

EI-119/PFEIFFER

**EI-119**

**FRIEDRICH PFEIFFER**

**BIRTH DATE: JANUARY 9, 1900**

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**INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.**

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**RESIDENCES:**

- **GERMANY: DAADEN, RHINELAND**
- **USA: SCHENECTADY, NY**

**Oral Historian's Note:**

**Mr. Pfeiffer was originally scheduled to be interviewed in his home one year prior to his actual interview date (1/21/1992). On the date of the original interview, he fell in his kitchen and was incapacitated for a lengthy period of time. The interview was ultimately conducted in Mr. Pfeiffer's home one year later. A large and solid man, he frequently chuckles throughout the interview. A large grandfather's clock can be heard chiming prominently. -Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., 6/4/1993.**

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is January 21, 1992 on a Tuesday afternoon, and I'm here in Schenectady, New York with Friedrich Pfeiffer, who came from Germany in 1925 when he was twenty-five years old. Good afternoon, Mr. Pfeiffer.

PFEIFFER: How do you do!

SIGRIST: Fine, thank you. Could you please give me your full name with a middle name if you have one, please?

PFEIFFER: Yeah, I have no middle name. Friedrich Pfeiffer.

SIGRIST: And what's your date of birth, sir?

PFEIFFER: January 9, 1900.

SIGRIST: I see. And where were you born?

PFEIFFER: In Daaden, Germany.

SIGRIST: Could you spell Daaden, please?

PFEIFFER: D-A-A-D-E-N.

SIGRIST: Where in Germany is that?

PFEIFFER: That is in the Prussian Rhine province. The Prussian Rhinelands. The way it used to be up in Kaiser's time. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: I see. Is that the town that you grew up in or did you...

PFEIFFER: I grew up in there, yes and...

SIGRIST: Oh.

PFEIFFER: We also left from there...

SIGRIST: I see.

PFEIFFER: To come to the United States.

SIGRIST: So your whole time in Germany, you lived in this town.

PFEIFFER: Right.

SIGRIST: Well, good. Can you talk about the town? Describe it for me.

PFEIFFER: Well, it is a rather rural town in – very ideally located but eh, mountains on both sides and, it was actually a town where many of the people worked on the iron ore mines in the Siegenland. That is, of course, a very famous section where already in Celtic times, the Celts dug for iron ore. And in recent times, they have unearthed some of their earlier smelting furnaces. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Can you spell the name of that place please?

PFEIFFER: Siegenland?

SIGRIST: Yes, please.

PFEIFFER: Siegen, of course, is the capital city of that district. It actually is located in Westphalia on the western end of Westphalia and S-I-E-G-E-N. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: I see, I see.

PFEIFFER: Siegen, or a land of Siegen. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: So this area was an industrial area.

PFEIFFER: Right, right, a very famous industrial area for many years. And of course, originally apparently, the Celts worked the ores there and they were driven away from the Germanic tribes which came from the east and so the remnants, of course, are perhaps found in Scotland or also in the Pyrenees of Spain and so on. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: So what did the town look like?

PFEIFFER: It's very ideally located, as I said, with the Protestant church part that was a Baroque church built in sixteen hundred twenty-five, eh four to twenty-six and...

SIGRIST: Is this a Lutheran Protestant?

PFEIFFER: No, Evangelical Protestant church. Originally, of course, it was a Lutheran and Reformed so they had---my grandmother used talk about the Lutheran parsonage and the Reformed parsonage. And, of course, one of the German, or the Prussian kings, Friedrich Wilhelm IV, actually put in a law so that the, he didn't like the different denominations and he wanted to form the Evangelical Church of the Rhineland.

SIGRIST: I see. So...

PFEIFFER: And so, 'cause I've combined the two creeds to Lutherans and Reformed into one Evangelical. And, of course, the Prussian *Hohenzollernhaus* [the house of the family Hohenzollern] was also in that line. And, uh...

SIGRIST: Were there lot's of stores in this town?

PFEIFFER: Eh, no. No. Well yes, because my ancestors, for instance--I have, my father was a carpenter and cabinet maker. So was my grandfather. And also my mother's father and her grandfather was also cabinet makers and originally, the, well, I probably shouldn't tell you also that my uncle later on also built a

large carpenter and cabinet maker shop. But, all the big machinery and apparently when I was born on January 9, 1900, my father and my uncle had contracted to build or to do all the woodwork in an apartment house which the court had built for some of their secretaries. And as they, the mason apparently was rather lax with finishing the, putting the glass in and everything, and consequently when those wasn't in the house yet nor the doors, so my father, of course, contracted bad cold as they quickly tried to close the windows and the doors and so on and that, of course, led to pneumonia and he died just about three weeks after I was born. (he laughs) And so my mother, of course, was – my father was thirty-six years old and my mother thirty-four at the time, and, as he died. And so, naturally, my mother could not operate the carpenter shop even though they had journeymen there, too, but uh, could have assisted her but that was really out. She would have to be the leading person and – So, they apparently had a family meeting, perhaps all the rest of the uncles and so on – And each one, of course, suggested different things, but they finally came up with that she was supposed to run the property which they have inherited from my father's people as well as my grandmother still held some property, that she run that as a farm proposition so that she would be able to earn a little money buy selling milk and butter and things of that sort. Because most of these tradesmen, they did not live from their individual shops like the cabinet makers, so in the summertime they did a little farm work, (he laughs) and most of them had one or two cows...

SIGRIST: Yes.

PFEIFFER: And they actually also did all their hauling. But cows – cows were trained to pull a wagon (he laughs) and so, of course, the yokes was tied to their, to the

cows horns so they could leave their heads – it wasn't tied into a solid yoke or anything like that. So, and that way, of course, which, of course, was extremely difficult for my mother, too. She really did not – wasn't used to that sort of a thing either. (he laughs) But, she, never the less, decided that she would have to enlarge the barn which, of course, apparently before must have been relatively small. They enlarged the barn and that way, in the old section where the old barn door had been, they decided to have an extra room downstairs as well as upstairs. But the way the Prussian law was at that time, that rooms must have a certain height. And so that of course, she could get that all right downstairs, but upstairs – no, because there was no room there left, and so that they feel that actually the whole thing for her that make easier for her to, and so finally they built a new barn and she also had to put a solid brick wall up because the neighboring houses was too close. So in case of fire or something the neighbor's houses didn't catch fire right away, too. And so, they, then she, the carpenter shop was taken out and new floors put in so that she could live downstairs and rent the upstairs to newlyweds. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

PFEIFFER: Henrietta.

SIGRIST: What was her maiden name?

PFEIFFER: Reusch.

SIGRIST: Would you spell that, please?

PFEIFFER: R-E-U-C, eh, S-C-H.

SIGRIST: And she was from Daaden.

PFEIFFER: Daaden, also. Yes.

SIGRIST: What was your mother like as a person? What was her temperament?

PFEIFFER: Oh, she was a very good natured person and a hard working person. She had, of course, had to work extremely hard to – She, of course, bought two young cows and all, so that, the thing would get a good start. And my grandmother moved in with her because I was only three weeks old when my father died.

SIGRIST: This was your mother's mother.

PFEIFFER: Right. So that she could take of me while my mother tended to the farm work.  
(he laughs)

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever talk about what it was like after, right after your father died, and what she was feeling, what she had to go through?

PFEIFFER: No, very seldom. The only thing I remember that when I, occasionally when she worked out on the fields, which was scattered all around the village on the hillsides and that she sat there when I brought a coffee, some hot coffee for her and some sandwiches. And she looked over towards the other hillside where the cemetery was and she cried and said, "Well, there he is. Already he's so many years dead now." And she felt lonely, definitely. (clock chimes in background)

SIGRIST: Did you have other brothers and sisters?

PFEIFFER: Yes. Two. When my father died, of course, I was then three weeks old and the oldest boy was seven and the other one was five and a half. And I was three weeks. So you can imagine what that woman faced.

SIGRIST: It must have been very difficult.

PFEIFFER: Right.

SIGRIST: Now did your grandmother live with you all while you were growing up?

