

EI-1016

WILMA VALACH DANCIK

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: Today is August 2nd, 1998 and I'm here on Cape Cod and I'm with Vilma Dancik, who—Wilma Dancik, sorry, who came from Czechoslovakia in 1920 when she was three and a half years of age on the Lafayette from Le Havre. And today, Mrs. Dancik is 78?

DANCIK: Eighty-one.

LEVINE: Eighty—

DANCIK: Eighty-one. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Oh, wait. You were born in 1916.

DANCIK: Sixteen, yes.

LEVINE: Okay. Today she is 81 at the time of this interview and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Okay. Well, I'm delighted that I got

a chance to talk with you. And I'll start at the beginning. If you would give your birth date again and where in Czechoslovakia you were born. And also, if you would spell any names of persons or places that maybe I would be unfamiliar with. Okay?

DANCIK: Okay. Well, I was born in Stara Tura [PH]. I'm giving it the real Slovak pronunciation. S-T-A-R-A T-U-R-A. And that's in Czechoslovakia. And that means "old town."

LEVINE: Uh-huh, okay.

DANCIK: And—

LEVINE: Did you live in Stara Tura?

DANCIK: Stara Tura.

LEVINE: Stara—

DANCIK: You have to roll your r's. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Stara Tura. [chuckles]

DANCIK: Right, good. Good.

LEVINE: Did you live in Stara Tura—

DANCIK: Yes.

LEVINE: —up until you left for the United States?

DANCIK: Yes.

LEVINE: Yeah. Okay, so—but do you have any memories of Czechoslovakia?

DANCIK: I have one or two. In those days, we—every—every son was given a certain amount of land. And my father had three or four brothers. So he—he liv—we all lived in a—sort of a peasant's house. It was—it was not, you know, a regular farm. And the chickens and the ducks and the goats and whatever lived underneath the house, and then we lived above the little—little farm area. And my mother used to kind of support us b—my father, of course, took care of the animals. My mother used to walk with my oldest daughter to—to Vienna and sell whatever produce they had. And she would carry it—they would carry it on their backs and walk several miles from—to Vienna and to Budapest. And they would make their living—partial living by selling whatever. And I remember the only

Hungarian that I learned from my mother was “Vaska tuni” [PH]—oh, what was that now? “Vaska tuni konig cabel?” [PH] Something like that, which means, “How would you like—how much would you like for this basket?” [chuckles] I used—used to be able to pronounce it better. And—but they—they came. My parents and my ol—oldest sister came to the United States back in 1904. They were married in 1902 and they had a baby and they came here in 1904 and lived here 10 years in the United States up in Little Falls, New York. And then after they’d been here 10 years, they decided it was time to go back for a visit. So they—they went back and, two weeks later, Prince Ferdinand and his wife were assassinated. So my father had not bothered to become an American citizen, although he considered himself an American. And so he was imprisoned by the Hungarian government, because Slovakia at the time was under Hungary and had been under Hungary for a thousand years, so that he—he refused to fight. He refused to fight against what he considered now his country, the United States. So he spent the war years in prison and in a Polish prison, and that’s when he heard first that—from another prisoner that there were a couple of men who were trying to form a state of Czechoslovakia. And—and of course, my father couldn’t believe that that was happening but he was very happy. And—and he heard that President—that Dr. Maserik [PH]—Maserik was working with President—our President Wilson in—in forming this new country. So as soon as Czechoslovakia was formed, he was released. But he did spend several years in—in the Polish prison.

LEVINE: What was your father’s name?

DANCIK: Steven—

LEVINE: Steven.

DANCIK: —Valach—W-A—well, V-A-L-A-C-H.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

DANCIK: And I never found out exactly why I was born during all this time, whether he was given a leave of absence or something, because I was born in 1916, right in the middle of the war. And he always prided himself on being in the honor guard that escorted Emperor Franz Joseph whenever he made his rounds. And because my father was six feet tall, he was put in the front line. And I often said, “Well, did you see the emperor?” He said, “No, we had to keep our eyes straight and only when he passed our eyesight,” he was allowed to see him.

LEVINE: Did he talk about those years in prison?

DANCIK: He did but I—I didn't ask as many questions as I should have.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Is there anything you can recall that he said about it?

DANCIK: No. He—I mean, everything must have been all right. And of course, the big, big thing was that he heard that there was a Czechoslovakia in the making. And that was just wonderful, wonderful news. So he was released sometime when the war ended. And then in those days, if the son wanted to leave the—the homestead, the older sons were given a plot of land on which they could build the houses and live with their families. The youngest son got \$400, or the equivalent of \$400. So there was my father with—well, by this time, four chil—well, when—when they—the 10 years that they lived in the United States, between the time they arrived in 1904 and the time they went back to visit in 19—I don't know—

LEVINE: Before the war [unclear]?

DANCIK: Before the war.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

DANCIK: He—my sisters, Mary, and my brother, Paul, were born. So they were Americans by birth. And they—they often chided my sister, Anna and—oh, my older sister and I, the youngest, were born in Czechoslovakia. And so when my—my sisters wanted to, you know, annoy me, tease me, they would say, "Oh, you're foreigners. You know, we're Americans." So—

LEVINE: [chuckles]

DANCIK: Anyway, my father took the \$400 that he was allowed and decided to come back because he now considered, you know, United States his—his country. And all I remember of that—I do remember anim—animals, you know, living all around the house. And I remember my grandfather carry me over a little river and—and I don't know whether that was on our way here or whether that was just something that he did. I was, you know, a little over three so my memory is a little—

LEVINE: Right.

DANCIK: Has little lapses.

LEVINE: Yeah.

DANCIK: Now, in those days, it was customary for part of the family to come to the United States first and establish a residence and whatever. So my mother came with my oldest sister and they—they came in something like June. Now, one problem people had in those days was that the man would come over, maybe with a child or two. And then he would forget about that family back there. And he would stay here, make a life for himself, get married again. And the rest of his family was forgotten. So—but we were a very close and happy family and determined to be together. So my mother found a place up in Little Falls, New York, which is where there was quite a large colony of Czechoslovak people. And they had gotten there quite by a fluke. At Ellis Island, somebody looked where it said “Little Falls, New—NY” and the—it was supposed to be a J and apparently the Slovak J looked like a Y. So this one woman back in the 1890s was sent to Little Falls, New York where she knew nobody. And she arrived at the station and there was no one to greet her. And finally, you know, somebody said, “There’s a woman here.” You know, and of course, she couldn’t speak English and they had no idea what language [chuckles] she spoke. So they—somebody took her in as—as a domestic. And she liked it so much. Now, there is a Little Falls, New Jersey, which I’m sure has a good, healthy collection of Czechoslovak people. But this woman loved it Upstate New York and she drew her family back here. And—

LEVINE: This was someone from—from—

DANCIK: From our—

LEVINE: From your little town?

