

EI-1100

MARIE JASPER

BIRTHDATE: JUNE 29, 1906 or 1907

INTERVIEW DATE: AUGUST 24, 1999

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 92

RUNNING TIME: 27:53

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

RECORDING ENGINEER:

INTERVIEW LOCATION: ELLIS ISLAND

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:

CZECHOSLOVAKIA, 1920 OR 1921

AGE: 14

SHIP:

PORT:

RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: Okay, I want to say that today is August 24th, 1999. I'm here in the Ellis Island studio with Marie Jasper, whose maiden name was Dobrava. She came from Czechoslovakia when she was fourteen years of age.

JASPER: Yeah.

LEVINE: And either—well, the year that you came here—do you remember what year you came to Ellis Island, when you came to his country?

JASPER: No, I can't remember.

LEVINE: Well, you were fourteen, so--

JASPER: Yeah, I was fourteen.

LEVINE: And you're ninety-two today, at the time of this interview, and I have with me today is Mrs. Jasper's son Charles, and her granddaughter—

JASPER: I'm an American citizen now, you know?

LEVINE: Right. And her granddaughter Jackie, and her granddaughter's friend Rebecca. Rachel, I'm sorry! [Laughs] Rachel. Okay, and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Okay, so you were born on June 29th, and you think 1906 or 7, right?

JASPER: What?

LEVINE: You were born in Czechoslovakia—

JASPER: Yeah.

LEVINE: On June 29th, right.

JASPER: I don't know. I don't want to say anything, because I don't exactly remember, you know?

LEVINE: Okay.

JASPER: I know I didn't want to come; I want to go back.

LEVINE: You wanted to go back to Czechoslovakia?

JASPER: Yeah.

LEVINE: Why did you want--?

JASPER: And they said, well, I had friends there, and I don't remember now, you know?

LEVINE: How--?

JASPER: And I don't think I would have liked it there no more, because I learned the language. You know, you're supposed to learn the language. And there's people can't speak even, you know? I got people, I don't know what they are, and they don't speak English. I said, "Why don't you learn how to speak?" [Unclear]

LEVINE: Was it hard for you to learn English? Do you--?

JASPER: What?

LEVINE: Do you remember when you were learning English?

JASPER: I don't know.

LEVINE: When you first came here, you didn't know any English?

JASPER: I thought I'll go back. Now I wouldn't want to go back, because nobody knows me. Because I didn't want to go to school. I said, "If I go between people, that's where I learn easier," you know?

LEVINE: Uh-huh, so you learned it when you went to work?

JASPER: Then I was learning how to speak German, too. You know, I know, but when you don't use the language, you don't remember it, you know.

LEVINE: When you first came to this country, did you know German? Did you know how to speak German?

JASPER: No, I was—I don't remember.

LEVINE: You learned German--?

JASPER: Because once you don't speak it, you forget!

LEVINE: Yeah.

JASPER: I don't remember, yeah, I wanted—now I said, I don't know. [Sighs] I was speaking German, a little bit of German, and then you know, if you don't use it, you forget.

LEVINE: Right. Would you remember the little town? Where were you born in Czechoslovakia? What was the town?

JASPER: Gerovnyitsa [PH].

LEVINE: And what was it like there? What do you remember about it?

JASPER: Oh, it was nice.

LEVINE: Was it big? Was it little?

JASPER: I was—I think I was there, but I don't want to go there. I want to stay in United States. My son is born here, and I want to stay in United States.

LEVINE: Okay, we're going to pause. [Tape off/on]

JASPER: I don't think it was too big.

LEVINE: Do you remember your house?

JASPER: Popelline [PH]. I remember Popelline. That was a little town, too. [Czech].

LEVINE: But do you remember your house?

JASPER: It's hard. Hard those years.

LEVINE: Marie, do you remember your house?

JASPER: My what?

LEVINE: The house you lived in?

JASPER: If I remember the house?

LEVINE: Yeah, in Czechoslovakia, where you lived?

JASPER: Oh [pause] I don't think so.

LEVINE: Did you have sisters and brothers?

JASPER: [Unclear]

LEVINE: Did you have any sisters, or brothers?

JASPER: No, I don't have any picture.

LEVINE: You had one brother and one sister, when you were growing up?

JASPER: I don't remember. I don't think my brother's living.

LEVINE: How about your mother? What was your mother's name? What was your mother's name?

JASPER: I don't know. We used to go to camp.

LEVINE: Okay, why don't you say your mother's mother's name?

CHARLES: What was Babi's [PH] name?

JASPER: What?

CHARLES: My Babi. Grandma, your mother—what was her name?

