DP-55
MARY SLOBOJIAN NERSTAD
BIRTH DATE: 1917
INTERVIEW DATE: NOVEMBER 13, 1989
RUNNING TIME: 50:00
INTERVIEWER: NANCY DALLETT
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THE UKRAINE (BORN U.S.), 1926
AGE 8
SHIP NAME NOT RECALLED

DALLETT: My name is Nancy Dallett and I'm speaking with Mary Nerstad. Do I pronounce that correctly?

NERSTAD: Nerstad.

DALLETT: Nerstad. On Monday, November 13, 1989, and we're beginning this interview at 2:15 in the afternoon. We're in Mrs. Nerstad's home in Tempe, Arizona and we're going to be talking about her immigration experience through Ellis Island from the Ukraine in 1926 when she was eight years old. This is the beginning of Interview Number 429, [SIC, DP-55]. Okay. Let's start back at the beginning of your story, if we could, and

could you tell me where and when you were born?

NERSTAD: I was born in East St. Louis, Illinois in 1917. I was the second of five children. I was the only one of the five born there. My parents first came to Philadelphia as teenagers, married. I don't know if your interested in what my parents did.

DALLETT: Yes. Tell me.

NERSTAD: My dad worked in a button factory because he didn't have the money to start his own shoe making and boot making and shoe repair shop. That's what he had learned to do in Europe. And my mother became a domestic. She lived in a Jewish family's home, who were very good to her. She was with them about four years, and she learned to speak some English. She learned her way around. And my mother came to this country with my father's sister. She was very young. They were only sixteen or seventeen years old. So anyway they knew each other and they settled among other Ukrainian people in Philadelphia. They stayed here maybe three years, and three or four years after they were married, and then they went to East St. Louis because my father's cousin offered him a job on the railroad as a maintenance man on the railroad, which would have been much better pay than being a button factory worker, plus it was affecting his health. He wasn't that healthy from being inside that button factory. Well, it was great, they loved it there, and I was born there in the middle of winter. And then the flu came along and people were dying left and right. And they caught

the flu but survived it, and decided to come back to Philadelphia where my father had a sister and they had other friends. And then he was able to get a shoe repair shop. And they stayed there and had two more children, that made four. Then they got word from my mother's family that oh, they needed help on the farm and couldn't they come back, and oh, they missed them so much. So they thought it over, and my father was swayed to go back. My mother wasn't that anxious, but they went back and, with the four children. And having lived in America for almost ten years it was quite a shock to my mother, you know, to come back to that very rural living. Plus there was some animosity towards these rich Americans that came back. They were no longer one of the, you know, one of the villagers there. My mother was very unhappy and she just, within a year she kept asking my dad to please go back to America by yourself, earn some money, send us passage and bring us back. And my mother was pregnant with the fifth child. My father said, "Oh, I can't leave you, you're having, you're going to have another child." She said, "Don't worry about that. I'll make out. You just go." So he took my older brother. My older brother, he was two years older than I, and they came back and lived with my aunt, the one that originally came with my mother. And in two years time he save enough money to send us the passage. So I remember that part very well, and I remember a little bit about being in the village. I don't know if you're interested in that many details, but to me they're fascinating. I can remember the little thatched roofs, I can remember the Christmas celebration, which was the twelve, you know, Christmas in Europe was celebrated with a twelve course meal and the excitement of getting ready for that. That stayed with me as a child and I