DANCIK: Probably our hometown. There’s another town called Miova [PH] that is quite close, so a lot of the people came from the two neighboring towns. And so that’s why—how we happened to—to get here. So my father—my mother and my oldest sister were—were the ones who came over in about June of 1920 as soon as they could get enough money, you know, to bring us all over. And then I came with my father and I was considered an infant at three and a half. My brother came and he was five years older than I so he must have been about eight. But he’s—is listed here under infant. And then my sister, Mary—now, Mary and Paul had both been born in the United States so they had no problem. And apparently, we had no problem. Now, I remember—I’m surprised. I was—I’ve always been surprised that—considering that my parents had the equivalent of a high school—it was called a gymnasium in Europe—equivalent of a high school but, of course, it’s not as sophisticated as education is today. But they must have known about the Statue of Liberty and what it meant. So I remember all of us were crowding out on

the deck and—and passing the statue. And it was just a big moment in my life to see that statue standing there. The only other—

LEVINE: Do you remember that?

DANCIK: I remember that. For—for years, I could remem—now, of course, it's—it's just a memory and I've repeated it so often it's—but then I—I can still see ourselves standing on the deck and watching—going past. I probably didn't quite realize what it meant but I saw it, and now I can say that I saw the Statue of Liberty. Well, we—before we landed, we were in the steerage class in the very bottom of the boat. And I remember going into the dining room and there—there were these long tables set up with a bowl of soup, a noodle soup. And these—as the—as the boat waved back and forth, the soup would go sliding down the—the tables and sliding back. And that just somehow stuck in my memory. I wondered why didn't they all go smashing off the end of the table? But they didn't. And then we—I don't know what else we had but we had soup for that meal. And I just remember large crowds. I know we got to Ellis Island and it was just wall-to-wall people, just—it was right after the war, 1920. And there were lots of people who were taking advantage and coming to this country because they'd seen enough of war. And then when we got off the—the boat and there were just lar—large crowds. Everyone was trying to—they had little pieces of paper with some address and they—they were going to Little Falls, New Jersey, or they were going to Garfield, New Jersey or—or New York City. Many of them, of course, settled in New York City in the lower 20s, which is a—which is—in which there is located the church which we later attended when I moved to New York.

LEVINE: On the east or the west?

DANCIK: East Side, East 20—something like East 22nd Street. And it was a—a—a Slovak Holy Trinity Lutheran Church. And—and the one thing I couldn't find, and I know I have it somewhere because it's beautifully embossed, my christening certificate.

LEVINE: Oh.

DANCIK: And I was christened within a week after birth. They did it right away.

LEVINE: In a Lutheran church?

DANCIK: In a Lutheran church in Czechoslovakia. And in those days—probably by that time, the Lutheran church had a—permission to come out, you know, with—from the restrictions that had been put on it by the Hungarian government. Slovakia had been under Hungarian rule for a thousand

years. The Czech part, Bohemia and Moravia had been under Austria for 400 years so that I often marveled at the fact that the Slovaks, and a hundred years of repression and whatever, were able to maintain their identity. And they—they had their costumes, which were hidden away. And my—my mother used to tell me that my—I think it was her grandfather, not my grandfather, who would—somehow, we, of course, were all able to get a hymnal and a—and a Bible. And he would dig a hole in the backyard and cover the Bible up, so when the Hungarian soldiers came to check to make sure that there was no religion going on, he didn't find a thing. And then in the evening when the—when the soldiers had left, my grandfather would go out and dig up the Bible and the hymnal. And—and I still have a copy of—the original copy of the hymnal, but my daughter has it because she was afraid I would lose it or something. [chuckles] And she—we would bring out the—the Bible and the hymnal and my grandfather w—would read whatever scripture lesson he thought was appropriate. We had no connection, you know, with the church, although by 1916 there was a Lutheran church and that's where I was baptized. It was the Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Augsburg Confession. Augsburg Confession is—was kind of the basis of the Lutheran doctrine at the time because it—something that was signed at Augsburg, Austria probably years ago, or Germany. And so we would have our services there. We would sing the hymns. And that's why my mother knew ev—every hymn in—in the—in the hymnal because we—we just sat around, you know, with our extended family, which was good in those days. Then we—and I still have the hymnal.

LEVINE: Ah—

DANCIK: If you'd like to see it, I have it over there.

LEVINE: I'd like to see it when we're finished.

DANCIK: Yes.

LEVINE: Yeah.

DANCIK: Right. And, I mean, that wasn't the original hymnal but she got a copy of it after we came to the United States and—

LEVINE: Oh.

DANCIK: —gave it to me.

LEVINE: Let me ask you just a couple of questions of background. Did your mo—was your mother's family and your father's family from that area?

DANCIK: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Their parents—

DANCIK: Yes.

LEVINE: —or their parents before them?

DANCIK: Oh, there's a story to that. Do you want to hear it? [chuckles]

LEVINE: Okay.

DANCIK: Years ago, there was a man—years and years ago, there was a man named John Huss [PH]. Jan [PH] Huss. Huss means goose.

LEVINE: Goose?

DANCIK: Literally, goose. Huss. And he had started—a hundred years before Martin Luther, he had started to kind of rebel and to criticize the Catholic Church. He didn't like some of the things that were going on. So he started that whole protestant reformation without really knowing that that's what it was going to be. And the Catholic Church, of course, was—knew about him and was very upset because he was doing this. And they—they promised him—he had quite a following in Bohemia in the Czech part. And he—he objected to some of the things that Martin Luther objected to. And the pope said, "I want to see that—that goose." You know, th—they te—teased him about his name. "And bring him to me and I will give him safe conduct." That—those two words always show up in any—any report. And so he believed them and he—he had his own version of what the Bible meant and what—what, you know, Jesus meant, what God meant, and when he was saying certain things, which didn't agree with what the Catholic Church was teaching at the time. So he had quite a following in Bohemia. And he decided to go and—can't remember the name of the place where he was supposed to meet with some representatives of the pope and kind of hash things out and, you know, try to quiet him down. Well, he got to this place and they strung him up on a cross and they burned him at the stake. And so everybody thought, well, that was the end of his beliefs and—and—and for a hundred years, nobody really did very much to—be—because they were so terrified. This was such a terrible thing to happen to their leader. So he—his followers had to flee from Bohemia into the mountains of Slovakia, because they felt they were safer there. Nobody was going to find them in the mountains and—and then, a hundred years later, Martin Luther, who was a great reader, read about John Huss and—and said, "Oh, hey. He has some good ideas." And he also—I have a book of his—he also called Huss "that goose. He really has some good ideas,"

you know, and capitalized on the nickname. And he used quite a few of John Husses' ideas and—in expanding his ideas and what changes he wanted to make. And of course, you know, he was in exile for—Martin Luther, for quite a while. But those people who escaped from Bohemia, escaped persecution, came to the mountains of Slovakia and—and we were among that group.

