought two five-gallon cans of cream and twenty-four dozen eggs. The horses were plodding along after z\sixteen miles of roadway. They had no idea that a locomotive was stalled behind the town grain elevator, and the train let out a shrill whistle, and went cha, cha. And the horses stood straight up in the harness, turned the wheel sharply, and ran away. The cream spilled. The eggs went bouncing down the street. Some broke all to pieces. Others only, the yolk with dirt, specks of dirt, remained. The people below the tracks came running out of their houses to see the excitement. They scooped up the eggs, and later we heard that Mrs. Brown, they lived up near the stockyards, had baked two cakes. I wrote that story. Every other word must have been misspelled. And the next day the teacher held up a paper and said, "Amelia's is the very best." They didn't, they called me Amelia instead of Mela. And wow, I couldn't believe it. And neither could my classmates. They all looked at me, a dumb Russian, and now I was the winner? That is what made me want to write. It was the only praise I had in school, and later maybe I'll tell you about my book. (She laughs.)
Oh, yeah. I'll never forget that day.

PHILLIPS: Tell me about work on the farm for a young girl.

LINDSAY: Oh, yes. Work on the farm. That was really something.

Like I said before, my father was a teacher in the old

country and when he came to America, not knowing the language and all, not being a farmer, really. And now he had all girls and only one boy. We had to work like men on the farm. And I, well, you may not want to believe it, but when I was thirteen years old, I could drive six horses. And you didn't have to be out there to show me. But we generally worked with four of them. The six only came usually in the harvest time. Okay, but I worked in the field like a man. I really did. You didn't have to be out there. When you have a section of land, you've got a lot of plowing to do, harrowing, and drilling wheat. And, uh, shall I tell you about the day the farmer came? Maybe I shouldn't tell.

PHILLIPS: I don't know what the story is.

LINDSAY: Well, that was when papa got his citizenship papers. No, but I could make a stack. I could make a pretty stack. They had to be perfect on stack here, whether it was alfalfa or wheat. And my goodness, when we had our wheat harvest, you know, we didn't have just one or two stacks. There would be thirteen and maybe nineteen stacks of wheat. And, uh, so--

PHILLIPS: So were there many other people from your part of the world out in Kansas? Many other people from Russia that you had a social life with?

LINDSAY: Yes. This is the way it was. For instance, here would be my city, my town, WaKeeney. And all the land to the south of it--

PHILLIPS: Can you spell WaKeeney for me?

LINDSAY: WaKeeney. WaKeeney was made up from two names, Walker and Keeney

Edwards. Two men that came from, when the railroad was being built long ago, two men came from Kansas City, Walker and Keeney and they named the town after them. W-A, capital K-E-E-N-E-Y. Okay. Now, what was I saying?

PHILLIPS: I was going to ask you the question did you socialize much with other people from Russia?

LINDSAY: Oh, yes, yes. What I was saying was, all right, so here was WaKeeney, and everything to the south within sixteen miles and more, those were our people, because when people came over from the old country they usually went where their relatives went. And so that farmland was taken out to the west of WaKeeney to the next town, Voda, there were the Bohemian people. To the north we had people from England and Scotland, and to the east there were the Hungarians and Swedes. So everyone settled among their own kind of people, don't you see, and then they had their churches and things out there, yes.

PHILLIPS: Did you socialize much? Did you have social occasions, dances, for instance?

LINDSAY: Well, yes. You asked me about dances, I'll never forget when I grew up as a young girl, we had moved away from our German people and no boy could come nine or twelve miles to pick you up by horse and buggy and take you to a dance. So I just had to dream about going to dances. But there were barn dances. It was beautiful. People would play their accordions and fiddles, you know. I would dream about that. I didn't get to go. (She laughs.)

PHILLIPS: So how long did you stay on this small farm?