remember walking to school in the snow in my boots to the next village, which I have no idea how long it took, but it seemed long to a child and I remember the corn husking they did in a group with lots of singing and so forth. I remember being taken by my mother. I was the oldest one there, to a wedding in another village, and we stayed overnight. And that was very exciting, all that polka music and dancing and all the good food. That was very memorable for me. And then I remember the day before we were to leave for America, and the relatives all crying. And then they had a party that night, and there was more dancing and wishing us well. And I remember being allowed to sit there at eight and see all that excitement. That was the last memory I had. Then the next thing I remember is the traveling in a wagon with the whole family to Warsaw where the, where we'd make the connections to go by train to Liverpool, England. And one thing that impressed me immediately was seeing the telegraph poles, and those little blue things on the top and we'd never seen anything like that in the village, you know, that was really rural. Then I remember in, the train rides and having to switch trains in the middle of the night, you know, and being awakened, and my mother with the baby. My youngest brother was only, he was oh, a little over a year. And it just seemed forever, you know. Finally we got to Liverpool, England. I remember boarding the ship and being very frightened. And getting in lines all the time for passport checks and examination of the heads and things and so forth, which you have to go through when you're coming from another country. And--

DALLETT: Were your parents, excuse me, were your parents citizens

by that time?

NERSTAD: Pardon?

DALLETT: Were your parents citizens of this country when they came back?

NERSTAD: Oh, uh, no, they became citizens after we arrived because the children were citizens, because we were born, four of us were citizens. But the baby was born over there, and I very distinctly remember my mother and father studying for the citizenship, you know. I still have the book they studied from. I'm a very sentimental person. I save things like that. And I remember my mother going through the questions and so forth, and the day that she went to have her, uh, you know, citizenship authorized she looked so lovely, she had her hair done the first time in all those years, and she got a new dress, and they both became citizens. I don't remember exactly how old I was. I think junior high age. And they became citizens. It was a very proud moment, and they were very, very patriotic. That was instilled in us ho wonderful it was to be an American. We had no idea, they said, and it's true. As we grew up we had no idea till we began reading about, hearing about what was going

on in other countries. As a child you don't even think about that. And one more thing, before we got on board ship, we were waiting to get on, and a lady approached my mother with a teenaged daughter. And she saw that my mother had four children with her and she said to here, "Would you be kind enough to let my daughter travel with you for safety?" And it was such a blessing to my mother because here was this teenage girl who could help with the baby, and we really enjoyed having her. She brought with her a wicker basket full of Jewish rye bread, Jewish cakes, bagels, all those good things that her mother had baked for her to take along the journey. So it turned out to be a mutual help. And, uh, I wish we had contacted her after she left, but my mother was too busy for that. Then on board ship I remember tasting corn flakes and red jello for the first time. You can imagine when you've had nothing but muselix and things like that. They call it muselix today, very plain food. But we had never had anything like corn flakes of jello, and I remember that very distinctly. And also our first balloons. Excuse me. The day before we landed we all got balloons. And I remember being on deck with my sister and holding onto the balloon and looking at the water and watching for fish. And then suddenly the balloon left and it was just such a shock. But it was a

thrill, you know, to, for the first time that you have a little thing like that. Today it's nothing, but to us it was big. Then the journey was rather long, and we loved going down to the playroom, because we had never had toys at home, and they had a wonderful toy room with all kinds of things to do. And this anonymous little friend, a teenager, would take us down and bring us back to the room, and she was in our stateroom, even. Then the next thing I remember is we were approaching and everybody on board was so excited. That's what they were talking about. And everybody was up on deck. And it was very foggy and they were looking and looking. And I thought, "What are they looking for?" And, of course, it was the Statue of Liberty. And then when it was finally spotted everybody was real excited, couldn't wait to get off. Well, when we got to Ellis Island everybody was getting ready to leave, and people were meeting them. My father wasn't there, and it was quite a shock because we thought he would be there waiting like everybody else's relatives. Oh, and one more thing, I want to backtrack a little, that I remember about Ellis Island, is that we had to have communal bathing and our heads were washed with things to prevent lice, you know. Not coming off the ship, I mean, out of Ellis Island with lice in our heads. (She laughs.) I remember that so distinctly,