JASPER: What was her name?

CHARLES: Yeah. [Pause] Her first name?

LEVINE: Do you know it? Why don't you say it?

CHARLES: Marie, right?

JASPER: Huh?

CHARLES: Marie.

JASPER: I think Marie.

CHARLES: Yeah.

LEVINE: And how about her maiden name? Do you know her mother's maiden name? Why don't you say it?

JASPER: Her what?

LEVINE: Her maiden name?

CHARLES: She was Jankova. Jankova?

JASPER: I don't know, was it Boowolna [PH], or Jankova? I don't—I can't answer.

LEVINE: How do you spell it?

CHARLES: Jankova.

LEVINE: Do you know how to spell that?

CHARLES: Yeah.

LEVINE: Go ahead.

CHARLES: It's spelled J-A-N-K-O-V-A, Jankova.

JASPER: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay, and how about your father? What was his name?

JASPER: Well, my father was saying that he didn't leave us. It was the woman's fault. They say they always blame man, and that the woman was after him. So I said, "Well, anyway, you had three kids. You shouldn't leave us."

LEVINE: Now, how was it decided that you'd come to the United States? How come you came to America?

JASPER: How come what?

LEVINE: You came to America? Why did you--?

JASPER: My son was born here.

LEVINE: No, but when you first came here, who did you come with? Did you come with your mother?

JASPER: Oh, I think some lady came with my mother.

LEVINE: And how about your sister? Did you go here with your sister?

JASPER: I don't know.

CHARLES: Aunt Anna came with you, right?

JASPER: Huh?

CHARLES: Your sister came with you?

JASPER: Yeah, my sister, my brother, I think. I don't know where they are.

CHARLES: No, they came from Europe?

JASPER: I think they're not living, are they?

CHARLES: No, but when you came here, they came with you, right?

JASPER: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: And how come you came here? Why did you come with your sister? Why did you and your sister come to America?

JASPER: Gee, I don't remember.

LEVINE: Did you think you could have a better life here? Did you know—

JASPER: Yeah, that's what they thought, it was better here.

LEVINE: What did you know about America? Did you have any idea what to expect?

JASPER: Did my mother what?

LEVINE: What did you expect when you came to America? What did you think it would be like?

JASPER: My sister married Novotny [PH], you know, he was born there. Something, I don't know.

CHARLES: Yeah, but Ma, when you came here, but did you think America was like? [Czech].

JASPER: I didn't even think. I was too young. I wouldn't want to go there, I said—oh, excuse me, because Charlie was here, my son was here, and I wouldn't want to go there no more.

LEVINE: No, later on you didn't want to go back.

JASPER: Nobody knows me.

LEVINE: Right, right. Okay, let's talk about when you left home, when you left your house in Czechoslovakia, and you were in your Aunt's house? And then you went to the boat, you went to where the boat came in. Do you remember that?

JASPER: I used to be [pause] I don't know, with some lady.

CHARLES: In Europe, you were at your Aunt's? Right Ma, you lived with your Aunt?

JASPER: Aunt, yeah. She helped me, anyhow.

CHARLES: You lived there.

JASPER: She was very nice, my Aunt.

LEVINE: Was she your mother's--?

JASPER: She was like my mother. She was very nice.

LEVINE: And then, do you remember saying goodbye to her?

JASPER: What?

LEVINE: Do you remember when you said goodbye to your Aunt, who was so nice to you? Do you remember when you said goodbye to her, when you left for the boat?

JASPER: I don't know.

CHARLES: [Czech]

JASPER: I said goodbye?

CHARLES: Goodbye, yeah.

JASPER: [Czech]?

CHARLES: Yeah, yeah, [Czech].

JASPER: I don't remember everything. It's too long.

LEVINE: Do you remember the ship?

JASPER: Huh?

LEVINE: Do you remember the ship?

JASPER: The name was America, I think.

LEVINE: And what was it like on there? What was it like, for you, on the ship?

JASPER: What was--?

LEVINE: When you were on the ship?

JASPER: Yeah?

LEVINE: What happened? What did you do on the ship?

JASPER: I don't know. I was yelling that, I said, "Why don't you, you looking if you were clean, why don't you clean your bed bugs?"

LEVINE: There were bed bugs on the ship?

JASPER: Yeah, there wasn't—I think so.

LEVINE: Yeah? And did you—do you remember when the ship came into the New York Harbor? What did you see?

JASPER: I was glad when we went home, because they had bed bugs. I remember, at that time there was bed bugs; there's no bed bugs now.

LEVINE: No.

JASPER: But at that time there was bed bugs.

