

EI-127

AGNES SPRICK GRIMM

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- **GERMANY: GROHN, NEAR BREMEN**
- **USA: BROOKLYN, NY**

LEVINE: I'm here today with Agnes Grimm, who came to the United States from Germany in 1922 when she was 22 years old. And today is March 23, 1992 and I'm here in Massapequa, New York, at Agnes Grimm's daughter

Alice's house. Okay, well, I'm very happy to be here, and I'd like to start, Agnes, by asking you your birth date.

GRIMM: My birthday, January 21, 1900 I was born.

LEVINE: And where were you born?

GRIMM: In, the name was Grohn, that's near Bremen, by Vegesack in Germany. And that was the town named Grohn, G-R-O-H-N. And it was by Vegesack, yes, the city. Not too far away from the city of Bremen. By train about a half an hour.

LEVINE: That's wonderful. If you could spell some of these German words, because I...

GRIMM: Spell them?

LEVINE: Yeah. If I, you know, if you say something that...

GRIMM: If you ask me then I can spell them, right?

LEVINE: Okay, fine. Now, what was your mother's name?

GRIMM: My mother's name was, before she was married?

LEVINE: Yes.

GRIMM: Anganasa Winters. W-I-N-T-E-R-S.

LEVINE: Okay. And your father's name?

GRIMM: August Sprick. S-P-R-I-C-K.

LEVINE: And did you have brothers and sisters?

GRIMM: Oh, yes. We were a big family. I think we were to at least ten. I have to count. I don't know. We had a big family.

LEVINE: And were you the oldest or the youngest, or in the middle?

GRIMM: No. I was about the fifth or the sixth.

LEVINE: Okay.

GRIMM: My older sister was here in America, and you want the names of the sisters? I had a sister Marie, a brother Christian, another girl had Dina, Augusta and then I came, and there were two behind me. Louisa and Otto.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, do you remember the town that you lived in before you came to the United States?

GRIMM: Oh, yeah. I came from Grohn, G-R-O-H-N, by Vegesack. That's all about a half an hour from the city of Bremen.

LEVINE: Vegesack? How do you spell that?

GRIMM: Vegesack. That's V-E-G-E, V-E-G-E-S-A-C-K. That's the station was named like that, the railroad station. Grohn Vegesack. I was born in

Grohn, but because the station was built in Grohn, but the next city was a small city, it was Vegesack. So they named the station Grohn Vegesack.

LEVINE: I see. Now, in Grohn, do you remember the house that you lived in?

GRIMM: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Could you describe that house?

GRIMM: We had a nice two-family house, and we had a lovely summer house in the front, my daddy built it. And lovely trees, linden trees. And I remember here in America when we went, ooh, I don't know, somewhere, to a park, they had the whole street, what park is that? They had all linden trees. I felt at home again. (he laughs)

LEVINE: And what do you remember about Grohn, in particular?

GRIMM: Our beautiful church. There was a beautiful Lutheran church. And they had built it new. That was a beautiful thing. And all our schools. I'll never forget them as long as I live.

LEVINE: What were they like? Tell me about them.

GRIMM: We had three big buildings. They are classes. So we began in low classes over there in, I don't know what the heck do you call that now, and then we had to go up to the 1-A, till we got out of school.

LEVINE: The kindergarten you started?

GRIMM: Uh, sort of, yes. But we started, that was separate from the school, Kindergarten. They had a separate place there. But we started with the, let me see, 7-A and 7-B. They had two different classes. And, of course, I was very proud I was in the 7-A. (she laughs) That didn't mean anything, really, today when you think back. But when you were a kid you think when you're in the "A" class you're the best. But I don't know how they did that, but they had all twos, "A" and "B"'s. We had always two up to the first class. In the first 1-A, we were two years because we were in the lower and in the upper.

LEVINE: And do you, what do you remember about school? The teachers, or anything.

GRIMM: Yes, we had a little teacher they used to call, it was funny, he was, I forget his name at the moment. I'm forgetting a lot of things. But he was short and they used to call him, the kids used to tease him and call him "Fidisent." But he was Miller, was his name. M-I-L-L-E-R. He was small. But he was a teacher for six years, we had him.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what did they call him?

GRIMM: Fidisent. (she laughs) I don't know what that means in English. Don't ask me. That means you're short, small.

LEVINE: And you liked school. What did you like best about school?