LINDSAY: I, well, let me tell you how my life changed, otherwise I would not be here talking to you. Like I said, I was this farm girl, and worked so hard day and night, and on this one particular day I had, I was, all right, we had a landlord and he lived in Denver and he was coming to, every fall he would come to see how you were doing, and he had land in, they also had property in Kansas City. They would check in WaKeeney to see how the land was doing, and then they would go down to Kansas City and see that. So, all right, the day that they came, I didn't know they were coming, but I had hauled three loads of feed. And when I'm talking of a load I'm not talking just a wagon, I'm talking of a big hayrack. I went out and got a load of alfalfa. And if you have never pitched alfalfa you don't know how heavy that is. I went down and got that, brought it, and that had to be pitched up into the hayloft. And every now and then I'd have to go up in the hayloft and pitch it back so I could get more in. All right, I did that. Then the next load was a load of cane, and that grew six feet tall in Kansas, and it was cut in bundles. And I brought that home. We had built a little corral in our pasture, and there I would build a stack, and that was feed for our cows in the wintertime, and that way all we had to do was throw it over the little fence there, and so the cows could walk up to it, so it was just a square building inside, and I would throw it in there. And now that is terrific, because if you do not get this bundle straight, why then you lift it and you fall over because you haven't got the balance. You do it again. All right. I did that. And then I went out for a third load, and that was straw. Well now straw is real light, but not when Kansas wind blows. You can get a pitchfork full and the wind blows it off and you have to pick it up again and again. All right. And that, late that afternoon toward evening here came this car into our yard, and it was our landlord from Denver. And when that woman saw what I had been doing, she said, "Oh, my stars, I'm going to take you Denver with me and I'm going to get you a job at the country club, and your father, you can send the money home and your father can hire a man." Shall I quit? All right. Boy, that sounded

terrific to me, but it didn't work. My folks wouldn't think of sending a nice little girl like that far away. But the next year when they came I was a little smarter and they wanted to take me again and I bothered mama so much, I talked, mama said, "Leave me alone. Go to your father. Leave me alone." And, well, I was my father's hired man, you know, and I could break him down easier. The reason I'm talking about me doing all the work, you see, my sister Lydia did also, but mama, when mama needed help at home, she was always having more babies, you know. Lydia had to help at home, so Lydia worked hard too, and then she had to work at home, but I was always out. All right. So now the next year I was that much smarter, and I finally broke papa down and they let me come. And I came to Denver, and my life changed.

PHILLIPS: What happened?

LINDSAY: Well, (She laughs.) it was nice what happened to me but,
 you see, what papa had to do, he tried to keep on farming and
 he gave up after that, and they moved uptown, and he went not,
 could not be idle. Why, he started being a builder, you know. So
 he did work like that. But my life changed. Want me to go on?

PHILLIPS: Yes, please.

LINDSAY: Well, this lady, now, she had promised that she would keep track of
me, she would really. And now she, I didn't know that she had got cold feet, because she
had promised that she would let nothing happen to me in Denver. Now, I didn't know that
right from the beginning, but it was two weeks before she got me any work, and I wondered
about that. What happened was that country club, even though it wasn't too far, we were
southeast Denver. This is over there, where, and the country club is just a little further
down. That seemed awful far away, and how was she going to watch me. So they took me
around and showed me the city a little bit to entertain me. But finally when it came down