PFEIFFER: Yes, she did. She moved right in with us and she, of course, and she took care of me. I will always remember her. She was a good storyteller and she could sing. So I learned quite early, learned all the German folk songs and even some student songs. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: What did she look like?

PFEIFFER: Well, she was a little woman. A little on the stout side because she had by then also eye trouble. (he laughs) She doctored in Cologne, and she would, when she came back, she would tell me about the various streets, apparently ring streets. They would go in a ring. Apparently, the old, where the old walls had been surrounding the old city, medieval cities. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: In Cologne.

PFEIFFER: And, of course, now, the way she told it, very modern streets with pretty

houses on both sides. Of course, that wasn't where her eye doctor was. (he laughs) So, and of course, she would tell me about the Cologne Cathedral and well, as a youngster, I never, could never travel because my mother, first of all, didn't have the money to take me anywhere's and...

SIGRIST: So you were close to your grandmother.

PFEIFFER: Yes, yes. (he laughs) Definitely. And they used to tell that she would knit and, of course, knit stockings or socks for us. And they told me that in order to keep on knitting, she would tie a rope on my, on her legs and on my cradle, so that she could operate the cradle (he laughs heartily) with one leg while she was knitting.

SIGRIST: She was an ingenious woman.

PFEIFFER: Oh yes, yes. And she was a happy person, too. Extremely. And she couldn't, well, take care of me alright.

SIGRIST: Who did the cooking in the house?

PFEIFFER: She did as long as she was able to see enough. She did most of the time, yes.

SIGRIST: What did she cook that was something particularly...

PFEIFFER: Well, it was, that would be the local fare--potatoes and green beans and the like. Well, the usual vegetables that we would grow in our own garden--carrots and the like. And then, of course, occasionally she would operate the churn. The churn was a small, cylindrical apparatus made out of wood, and where

they would put the cream in and then she used a plunger and worked that up and down, and then after a while, of course, the plunger was harder to push and she found that it had turned into butter. Well, she would then take the butter out and knead it together into a ball or something like that and, of course, butter me a sandwich. One of the rye sandwiches which my mother baked the, my mother baked the rye bread in ovens which was, or bake houses which were scattered all over the village. There must have been about five or six bake house for the individual neighborhoods in various locations.

SIGRIST: And these are like public bake houses.

PFEIFFER: Yeah, yeah. And so, she would, she had a great bake, well, (he laughs) a trowel like, where she mixed the dough at night, and then that had to raise overnight and the next morning she would knead it into large loaves; large round loaves but not oblong so they would fit in an angle on a big board. We could carry that to the bake house the next day. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: That's a lot of work.

PFEIFFER: Yes. So they, to heat their houses, they made wood in the surrounding woods in the early spring and they cut down birches, oaks, and hazel and all the various other woods that grew there. And that was made, generally, you had to have a man to chop the trees down and she would then trim the branches and put them, the smaller branches into bundles which were tied twice and later on, of course, those bundles of brushwood would be used to heat that bake oven. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: I see.

PFEIFFER: Bread or *Kuchen* [pie] or cake was supposed to be baked. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: I see.

PFEIFFER: So, you see, it was definitely a rural section where, in the, well--they started early, of course, to make the necessary wood for, to heat the house, for the cook stove, and also for the main. We had a two story, cast iron, black cast iron stove in the living room, which was, well all sorts of figures cast into 'em. Sometimes, out of the, stories out of the Bible or so, representing certain things. (he laughs) And it was two story high and then, of course, set on four legs where, 'cause there was room enough for the cats to go underneath and wash themselves. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Was the climate very cold in this part of Germany?

PFEIFFER: No, it is not as cold as it is here. They still report about, well, zero temperatures, that is centigrade while we here, I have read twelve degree below centigrade here on my porch, (he laughs) at this time. And so then, of course, that had to be all carried down to near a road where they would haul the stuff away. And they had big wagons with the rear wheel generally about a good five feet to six feet in diameter--the front wheels, of course, correspondingly smaller. And the two cows would pull that wagon up in that district that sometimes was a couple of miles distance from the village--and very rough roads, too. And then load it on the wagon--heavy stuff, sometimes alone. Then the next time we'd put the brushwood on, a load of brushwood. And that was, of course, stored in the barn. And the other wood had to be chopped with heavy axes, to small stove lengths. (he laughs) And kitchen

stove length, too. They were generally smaller yet. And then, of course, the work would start after that was done. The work would start in the fields, which was scattered all around; always, at least, a mile away from our home. So you can imagine what my mother had to run, from one place to the other. And, of course, if she decided, well, on this particular field I would like to plant potatoes this year. So, we had to, we had special trays. She scraped the tray-full and then, when I later on was bigger (he laughs) I could carry that up on the upper end of the sloping field, because if you didn't do that, we would plow the, a lot of the good soil, we would loose that to the neighbor below us. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Sure.

PFEIFFER: So, well probably about eighteen inches of soil had to carried up on the upper end, poured out there and then, later on, evened out. And then the first row of seed potatoes was laid in that area about, well, about twenty-four inches apart. And then, of course, the first furrow that you would plow had to cover the seed potatoes. (he laughs) And so, then, of course, another, on the back, coming back, there wouldn't be no seed potatoes put in, but then the third furrow began so that there was always plenty space between the rows of potatoes, and of course..

SIGRIST: So you were young when you did a lot of physical labor. Weren't you?

PFEIFFER: Yeah, well, naturally the cows are not trained to walk like a horse or so, or oxen so they, somebody always had to lead the cows so that they would plow that furrow correctly and that person would handle the plow in the back, he would run a straight furrow. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Well, growing up in this kind of environment, what sticks out in your mind? When you think back to this, what are some of the things that you think of specifically?

PFEIFFER: Well, I always wanted to be a cabinet maker, too. And so, every opportunity I would have, as I grew up gradually, that I could find my way to my uncle's shop was to, to watch him and sometimes carry proudly a board home and sawed it up and probably made something or another. I was quickly able to nail a couple of boards together (he laughs), build a little house, or something. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Did your mother encourage this with you?

PFEIFFER: Yes, yes, yes. Both, of course. Both thought I should and, uh, well my uncle as well. He thought that I was so interested in the cabinet making, that I would make a very good carpenter and cabinet maker eventually. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Did you have things around the house that your father had made, pieces of furniture?

PFEIFFER: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: What did you have, specifically?

PFEIFFER: My mother had a big desk, which was out actually. Underneath it had a cabinet for linen and the like. And above it had a cabinet for the dishes; the good dishes. And then in the middle, there was an angular, well, angular door

which could be opened up and then serve as a desk, a writing desk. And then, in the back, there was all sorts of small portions where paper and ink and all had to be put in. (he laughs) So naturally, they had even a small secret board which you could lift up where you could put special papers or even money in so that nobody knew where that was. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: I see. And this is something your father had made.

PFEIFFER: Yeah. (he laughs) Yes, well, of course, there were other things that he made for my mother, like the beds and all that but, I always wanted to be a cabinet maker. Then, my oldest brother, when he became fourteen years of age, he learned the cabinet making trade with my uncle. Well, by, he wasn't, he'd finished his trade alright and went to a distant city to work at a larger furniture factory. He got lung disease and so my mother said, "You're not going to learn the cabinet making trade. You have got to either take up metal trade or some sort or another." And she had a friend or probably a friend of my father's, because in the small village everybody knew everybody anyhow. (he laughs) And she had yet asked him whether I, as I soon as I would be fourteen years old, whether I could learn the blacksmith trade in the man's shop on an iron ore mine.

SIGRIST: How did you feel about that?

PFEIFFER: Well, I realized, by then I was, I was thirteen years old when my brother died, and by then I realized what, that that perhaps wasn't a good, healthy trade to learn.

SIGRIST: Well, and this is the second major tragedy your mother has had to face.

PFEIFFER: Yes, yes, yes. So that's why I agreed with her decision. And then she died also in 1914.

SIGRIST: What did she die of?

PFEIFFER: Of pneumonia. She must have caught a cold and turned into pneumonia and she died the same as my father had, quickly. Within a week she was gone.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about that experience?