LEVINE: Now, wh—when—when was that, roughly?

DANCIK: Well, that was a hun—it must have been in the 1400s because I think—I think Martin Luther published his 95 theses on the doors of the Wartburg. You know, the—you've heard about that, and—and—and he—95 things that he objected to that he believed in—also—well, okay. Martin Luther was—and a—he—he was befriended by Frederick—I don't know Frederick—Prince Frederick or somebody, a nobleman. And he hid away and in the—a castle called the Wartburg. And that's why you'll see Wartburg a lot. There's a Wartburg Nursing Home in—in New York City in which my husband died. It's—all good Lutherans always thought the place to do—the place to go to was the Wartburg Nursing Home in—in Mount Vernon, New York. So they—they decided to kind of—when Martin Luther's theories came over the border and into what was still the Austro-Hungarian Em—Empire, these followers of John Huss latched onto this and said, "Oh, well, this is what we believe in." So—so his followers—Martin—John Husses' followers became followers of Martin Luther. And so that's how we happened to become—

LEVINE: [unclear]

DANCIK: —Lutherans, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

DANCIK: And when we visited Czechoslovakia, or when my daughters at one point visited it with a—a school—as a school project with Bucknell University where my daughter—one of my daughters attended, they visited the oldest church—oldest Lutheran church in Czechoslovakia. And they were so sorry then that they hadn't let me teach them, you know, Czech. I would say, "You've got to learn it." I mean, it was so easy. And I would say, "[speaking in Czechoslovakian]." "Give me some milk." And they thought that was so funny so they just laughed. And they never—and then when they were there visiting and staying overnight at people's houses, they couldn't say anything, could—couldn't talk, th—that's when they regretted it. They had—and by this time, they were in college so it was a little bit too late.

LEVINE: Yeah.

DANCIK: But anyway, the—then the Lutheran church became quite strong in Czechoslovakia.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

DANCIK: And it grew from—from that and—

LEVINE: Wait. Let me just—

DANCIK: Yeah.

LEVINE: —interrupt you for a second. I want to get your personal history—

DANCIK: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: —more than the history [chuckles]—

DANCIK: I know.

LEVINE: —of the Lutheran church, although it's fascinating and it kind of tells how your family came to where they were.

DANCIK: Well, it—it's the background. Yes.

LEVINE: Yeah. Okay, but just don't—

DANCIK: Well, then—

LEVINE: Summarize that part.

DANCIK: We decided—I mean, we—we were allowed to—to have our own churches after a while, and I did visit when I went back in '89 for a visit in Czech—my first visit. We—we attended the services in a Lutheran church right there in Stara Tura, which—but we—we didn't attend a service because we were there in the middle of the week. But we were allowed to go inside and—and look around.

LEVINE: Well, it sounds as though your family was—was—was quite religious.

DANCIK: Oh, yes. Oh, absolutely. I mean, we had services every night, even here, because we lived on a farm. And in the horse and buggy days, you just couldn't get to—to the city, which was about eight miles away, for Sunday services. So we had our own service every Sunday at home.

LEVINE: You mean in the—in the house?

DANCIK: In the—in the—in the farm, yeah.

LEVINE: Oh, and just your family?

DANCIK: Just our immediate family, my—my—my mother, father and my brother and I. My sisters, by this time, were 16 and 17 years old so they had to get jobs as domestics. And that's what they did for many years.

LEVINE: And where was your farm?

DANCIK: It's—actually, it was in Fairfield, New York, but nobody ever heard of that, but Little Falls, New York is on the main route from Albany to Syracuse to Buffalo.

LEVINE: I see.

DANCIK: So—and we did all of our [clears throat]—anyway, we headed for Little Falls from—from Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Well, tell me about—you—you passed the Statue of Liberty.

DANCIK: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: And then did anything happen at Ellis Island? Is there anything about Ellis Island that you recall?

DANCIK: No, just a lot of people.

LEVINE: Okay.

DANCIK: And apparently, my mother—my—my father—I don't know whether—whether my mother met us there or what. But we did take a train up to Little Falls so we—

LEVINE: Do you remember the train at all [unclear]?

DANCIK: No, not at all. No, I just remember crowds of people.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

DANCIK: And the Statue of Liberty and the soup. Those are really the three things that [chuckles]—

LEVINE: You remember.

DANCIK: —stand in my mind.

LEVINE: And when you got to Little Falls, was someone meeting you?

DANCIK: Yes, my mother and—and my oldest sister. I—I don't think that my mother met us in New York City. I think we just got there on our own. And my mother had already found a place to live and she and my father got jobs right away in—my mother worked in a knitting goods family. She made underwear. [dog growls] Oh, oh. My daughter's husband is here with our—with—with their dog. So they're all right. They just have to get reacquainted. Ann was afraid this would happen. They—they—they lived in Little Falls at first. When we lived on—and this—on, of course, the wrong side of the river, the Mohawk River and the Barge Canal. We lived on the south side, which is where all of the immigrants lived from, you know, Poland and Italy and whatever. We had—and my father worked in a—a—a factory where he cleared the skin of animals, preparatory to making shoes.

LEVINE: Oh.

DANCIK: The shoes were made out of, you know, cowhides and whatever. So that was his job and he must have used some kind of chemicals and he— [clears throat] he was getting ill from that. He was in danger of getting TB, according to the doctor. And the doctor said, "You have to get out of that factory." And he worked nights so that my mother could work days and my father took care of us, of those of us who were home, which was my brother and me. By that time, my sisters were working as domestics for the lo—local people.

LEVINE: I see.

DANCIK: And—and I—and I was still too young to go to school. And they had—which was, I thought, very foresighted of them—they had a place for the children of the workers. They had a little room where we were—we—we spent the day while our mothers were working in the factory. So I'm surprised that something like that existed. But I remember my brother—I said, "I don't know to make an eight." And so he drew two circles, one on top of the other. And he said, "That's how you make an eight." I always remembered that.

LEVINE: Well, tell me about, like, you were living on a farm?

DANCIK: Yes, we had to buy a farm because of my father's health. The doctor said, "He's not going to live. He's going to get TB and"—TB was big in those days. And he said, "You have to get out." Well, of course, we had no transportation so my sister—my oldest sister and my father walked

miles and miles and miles in every direction every day or whenever they could. They went out looking for a farm that was for sale. And then we finally found a beautiful farm in Fairfield, New York, which is about six or seven miles from Little Falls. And then eventually—and my father, of course, had to learn how to use American machines and how to fix them. And my brother learned—that always amazed me too that he could come from whatever—whatever he did in Czechoslovakia, he could come here and—and adjust to an American farmer's way of life. And—

LEVINE: So was your father predominantly a farmer in Czechoslovakia?