because that was something strange. Not that we didn't have lice, and hear about them, but it wasn't done that way. Now, let's see. We waited for my father, and that night we all slept on cots in this huge, huge room. And just everywhere you looked there were people, you know. And I guess we weren't the only ones that had to wait. Well, I think the next day my father showed up, and he had the wrong date on his card for when the ship would be coming in, I guess. And the next memory I had, that I don't remember greeting my father. He was a total stranger, you know. But we got into a cab, I believe, and it was such a thrill to see the fruit stands. Now, we had never seen anything like that anywhere, all the oranges and apples, you know how the outdoor fruit stands. And the shoes in the shoe store. You know, just looking in and shop after shop of all these clothes. I, that just never left me. It was just such an exciting thing to see all this. So then we got on a train and came to Philadelphia and I remember meeting my aunt, the same aunt that had come over with my mother, and she had one son, and our brother was living there. And, of course, they looked at us. We were strangers. And that night we all slept on the floor, wherever we could find room and I don't know how many, maybe a couple of nights we did that. And then my dad had a place for us to go

to, a house that he was renting. And, um, I know that we had to go to school, and somebody took us to a school that was pretty far away, and we had to walk. And we didn't stay in that neighborhood very long. Maybe less than a year. And we moved to a new neighborhood, a different neighborhood, where we lived for three years, Uber Street in Philadelphia. And I had happy memories of school. I just loved school. The teacher was so kind, and I remember being asked yo sit up front, you know, and it was so that I would be able to catch everything. The teacher made a special effort toward me because I was different. But I loved the school there, and I was there till third grade. And I remember bringing home little papers with 100 or 10 on them, the spelling words, and how pleased my parents were. And I was pleased because, you know, I just felt so accepted there. Then we moved to Germantown, Philadelphia. My dad got a nicer home, that was a very small home, and it was in a, in just a very poor neighborhood, but we belonged there. We were very poor, too. Came to Germantown, and that was the first time I experienced prejudice. We were foreign, we had a foreign name, uh--

DALLETT: What was your name?

NERSTAD: Slobojian, Slobojian. And in the neighborhood, some children were, they called us "Pollack." I don't know if you want to put that in the tape or not. But we weren't Polish, but they knew we were foreigners. And, uh, still, school was just a lovely place as far as we were concerned. The teachers were so good. And I secretly kind of made up my mind someday I would love to be a teacher. I want to backtrack one more time to Europe. When I was going to school there, the teacher, we had to learn Polish first, and then Ukrainian. Our own language, we could not learn to read and write till we learned Polish. And the teacher was lovely. But I, the thing that I remembered about her was that at lunch time when we had our little bread, it wasn't sandwiches, bread, she had white bread and we all had the black, Russian bread. And I thought, "Oh, someday I'd like to have white bread." (She laughs.) Well, anyway, teachers were a big thing in my life. They were very encouraging.

DALLETT: Let me ask you this. When you were a child in East St. Louis, what language did you speak as a young child?

NERSTAD: Well, I'm sure it was Ukrainian. You know, I was very young. I was only, uh, let's see. I was young when we left East St. Louis. I was only two years old and I had had two major illnesses. I was a very quiet child because of that, sickly. But I'm sure that they spoke mostly Ukrainian, because my parents were not fluent at English. But my dad tried very hard to learn English because of having his shop. He had a shoe repairing shop, and he had to converse with people, and they made an effort.

But I don't remember knowing any English when we went back to Europe. Of course, I don't remember that far back. I was just very young.

DALLETT; How about when you came through Ellis Island the, if, did someone help to translate?

NERSTAD: For my mother?

DALLETT: Yes.

NERSTAD: There was always someone there, because she knew very little English then. You know, you, I guess she knew some, because she had lived with these people who always spoke English before she got married. But I know people came and helped her a lot when we were in lines for different things, they'd see the four children. Lots of people came and would help her. And there were people who would translate.

DALLETT: Do you know if she came through Ellis Island the first time she came to this country? Had she come through once before?