CHARLES: What did you see when you came here? On the boat, what was the first thing you saw in America?

JASPER: Oh, Statue of Liberty.

LEVINE: What did she look like?

JASPER: Oh, they say, "See, see! The Statue of Liberty."

LEVINE: And then do you remember Ellis Island? Do you remember Ellis Island, what happened to you there?

JASPER: I don't know if I remember anything. I know they had bed bugs.

LEVINE: And do you--?

JASPER: They say there's no more bed bugs now, I don't know.

LEVINE: Right, now do you remember anything about all the people, and the inspectors, and people trying to ask you questions?

JASPER: I don't know. I don't know.

CHARLES: How long were you here at Ellis Island?

JASPER: At Ellis Island?

CHARLES: How long did you stay?

JASPER: I don't—I think it was [Czech].

CHARLES: Christmas?

JASPER: No, [Czech], Christmas Eve.

CHARLES: They got here Christmas Eve.

LEVINE: Oh, you came here on Christmas Eve?

JASPER: Yeah, that was the date.

LEVINE: Oh, what was Christmas like on Ellis Island? Did anybody celebrate?

JASPER: I can't remember that long, you know.

LEVINE: Did you celebrate Christmas in Czechoslovakia, before you came?

JASPER: Oh, [pause], oh we had nice. We didn't get much. Like, we got cookies, but we didn't get like here people get. I don't know what they get; it's a long time ago, I said, what they get now, you know.

LEVINE: Were you a religious family?

JASPER: Huh?

LEVINE: When you were a little girl, was your family religious?

CHARLES: They went to church. Did you go to church?

JASPER: Oh, yeah, we went to church. We had a nice church.

LEVINE: What was the church like?

JASPER: There was a church, and there was a house where church people lived. They had a nice, nice—

LEVINE: It's still there?

CHARLES: They're just renovating it.

LEVINE: Is it a Catholic church?

CHARLES: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

CHARLES: The Czechs were—that was the religion of the country.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, right.

CHARLES: Catholicism, and they taught it in the schools.

LEVINE: Okay, now, when you left Ellis Island, did somebody meet you? Did somebody come and meet you when you left Ellis Island?

JASPER: I don't know what they had on Ellis Island.

LEVINE: When you left Ellis Island, where did you go?

JASPER: No.

LEVINE: You were with your sister, right?

JASPER: I don't know.

LEVINE: Was her father here?

CHARLES: Yeah, [unclear].

LEVINE: So your father was already here? Your father was already in America?

JASPER: Yeah, but my father—but my father said it wasn't his fault; it was the woman. The woman was after him. So, well, I said to him, "You had three kids, and you should have known better."

LEVINE: Right. How about your mother? Where was your mother when you first arrived?

JASPER: My mother was a pretty little woman, you know.

LEVINE: Was she? So your mother was here, your father was here, and you got to Ellis Island, and they came and they met you?

JASPER: I don't know.

LEVINE: Do you know where they went?

CHARLES: I think my grandmother might have met them, because they might have been split already. I don't know.

LEVINE: Okay, so did you go to New Jersey then?

JASPER: Pardon me?

LEVINE: Did you go to New Jersey? Is that where you settled, in New Jersey?

JASPER: I think so. I'm not sure. I can't answer that, because I'm not sure.

CHARLES: Where did you live when you came here, what town? Was it Union City?

JASPER: No, in Jersey I think. I'm not sure. I'm tired.

LEVINE: When you came here and you were fourteen years old, did you go to school?

JASPER: Go where?

LEVINE: To school?

JASPER: Church?

LEVINE: School. School.

JASPER: School? Oh, I remember, I think we were helping. I was helping here.

LEVINE: Oh, you worked for people and you lived in their home? Is that what you did? You took care of children, or you helped with the house? Do you remember that?

JASPER: I do, but I'm tired, you know. I think I'm just—

LEVINE: Okay, just a few more questions, okay?

JASPER: What?

LEVINE: Could you try to do a few more questions? Before? We'll do a couple more questions about when you came here. When you went to work? When you went to work, what kind of work did you do?

JASPER: Oh, I was sewing. Sewing, you know.

LEVINE: In a factory?

JASPER: I had three bosses. I was sewing. I was paying off something, I don't know.

LEVINE: You were paying off a house?

JASPER: Yeah, I think. I could remember their name yet, uh-huh. Laura, Laureen. I was last, I'm thinking of it. I said, "I wonder if I remember their name." Mr. Laura, Laureen, another name that I didn't remember.

LEVINE: Did you like your work? Did you like to go to work?