PFEIFFER: Well, to me naturally, there I was a full waif, of course, and so it was a tough experience. Then, of course, I saw yet when the furniture and things were sold; the cows left and everything and the wagons and all. Well, you're helpless then. You know that you're facing a life that, well, that many boys would have to face, but had still their father and mother here. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Was your grandmother still living at this point?

PFEIFFER: Yes, and she, of course, had to move back to her old home and she lived yet four more years and she died right on the end of the First World War when she died. It was that crib epidemic world-wide where millions of people died throughout the world. And most cases, of course, the strong persons too was affected, but after a crib epidemic. But anyhow, here I naturally had to go with, and find and, my mother had yet arranged all those things while she knew she would die and with my, her younger sister, my brother and I were supposed to live with her younger sister.

END OF SIDE A (TAPE I)  
BEGINNING OF SIDE B (TAPE I)

PFEIFFER: They had, of course, a fairly large house and they themselves had four children; three boys and a girl. And their oldest boy was just a year younger than I, so I fitted well in that family.

SIGRIST: Was this in Daaden, also?

PFEIFFER: Yes, yes. (he laughs) So, interesting thing, of course, then I start in the blacksmith shop soon after that in the spring of the year my mother died, during the winter time. I guess in February. And then in the spring of the year, of course, I had to go to the mine and learn the blacksmith trade. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Now did you keep in contact with you grandmother at all?

PFEIFFER: Yes, yes. I did. Now, of course, in 1914 you have to remember that the First World War broke out also, and consequently the, many of the journeymen that worked in the blacksmith shop was called to war. And the boss, quite often was alone with, after a while, with three apprentices. (he laughs) And we finally got the prisoner of war, Russian prisoner, who had been in his third year of service in Presklitovsk in Russia, when he had to go to war. And he was caught, made a prisoner in the early part of the war. (he laughs) And so, on the end of the war, of course, he had been seven years away from home, too! Now whether he ever later on saw his home or not I don't know because he talked that his father had a steam mill, a steam-driven milling operation for

wheat and the like, a flour mill in other words, not too far from Moscow. Now, of course, when that revolution started and they got going, of course, everybody that owned property, of course, was called "kulak," or something like that and there property was confiscated and most cases they were shipped to Siberia. The owner was shipped to Siberia. So whether the poor man ever saw his father or mother again I don't know.

SIGRIST: But he was taken into the blacksmith shop.

PFEIFFER: Yes. As a prisoner, he worked in the blacksmith with us boys. (he laughs) We all learned all sorts of Russian words, but in most cases not very good ones! (he laughs)

SIGRIST: But what a wonderful experience, in a way, to learn how to do everything...

PFEIFFER: Right, right.

SIGRIST: ...because you had to.

PFEIFFER: So, well, of course, the, perhaps my mother had heard that he, that this boss was paying his apprentices a small wage, and that was, well, I guess, almost throughout my apprentice experiences, that was enough that I could pay my room and board.

SIGRIST: With your aunt.

PFEIFFER: (he laughs) Yeah. I was on my own in other words, and I had to. Then, of course, there was in most cases nothing left for spending money of any sort.

(he laughs) So we had to live very frugal.

SIGRIST: Were you happy with your aunt or was it an uncomfortable situation?

PFEIFFER: Very pleasant situation. They were on the end of the town. They had two huge, old linden trees. When you walked over to their home, you walked between them as an entrance more or less. And, well soon, we were, my cousin and I we were, found that we could build a tree house right under one of the linden. (he laughs) And so, and, of course, my uncle was a very good natured man, too. He let us boys do some of those things...

SIGRIST: So it wasn't all work. At least you got some enjoyment.

PFEIFFER: It was a pleasant surrounding for me and I felt quick at home there, too. But, of course, in the blacksmith shop at first, there was huge windows on the one side. And we sharpened the miner's drills. See, they used air hammers, of course, in the mine and so we would get hundreds of them each day to sharpen – hammered single cutting edge on the end. And then afternoon or the next morning they would pick them up after they had been hammered and then, later on, hardened and then put into various bins with their various numbers equipped. The miners in the morning would call for their numbers and they would put the bundles and take them down in the mine. We also had to make construction work, do construction work. When they lowered the shaft, for instance, we had to make the channel iron drilled out and cross pieces and everything where the guide beams would be bolted to, for the bucket, which, one would go up and the other would go down. (he laughs) And so that, then besides that, we met miners or the ore wagons which, of course, ran on narrow gauge tracks and they would be made out of heavy sheet steel

and then reinforced on the ends with heavy angle iron and on the top with heavy flat steel and drilled and riveted with half inch rivets. (he laughs) So, those construction jobs were interesting too. We learned a few things. But this endless hammering of these drills, that was a daily job for hours that just heated those drills up and then hammered a new edge on it. (he laughs) And so, on the first spring I, apparently, the sun shone so nicely through that window, and I started to dream about that now up in the woods where my mother used to make the supply for the winter, she knew always where some of the wild flowers grew, especially the snowbells which were pushed through this melting snow in the earlier spring and they had a delicate, bell-shaped flower and wonderful fragrance. So I imagined, I think about that and just hammered slowly and all of a sudden the old boss came, and he knocked my hammer out of my hand and flew in one corner and then he pulled the drill out of where I was hammering on the other hand and pulled that back in the fire that the sparks flew and he said, "We're not playing marbles here!" (he laughs) That woke me up for good, though.

SIGRIST: I bet!

PFEIFFER: That scared me to death, practically. And, of course, after that he never had to say a word to me. I was always on the job. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Talk to me about Daaden and your experience during World War One. And how did the town change and how did what you did change because of the war?

PFEIFFER: Well, of course, at first seemed to be a lot of play, too. I mean, everybody was sure that we would win the war within a couple of months or half a year at the

most. (he laughs) That didn't turn out to be that way. And, of course, gradually, the shortages became to be noticeable.

SIGRIST: What was, what was in short supply?

PFEIFFER: Well, first of all, the food was, became scarcer. You couldn't buy flour as you wanted, as you did before – butter and things of that sort. Now, of course, my uncle had also two cows, so they had always fresh butter and things and some milk, too. But never the less, gradually by, 19, from 1916 on it went worse gradually. Everybody knows that there wasn't, then they changed to, if you wanted to buy a loaf of bread, you had to have a card for it and you had so many grams allotted to you. (he laughs) So all these shortages, the same as you wanted to buy meat. You had to have another card for meat. And so many grams of meat was allotted to you. (he laughs) So it became more and more difficult to, then, of course, gradually, actually to go to the mine, we had to go over a mountain and the mine was on the other valley; next door to the one in Daaden. (he laughs) And at the beginning, the miners had a path where they had probably walked up and down for generations. I think they picked out steepest portion of the mountain to climb over and at night it was very difficult, especially in the winter time when it was icy and all. So I guess one of my uncles had broken a leg there and he never went back to the mine. He bought a horse and wagon and did, well, plowing for people that didn't cows and so on, and hard work. He had a heavy Belgian horse and so he never went back to the mine after that. (he laughs) And, of course, always the very first thing we had to do when we wanted to go to the mine, we had to buy a walking cane with a sharp pointed broom on the end (clock chimes in background) so that we could, in the wintertime, could really be sure that we didn't slip or fall or fell. Now many of the older miners, they would have a small lantern that, well, like

they used to have years ago on the automobiles as well as bicycles as well. They had this carbide stuff in the lower, was two containers, the upper one had, contained the water, and underneath was the carbide which made the gas. As you opened the valve slowly, then the water dripped on that and that formed the necessary gas and, of course, you had a fairly bright light that way. And that was also the same thing that the miners used. When they had to go down into the mine, they picked up their light in the morning, which was all filled with the proper amount of carbide and, of course, they filled it with water – their upper end with water and then lit them and they would walk in the mine. So...

SIGRIST: How often did you – did you have to go to the mine from time to time?