DANCIK: Oh, well, it was more like a peasant—

LEVINE: Oh.

DANCIK: —under Austria, Hungary. He—he wasn't a—a farmer, you know, with a herd of cows and a tractor and all that stuff. He—he just—

LEVINE: Worked somebody's land.

DANCIK: Well, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

DANCIK: And—

LEVINE: So—but let me just ask you about—were there—like the community you lived in when you were on the farm, were there many people around?

DANCIK: Yes. [clears throat] There were fa—we had 132-acre farm.

LEVINE: Oh.

DANCIK: So you have to picture that. And then the—a farm, you know, like from here down to the corner would be another farm. And—and 132 acres is a lot, depending on how you look at it, or it's small, compared to the western ranches out west.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

LEVINE: —side B of this tape. So if you'd just—

DANCIK: We—we were—we had a—a difficult time because we were considered foreigners. And the—the people who owned the other farms were all old

Dutch and German settlers who had come over here, you know, a century before to—to become farmers. And they had all the machinery they needed and I—my father and my brother came with nothing. And—and they had to—except what they found on the farm. And they had to learn how to use the equipment. And they also—the kind of farm we had, you need the help. The farmers had to get together and help each other during the harvesting of the corn and the oats. No—no two men could do that by themselves. You need—you needed 10 or 12 people. The people refused—at first, refused to help us. We were foreigners and that was it. And the—the names were names like Windecker [PH] and Dillenbeck [PH] and Vanheusen [PH] and whatever. And our name was Valach, you know, which couldn't have been more for—and they didn't even know where Czechoslovakia was so they didn't accept us and—

LEVINE: Excuse me. But right nearby, six miles away, was the immigrant town where people were coming in to work—

DANCIK: Well—

LEVINE: —in the factories. Isn't that right?

DANCIK: Yes, but we had to do that by horse and buggy. And—and that would take—take a whole day. That would be a whole day's trip to go—

LEVINE: Oh, uh-hmm.

DANCIK: —down to get any—we grew a lot our vegetables and whatever. But eventually we learned—well, eventually, the man—the other farmers needed my father's help. You need so many farmers. You know, five or six. They needed his help so eventually they accepted him. And—and he was a wonderful man. He was very kind and gentle and very loving. I—I can say that about my parents. I had wonderful parents. And we got through this discrimination period okay. We didn't—I don't think I knew really that I was being discriminated against. And, of course, I learned to speak. I spoke only in—in Slovak with my parents so I—and—and I didn't teach them English and they didn't learn much English. They spoke very broken English. But I—my mother wanted me to learn proper English.

LEVINE: [dog barking] Wait. Let me just pause here. [tape off/on] We're going to restart here. Go ahead.

DANCIK: So—so finally—finally, my—my father [dog barking]—Ann—

ANN: Yeah?

DANCIK: Take him for a walk. We—we finally—they were accepted and—and then my mother had to learn how to prepare a big dinner for 20, 25 men. I mean, here, she knew nothing but she had to learn how to make meat and potatoes and vegetables and bake a pie or something. So they—they did that and—and then I started school. And my brother was five years older than I, so the school only went to sixth grade. It was a one-room schoolhouse and the teacher—I don't think she even got paid. She got free room and board from the Dillenbecks, who lived close to the school. And—and I remember she had two dresses, one for the winter and one for the early fall and late spring. We never saw her in any other clothes. As I said, I—I really don't think she got paid. She had one year of high school. That was her total education, although by the time we knew her, she must have been, you know, in her 50s. She was an old lady, you know, as we thought of her.

LEVINE: Now, was the school—where—was it a special schoolhouse?

DANCIK: It was just—just a building with two doors, one for the boys and one for the girls. And inside was this large room and in one corner was a huge furnace. And it was a wood-burning furnace. So each of us had to bring in some wood every few days to keep—keep the furnace going. And—and—and the teacher was quite heavy and she worked her way down from the farm, which was the closest farm to the school. And—and she came on—on snowshoes. And—and I remember once she fell. Well, that was the funniest thing that we thought had ever happened to have this, as we called—called her elderly—you know, as I said, she might have been in her 50—50s, but because she was quite heavy, she looked older. And the—the boys had to go and help pick her up. And we—during the winter, the room was really cold so we would all huddle around the room and do our lessons. And she would have one class of, you know, two—there weren't too many kids. Like, I would—if there were 25, that would be a lot. And she would have one class here and the rest of us would sit there. And if we talked—we could whisper. But at the time I had a little bit of a sibilant s, and I was saying something to the girl next to me and this ssss sound came out. Oh, I stood in the corner. It was the most humiliating thing in my life. And—and my brother did something. I mean, he was a very good boy. Everybody was good. But whatever he did, whatever he was caught doing, she hit him on the wrist with a ruler, on the hand with a ruler. And I felt so sorry for him. I—you know, I—I was just devastated. We had two books in our library. One was the dictionary and there were two volumes of "Sheep Raising in Australia."

LEVINE: This is a school?

DANCIK: This was a school. Those were the only books we had in what was supposed to be our library. And I've often wondered—I mean, somebody

must have donated the “Sheep Raising in Australia,” because there were no sheep in that part of the country. And—but my mother insisted that—that I stay on after my brother left. And when you’re six—when you’re in sixth grade, whatever age you are, you just leave and that’s it. And you stay on the farm and, if you’re a girl, you leave. You help your father with the farm and you get married at 16, which is what all my friends did. And when I said, “I want to go to seventh grade,” the teacher said, “I don’t know what to do with you. There is no seventh grade.” And I—you know, there was no board of—board of ed. Nobody knew what to do with me. So my parents had friends down in—in the city of Little Falls. And we would give families chickens, potatoes, whatever crops—whatever vegetables we—we grew. And—and in exchange for that, these families would give me, you know, room and board. And that’s how I—until my brother and father finally got a Model T Ford, I could only come home weekends. My father would come down; the horse—two horses and a wagon and come down to pick me up. And going six or seven miles in those days, you know, was an all-day trip by horse, and then—then bring me back. And then, Monday morning he would take me down again. And I remember once we had a violent blizzard. And I was bedded down in the bottom of the—the—the wagon. And—and my father was standing up just covered with snow and ice and sleet and whatever. And—and he was determined to get me down. And in those days, nobody shoveled the—the roads. Nobody cleared the roads. So he would go in and out of people’s pastures and—and whatever, trying to get me down to the city. And he did. He was determined that, you know, I was going to get there. And then I would stay with different families, whatever. And—

LEVINE: What was it like for you to be away from your family for the first time and—

DANCIK: Well, I—it was just something that I accepted. I knew that I was doing something very unusual, something that had never been done before in that area. Nobody ever, ever had gone beyond sixth grade. They didn’t know what to do with anybody who wanted to. Later on, a few years later when my brother was married and had two children, some—somehow, somebody had formed a board of education. And then they discovered that—that our farm should go to Newport to—to high school instead of Little Falls. So I had gone—gone in the wrong direction. But it didn’t—didn’t matter, of course.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

DANCIK: And—

LEVINE: Tell me about—could you tell me about the church services that you had as an extended family on the farm?