NERSTAD: Oh, just when she came through as a teenager. Now, her father had gone to America, she told me, just before she died we got to talking, that her father had come several times to America thinking he was going to make a living here and bring the family, and he would always come

back broke. He just, he was kind of out here to have a good time more than to think about staying and bringing his family in. But he spoke so highly of America that, you now, he called the streets were paved with gold. It was just wonderful. And so she was very anxious to come, as was my father. There wasn't much to look forward to in your life except farming. And he did. He learned a trade. He could really make boots. He made beautiful boots, and he made orthopedic shoes for people when we lived in Germantown. During the Depression people didn't have money to fix shoes. He had a lot of time on his hands, and it just seemed God's will that these people came and said, "Oh, can you make shoes?" Oh, yeah. "Can you make a pair of boots?" And he did, and they were always so thrilled at his workmanship. He was really a craftsman. And he got to be, he always read the paper in English, and then he would read his Ukrainian paper later. But that helped his language. And my father was a very outgoing person and very, he would converse with people easily. He didn't just do his work and, "Hello, goodbye, yes." You know, he loved talking, he loved people.

DALLETT: I'm curious again, about that Ellis Island experience. You have an interesting situation because the children, four of the children coming through are American citizens, you were born here. Um, your mother is not, but I assume she came through some sort of quota system, or--

NERSTAD: You know, Nancy, now that you ask me, maybe my father had been a citizen. Maybe he had become a citizen when he first came here. I never really knew that. But I know that my mother had to become a citizen

for Steve, the youngest son, to be an American citizen too.

DALLETT: And do you know why it is, was it simply, the reason you stayed overnight at Ellis Island, was it just because your father hadn't come the first day you were there, or was there any reason to, other reason to detain you overnight?

NERSTAD: No, he just didn't, he didn't show up. (She laughs.) And I remember my mother being very upset because, you know, you're expecting to get off the ship, get off the island, and there's nobody to meet you. And they didn't have telephones that she could call, you know, and had they had telephones, she probably couldn't reach him because my aunt had no telephone. So it was kind of a frightening experience for a day, oh, I don't think it was longer than a day, but I remember she was upset, and that we had to stay over.

DALLETT: Anything else you can remember about that experience at Ellis Island?

NERSTAD: Of Ellis Island? Again, they had a playroom and they took care of the children. They just didn't leave you there. They knew that children had to be occupied, and there was a place where we went to play. And I remember when we finally got off we each got a toy, and I got my one and only doll that I ever owned, and it was a, like a linoleum material. It wasn't even a doll that did anything, but I was so thrilled to

have it, you know. And I remember getting that as I was going off, as I was leaving, you know. That was an exciting thing to have, your own doll. Uh, now, let's see. We're up to the school, and, oh, because I was eight years old, and everybody else was six, in first grade, I had to remain in the first two and a half grades. In those days they had 2-A, 1-A, 1-B, half terms, so you could start in January and you, you know. Which was good, because I was able to go to summer school. After, after 3-A, and we were living in Germantown, and we went to a school that was in the neighborhood, within walking distance, I was able to go to summer school four summers, and each summer I caught up a half year, so that when I got finished in junior high I was with my own peers. At the same time it was, it was a little upsetting because I was always having to make new friends in school. I was never in my own class moving up like everybody else was.

DALLETT: Tell me about the neighborhood, if you remember it.

NERSTAD: Oh, yes. The neighborhood, I wrote down here a little note that in out day of growing up, the neighborhood was almost like an extended family. Every body knew everyone, and the children played right in the street. We played tennis, we learned to play tennis in the street, the boys played baseball and football in the street. Uh, you just knew your own immediate neighbors, and although some neighbors were mean and called us "greenhorns", you know, and made fun of us, later on we all became friends. I remember that dissolved, you know, we just became friends, and we were accepted. And, uh--

DALLETT: Was it largely and immigrant neighborhood?