PFEIFFER: Yes, yes, 'cause we was directly where the mouth or the tunnel where they came out or went in and came out again. And then, of course, the shaft was perhaps a vertical shaft which ran down in the mine about eighteen hundred feet at the time when I left out there. Eighteen hundred feet deep. And then, of course, every forty feet they had dumped or blasted tunnels sideways towards the ore body. And then, of course, the miners would drill upward, always in the ceiling and, of course, all that rock dust fell right on their faces. So later on most of the young fellows, in my age they had lung sickness. In fact, it blocked their lungs up completely that they couldn't breathe anymore, and that could not be removed. That rock, silicon dust. And so many of them died quite young, too.

SIGRIST: Because of the war, was production at the mine increased?

PFEIFFER: Oh yes, sure.

SIGRIST: And how did the war affect what you were producing at the blacksmith shop?

PFEIFFER: Well, in fact, towards, in 1917, I was seventeen years old and I was drafted then to go into the army, too. But, the day I was, in fact I was called, the day I was going to quit, one of my uncles brought a telegram to the blacksmith shop and said, "You don't have to go. You were deferred." So, even though I was still of the age where I was, where I made good cannon fodder, anyhow, as they used to say, (he laughs) I was deferred because there wasn't enough people there, had that skill to sharpen these drills and keep the miners going all the time.

SIGRIST: So you actually didn't produce anything different at the blacksmith shop. You still maintained what you were making for the mines.

PFEIFFER: Right, right, right, right. Well, of course, afterwards, when, by then, when I finished my apprentice work, and I worked there just about three quarters of a year afterwards, but I, in the meantime I found that that sort of job I would never be able to perhaps buy or build my own home someday and all.

SIGRIST: Well, of course, Germany was hit very badly after the war.

PFEIFFER: Oh yes, yes. So, I naturally kept my eye open for other things and at the time – directly after the war in 1919, the people that owned the mine, and also the smelter was just about five miles away from the mine, that was still owned by a family concern. And those people were old, too, and had no male heirs, so they decided to sell to one of the rural district concerns – Thyssen and Co.

SIGRIST: Could you spell that please?

PFEIFFER: (Mr. Pfeiffer does not hear the question) And so they, the big company, of course, decided to improve or make facilities to improve the iron ore, because our iron ore probably had, at the most, thirty-five percent iron. And so the rest of it was rock and other impurities – slate and crag rock and (he laughs) all that sort of a thing. And so, they intended to build a huge concentrating plant right on the outside of the mine. They would bring the ore out and then be dumped and crushed in big crushers and then sorted out by various processes on conveyer lines and finally, when that became smaller and smaller in this crushing process, they finally had a lot of small, fine sand, or sand in all various consistencies, too – very fine, medium and courser sand. Well, that was run through a magnetic separators. It was pumped with water over rolls and spread out. The rolls were probably about thirty inches long – thirty to thirty-six inches long. And then, as this stuff rolled over the, was distributed by the water over these rolls, the iron particles clung to the magnetized roll and the rest of the stuff was flushed out with water, and then later on brought outside in great big pans where that again, the water separated from the sand and then the sand could be removed later on separately. And so, I took that opportunity. I was realized that there was only one electrician on that mine. You see, all they had the hoisting operation was driven by elect – big electric motors. They had compressors, which was also driven by electric motors, and then, of course, the most important thing was the pumps in the mine that had to bring the water out or else the mine would have drowned shortly in a couple weeks. And so they had only one electrician to maintain that business and, naturally, here when this great big concentrating plant up on the outside and I realized that one electrician would not be able to all that. The installation work would have to be done on that. And so I asked him could I join him and then

he would train me as an electrician. "Yes," he said, "I need men." And, of course, I knew him quite well. I had contact with him on various times and so I became an electrician. (he laughs) And, of course, I installed all the electrical lighting system in the big building. It was almost like a big skyscraper. The hillside where they build that thing on was extremely steep, and so they built a ramp up there where the ore was brought out on with huge chains. An endless chain was run between the track and every once in a while, that would be every, probably ten feet or so, there would be a lever sticking out of the chain which would take a hold of the axle on the wagons and drive the wagon out. No more boys would have to push the wagons out from the shaft. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: So how long did you stay in this capacity?

PFEIFFER: A good six years.

SIGRIST: Oh, a good long time, then.

PFEIFFER: Yes, I helped actually install almost all the motors and oil switches for the equipment. We got from the smelter, they cleaned the, the gases as it comes out of the blast furnace. The gases clean them and then, after that was clean, they burned the gas under the boilers, because that produced the necessary steam to run the two steam turbines; originally big, huge compound steam engine. But that was so huge, it wouldn't have fit in this whole building from the bottom up. And then, of course, the two generators, which ran about fifteen hundred RPM, they hardly took any, any room to speak of in this huge building. Before that, huge compound steam engine had driven a fly wheel and then, of course, a big generator.

SIGRIST: So these people turned a small operation into a huge operation.

PFEIFFER: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Now did you continue living with your aunt and uncle during this time?

PFEIFFER: Yes, yes I did. And, of course, here is what happened, also. You see, at 1919, there wasn't too much noticeable difference. We went still in the mine, did our work as before and, but gradually, we realized what the Treaty of Versailles meant to Germany. After all, we was the losers on that war and so we lost tremendous territory like part of, or all of West, what we call West Prussia went to Poland. Then, of course, the Poles wanted an outlet to the sea so they used the Weichsel River, which flowed past Danzig into the Baltic Sea. And they put an harbor on the their side of the new territory while Danzig, of course, remained on the other. And, of course, when the Germans wanted to go into East Prussia, they had to stop on, to get through that Polish corridor! (he laughs) And that, of course, later on, caused, as part of the cause of the Second World War, too. (he laughs) But not only that, we also lost a large portion in southeastern Germany to Czechoslovakia. But, we used to call Bohemia *Böhmen* and *Mähren* and that formed the new Czechoslovakia. They cut also a large territory off which, of course, where Germany had coal mines as well as iron mines and the like, too, and silver mines, too, up in that territory. So, then, of course, on the west side of Germany, we lost Alsace-Lorraine. It had to be returned to France. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: So you're beginning to think that this is a good time to get out of Germany.

PFEIFFER: Well, no, not, not yet. I had no idea that I wanted to go then, yet. But, you see,

all those losses and, of course, according to the Treaty of Versailles, all German ships had to be sent to England and France. So when we finally wanted to go, we couldn't travel with a German ship. We had, we traveled with the old Royal Mainline later on. But, you see, that gradually sunk into us and besides, what France demanded because they had, France had lost the war against the combined Germany in 1871. (a clock chimes in the background) And Bismarck at the time, demanded a certain amount of gold immediately as reparations and, besides, Alsace-Lorraine moved to Germany because, had become German territory now, of course, after the First World War was over, according to the Treaty of Versailles, they demanded first of all, all that gold that they sent to Germany after that 1871 war. And so they ask us for the money, there was a still gold standard, too. All of a sudden the inflation, a terrible inflation started. At first, people didn't know what, why, what caused that. All of a sudden a loaf of bread was twice and three times as much as they had to pay before. And butter, too, everything went up, you know. All the cost of living. And, first slowly that you hardly notice it, then also people realized that their money in the banks wasn't worth anything anymore as this inflation went after a while rampant, really. It was a galloping inflation by 19, it started really in 1921 to '22 and '23, that was the worst years. Well, it went from, in fact, they used to get paid monthly in the mine. And due to that rapid inflation, they had to pay us twice a month, then twice a week after a while, because (he laughs) they couldn't even, even print the money fast enough. So that some of the bigger corporations, they took a big rubber stamp and stamped on the ten thousand dollar note, bank note, they stamped a "hundred thousand" right across. (he laughs) They didn't print the money fast enough. So, you see, that went so wild. Well, in the meantime, of course, I also fell in love on top of it all and met my future wife. And, well, in by '22, '23, we thought well, eventually, I was, after all, twenty-two years old and, you think of

eventually getting married once. But, it was impossible that we would even have been able to rent a small apartment even with two rooms; a kitchen and a bedroom. So, we tried yet to buy some of the kitchen utensils; pots and pans and the like. And we found a set in the store in nearby city and we priced it, a hundred-fifty thousand marks for just a simple kitchen utensils, (he laughs) enameled pots and pans. (he laughs) Well, I didn't, up to then, I had never have earned that much. A hundred-fifty thousand mark, I never had earned that much. Not even near it! So, I went to the bank and asked them to, where I could have some money, that much money on a short term loan. Yeah, so I got a hundred-fifty thousand mark and we went and bought the utensils. Then, one day I had to go to the blast furnace and pick up something there, and coming through other village, which was on the other end of the valley from us, I saw [a stove].