to where she had to do something, she said to me one day, "You know, there are some rich people just up the block here. Maybe they'll take you." That was the H.A. Marr wholesale grocery people. They sold, there was all these shopping centers went, you know. They sold groceries to the grocery store. And maybe she will take you. So she went to see, and the woman said, "Yes, I'll try her for two weeks, if I like her I'll keep her." Okay, well, they were wonderful people. They had three children. A girl fourteen, a boy ten and another one seven. And they lived, this is quite a long story. You want a long story? All right. Denver was just building up a lot of sections, you know. And these people lived at the end of a great vacant place and they had a pony for their horses and they had a washerwoman. They had a man that brought the feed for the horse, and all these things. And Mr. Marr had built in this vacant place across the road he built a tennis court and all that and they were terrific people. Now, behind the house, they lived at 800 South Gaylord, and across the alley there was another block of houses. And they had a flower garden. They had fruit trees in the garden. They had a man to make a garden and way down, about halfway down the block, they had the hammock and the swing where the children played and, of course, I was to take good care of the children, which I did. And across the alley, as I was down at the hammock one time, I looked across the alley and there I saw a young man and I couldn't see him very good. There was bushes and trees and the fence, of course. But he looked pretty nice to me and I kind of, (she laughs), see, I was eighteen years old. All right. He looked good to me, and then I caught on that he had a motor bike, and he would come up the alley and have to turn to go right by my kitchen window and I, when I'd hear that motor bike come, I would be ready to look out. Well, of course, that was not fast that he was going because he had just turned the corner of the alley there, but I got a better glimpse at him and I said, "That's for me, that's for me." But now do you want to hear all this? This is terrible. This is terrible. All right. You asked for it. Now, Marr's had three children, and they had this tennis court, and I was the Pied Piper. I could tell stories, and I loved kids. I would play with them and all these kids from across the alley, this boy that I liked, he had a brother that was about fifteen years old, and a sister twelve and one about nine. Those kids would come over and play, rode the

horse, and all these from the south came and down from the west. And everything else to the north was open land. Okay. We had a lot of, ride the horse and play ball, tell stories and all that. And this is what made it hard. That brother of Jim's, that younger brother, fifteen year old boy, that kid was crazy about me.

PHILLIPS: Was it the kid on the motorbike?

LINDSAY: Huh?

PHILLIPS: Which kid was this?

LINDSAY: That was the brother of the man that I will eventually marry.

PHILLIPS: But he's not the man on the motorbike.

LINDSAY: No. No, no. That's his, the brother. That was the older brother to this young kid that used to come over and play basketball and volleyball and all that. And I didn't know that he took such a fancy to me. To me he was just a kid because somebody that can make a haystack and drive six horses you think of grown people, you know. Well, anyway, all right. I'm telling a bad story. ut anyway, it went on and on, and I would watch for him, let me call him Jim. That was his name. And I would watch him to come by the window. And maybe I should tell one more thing. Let me tell you one more thing before I go on. When I really made up my mind that nobody else but he could be the one. When these people, the Bairds [PH], our boss, when they were still trying to entertain me, they would take me down. They would always talking about people coming to the mountains, and when you came to the mountains, you did not drive up with your car and just go any[place]. There was Overland Park down in the west part of Denver where you could put up your tent. There were trees under there, way back. And you could put up your tent,

and this you would make your trips back and forth. And one day when they were still trying to entertain me they said, "We're going to take you down and show you where people lived before they go visiting in the park, in the mountains. So as we went down there, there was a fence around it, it is now a gold course. And they had a little grandstand in there, and sometimes they would have little car racing, entertainment in the park part and whatever they were doing that day was just letting out and so traffic stopped. We were trying to get in, and traffic was coming out, and we had to stop. And guess what. The car coming out was the boy from across the alley. His brother was sitting with him on the other side, but I got down, I was in the back of the car and I got down so they wouldn't see me. And I took a good look at him, see, and I really, that's when I was cinched. I said, "That's for me." All right. And then all this other came on. And time went by. One year went by, two years went by. I'm getting into the third year, and still I had not had a word with him. Now, but when I used to be down at the swing, go down at the swing and look over there in the yard, I saw this man sitting out in the yard with a blanket around him, and that was his father. You see, they had come out because his father was sick, had tuberculosis. And I, and he died, in that third year he died. And Mrs. Marr had me cook a ham, and I baked a cake or whatever it was, and I was to take it over to the family. I had not met his mother yet, the mother. I knew the kids real well, I did. And now, of course, she knew me. And after the sorrow was over with, and on a Sunday afternoon, Jim, the older one, would take his family to a show they used to have, picture shows in the afternoon in Denver here over in Colfax, down on Broadway. And then they asked me to go along. And I would sit in the back seat with the women and the girls. Jim and Franklin would sit up in front, and when we got to the show the brother would step aside and let Franklin sit besides me and I learned later why that happened. This kid was so crazy about me that in his sleep at night he would say, "Melie." He called me by name. His brother never interfered. You know, he thought, "It's not for me." Okay. And he would step aside and let his brother sit besides me and mind you, now, after three years I was getting so desperate how was I going to get that man? And I thought, and I was figuring and figuring and figuring, and I figured this way. I said, "I've got to quit. I've got to go home to