NERSTAD: No. We were the only ones that were immigrants. I think that's why the children, the parents never mad fun of us, but the children made fun of us because we couldn't speak English fluently, see. Gradually we did, but, and my father and mother spoke with an accent, so maybe they thought that was strange, but there was not a single other foreigner in the neighborhood. And, you know, that made it a little hard for us in school also, because today there are so many foreign names in, on the school roster and so forth, but in those days it was not like that until I got to junior high there were a few more. And in high school, I went to a Germantown high school, which was a neighborhood. Gillespie Junior High was in a, more of an ethnic type neighborhood, but Germantown High was pure white and, you know, Americanized, American names. And I was always conscious of my name. I was always bashful because of that, very shy. And in junior high my cousin, who had the same name, was kind of mischievous in school. And the teachers would say, "Oh, are you the sister of Walter?" And I always dreaded that question. I said, "No." I wouldn't tell them he was my cousin, because I didn't

want the reputation he did. You know, we were a different family. In my family kids weren't allowed to be misbehaving in school. We just never did that. But, anyway, that was one thing that I think affected my personality, the foreign name. It also made me very considerate of others who have a difficult to pronounce name and so forth. And when I resolved to become a teacher, I worked very hard, we all did. We all wanted to make something of ourselves because my mother always said, "Education is important. You don't want to be like I was. I had to work so hard." When she, when we were growing up and the Depression days were on us, they never, my parents never took a penny of welfare. My mother went at night to clean office buildings. My dad's work was very slow. People couldn't afford to get their shoes fixed. So my mother, for ten years, that made a big impressions on all of us. And I was like a little mother. When she went to work I had to take her place and mind the children, and I did ironing and I made lunches and we had a very happy family life even though we were poor. But I was always thinking, "I don't want to have to work as hard as my mother." And so I, I did well enough in high school to be accepted in the Philadelphia Normal School for teachers. And that was for three years that I went, worked really hard. At the

end of three years the Philadelphia Normal School closed. And those who could afford it went to Temple. We were transferred to Temple to finish. I had just six months in Temple University. And, of course, I was a teacher, but there was an abundance of teachers and a shortage of jobs, so I couldn't get a job. So I went at night and learned to do shorthand and typing and worked for the Lippincott Publishing Company for about a year. Then I worked, then the war broke out. I met my husband. I worked at the navy yard after he, after we were married for about a year. Then I worked in a brass and copper company because you had to work for a defense industry in those days. So I remained with the J.H. Jolley Copper Company until the war was over. And, uh, during the war my brother was in the Navy, my husband was in the statistical section of the Air Force. His brother was in the Air Force. My sister was a nurse. And so I was writing letters all the time during the war years. They all came back except my brother's, my, uh, husband's brother. My family came back after the war and I don't know how much of this you want to know, but there was shortage of housing. My parents had been saving the money that, I had moved home, so I was living home and paying board, and my sister's allotment checks and my brother's allotment checks, part of those were being

saved for them. But my parents also saved up and bought a house that had three floors, and the servicemen all came back and worked on renovating this three-story house into apartments. So we had a place to live as young couples, married couples.

DALLETT: Actually, I think I'm going to flip the tape over now.

NERSTAD: All right.

DALLETT: That's the end of side one of Interview Number 429,[SIC, DP-55].

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

DALLETT: This is the beginning of side two of Interview Number 429, [SIC, DP-55], with Mary Nerstad. Okay. You were talking about after the war your family was renovating this house.

NERSTAD: Right. And we, my sister lived on the second floor and my parents lived on the bottom floor, and my husband and I were on the top floor. It's a nice, old Victorian home that we renovated and it was a very nice

place to stay for, I guess we were there about two years. Well, I didn't become a teacher yet, and I did have a family, and I was twenty-eight. And I just thought I was never going to have a family because I had had a miscarriage. But God was good to us. We had three children and we moved out to the suburbs. John was from the country, and he loved the country, and I always did too, so we moved to Hatboro, Pennsylvania. And there we were raising our three children. And I was home with the children for ten years. And then I heard that there was an extreme shortage of teachers. My sister told me that in Germantown. And, so she said, "You should see the teachers that we have." She said, "You ought to apply. They're, you know, they're ready to retire, and they're just being hired." So I thought, well, now, this might be my time to come in, so I applied in Philadelphia to substitute, and finished out a two month stretch and just, I did very well. I mean, having been away from it all that time, I did well, I enjoyed it, it was third grade. And they wanted me to stay as a permanent teacher, but it was too far to travel. So I applied in the Hatboro district where we lived, and the principal said, well, "Will you take first grade?" I said, "Well, I would be afraid of first grade. I just had third grade, and I really don't think first grade would be for