END OF TAPE I

BEGINNING OF TAPE II SIDE A

PFEIFFER: And, "Oh," I said, "that is nice, that'd be good." So I priced it. Two million marks! (he laughs) Two million marks! So I, of course, wanted to do the same thing. I went home and told my girlfriend about it and I said to her, "Wonderful stove, white enamel and all." And so I went to the bank to get the two million, a short term loan. And they said, "No. No more short term loans." So, and here I wanted to have that stove, too. So I went to my uncle. He was, of course, the, perhaps the largest businessman in our small town and told him what had happened. He took his apron off and he said, "I'll get you the money right away." So he went to the bank and he brought a check for two million marks.

So we, of course, hitched two cows to the small farm wagon and off we went over the mountainside and (he laughs) as we got there, must of been a little after four o'clock, and a woman said, "No, you can't have that range anymore." I said, "I have the money." "No, no." She figured that tomorrow she could ask two and a half million for it! (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Horrendous inflation at this time. It was almost like a joke.

PFEIFFER: Absolutely unbelievable! So, well, finally my wife, of course, was with me too, or at that time, my girlfriend. She was a very good looking, too. She made, somehow she'd talk to the man, you know, the store owner, and he finally softened up, you know. He said, "Oh, let the two young people have the stove." So, I gave him the two million and we loaded it on the wagon, and, of course, we got promptly home by dark already. Of course, cows are very slow. They don't go like a horse. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: This is a horrendous environment to be living in!

PFEIFFER: Yeah, yeah. (he laughs) Well, we had no room to put the stove, either. I had, we had in our home, our home was not sold where I was born. My mother insisted that that was so supposed to be left. The rest of the furniture and everything was supposed to be so sold but the home was supposed to be left for us eventually. Well, I had a small room at a time where they put the linen and things, bed sheets and the like and pillowcases and all what these two women had probably accumulated in a lifetime and which was extremely valuable. And, of course, most German women, of course, always wanted that linen closet stacked up high. The more linen they had, the greater a pride they possess. And so that was still in this small room together with a couple other

smaller furniture pieces. I guess a bed was in there, too. But it was a comparatively small room. And so we put it in there and hoped we would find a place where we could rent. With nothing we couldn't rent anything. So by then, of course, we were greatly discouraged, too. And so there was a man that had lived in Kenosha, Wisconsin since he had emigrated, I guess, around 1906--between 1906 and '07, something in that area the way I remember, because we had a boy, one of his boys was in my class, when I started off in grade school. And so that's why I remember those dates, roughly. (he laughs) And he came out -- his wife had been not too well and the doctor had told him in Kenosha that the best thing would be for her to have a climate change. That would, perhaps, revive her again. So he came out. Of course, he had plenty of dollars and so he bought one of the nicest looking homes in Daaden. And then we heard that he also supplied some people with money to go to the United States, because dollars, you see that we couldn't, we couldn't use our own mark. They wouldn't take the mark for the ship's passage. So we, naturally, had to have either pound sterling or dollars. So I finally said to her, I said, well her brother was also in the United States. He moved here in, I guess only two years after the war, the First World War. He moved over here because they had an uncle living in Scotia, right across the river from Schenectady here. And they, and he was a baker by trade. They ask him to come over and he would always find a job as a baker, anytime. And so he did. He moved over here and so I asked my girlfriend one day, I said, "Why don't you write to your brother. Maybe he can send us the money. Then we could leave for good from here. We didn't seem to be able to make out though, (he laughs) out there. So, "No," she said, "I won't write. I won't write to him. I don't know whether he even has saved that much money that he can send us that amount of money." It wasn't a great sum either, but a hundred and ten dollars or something like that per person at the time -- third class. And so, then I happened to think, "Well,

why not try that man that came from Kenosha. He seems to have all sorts of money." So I went there. They lived directly adjacent to my father-in-law. And "Yes," he says, "but right now I don't have enough cash for that. But I have a second mortgage that's due in the fall. As soon as I have that money, you can have your money." And I was going to let him have some of that land that I inherited as a, well, more or less as a guarantee that we would pay the money back. And he approached me later on. Once again he says, "Why don't you sell me the stuff outright. You never will come back, anyhow." And well, I finally consented to that, too. I sold the thing outright, all the property that I inherited from my mother. Now you see, the trouble was there that all the property was divided by the children, you see, and became smaller and smaller. And then, of course, my mother used the land that my grandmother had while she lived with us, too. And that way she had a fairly good farm operation, enough to raise, enough grasslands to raise enough hay for the, to feed the cows over winter. That was one important thing, naturally. And so, then, of course, as soon as my mother died, my grandmother's property naturally went to the rest of her children. And so each one got a field or a grass lot or something like that, (he laughs) and, while we, of course, had also a share in her inheritance as well, but that was so small that (he laughs) we never could have made, fed even one cow on it. Maybe a goat! (he laughs) And I wasn't inclined to be a farmer either, anyhow. The hard work that all men, of course, most of the miners, they worked eight hours a day and then rushed home and did some of their farm work. The hard work, we say cutting the hay with a scythe by hand or hauling stuff in and chopping wood and the like--all the heavy work. And while the women, they had to do all the hard work on the fields, like after the potatoes were planted and they started to sprout and then, of course, the weeds sprouted with it. Weeds, of course, had to be hoed and that was, must have been an endless job, too, for the women and

the children as well. Of course, I had to carry that earth up to the upper half of the sloping field. So...

SIGRIST: So did the man's second mortgage come through?

PFEIFFER: Oh yeah. (clock chimes in the background) Well, they already wrote us that we should hurry. There was a chance that the quota would be filled. We did...

SIGRIST: Who wrote you? Your girlfriend's...

PFEIFFER: Yeah. Her relatives...

SIGRIST: Were you married to her yet? When did you marry her?

PFEIFFER: No, we finally decided, "if we want to go, we might just as well get married. Then we can at least sleep together on the trip, too. (he laughs) On the ship. So we did. We got married. And then all of a sudden, in fact I had quit my job and it was in 1923. We got married on October 19, 1923. And just about that time, I quit the job after we got the money, you see, and had passage with the Royal Mail Line from Hamburg, we were supposed to sail. And I quit the work and we were saying good bye to all our relatives. So my wife said to me, "You are related to the whole village!" I said, "Yes, and we include your relatives yet, too. We are related to the whole village!" (he laughs) And, well just a day before we were supposed to leave for Hamburg, a telegram arrived from the ship's line that we couldn't go no more because the quota was filled. That was the first time that that ever had happened. Germany, at that time, had seventy thousand people that could emigrate to the United States, and that was already filled by October. (he laughs) That's in 1923. So there you are. We

had, in fact, the, we had packed a big box where some of these kitchen utensils were in, and other feather beds and what not, and sent that already to Hamburg and, of course, they naturally stowed it right away on the ship where we were supposed to be sailing with. So I said, " Well, let it go." They told us, the ship line, they told us, "Well, by, you can sail the middle of June and then when the new quota opens at the first of July, you're right in New York." (he laughs) So, well, that was only after, from October of '23 to '24, it would have been. But, during the winter time, and there was all sorts of rumors of something, that something, some changes. So I went one time to the American Consul to Cologne and inquired and they didn't know either. During the session of Congress of 1923/24, they had changed the immigration law, (he laughs) that Germany didn't have that large a quota any longer. They cut the quota down, and, I don't know, in favor of perhaps Polish because the Polish had anyhow a small quota and so that they didn't lose much. So we had to stay. We couldn't go. Well, that was a fine thing. Here we had no plans to live but, my wife and at that time, slept with me in my old bachelor's quarters. (he laughs) It was just a bedroom, narrow enough, and just a clothes closet and a bed. And, what could we do? We naturally, then, however went and tried to make, that we could cook ourselves. We brought the stove from the little room in my home and set that up, up there so that we wouldn't depend on my aunt and uncle yet, too. And, of course, while we first got married and my wife helped them, and well, digging potatoes and the like and my uncle one day said to me, "Oh, can that woman work?", he said. Well, her father was an awfully strict man who never, who made the women work so hard. And they had to be home at ten o'clock at night, even though they were nineteen and twenty years old. They had to be home at, they had a big bell on the front door. As soon as they opened that bell, the door, the bell would ring. And the old man, naturally, turned the light on in the bedroom and checked. (he laughs

heartily) Oh, and he was a tough old customer. And so the women knew how to work all of, he had five girls and two boys. Big family, naturally he must have, as a younger man, acquired a nice home, too, and probably had a mortgage. And so each of those girls, as soon as they was confirmed fourteen years old, they had to go and work as a maid somewhere for richer people and nearby or farther away cities. (he laughs) And so those girls, naturally, was brilliant cooks later on. They learned an awful lot in their years of slavery.