Kansas and I'm going to have to make him write to me." It took a lot of thinking, and I thought, every night I couldn't sleep. I thought and thought and thought, but that is the way it had to be. There was not other way. And so I said to Mrs\ . Marr, I said, "In two weeks I'm going to quit, and I'm going to go back to Kansas." "Oh, no, Melie, don't. No, no, no." And I said, "Yes. I've got to." She didn't know why, but I've got to. Next time I went downtown I bought a trunk and had it shipped home. And when I told her, she said, "Oh, child. That's stupid. What do you want with a trunk?" Well, a girl had to have a hope chest, didn't I? I had to have a hope chest, because if I was going to get married I'd have to have quilts and pillowcases and all that. You didn't get married without that. All right . So I did. I went home, but this is where the turning point came in. I still didn't know whether it was going to work or not. But when the day came that I was to take the train, there was no buses in those days, and Jim happened to have the day off. He must have been planning to. And he took me down to the depot. All right. There was his brother, his two sisters, and my suitcase and all that. And when we got down to the depot, there were all these kids. Oh, I didn't tell you that. I had so many kids that, from, they would come from the blocks all around, and we would tell all these stories. I just want to tell one more thing here. And there was the Methodist Church over near South High School that had a picture show on Friday nights in the basement of then church, and usually just comedies and things like that. And I would take the Marr children over there, and all this gang of kids would go with me. Like I said, I was the Pied Piper. And when we went in, we would fill up almost one side of that space, church basement. Okay. And we got down to the train, there were many of those kids down at the depot. And they were halfway crying. "Oh, Melie, don't go. Don't go. We'll miss you so." And I said, "Well, you write." And it happened to be right close to Jim, and I looked up at him, and I said, "You write, too." And he said he would. I went home and oh, about eight days later I had a letter. It was no more than hello and goodbyes, so to speak. But aah. Papa had given up farming, like I said, and now they lived uptown and I would, now you won't like this part of the story, but then this is the way it was. They lived uptown just on the edge of town, in fact, down there, close, where those poor people are, where I walked

by really when I was younger and going to school. And they didn't have a bathroom but they had this outdoor toilet, and I would take my letter and I would go out there and I'd watch the moon rise through the trees. That was my escape place, you know, I'd sit out there and I'd watch the moon rise and I would dream. That was just wonderful. And, uh, the letters got better and better and guess what? Pretty soon there came an engagement ring. I hadn't even spoken to the man yet, and here I had this ring. And I said, "I can't be engaged just this way." And so I did some more thinking and you know what I did? I sent it back to him. I said, "I want to be engaged in person." And I knew exactly where I wanted to be engaged. I don't know, poor kid, that must have killed him, but anyway, and I knew exactly because I'll tell you, out on the farm, okay, this is where I used to cut the alfalfa field, and that is hard, hard work. And every time, all right, the house is up there, and we'd drive down there and here I'd be cutting this, and had to drag, you know, where you brought it together and pitched it up on the stack. And mama would bring, in the morning at ten and also in the afternoon at four, she would bring lemonade and donuts or something for a rest. And I would be so tired that I could hardly enjoy that. But what I want to tell you about, I knew where I was going to be engaged. All right. (Tape ends.)

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

PHILLIPS: This is tape number two with Mela Meisner Lindsay. It's Interview Number 417 [DP-43], and as I said this is tape number two, and we're just continuing.