me because it would be too difficult." He said, "Look, you're a mother of three children. You'll be fine." So he hired me and I loved first grade and I taught first grade for about fourteen years. And it was a neighborhood school. We could walk to it. It was just a wonderful little school, Round Meadow. Then I was asked to take a different job running a learning center and that turned out to be a very rewarding experience because I worked with children who were gifted as well as those who were having problems. And I always had a compassion for children who were struggling for one reason or another. And so, uh, I enjoyed that job and I wish I had time to tell you what I did to make those that were not accepted be accepted in the learning center. But a learning center can be a wonderful place, not just for, like the children used to think it was for dummies, but it was also for children who were gifted. So what I did, just briefly, put the two together, I had the gifted work with the slow learners. So when they came to the learning center, nobody knew why you were coming there. And anyway that was a wonderful thing, and I'm sorry that they don't have the funds for that any more. But at that time the schools had money for that. Then our daughter had moved to, uh, oh, our daughter got married. I'm ahead of myself, nineteen years. I taught for nineteen

years in the same school district. In the meantime, our children had grown up and our daughter, who was nineteen, got married to a young man from A.S.U. That's how we ended up in Arizona. So they were living here. They came to visit us in Pennsylvania for about a year, and they had a youngster. And then he came back to Arizona and our little grandson, the first one kept telling us on the telephone that we should come because they were making pancakes for breakfast. So we missed them a lot and they missed us. So they said, "Why don't you move to Arizona? You can get jobs in Arizona." So the other two children had gone to college and had, one was in Chicago, one was in Arizona. So we came to Arizona. The first year we could not find jobs. My husband was an auditor and I was a teacher and we couldn't find jobs doing that, but we found a job for the summer working at the Grand Canyon. So for three summers we worked at the Grand Canyon, the North Rim. Beautiful job, loved it. And then I did get appointed to teach, and I taught first grade for six more years, and it was a Christian school. And then we retired in '83. We were both sixty-five, so we retired. And not liking the hot summers here we visited my sister in Washington. So we got to Washington for part of the year. When it's hot here we go up there and enjoy it, in a little town called Squim, Washington.

Did you ever hear of it?

DALLETT: No. Uh-uh.

NERSTAD: It's near Port Angeles, if you've ever heard of Port Angeles.

DALLETT: Yes, I've been there.

NERSTAD: So that kind of wraps up.

DALLETT: I'm interested in, did your children know your mother?

NERSTAD: Did, our children know my mother?

DALLETT: Yeah. Was she still alive--

NERSTAD: Oh, oh, yes. Oh, my mother just died a year ago. Oh, I've skipped a very important part.

DALLETT: Well, I'm interested in that whole process of--

NERSTAD: How they related?

DALLETT: You said she never really learned English that well, and

she was very much Ukrainian and you were born here and your children were born here. I'm interested in that inter-generational process--

NERSTAD: Oh, that was, it was a wonderful relationship. When I, to begin with we always, we felt very close to my parents. My husband, too. When I decided to go back to teach, our youngest daughter was about two and a half or three, and I needed someone to stay with the children. We had lovely neighbors that we could take them to, but she was so little, and my mother lived in Germantown where we had renovated the three story house, and my dad was living there, and he had retired. So I asked her if she could possibly come and stay with us in Hatboro during the week and then go home weekends, so that's, excuse me, that's what we did. For a whole year, my dear mother came. She was so anxious for me to be a teacher, because she knew I was so frustrated, having wanted that all my life, and things just prevented it all the time. The war, the Depression, this and that. And so she came. We would pick her up, the whole family would go, we'd pick her up in German town in our car and bring her up on Sunday night and she would stay the five days of school, and then we'd take her home Friday night. And it was a fun time. The children enjoyed my mother, and she dearly loved children, she enjoyed the grandchildren. So the children did know my mother very well. Then my dad got sick, so she couldn't continue to do that. So we would take the youngest one, Nancy, down to the neighbors a few doors down, and they had children her own age, one year older. So that Nancy would play there, the other two were in school. So then we were, I was teaching in the same school where they were. So, uh--