SIGRIST: So now, so now you existed this way until 1925.

PFEIFFER: Well, yes. So naturally we first thought we probably never will go. In the meantime, my wife became pregnant. You can't sleep with a beautiful woman night after night and nothing happens, you know. (he laughs) So she became pregnant and so, of course, finally, then we could never hear from the Consul in Cologne, where we had the original visas, when we could go. And then the new law specified that because they had a small depression here, too, in '21/'22, where some factories wasn't too busy and people were out of work slightly and so they didn't want no industrial workers. Farmers could come. I wasn't enough of a farmer that if they would ask me a ticklish question like, "What is the gestation time of a cow?" I wouldn't not even know that! (he laughs)

SIGRIST: So you guys were really in a pickle.

PFEIFFER: Yeah! (he laughs) That's right. So, but finally, about the girl was just born when we got a letter. We had to be in Cologne Consul for the visa and everybody, before, only the man of the family, the family father, more or less, had to go and get the papers for the whole family. This time, everybody had to

go. (he laughs) It was just, she was still in bed yet when this letter arrived. So she says, "I'm going if it costs my life." So the very first thing that she got out of bed was to go on the railroad that morning with me down to Cologne. That was about eighty miles railroad trip, too. So I, to be sure that she wouldn't catch any draft or anything, or any cold, I bought a first class ticket because those early trains, of course, was full of labor people that got to work somewheres. So you could hardly get a decent, and the doors would always open on every succeeding station. They would open up and close again and all, so by buying a first class ticket, I was relatively sure that we would get safely down to Cologne. Then as we got there the consul was directly behind the cathedral and the cathedral was, or the railway station was almost directly in front of the cathedral. So we didn't have to walk very far. And as we got there to the consul, we had to, all the immigrants had to go the back way. You couldn't go the front, up the front way. And so here was the, the whole stair, from the bottom on up, full of people already waiting until they would open the door, you know, all ready to go to America. And then they finally opened the door, and let us in. There was a long room with just plain benches, and we sat on the benches. And then waited what would happen next. Finally, a man, a door opened from a corridor and a man came in and he announced the first numbers. We had waiting numbers, each one us, see, which was mailed to us in our home town. And so, he announced two numbers. Two people would go and I watched how long a time. Well, it would take roughly ten minutes and then he came and announced another two more numbers and I then looked at my numbers, I said, "We'll never get home tonight if we wait until our number is called!" We had to go because my wife breast-fed the baby, too. (he laughs) So somehow or other we had to get home, so I said, "Okay, when the man comes again, I'm going to ask him whether he couldn't take us first, that is such and such was the case, that my wife had just given birth to a baby and

we really didn't have much time, or we would miss the train that would bring us to our home town again in time, the last train." So, he couldn't understand me. He couldn't, he apparently, all he could do was announce the numbers. So he took me by the sleeve and took me into the corridor. It was a long corridor and doors leading to the various offices on both sides. And all of a sudden, a tall man came out of one of the doors and this fellow hit me on the arm. He went up to that man and talked to him and it happened to be the American doctor. So the doctor, of course, also only spoke broken German but, never the less, he understood what my problem was. And he said, "Where is your wife? Go and get her." And so I quickly rushed out and brought her in and he brought us in to an office with girls typing and things like that, two or three girls in there. And he looked around and he saw a couple of windows open, so talked to one of the girls, girl jumped up and closed the window. Then he, of course, had already given my wife a chair to sit down and (he laughs) so that was the very first gentleman I met. (he laughs) Yeah. Well...

SIGRIST: So, did you get your visa? Did everything...

PFEIFFER: Yes, yes. Of course, the girls right away made the visas out and I said, "Well, we need health certificates. We don't have them. We thought we would better get them from, our health certificate from the American doctor." "Well," he said, "Come in and follow me in my office." So, he took our pulse and then he wrote out the, "Well," I said, "we have that baby that, we have a health certificate from her." And he looked at that health certificate and all he said, "No, that's no good." "Well," I said, "couldn't you write one out?" He said, "Well, has she got all ten fingers? All ten toes?" (he laughs) I says, "Oh yes, she is no cripple, she is definitely a healthy baby!" (he laughs) So he wrote the thing out, and, of course, he charged us ten dollars each for the, for our health

certificate and then five dollars for the baby. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: So, were you able to leave soon after that?

PFEIFFER: Right, we left immediately and I wanted to, I saw as we walked past the outside of the railway station, there was a money exchange, too. So I said, "Well, I would like to change some mark into dollars." And so I brought my wife to a waiting room, first class in the railway station and then quickly rushed to this place. And then I glanced at some clock I saw, and I said, "Now, what that's confusing. I had a half an hour or an hour difference." At that time, they had the English occupation in Cologne and they, naturally, had western European time while we had central European time. Then I did one little thinking, (clock chimes in background) I said, "I didn't even go to the exchange!" I rushed right back and picked my wife up. I said, "We have to rush, or we'll miss our train yet." (he laughs) So as we got up the platform, oh boy, was that a count on that platform. So, we didn't, first, momentarily we didn't know what to do--what car we should go into. Then, I saw the conductor. He was a friend of the family's and I talked with him. "Oh," he said, "that train is filled to the gills, but," he said, "I know a way out." So, he pulled a key out of his pocket and he had his own first class compartment that was locked. So he unlocked that compartment and shut us in, and so we got home. (he laughs) And...

SIGRIST: Well, that's good. We need to, to, to hurry a little bit along.

PFEIFFER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Why don't you tell me when you left for America.

PFEIFFER: Well, in the, that was towards the end of January for Hamburg. And there, of course, ...

SIGRIST: So how old is your baby by then?

PFEIFFER: Well, just maybe – I always said she was three weeks, or eight weeks old when we brought her over here. So she must have been...

SIGRIST: She was very young...

PFEIFFER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...little.

PFEIFFER: Yeah. Eight weeks when we brought her to New York. So, (he laughs) then, of course, we, I remember, never forget the first morning we stood on deck and looked at that Manhattan skyline and it was a cloudy day. The sky was completely overcast and, of course, the whole buildings, what we could see from the ship, looked awful dreary and oh, not very inviting at all. And there we are, my wife had the baby in her arm and here I, both of us couldn't speak a word a English. (he laughs) And no opportunity that I would have a job right away, either. And here I was with a young family and well, I wasn't exactly a worrier, but was very blocked out in my mind.

SIGRIST: How long was the boat ride?

PFEIFFER: Well, since it was an English ship, they left from Hamburg, and crossed the

North Sea, and then Southampton was their home port and they, of course, refueled the ship and, as well as put on provisions, too. So we were several days in Southampton. In fact I, one day I took the courage and bought, took a walk into the city and, of course, I wanted to bring the couple nice oranges. They had such nice oranges there in the stores and I bought, naturally, wanted to buy, but I had to change money first--(he laughs) get some dollars into pounds and shillings, and then came back with the fresh oranges.

SIGRIST: Was is it a rough trip?