DANCIK: Well, we—we would sit around the kitchen table after the cows were taken care of, and the chickens and the ducks and whatever. All that, of course, came first and the barn had to be cleaned. And then about noon we—we would sit. My father would—would read the—the—what—what would have been the Bible lesson for the day. If—if you could—there's a green book. Yes, over there.

LEVINE: "The Mission and Message of Jesus"?

DANCIK: No, the—underneath; that second row.

LEVINE: Oh, here?

DANCIK: There. That one, yes. That—that's the Slovak hymnal. And—and somewhere in—in here, I'm sure that they have the—the makings of—of the—the liturgy. The Lutheran church is big on liturgy. And, you know, Magnifica [PH] and the Psalm—

LEVINE: Could you sing any of those? Would you on tape?

DANCIK: [chuckles]

LEVINE: Anyone you choose? It'd be kind of nice—

DANCIK: Well—

LEVINE: —to have that as a—as a [unclear].

DANCIK: I—I—as you can see, I have a terrible voice. But my mother would fill it up—up on here, [unclear]. This is a Christmas hymn. And some of these, I always get a thrill when we sing a hymn in our church here or the church I belong to in—in New York. And—and it was the hymn that—that—the same hymn in—in—in Slovak as it was—as it is in English. Like, for instance, "A Mighty Fortress is our God," which is the big Lutheran hymn, that—that's in here and a—a quite a few. Now, at one point when I was teaching school, we had a very liberal principal [phone rings]—

LEVINE: We're going to pause here. [tape off/on] And we're resuming here after—

DANCIK: This one year, when I was teaching school in Hartsdale, New York, we—the teacher decided to have a real Christmas program. And she—she bought several Christmas trees. And those of us who had countries to which we could refer, decorated the Christmas trees in—in the—

whatever Christmas ornaments were used in Europe or in Asia or whatever. And we were supposed to teach our class a—a thing. A thing. A song, which was special for—for that year or for Christmas or whatever. So I taught my children this one and this is one that—that's easy to sing. And they learned it in—in Czech. They did very well and we decorated the trees with the Czechoslovakia—little bits of chocolate candy and with—with—they cut out pictures of violins and musical instruments because the Czechs were very, very musical. I—I can sing this.

LEVINE: Yeah, why don't you do that one? Yeah.

DANCIK: Yeah, this is "Chess Revolsty" [PH] and this is also in our English hymnals. [sighs] Sure you want to hear this? [chuckles]

LEVINE: [chuckles]

DANCIK: [singing in Czechoslovakian]. And I'll translate for you. It means, "Day of rejoicing, of happiness came to the world. For—for God [unclear]—God eternal, everlasting was born from a maiden." I'm translating it pretty much as it's written. "In the village of Bethlehem in a manger of—on a straw lies a little baby in the cold, lies a little baby in the cold."

LEVINE: Hmm.

DANCIK: And it's—it's just—just tells the whole Christmas story. It was very sweet.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

DANCIK: And of course, we—we sang that and, of course, everybody—all the other—should I just see what—what the Czech language looks like?

LEVINE: Well, tell any other things about your life on the farm and anything else about what it was like, because you really have a wonderful memory of the—

DANCIK: Well, I have—

LEVINE: —[unclear] experience.

DANCIK: I—I had a wonderful life on the farm. I didn't know that we were poor. I didn't know that there were things going on. And we had no radio. We finally got the local newspaper printed—I mean not printed. Delivered. And—and my parents—we just kind of eased off into the next part of my life. Instead a staying home, getting married and having children, this friend of mine with whom I grew up on the farm, now is a great, great

grandmother, I think, because she got married at 16 and had children, whatever. So that would have been what, you know, would have happened to me. But because my parents felt they could get along without my services on the farm; it wasn't a question of, "You've got to do it. You absolutely have to go on to high school." I just went. It just was a flowing evolution of my experiences. Finally, my brother—we—we bought a Model T Ford and my brother, of course, drove it. And so he would drive me down to—to the high school and—and I could never participate in any after-school activities. I couldn't join the Girl Scouts or anything because he had to be—pick me up and be back on the farm at four in time for milking. So everybody sacrificed a little in order for me to get through high school. My mother had to do a lot more work than she ordinarily would have. And she had to help in the barn and clean—you know, clean out things and spread the hay around in the barn and—when we were haying. And my job during the summers was to drive this big team of horses—they were just workhorses—and with a load of hay behind me. And we had lots of little hills and I was very proud that I never tipped over a load of hay. That was a big achievement because so often, you know, a man would be driving a team and there'd be a sharp turn and a hill and off—everything would go off and, you know, it was a big—big production getting it back together. And—and then I did well in school. I worked very hard, considering that—that the background that I had—my mother finally bought a dictionary. I think she knew the value of that. And then whatever class books I brought home, either in elementary school or in high school, she would study them. She would try to read them. So she built up her own—I mean, just created her own education. And—

LEVINE: What was your mother's name?

DANCIK: Well, Maria.

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

DANCIK: Maria. Her maiden name was Biesik [PH]. And for the first time, in looking over these papers, I saw that it was spelled B-J-E-S-I-K. But we always spelled it B-I, which they changed the I to J. B-I-E-S-I-K. And this is a copy of my—my birth certificate. I have a lovely christening certificate but I couldn't find that. That's one of those that's embossed along the edge and flowers, you know, all over it. I—I couldn't find that.

LEVINE: Was your mother's attitude to become Americanized?

DANCIK: Oh, very. Immediately.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

DANCIK: As—as—as quickly as possible.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And how were you treated as—as the girl who went off to high school? It was unusual.

DANCIK: In elementary school, I was ridiculed a great deal because everybody knew that I was a foreigner. That was the label. And they would make fun of my name. They'd say, "Oh, Vilma Vinegar Jug," and, you know, things like that. I don't think it hurt as much as now, I think, it would have hurt. But I was so glad to be there, and I was so glad to be in school that I just—but they—they didn't take to me right away. That—that foreign label just stayed with—with me until suddenly they realized that I was the one going on to school and they all left. The—it was just the to go to do. No—after me, then other children began going—looking for a high school. Actually, I skipped seventh grade because the Little Falls High School didn't know what to do with me either. So they put me in eighth grade. And I've often wondered what I missed in seventh grade, what—what they didn't—so anyway, I—I did well in high school. I worked very hard. I—I really studied. [clears throat] Excuse me. And I think I graduated on the top ten. I was number nine. And, which was really quite an accomplishment for somebody with my background. And then college, well, okay. You know, you might as well go to college. You're—you've done this so let's go on to the next step. Well, in those days there were no guidance counselors. I didn't know what to—whom to ask, what college to go to. I'd heard of University of Rochester and Syracuse. And that seemed so overwhelming. Fortunately, somebody started the equivalent of today's community colleges. It was called the Little Falls Community Center and it was primarily for those kids, like myself, who had no transportation and who wanted to go on. And we only took two or three courses a day or—and you went for two years but you didn't take a full load, because they—they had difficulty getting teachers to come and teach all these farm kids who felt they—you know, why did—farm—farmers belong on a farm; they don't belong in college. But this college—the system was organized by Syracuse University. So when it was exam time, the teachers would drive us to Syracuse and we took the exams there.