DALLETT: Did your mother teach your children Hungarian? Did they learn any language?

NERSTAD: Ukrainian?

DALLETT: Sorry, Ukrainian.

NERSTAD: No. In fact, that's a lack that I regret, that I didn't myself continue to remember some Ukrainian. I spoke beautiful Ukrainian at one tome when we first arrived, and I remembered it for a while. They even sent us to a Ukrainian school for about a year in the evenings, you know. But, you know, when you're trying to do, you're trying to be an American, you want to be an American. And I even tried going to Ukrainian affairs. I just didn't seem to want to be part of it. You know, I wanted to, and yet I wanted to be Americanized. And so, and that didn't work out too well, so we just, my parents never pushed it that we should continue. And I think if I went back and took Ukrainian it would come back to me very readily because I remember words. And my mother spoke English well enough that they could understand her. She just had an accent. But, and she always tried to make her English better. She even ended up, at one time she couldn't write the English that well, but she would always write her grocery list in English for practice, and we were very proud of her for that. So, no.

DALLETT; Did she carry on cooking and baking in the Ukrainian

style?

NERSTAD: Uh, yes. She was a very plain cook, but an excellent cook. You know, it was the staples, the chicken and roast pork and, we didn't have roast beef that much, but stuffed cabbage bundles, and my children loved cabbage bundles. I've learned to make them, and our grandchildren are crazy about them now. So she, and once or twice she had the Ukrainian traditional twelve course meal. I remember when John's brother, we were practically newlyweds. When he came out of the service, he was not married. And I remember my mother making the twelve course meal for the family, and we invited Chris, his brother, and we thoroughly enjoyed it. But our children never really had that, because they were not, they were so little they didn't remember that, but I, I have a newspaper clipping where someone wrote all the things you serve and how you make them, and one of these days I'm going to have it for the grandchildren. (She laughs.) I don't know if I'll be able to make the bread like they did, but I'll do the other things. But I do make the cabbage bundles on a regular basis, because they all love them. That was one of her favorites.

DALLETT: You mentioned that there was this sort of tension between following the Ukrainian traditions and wanting to be American. Could you talk about that a little bit? How would you characterize what it meant to be an America? What were some of the things that symbolized that that you wanted to take on?

NERSTAD: Well, uh, I think, just the lifestyle. The Ukrainian people who came here and stayed among their own Ukrainian people had different lifestyle. I enjoyed, I meant to say that each of us had a special friend in the neighborhood, and we are still friends after all these years. And those friends, being always American, you know, their mealtimes were different, their families went on picnics, their families, the one had a car and, of course, we didn't have a car, we never had a car as a family. My brother, my oldest brother had a car, but my father never learned to drive. He tried, but he had a little accident and he gave it up. So we never really had that type of a home life, and always liked it. And these friends that were so nice to us invited us to their church. And so we got involved in that type of church. And in that church people were, I don't know, just, I can't describe them, but they had a happier life, let's put it that way. Among the Ukrainian people there was a lot of unhappiness, poverty, and they weren't motivated to get out of that lifestyle and out of that neighborhood, whereas we were. It was just a blessing that my father moved where he did in Germantown because , as I say, we were the only foreigners there. And, uh, that's the reason. I wanted to meet somebody Ukrainian when I was a teenager, because I thought that would please my parents. And I did meet one or two Ukrainian young men. But their backgrounds were so different from mine, and I wanted to be different, you know. I wanted to be an American. So I really wasn't interested in them. And I did meet somebody at Temple, but that wasn't right either. But, you know, you just know what kind of a lifestyle you would like to have, and it

was possible. So I gave up trying to be a Ukrainian and an American. Although I do admire, and I will go to concerts and I will, and I love the embroidery work and the culture. I look back on it, and I'm glad I am a Ukrainian by background. I mean, there's nothing to be shammed of. But at that time when you're growing up you just don't want to be different. You want to be like your peers, you know. So, uh--