LINDSAY: Well, like I said, I knew exactly where I wanted to be engaged. I remembered that place from across the field when I used to work in the alfalfa field. There were trees over there, and it always looked so cool. I never got up over there, but it always seemed like they were, nymphs dancing around there. And this is where I wanted

to be engaged. So I had this in mind, and okay, when, he told me when he was coming, of course I put an awful job on him because, you see, he had to earn some more money to get his train fare and all that, and he had to have time off to come. But anyway, when he said he was coming on a certain day, I had fried some chicken, baked a cake, and then I said, "Hey, I ought to have some ice cream." And I went down to the bakery. That was the only place you could buy ice cream, and in those days you didn't have packages like you buy it now. You had to get a whole, uh, freezer-full, you know. So I went to the bakery man and asked if I could have some ice cream, and he said, "Well, I've got five gallons of it, and you'' have to take it all." I said, "Okay, I'll take it." And he took the handle off of it and put ice over the top and now I needed a car because Jim was coming on the train and I had gone down to, well, now, here we're thinking about the elevator again. There was a German old, old German grandpa lived down there, and I asked him if I could borrow his car and he said, "Oh, yeah." And I had a car, I had all the food and the ice cream. And so we went on out to this beautiful place and I'll tell you what. It was wonderful. I got engaged, and the family had ice cream for two, for a whole week. (She laughs.) We never even touched the ice cream. Okay. Now what else do you want to know? (She laughs.) And I got married. Not right away, but I got married, went to Denver, a wonderful man. He later became a Denver police sergeant and--

PHILLIPS: Well, perhaps you could tell me a little bit about your,
what developed your interest in writing and expressing some
of your experiences in books and in articles.

LINDSAY: In writing? Oh, excuse me, I'm making noise here. Well,
like I--

PHILLIPS: Let me ask you a more specific question. Well, it's one
question that perhaps, before you get onto that one, might
tie into that, you could tell me about your experiences during the

Depression.

LINDSAY: During the Depression? Oh, that was hard. That was really hard. You shouldn't have asked me that, I guess, because, you know, I said we came to this house in 1927 when we were married and then the Depression came on and we nearly lost it. And, uh, well, there again, God was with us. I remember we were so poor. Jim had lost his job. This was before he was a policeman. He was still working for Tom Botterill [PH], it was a Hudson, a Hudson Essex agency down in Denver.

PHILLIPS: It's Hudson Essex?

LINDSAY: Hudson Essex. Did I say it right?

PHILLIPS: That's all right. I was just clarifying it, that's all.

LINDSAY: Yes. Hudson Essex.

PHILLIPS: Which is a car dealership, is that right?

LINDSAY: Huh?

PHILLIPS: Was that a car dealership?

LINDSAY: Yes, it was. They were down on Broadway just close to the capital there and a wonderful place. Jim had work there. This was before he was a policeman. And during the Depression years, okay, uh, some had, some men, knowing that Jim's father was sick, had gone to Botterill [PH] and ask if they could train this young boy to be a mechanic and they had, and he had got wonderful training down there at Tom Botterill's [PH]. All right. Now, just before the Depression began, why, there were two young men in

the front office that wanted to start an agency of their own and they got a place on Santa Fe and now they needed a man to run their, be a mechanic, you know. And they took Jim and the Depression came on, and it got so bad that they went broke. These two men went broke. And that put Jim out of work. And that made it very bad for us, because we were buying this place here and we couldn't make the payments and I remember that I used to feed my children radish sandwiches. Bread was five cents a loaf and when it went to eight cents you thought you couldn't afford it. And it went, from there we almost lost the place. But somehow we hung on. I know one day he came walking home. He didn't want to spend ten cents for the streetcar fare from downtown, and he said, "Look, I've got to do something. I've either got to study for the police department or the fire department." And we decided on the police department. He got a rule book and we sat there in the room studying, both of us. I could have made the grade too. But, I'd be weary and tired. I'd sit there with my eyes shut while he was reciting and he'd say, "You're not listening." And I said, "Yes, I am. You make a mistake and I'll know it." And he made the grade, and he got on the police department, and life changed for us. He was a terrific man. He was a sergeant.