LEVINE: Hmm.

DANCIK: And so that it isn't as though we were taught on some lower level of—of education. We had to learn whatever Syracuse was teaching at—at the time. And so I went there for two years but I did not have the—the complete, you know, curriculum that I should have had. Well, I knew nothing about colleges. A friend of mine, who had graduated the year before I did, happened to learn about Barnard College in New York City.

And she said, "Why don't you come down there? It's very nice." I—I had barely heard of New York City, let alone Barnard College. And—and so I applied and I got in and that was it. And what was bad was that I did not belong in a big city college. But I loved the professors. One of the professors I had had actually written the history book that I had used in high school. And I just thought that was wonderful. And of course, Barnard did have high standards. And I could not afford to live in the dorm. I mean, that was completely unheard of. I never even expected to. But I—I—Columbia had a—an employment section, which—which helped people out, like me, who needed a place to live. And they found a—a place for me which was very nice. It was an unemployed professor who didn't have much money, but he needed somebody to take care of his two sons. And he had a—a wife with a beautiful voice. I heard her practicing all the time. And I was with them for a year and I spent the summer on Fire Island for a year. And—and there again, I was discriminated against because I was doing domestic work. I was a mother's helper, they used to call us in those days, whereas all the other college kids were waiting on tables in some fancy Fire Island restaurant. So they—they didn't have too much to do with me. But it was okay. I—I was busy taking care of the boys. Then the following semester I had to find another place to live. And then they put me with a—a lawyer on—would have been Riverside Drive. Well, he had two children. His wife had a third and a—a little boy. And when he was born, they decided they needed a built-in mother's helper. My half—you know, part-time work wasn't enough. So then the college found me what was the best place, a—there was a Methodist minister in Leonia, New Jersey. I don't know if you know where Leonia is. It's—it's in New Jersey and quite a ways up the river. And that was a wonderful experience because he was a—a great preacher. He was Methodist. And in the meantime, a Luth—a young Lutheran pastor for the Lutheran church began kind of courting me. But he knew that I was still in college. He never once touched me. We—he would sit over there. He came to visit me every Sunday when the pastor was out making calls or when the—Dr. Wilkey—Wickey [PH]—I would be sitting over here and that's as close as we ever got. But he liked me and—

LEVINE: Did you like him?

DANCIK: Yes, but I was a little overwhelmed. You know, I mean, I was still a shy little country girl. It took a long time to get over that. In those days, I wouldn't have been able to talk the way I'm talking now. Also, I stuttered very badly all through high school. I don't know why. And I read things on stuttering and I got over it when I left home and got into college, and I could finally be on my own. And I didn't have to wear my brother's—my mother's homemade cotton dresses. The other children—girls looked so pretty and I looked like somebody off the farm. And the teacher—

LEVINE: So did you change your clothes when you got to Columbia?

DANCIK: Yes, because by that time my two sisters were working as domestics in New York City. And—and I—so I saw them weekends. And they would give me some of their clothes. And of course, in those days, teenagers and little girls didn't wear what their big sisters wore. They were 10 and 15 years older than I, my sisters. So I looked kind of funny in some of their, you know, grownup clothes. But anyway, I—I survived. And for some reason, my stuttering left me. When I was in high school, I stuttered so badly that I couldn't talk. I could not recite or say anything in class. The teachers were so good to me. They didn't call on me and I did very well on my tests so they knew that—so they knew I knew the subject. But they—no matter what I did, I did the right—I was right. If—if I called—if I raised my hand and tried to give an answer and I couldn't get it out, you know, I would sit down. And the teacher would say, "There, now, that's a good student. Wilma didn't know the answer so she's not taking up class time. So everything is—you know, I admire that." Well, the next kid that got up and didn't know the answer, she said, "Why didn't you study? You know, you should know that." And—and—or if I did give an answer, the teacher would say, "Well, at least Wilma's trying." So no matter what I did, I couldn't do anything wrong because they—they were so supportive. I didn't realize it at the time that—that she could turn her answer around to—to see—to meet my situation. So in college, all of a sudden I came into my own. And again, because I was working, and this Methodist minister, I—I actually typed his doctoral thesis and—and then later he became a bishop of the Methodist church. And I—now, when I see my typing now, I can't believe that I typed. He attended Drew University Divinity School or whatever. So—but they gave me confidence. I didn't have much money. They would give me 15 cents for my—I had to take a bus down to the ferry and a ferry across and then a train from—I don't—a subway up to 116th Street where the college was. But I got through. And my sisters were so proud of me. They—they never threw it in my face that they had no education and here I did. They—they were—they were—as a family, they were so wonderful. And one of the biggest moments of my life, the year that I graduated—actually, I had finished school in January because I had those extra credits to make up. And I—but I went to the graduation ceremony in June. And who received a—an honorary degree but President Binnish [PH] of Czechoslovakia. And of course, that was—oh, we just thought that was wonderful to see him in person. We were so proud of Czechoslovakia and the strides that it—that it was making until, of course, the Russians come in, and then everything fell apart again. But then, finding a job. Well, I applied. First thing you did was apply to a place like Schrafft's [PH] because anybody could get a job in a restaurant. You know Schrafft's.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

DANCIK: Yeah. That's—are you from New York City?

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

DANCIK: Yeah. And—and I found a place to live, a nice little place for single girls to live and be safe and get a couple of meals a day and whatever. And—

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B]

[BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A]

LEVINE: We're continuing here on tape two with Wilma Dancik. And you were talking about what? You had finished—you finished college [unclear].

DANCIK: Yes, I was applying for a job.

LEVINE: Right.

DANCIK: Yeah. So my first job was—was with Schrafft's as—as a waitress in the middle of Manhattan. And they were very good to me also. I—I loved it. That's the only job I ever had at which I cried when I left.

LEVINE: Hmm.