JASPER: Oh, yeah, well, I had to pay up the trip, for the trip, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and then did you buy a house?

JASPER: A what?

LEVINE: Did you buy a house?

JASPER: Buy what?

LEVINE: A house to live in, for your son, and for you, and your mother to live?

JASPER: I don't know.

CHARLES: [Czech]

JASPER: Yeah, but see, this man said, "You're making little money." And he said he'd lend it to me. [Czech], you know. I'm sorry if I talk to Charlie.

LEVINE: That's okay, that's okay, whatever you can remember. So somebody loaned you money to get the house?

JASPER: Yeah. I used to work Sundays, too, I think, to pay up, you know. I got, I don't know what kind of job I got.

CHARLES: Seamstress.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, and how did you meet your husband?

JASPER: What?

LEVINE: How did you meet your husband? You husband, how did you meet him?

CHARLES: My father, Ma. Where did you meet my father?

JASPER: My father?

CHARLES: No, my father. Where did you meet him?

JASPER: Oh. No, he was in a hospital, and—

CHARLES: Was it a dance you met him at?

JASPER: I don't remember. Why should I ask if I don't remember?

LEVINE: What was your husband's name?

JASPER: Paul.

LEVINE: Paul, and what did you like about him? Why did you like him?

JASPER: What did I like? I don't—he was good-looking man.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So then you--?

JASPER: No, he should have stayed in the hospital. He would have lived, they say. So I don't know. I don't know, okay.

LEVINE: Yeah, right. And then, you had one son?

JASPER: Yeah.

LEVINE: You had one son, Charles.

JASPER: I never got married again.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. And when you look back on it--?

JASPER: I what?

LEVINE: When you look back on your life, are you glad that you came to this country? You're glad you came to America?

CHARLES: [Czech]

JASPER: No, first I was going to go back. And now, I wouldn't leave. My mother didn't like it. She said—she said she didn't like the men there.

CHARLES: [Whispers, unclear]

JASPER: We had a camp, I know. I can't remember. See, I'm not sure I'm telling the truth, see?

LEVINE: Well, whatever comes to your mind. You can say it; it's all right.

JASPER: We had a camp in Jersey. I don't know, they were, you know, accusing people of stealing. And I don't know.

LEVINE: Okay, well is there anything else you'd like to say about coming to America? What it was like for you? Anything else you want to say before we stop? Anything else you can think of about Czechoslovakia, or coming here, or--?

JASPER: Oh, it's long time ago. You know, every kid likes their country, 'til get used to another. I don't know what happened.

LEVINE: Well, you got used to this country, I guess. You got used to this country.

JASPER: Yeah, 'til I learned how to speak. There was people, and I said to them, "Why don't you learn how to speak? You're going to feel at home." I don't

know what language. I can't talk to them, because I don't know what language, you know. And I said, "Learn how to speak English. That's the best."

CHARLES: Ma, what kind of marks did you have in Czechoslovakia, in school?

JASPER: What?

CHARLES: [Czech]

JASPER: Yeah, [Czech].

CHARLES: [Czech]. Marks. What kind of grades? [Czech]

JASPER: Oh, I always had the best marks in school.

CHARLES: Yeah, what kind? What did you get?

JASPER: One and two was the best, and I always had the best mark.

LEVINE: Did you like school? Did you like school?

JASPER: No, to learn [unclear], I says, "Well, I'll never like it here 'til I learn how to speak." I didn't go to school, I went living with some people.

LEVINE: And working for them, right?

JASPER: Yes, so, that's it.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, I want to thank you.

JASPER: Well, I don't think I would want to go back, because I said, people over there have different manners, and everything.

LEVINE: Okay, well I want to thank you for talking to me.

JASPER: Well, I wasn't so good, you know.

LEVINE: Yes you were! You were fine. You remembered a lot of things. You remembered a lot. And then I'm going to send you this tape so you can listen to it. Okay? Okay, well I'm talking with Marie Jasper—

JASPER: I always, like I said, I always had the best mark in school. And I think my son is the same.

LEVINE: Oh, that's wonderful!

JASPER: That's my—this is my daughter-in-law, with her friend.

LEVINE: Your granddaughter.

CHARLES: No, no, this is your granddaughter, Ma.

LEVINE: And Rachel is your granddaughter's friend, right? Okay, well I'm speaking with Marie Jasper, who came from Czechoslovakia at the age of fourteen, when she—which must have been around 1920, '21 somewhere. And if you get the passport, it would be nice to have that. She's ninety-two at the time of this interview. And this is Janet Levine, and I thank you very much, and I'm signing off.

END OF INTERVIEW