PHILLIPS: So tell me a little bit about, now, you writing career, when that interest.

LINDSAY: My writing?

PHILLIPS: Yeah. How that happened.

LINDSAY: Yes. Well, I think I mentioned it before, that I got the idea when I, when the teacher held up that paper and said mine was the very best, that some day I would tell the world that we are good people. But now when you write a story you do not tell it with anger in your mind. You tell it as it is, and you leave it for the reader to decide whose side they want to be on. I did not put any hatred in it. I wrote it like it is, and I started to write my book, The White Lamb. I'll have to tell you a little bit

about the title. It was a, you know, in Russia there used to be dancers, the gypsies would come to the village and they'd always have their music out on the road, on the street, so to speak. And all the time they were making all this beautiful music and draw the people out, why, the kids would go and rob you blind, you know. But anyway, I got the idea about this gypsy fiddler playing the music and mama being out there listening to it, and I wrote the story of my mother before she was married. And I got my title from the Shukar Balan [PH], the white lamb. Shukar Balan [PH] means white lamb in the gypsy language. And I started to write my book and I worked on it for forty years. And it was pretty hard to do on sixth grade education, but I got the beginning and then I started writing stories for Sunday school papers and other avocations, but always came back to my, to my book. And, uh, what else did you want me to say here?

PHILLIPS: It took you forty years to write it?

LINDSAY: Yes. (She laughs.) Shall I tell you how I struggled? I used to lie awake at nights and I'd say to God, "God, I can't do it. I can't do it. You have to help me." And God did. He let me struggle. I would think up a chapter, rewrite it in my mind, and then I'd learn it by heart because I knew I wouldn't have time to get it down on paper in the morning. I'd get up and get my husband off to work, the kids off to school. Maybe I would do the wash, or hoe the garden. And by eleven o'clock I'd finally get it down on paper, by eleven o'clock. And then every time I started on it again, if it didn't suit me I would rewrite it three times, four times, seven times, whatever. And when it suited me, that's the way God wanted it. So it really has, it's gone all over. It's in the seventh printing now. I just get letters from everywhere. Like I said before I, I get letters from all over the United States. Perhaps not from Maryland and whatever. But from Canada; Juneau, Alaska; and from, well, South america; Germany; Bombay; India; the Philippines. It's wonderful. I used to buy a thousand stamps a year just to answer my fan mail. It's terrific. (She laughs.)

PHILLIPS: Okay. Now, is there anything else? I mean , I'm sure there's other things you'd like to talk about, but anything else in the context of, that you think might interest us at Ellis Island that you feel you would like to say, talk about?

LINDSAY: Well, I don't know. If there wasn't an Ellis Island I wouldn't be here. I think it was, it must be a terrific place. They had, maybe I could tell you about how at WaKeeney, Kansas, one time a man came, let's see, what was his name, Professor Bolino [PH], the vice-president of research, came to Wakeeney one time and we had such a terrific time. All the stores were closed and everybody came from the country around and they had marches and everything and oh, what a day. And they had seats out in the middle of the street for us to sit on. My sister Lydia and Ophelia were there and it was terrific. I got quite a write-up about it.

PHILLIPS: That was honoring you.

LINDSAY: Yes, and my sisters, and other people. But, uh, they tried to get the torch at that time. The reason this got so big and was so blown out, WaKeeney was trying to get the torch when they took the torch off of the statue and they were going to make a big tower. And, you see, WaKeeney is on the east and west road and north and south it would have been an ideal place, they thought, to have the torch out there, lighted up, you know, just outside of town. But, uh, Ellis Island decided it was best to keep the old torch there. So we didn't get it, and this is why they had all this ado at WaKeeney. (A telephone rings in the background.) (Break in tape.)

PHILLIPS: Okay. It's now 2:45 and this will bring to a close Interview Number 417 [DP-43]. This is the end of tape number two, one of two tapes, interview with

Mela Meisner Lindsay.