DANCIK: They were so good to me. But in the meantime, when I did graduate from college, I had applied at the New York Public Library on 42nd and Fifth Avenue for—for a job. I figured there must be something I could do. Well, nine months later I got a call from the public library. I thought I would be a waitress all my life. I got a call from the public library asking if I was still interested. And of course, I—I was. It was great. So I worked in the library. I did some—I handled the—the foreign mag—magazines and manuscripts that came in from different countries and—and I guess I just put them in the right places or whatever. And I loved that but then somebody said, "Why don't you go work for the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company? That—that's a wonderful place to work." So I left the library and—and there I was put in a small, special library at the Mother Met, as we used to call her, where there was—there was a man and a woman, his secretary and I. And it was the field—field library. It was the library where men came in who were going out into the field, insurance. And there were all kinds of things for them to take out and study or whatever. And I—I was—I was there for a couple of years. I loved it. But then—then the war started and—and someone said, "Why don't you come to Gibson Cox [PH]? They're very good. You'll get paid

more and you'll be doing something for your country." Well, I had no idea what Gibson Cox was but it turned out to be that they drew up the plans for the U.S. Navy for their ships. And I guess because—I don't know why—because I looked honest—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, go ahead.

DANCIK: —and they felt they could trust me, and the—the FBI took my father's citizenship papers—I hadn't become a citizen on my own; I was a citizen through him—and my birth certificate. I had it sent down to somewhere in Washington. And I didn't see those papers again for six months. And I was really worried because my father's citizenship papers were very important to him. He became a citizen three years after he—after we landed. And—and thanks to the post office, the postal system of return receipt requested, I was able to follow up. And there somebody had gotten these, to me, important documents. I mean, it was the original birth certificate, which would have been impossible to replace, and my father's citizenship papers. And some man had gotten them, you know, from the—from the mail, put them on his desk and then put other stuff on top and there they sat for—for nine months. And finally, the post office traced them. And I guess by that time the FBI and everybody had faith in me; I wasn't going to betray any secrets. All of the plans that the ships—that the Gibson Cox was designing for the Navy went through me. All I did was sign them in and out. And then a handsome ensign would come and take them and do whatever the Navy did with these plans, okayed them, then gave them—gave them back to me. And I would check them off. So I knew every ship that—that was being built and that was being planned for the U.S. Navy. But they—I mean, now I realize how much faith and what an important job it was. I mean, it was just a little clerical job but—but I—I never looked to see what—what ships or—I mean, I could have. I—I would have been a big asset to either Germany or Russia or somebody. But I was very, you know, honest and that's what they—that's why they hired me, because they knew they could trust me. Well, after the war, I decided I ought to do something better with my life. And I had the courage to go to "Time" magazine and apply for a job. And I was there until I got married. And I worked for Time Life and "Fortune." Actually for "Fortune." And I remember one exciting job. I did—I helped in the Research Department. And I—I went up to Yankee Stadium and interviewed people there with the questions that somebody needed for—for an article on—on—on the Yankees. And I asked, you know, questions and wrote them down and gave them the answer, and that's kind of thing I did. And that was exciting. Well, then, by that time I had met my husband.

LEVINE: How—how did you meet him?

DANCIK: Well, there's a library on the East Side in the 70s, I believe, of Manhattan, a—a library that specialized in it, because that was the Czechoslovak area. That's where the Czechs settled. And I used to go there and take out books and whatever. And there was a—a group of us who were of, you know, Slovak descent. And we would just meet and, you know, talk about how awful the war was and how badly Czechoslovakia was being treated and whatever. It—it was just a group of us with similar interests. And my husband, you know, looked everybody over and settled on me. He was a lawyer by this time. He had graduated from Columbia Law School. And his mother—he had been going with other girls and his mother said, "You have to marry a girl of Czechoslovak descent, a college graduate and—and a Lutheran." So I—[chuckles] I fit—

LEVINE: [laughs]

DANCIK: —fit in all three categories so he—he—he settled for me. And then, of course—

LEVINE: Did you like him right away or—

DANCIK: No, I didn't. But I felt sorry for him. He had a rather large nose. You don't really notice it in men that badly but he told me once that he feels terrible because he's so homely and—and—and I felt so sorry for him. He got to my heart with that because I always considered myself homely. And, you know, I didn't wear makeup and I didn't—didn't know how to dress or anything. And so he—

LEVINE: And his name? What was his name?

DANCIK: Oh, William Dancik. And he—he just got to me by—by saying that he's so homely. He'll never get any place in the world and nobody, you know—one thing. Well, I—I didn't think he was that homely. But anyway, I started going out with him. Well, I went with him for seven years because he—World War II came along and it started in December. And by January, he had already been called in because he had no ties, no excuses. And because he was a lawyer, they used—he went immediately from private, first class to lieutenant, whatever the—and then he became a captain. That was as high as he went. And he was used for his legal expertise in writing all these legal documents, you know, that somebody has to write, put together. So he spent his war years in—in—

LEVINE: Do you think if we close the door, if the dog would stop—

DANCIK: Yeah, I don't know—

LEVINE: I'm just worried because [tape off/on]—

DANCIK: Don't worry about us. We can make it in five or six minutes. Oh, I don't know. She was driving my granddaughter to—to her job. So—so he—

LEVINE: So he—

DANCIK: So he was afraid to get married. He said, "I'll get off and get killed." Well, he spent the whole war in Brooklyn.

LEVINE: Oh. [chuckles]

DANCIK: And so we didn't get married until 1946, after the war was over. And— and then as soon as I could persuade him to move out of Manhattan, we moved to Yonkers and we had five children. And—

LEVINE: Why don't you mention your children's names?

DANCIK: Yes. Oh, Barbara was the oldest and—Barbara, Susan, Judy, Ann and Billy. We waited for that boy and when he came along, that was it.

LEVINE: Then you stopped.

DANCIK: But they have been absolutely wonderful to me and they take care of— they take such good care of me. And I had to buy a house here—I've only been here a year and a half—because I can't part with my animals. I couldn't go to a retirement home. So they come. They sweep and they dust and they do my dishes and bring some food and whatever.

LEVINE: Let me—let me ask you a few questions before we—

DANCIK: Yes.

LEVINE: —we finish. First of all, was your family—when you were on the little farm, were—were you—connection with any other Czechoslovakian people through a social network of any kind?

DANCIK: Yes, absolutely. As I said, we couldn't get to church. There's a—there's a Slovak Lutheran church in Little Falls. But we couldn't get there, which is why we had our own services. And all of my parents' friends were— were, you know, Czechoslovak. And my mother kept in contact with all of her relatives back in Czechoslovakia. They wrote back and forth. And after she and my father died, my sis—my daughter, Ann, and I decided to—I—I felt that I really had to go back and see Czechoslovakia, see the place where I was born, what it looked like, what it looks like now. And it didn't look—we—we couldn't even find the street that—that I had lived on. We—we met up with my cousin. We—we went on a trip that was

organized by a—a Czechoslovak Lutheran pastor in Wilksbury [PH], Pennsylvania. So we were all Czechs on—on the—on the bus.

LEVINE: But I mean earlier on when you were growing up.