PFEIFFER: Yes, yes, very rough. The, actually we crossed, we had no trouble going to the North Sea. That normally is supposed to be a very dangerous sea. And, but that was very smooth. We all thought, "Well, we never got seasick." So, as we left from Southampton to France, Cherbourg, and that was okay as we crossed the channel. But, when left that night late from Cherbourg into the open ocean, then, of course, we hit a storm. We wasn't gone very long when we hit a terrible storm and, oh boy, we got both so seasick that, and a good thing they had an old English nurse on board. She took care of the baby. She changed the baby on time and all and brought some soup to my wife, too. And my wife had said, "Well, give him a bowl full, too." She said, "No, no he can't go up." We wanted something to eat. (he laughs) She would bring it to my wife but not to me. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: What were you accommodations on the boat?

PFEIFFER: Well, lucky. We had, they had a small cabin for us with two berths, one, and I slept, of course, on the upper one. And so it wasn't bad accommodations while most of the other people, they slept in groups. The women in larger where

they had probably from six to eight bunks and the men also, in a similar condition. So, we was yet fortunate that they had given us that small cabin.

END OF SIDE A TAPE II

BEGINNING OF SIDE B

PFEIFFER: But this trouble started. We could hear the waves thunder over the deck. In fact, it had knocked the air conditioning out. You see, at that time, they didn't know, didn't have air conditioning. It was those big vents, you know, would take in the fresh air and they had knocked them all out. So it got terribly hot inside because that was still a steam turbine boat. Then if we had any complaints, sometimes we complained about, if the service wasn't exactly right or something or another, they said, "Well, this is a, a German-built boat!" It was one of those boats where they had to, according to the Versailles Treaty, had turn over to England. And this was the former München, or Munich. I don't know which line, either, the Hamburg-America line or the Bremen-Lloyd or whichever. I don't know. And they called the ship "Ohio." And, of course, while I was in the, taking a walk from the ship while they was provisioning the ship in Southampton, I also saw the, one of the mighty big German ships in dry dock there. And I guess they, it was the Vaterland originally, I think, something like that. It was an extremely large ship and they called it Leviathan. The English transferred it into the Leviathan.

SIGRIST: Well, so when did you stop being sick? When was the storm over and....

PFEIFFER: Oh, it took several days until the storm finally was up. Then there was a couple

of fellows from Minnesota – farmers from Minnesota that had apparently revisited Germany, their old hometown once more. And those two guys, they were always drunk. (he laughs) They didn't get seasick, either! So then, one morning, they knocked on the door and they took my wife between them and brought her up on the fresh air. Then when she came down again, she says, "You've got to go upstairs. You'll get quickly well. That is the only thing!" So, of course, later on she took me and I got up there and quickly well, too. So the rest of the trip was actually wonderful across the Atlantic at the beginning of February to the middle of February when we finally landed in New York.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

PFEIFFER: Yes. When we actually entered the channel, a fog came in and they had to drop anchor. And it was a hell of a noise at that time. Of course, the tunnels, wasn't there yet nor the bridges like George Washington Bridge at the other end of the Hudson wasn't there yet, either. So, naturally, everybody had to go on ferries back and forth. And they, naturally had to go fog or no fog. They had to go. Our big ship would blow the heavy whistle and then, on the front of the ship, a sailor was ringing the bell constantly. (he laughs) And finally, the fog lifted momentarily, and they raised anchor and we went up. And then the fog closed in again. Then at nine o'clock at night, everything was so still with exception of the noises of the ferries. I went out on deck and here we was anchored directly in front of the Statue of Liberty, (he laughs) in the channel. It seemed as if the, even nature was against us, wouldn't let us into the United States. (he laughs) But, once we, of course, got started---what her uncle had done, they had rented a small flat in Scotia, and it wasn't really a two family house, but Polish people lived downstairs and we rented the upstairs, just two bedrooms and a kitchen and a living room.

SIGRIST: Talk about Ellis Island.

PFEIFFER: And they had finished the stuff and discarded furniture, but well, they bought a, for instance, I had bought a new kitchen stove they gave us the old cast iron stove. Well, it was a good start and then they had a small kitchen table and two beds--a brass bed and then a crib for the baby. So, we was, we had a good start right away.

SIGRIST: Talk to me about Ellis Island and being processed at Ellis.

PFEIFFER: Oh, well, of course, after we went to the, that they inspected our suitcases and we had another big wooden box that was dumped down the chute and probably went right away in the freight yard and was transported up to Scotia. Then we had to board a ferry which brought us down to Ellis Island, and there, of course, we were separated immediately. I remember we walked up a fairly high ramp and then into the examining rooms and up on the top of the ramp was a man that checked your eyes and then, of course, we had to have enough papers--health certificate and birth certificate and marriage certificate all in triplicate. And we, of course, had to leave that there. And I don't know that I went through really serious examination of any sort. Before you know it, I went down on the other side, down the stair I guess and there, I naturally looked for my wife. And she wasn't there yet, so I waited there, of course, full of anxiety because that was supposed to be our last examination. If we didn't pass, we had to go back. (he laughs) After all that excitement we had behind us. So, but I guess I waited just for about five minutes and she came down with the baby and then we, of course, there was travelers aid personnel -- galore! They spoke, of course, all languages, and I soon found the person that

spoke German and they sent a telegram to Scotia that we would be on the way. And they must have given that we would come by train late at night.

SIGRIST: Did you eat while you were at Ellis Island?

PFEIFFER: Uh, yes we did. There was a buffet as we both met and we right away steered for that buffet. There was all sorts of, oh, great big bowls of oranges, and bigger than we'd ever seen oranges before. It must have been the California oranges and then they had pies there. We didn't know what a pie was. So my wife pointed at an apple pie, "I want a piece of that apple pie," or apple *Kuchen* [pie], she called it. And then when she had the first taste, she shook her head and she said, "They forgot the sugar in this *Kuchen*." (he laughs) It was tart, naturally – an apple pie should be. She felt they'd forgot the sugar in that *Kuchen*! (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Was this food that was just offered to the people after they were--you didn't pay for this, did you?

PFEIFFER: I don't really know. I almost think we did pay for it. But we took it along, of course, on the train then.

SIGRIST: Were there a lot of people at Ellis Island?

PFEIFFER: Oh yes! Well, there must have been other ships that had come in at the same time, too, so that was quite a commotion there. There we was, of course, handed a tag which was fastened on our outer clothing (clock chimes in background) which apparently said--ask police and conductors, train conductors and police to be sure that these people got to their right

destination. (he laughs) So it was our, it had Schenectady on it as a destination.

SIGRIST: So when you got to Schenectady you had a flat all waiting for you.

PFEIFFER: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: So talk, we have, we have about ten more minutes. So talk to me about what it was like assimilating into America.

PFEIFFER: Well, that was another hard thing. Now, of course, a cousin of hers was an invalid and she gave us the first English lessons, too. So that, at least, in my – and my aunt sent me up to the store and she had it written on a piece of paper – a loaf of bread and a pound of bacon. And I was supposed to go and get that. So, okay I traveled on, and on the way I read that over and over and said I would, could tell the man what I wanted and not him the piece of paper. And I was proud to, like a little boy, to come home and have that loaf of bread and a pound of bacon. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Was it hard for you as an adult to learn the language and to learn the customs?