DALLETT: And you ended up marrying, uh, what did you say your husband was--

NERSTAD: A Swede, a Norwegian Swede, John. I met him at night school. Remember I couldn't be a teacher, I went to Strayers Business College at night and worked for Lippincott Publishing Company in the daytime as a file clerk, which my friend got me the job, which my friend got me, my special friend in the neighborhood, Helen. So, uh, that's where I met my husband, least likely place.

DALLETT: And did you ever go back to Ellis Island at all?

NERSTAD: Uh, yes. We went to New York City and we took our children on the boat tour around the Statue of Liberty and we told them, you know, what that meant, and had a wonderful day with the children. They were old enough to appreciate it like eight, twelve, fourteen. Yes, we did. I wish I could go back and see what it's like now. I was just fascinated when they had the TV series, you know, when they were celebrating the birthday of

the Statue. I didn't miss an item. (She laughs.)

DALLETT: Well, maybe we'll try to get you back there for the opening.

NERSTAD: Oh, when is that going to be?

DALLETT: Um, it should be next fall.

NERSTAD: Really? Oh, I would love to see it. I would love to be there.

DALLETT: Okay. I think I've asked you everything I need to, unless there's anything you want to add.

NERSTAD: I probably told you more than you needed to know. (She laughs.)

DALLETT: No, not at all. I was glad you had your notes, because it was all very chronological. But anything else you just wanted to add?

NERSTAD: Uh, I just, I made a comment here about, oh, one very important thing. I was telling you how I had empathy for children who were struggling. And isn't it interesting that the boat people came over here in 1980, was it '83 or 1970-something. I was teaching in the Christian school.

And that Christian school took, the church brought quite a few Cambodian families into the area, and found housing for them and so forth. And I was the fortunate teacher to get two Cambodian children from the first group, brother and sister. And they were, I could just see myself in them. They didn't know a word of English. The little girl was eleven already, her brother was eight. And it was a real joy and a challenge to me to teach them to read in that first year. They not only learned to read, they, from being this sad, they were accepted by the children, I made sure of that. And their mother had struggled to come here, and her husband had been shot right in front of those children, so they had these memories. She met another Cambodian man, and she was married like a year after I had her two children in class. And the church had the wedding for them in Cambodian and in English and we, my husband and I got invited to their wedding, and the little reception at their little house, and it was just so neat, all these Cambodians, and there were only maybe four Americans there, and we were honored to be there, you know. So the following year I had six Cambodian children come, all six not knowing a word of English and they learned to read. I just made sure they learned to read. And then in the evening of that year the principal wanted someone to teach the adults at night, so two nights a week I had a classroom full of adults who couldn't speak English, Cambodians. And they were so eager to learn, and they were so desperately poor. My heart just went out to them, you know. I just thought what a wonderful thing to be able to do for others what others did for me, because the teachers really influenced me more than almost anybody else. So that's what happened.

DALLETT: That's wonderful. So you fulfilled your dream.

NERSTAD: Oh, really. Everything that I always wanted, it didn't happen when I wanted it to, but it happened in time. You know, it just taught me a lot of patience. God is so good to us. Um, let's see, I think I've covered just about everything that I had in my notes.

DALLETT: Okay. And that is the end. Thank you very much.

NERSTAD: Oh, you're very welcome, Nancy.

DALLETT: And that's the end of side two of Interview Number 426, [SIC,DP-55], with Mary Nerstad and it is 3:05.