DANCIK: Yes.

LEVINE: Was—was—were you in touch with Czechs who were—who were in the United States?

DANCIK: Yeah. Well, all of those in—there must have been several thousand in Little Falls. And they all stayed there so we were in touch with—with all of those who, you know—well, we would take down, especially during the Depression, my mother would take down eggs and potatoes and whatever she could spare and give them to some of her friends who were worse off than we were. And—

LEVINE: I see. But how did they get together, since you were so far out in the country? How [unclear]—

DANCIK: Oh, well. No, socially—socially, not. They would—they would come up and visit us and my father would visit them when he distributed food. But as far as any—belonging to any group, we didn't. No.

LEVINE: No.

DANCIK: No.

LEVINE: Did you have a newspaper that you—was Czechoslovakian that—

DANCIK: Yes, we had one but it was published in New York City. And my mother once trans—translated a poem by Edna St. Vincent Millay, which is a beautiful poem. And she did a beautiful job and I submitted that to the newspaper, this newspaper down in New York City. And they were so glad to have it, to have something from somebody without much of an education, was able to—to get Edna St. Vincent Millay's spirit in—and, you know, translated. But as far as that, I mean, our life was the farm.

LEVINE: I see.

DANCIK: You—you—

LEVINE: Yeah.

DANCIK: You—you eat, drink—drink and sleep the farm.

LEVINE: How do you feel now about your Czechoslovakian side and your American side? How do you reconcile the two?

DANCIK: Well, during the war, both wars and, of course, my husband was called back, finally went to war in the Korean War. And—but he was sent to Germany to help reconstruct Germany. And—and he drew up contracts and stuff, again, using his legal talents. So then we didn't get married until—well, no, we got married after World War II. But then we were expecting, I think, our third child when he—when this time, they got him and—and—and sent him not to Korea, even though this was the Korean War, but to—to Germany.

LEVINE: Germany, uh-hmm.

DANCIK: And—and—and then after he came back, we—we had a son and then that was—that was it. But—

LEVINE: As far as your Czech side and your American, do you—do you feel like you are American—

DANCIK: Oh—

LEVINE: —but you value the Czech? Or how—how do you think about these two—

DANCIK: I'm very proud of what Czechoslovakia has done. I'm proud of its authors and of—of the people who have accomplished a lot there. I feel badly about the pol—political situation. They should never have separated because my folks live in—in the Slovak part, Slovakia. And they are having a hard time so that my heart goes out to them. And I tried sending them some money. But they told me once that the money had been stolen, taken out of an envelope. But I—I'm very, very, very patriotic as far as the United States goes. I can cry when we're singing the "Star Spangled Banner"—banner. And I cried all through—that's why I can't stand watching some of the TV productions that show things that went on, because my heart bleeds for all of the men who sacrificed their lives and the things that—that, you know, happened to—to the United States. I—

LEVINE: Why do you think you're so sentimental and nostalgic about America?

DANCIK: I guess because every now and then I think I am so lucky to be here. It could have turned out completely differently. We did not have to come over in 1904, or my parents. And I—my favorite teaching grade was fourth grade because the curriculum was American history. And I—I would spend a whole day on teaching social studies. Forget math and

forget science. At the age of 40, I went back to school and did some graduate work, got my certification. Not 40. Fifty—the age of 50. So that took a lot of courage.

LEVINE: Ah.

DANCIK: Because I—and as a matter of fact, this daughter, Ann, helped me with my math under the new math. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Oh, that's great.

DANCIK: I don't think I would have gotten through. But—good.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, it sounds like you had an extraordinary life span. Why don't you just—we really need to close. If you can just maybe say something in closing about the span of your life, coming here three and a half as an immigrant from Czechoslovakia.

DANCIK: Well, looking back over my life as—as I have often done, I realize that—that the best times in my life, which I did not realize at the time, were the years I spent on the farm.

LEVINE: Why so?

DANCIK: It was such a peaceful, lovely, loving part—part of my life. Things got a little rough here and there. And—but I—I got through it all. And I have a great faith and I have learned to—to trust God and everything that—that I do, even its—looking for a parking space or losing something, my glasses. And I'll be going around and around looking for my glasses. And all of a sudden I'll say, "God, you've got to help me. I need to get to school." And then I would get this feeling, 'Go around the other way.' And I found my glasses. And I've learned to depend on Him more and more. And I've had a lot of things that I can't tell you about that would have been—

LEVINE: Devastating to someone.

DANCIK: —to somebody stronger than I that—that didn't have as much faith and didn't have the background of—of love that—that I had from my parents. And I've tried to pass that on to my children. And I feel that, if you had been here yesterday, one of my daughters had a problem. This daughter came down from Franklin to help her and—and—and even now, she just took her granddaughter to—to her job. I take my granddaughter. The other day, I took my son-in-law down to the hospital for a procedure. And he could—was not allowed to drive home so I had to go down and pick him up. We do things for each other.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

DANCIK: And—and a few months ago, my son called me up. He lives in Pennsylvania. And he said, “Mom, how did you bring us up so well?” He said, “How did you do it? What did you do?” I said, “Billy, you were such good kids. I didn’t do anything. You all—you did it all.” He—he sees how children treat their parents. They talk back to them. Mine never talked back to me. They were so good. I said, “You were born good.” I don’t feel that I had that much to—to do with it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

DANCIK: It was—it was their—their personalities and they all have a strong faith. And of course, I insisted that they go to church, they sing in the choir. Billy was a crucifer. Whatever. There was no such thing as saying, “I—I can’t make it. I have a, you know, soccer game.” No. Right from the very beginning, they went to church and that was it. And I think that kind of paid off. It made their religion and their faith stronger and strong in their eyes. Now, when I see my grandchildren going off to play football or something on a Sunday morning, I—I don’t say anything. I have to be a mother-in-law. And I just tell—I just, you know, to myself I shake my head. I—I hope this doesn’t have some repercussion later on in life.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

DANCIK: But—

LEVINE: We’re going to have to stop—

DANCIK: Yes—

LEVINE: You have so much of interest.

DANCIK: [unclear]

LEVINE: I thank you so much for a most interesting interview. I wish we could go on but I think we got a lot of your story. And I think we have the sense of—

DANCIK: To me, it sounds very humdrum. It really does.

LEVINE: Not at all.

DANCIK: But—

LEVINE: It's most interesting and you've accomplished a great deal.

DANCIK: I often say, "I should write a book," because—

LEVINE: [unclear]

DANCIK: —there are things that I haven't told you that would [chuckles]—

LEVINE: Would be—

DANCIK: —be more—

LEVINE: —more—yeah.

DANCIK: —interesting. Yes.

LEVINE: Okay.

DANCIK: But I can't do that.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I've been speaking with Wilma Dancik and she is going off to church. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm signing off.

[END OF INTERVIEW]