PFEIFFER: Yes, yes. Well, especially, I got the job – see we came here in the middle of February, and then I did not have a job until finally a job opened in the General Electric in the Induction Motor Division with the, one was as a sweeper and the other as a machinist. Naturally, I never had worked in the machine shop, either, and so I didn't want to be a sweeper, either, so I decided to ask for that machinist job and I got it alright. And, of course, what they had mostly

automatic machinery so all you had to do was chuck a raw casting or something into the machine and then start the machine off and then go to the next machine and do the same thing. And the machine did the work automatically. There was tool setters that did this, set these things to give the proper dimensions and all, and so the operators, all they had to do was, they worked piece work and got paid for so many pieces on the end of the day or the end of the week, whichever it was. And well, in the, I, of course, had learned a few words, like I knew what a pound of bacon looked like and (he laughs) loaf of bread but I pointed at the big pile of gears, change gears that laid on the floor, and asked the operator that brought me in, "What do you call that?" He proudly said, "Gears." But in the noise of the machinery, a big machine shop, I wasn't sure whether he said "gears" or "deers!" (he laughs) They both sounded alike. So after a while, of course, when I finally, well I worked there probably eight months when I found out that they had people or somebody that was supposed to have charge of all the foreign workers to help them to get citizen, to become citizens eventually. And we had classes in the works after working hours where young student engineers was our teachers and we had the "We and Our Government." I had that thing for five years (he laughs) and on the end was the Constitution of the United States and I, after the five years I knew the whole constitution by heart. (he laughs) So then I had to appear when I wanted to, 1930 when I wanted to get my citizen papers. The examiner naturally came and checked what you knew about your government and whether or not you could read or write. And so he asked me a couple of questions and I answered them almost directly like the Constitution said, see? And he looked at me and then I thought, "Oh, now he's going to think of a very tough question." And, of course, again as he asked, I answered him exactly what the way the constitution said it. (he laughs) So he finally said, "If I had a medal, I would award you a medal for answering those questions the way you

did. (he laughs) So I was through and I had, of course, a cousin of my wife's that was with me in the courthouse and as I was finished already, she looked at me in surprise, "Are you finished already?" I said, "Yeah!" (he laughs) So then, of course, later on shortly after that, of course, we had appeared before the judge and was sworn in as citizens. But, the, what was very difficult for me was the mechanical --the words for the various mechanical things like the gears and screws and nuts and various threads and all that. And somehow or another, after working there for ten months, I was asked to help the tool setter that set all these automatic machines up and was then responsible for the final outcome of the dimensions and everything--whether I would help him. I said, "It doesn't make any difference to me as long as I have work and bring money home." (he laughs) That meant, of course, I no longer work piece work and I had a---piece work we usually would get about 90 cents an hour roughly at that time. And there when I went back to day work again, that reduced my hourly pay to 60 cents. (he laughs) I had broken in the first couple of weeks with 55 cents an hour (he laughs) and there I went to get down to, but as long as I had kept on working because when I first saw the amount of bearings in the smaller shop we produced bearings babbitted bearings, sleeve bearings the way we call them where the rollers would run in and I saw really practically mountains of those bearings and I knew from my experience in Germany how long a bearing would, we never burned a bearing out that I knew in a motor out there. And I said, "Where the heck do they use that many bearings in this place?" Well, of course, we built after a while in the Twenties, '28, '29, we built as many as a thousand motors, twenty-five horse power up to two hundred horse power. A thousand a week. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: A huge operation.

PFEIFFER: Right, right.

SIGRIST: I have a question for you. You've told us sort of the positive side of being a immigrant. Did you ever experience any prejudice against you?

PFEIFFER: No, no.

SIGRIST: Anything like that?

PFEIFFER: Reading this, the book I have it somewhere, if I could find it quickly, I could show you. Reading that and the Constitution, that, I thought it was the most wonderful document that any that I ever had read. And I became right away an enthusiastic citizen for the, as soon as I had my citizen papers, my wife got them, too, and so both of us felt that way.

SIGRIST: But no one insulted you or made fun of you because you were...

PFEIFFER: Well, yes, yes. Naturally, we were called "greenhorns," of course, when you start. Well but there was an awful lot of Germans work in that part of the, of that shop and they were quite helpful, even though we had a foreman that also was of German descent and he more or less called me "greenhorn." And he didn't seem to want to help me much. But most of them were willing to show me or ask questions, when I ask questions to help me and so I sailed through that fairly good.

SIGRIST: What was the biggest difference between Germany and America?

PFEIFFER: Oh, another thing is in the management office like the superintendent's, they

called me by my first name! They said, "Fred!" And, well, out in Germany, they would have never said anything like that, by calling me by my first name no matter how well they knew me. Always Pfeiffer, not Fred. Here, I was, I felt, well, part of this big important tooth in this big gear system. (he laughs) And actually, I thought, "Well, that is democracy. That is what democracy represents." And so, naturally we became, both of us, enthusiastic citizens later on, too. We never missed an election, (he laughs) even in all those years.

SIGRIST: My final question for you of the interview is: Are you happy you came here? Was that the right thing to do at that time?

PFEIFFER: Yes, yes. In fact, later on as we went into the Second World War, by then I had done outstanding work. In fact, I was eight years with the General Electric when I got the gold medal and a big plaque, which I have on the wall out here, for improving the machinery of this department. And that was quite an honor, that was a paid of a hundred and forty thousand employees of all the plants of the General Electric, they picked out twelve men; two from the shops, two from Engineering, two from sales and so on. And they got that award each year and not only the gold medal, there was also a fairly substantial money award with it, too. And so that was a very high honor and I got that after, in 1933, which, of course, we was right in the middle of the Depression. We did not build many motors anymore. Our motors, quickly production went from a thousand motors down to – the lowest I ever knew was thirty-five a week. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Wow, but that's a substantial...

PFEIFFER: Yeah, and, of course, they laid off everybody, too. They laid off people that had twenty-five years service while I stayed on. I had, by then, had obtained

through this tool setting thing, on automatic turret lathes, I had gained a tremendous skill and also they, at that time in 1927, introduced the new cutting tools which was a Krupp patent, a Krupp Germany patent and the General Electric had that bought and produced it yet in the research laboratory here. And so they told me when they brought the first tool that I was supposed to try out, one pound of that material costs five thousand dollars. (he laughs) So, it looked to me like diamonds naturally. It was almost as hard as a diamond, too. The Germans called it "*Wie Diamant*" – like a diamond. (he laughs) And we, General Electric had, their patent name was "Carboloy." And the Carboloy Company today is quite an important subsidiary of General Electric.

SIGRIST: So America gave you the opportunity...

PFEIFFER: Right.

SIGRIST: ...to do all this.

PFEIFFER: Right, and at the same time, I made, they had a suggestion system, too. Every once in a while, I had a new idea to improve the speed or whatever it was necessary or prevent spoilage or something like that. I got well suggestions award from fifteen dollars, twenty-five dollars, fifty dollars, even two hundred and fifty dollars. (he laughs, clock chimes in background) Well, during the Depression years, when we only worked three days a week, that was an important thing that you could get here and there an extra dollar. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Sure, sure. Well, Mr. Pfeiffer I want to thank you very much for allowing me to come out here. I know we tried to do this a year ago...

PFEIFFER: Yeah, yeah. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: ...and it's taken me a year to get back in contact with you but I'm very glad that I did.

PFEIFFER: Well, okay. I, it's a pleasure for me anyhow.

SIGRIST: It's been a wonderful...

PFEIFFER: And here, of course, in the years since I had only grade school education in Germany, because I started working fourteen years in the blacksmith shop, I actually the last ten years here, I was appointed manufacturing engineer in motor section...

SIGRIST: That's wonderful.

PFEIFFER: ...who was responsible for the minutes and equipment of the whole department and so (he laughs)...

SIGRIST: You've come a long way.

PFEIFFER: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: You've come a long way.

PFEIFFER: So I'm actually has been a wonderful thing for me it always was and, of course, we have traveled. Once we had a home of our own and had that reasonably paid for, that's when we bought a car finally and also a telephone.

(he laughs)

SIGRIST: All the modern conveniences.

PFEIFFER: Yeah, yeah. And then, of course, since I never traveled in Germany had no chance to travel in Germany, I read, of course. Always was an avid reader from a small boy on, I was, I guess nine or ten years old when I read The Leatherstocking Tales of Fenimore Cooper...

SIGRIST: Sure.

PFEIFFER: (he laughs) which, of course, I never at that time, never realized that I would live practically a lifetime in that very section. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: That's right, that's right. Isn't that interesting that in the beginning of your life, you were reading about Schenectady and Glens Falls.

PFEIFFER: Yeah! Yeah!. (he laughs) And, of course, out there, my mother didn't want me to read the Indian stories or anything like that, so I had to hide the book in the haystack in the barn. She had discovered it and, of course, (he laughs) I probably got a spanking for that, too. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Well, we have to sign off now...

PFEIFFER: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: ...so this is Paul Sigrist signing off for the National Park Service with Friedrich Pfeiffer. Thank you.

EI-119/PFEIFFER

PFEIFFER: Yeah. (he laughs)

END OF THE INTERVIEW