GRIMM: Well, I liked everything. As we went through the school I was, well, I was fairly good. I wasn't too dumb. Thank God for that. And so I never was left back, and that's sometimes was an honor, you know, because some poor kids didn't know and they get left back year after year. But I went with

every class I went up to the 1-A till I got out. So, but we were in the 1-A, see, they started at the low classes, you sat. I don't remember what the number was. They go up. They don't start with the 1. They start with the, I think 12 or whatever. And then we had two, 1-A and 1-B. So we were in 1-A. We had the principal of the school for a teacher for two years. We were first in the lower grades and then in the higher. That's two years. So that's two years yet, in one class. And his name, our teacher was Brunswick. He was very strict and everybody was shaking on their feet, but he was very fair and very good. I liked him very much. He was very good. But he didn't have any favorites. We were all the same. I was a poor orphan kid, so that was all right. My grandmother raised us. And it was nice. I really, our school years were nice. I think they're the nicest time of your life.

LEVINE: Really. Now, how old were you when you finished 1-A?

GRIMM: 1-A, uh, I think was fourteen. You see, you go seven years. You start with six or whatever you go. Twelve, no, fourteen, I think, because you get confirmed. They don't confirm you before that time, you know, in the Lutheran school. We had a beautiful church, and from school we had to go one year every Wednesday from ten to eleven for one hour of instruction, and the next year we had to go every Monday and Thursday for one hour. We got off from school that hour and had to go to the church for instruction to the pastor.

LEVINE: I see. Now, was this a public school, or was it a Lutheran school?

GRIMM: No, public school. Most everything was Lutheran at that time, but we did have a Catholic, a Roman Catholic Church. And because what happened there, the factories, we had a lot of factories, and all the Poles came in. In fact, when I grew up as a little girl, before I even went to school, I could

talk Polish (she laughs) like the Poles themselves, because all the kids were my friends. You see, they lived around there. Some had, we were not rich, but we had a home and we were nice, but those poor Polish people who came over, they lived in one room and I know I had this little Katrinka, and she used to like to play because we had a house, we could dig holes and so forth and so on, and Katrinka came over and played with us. And I went over to her house and I got a shock of my life, because their daddy had come home and they were eating supper. And they were all sitting around the table, and they had potatoes with the jackets on. We usually had that occasionally, you know, occasionally. And they peeled the potatoes, and then they had sour herrings. I don't know how many were on the plates. But they had gotten them in the store, and they used to peel the potatoes and they dumped them onto the sour herrings and ate them. I couldn't believe it. We were poor. I mean, we weren't rich by any means, but that I had never seen in my life before. So I learned a lot. So I was rich in a way, because we had a home. But my mother died, I was only seven. So, I mean, it was a short, but my father then, I was ten, so we had my grandmother. And she was aces high, believe me.

LEVINE: Your grandmother raised you?

GRIMM: Yes.

LEVINE: She raised all of your brothers and sisters, too?

GRIMM: Well, we were yet, yes. We did, yes. Because we had quite a lot of children, my mother and father. One was here in America. She went over to her aunt when she was twelve years, my older sister, because her aunt, my father's sister, didn't have any children, and she wanted, she had a store in Brooklyn, a delicatessen, so she went over. But then my brother

and all the sisters, we had, that was almost a bad boy. Good times amongst ourselves.

LEVINE: Tell me about your grandmother. What was she like?

GRIMM: Oh, she was aces high. She was my father's mother. My mother's people, they were on the rich side, you know. They had a big house along side and grandpa had already, he had been a captain on the seas. And, you know, years ago how the boats, they weren't like today. So he was a little, I think getting childish in his old age. But I liked him. I used to always go over there, and I had to stay there. It was right next door. He gave my mother the property so she could build the house on there. But they had her pay for it later when he died. The sisters and brothers made sure she didn't get away with it, my mother, to get that free. She had to pay six or eight hundred dollars at that time, you know, because they were fighting for it.

LEVINE: I see. So you had a lot of relatives right around there. Your mother's sisters and brothers and...

GRIMM: Oh, yes. A lot of cousins, yes. We had a lot of relatives. And everybody was friendly. I mean, you usually used to call them "aunts." I know the neighbors, you know. We didn't call them Mrs. Sharper, Tante Sharper, we used to call them, you know, somehow it was more of a, I don't know, what should I say? How should I say that?

LEVINE: Like a great big family?

GRIMM: Well, we had a big family. But I mean the neighbors, they were more as if they helped along in the family, they helped one another more. But our

grandmother, my father's mother lived far on the other end. She lived near the church. She had a beautiful home there. But my mother's people lived right next door, my grandfather, and he was getting sick and childish and he liked to argue. Every little thing, he was fighting and arguing. (she laughs). I can always remember him, and my mother standing on the kitchen window with it open, answering him back. And I remember one time I was little, I was in the kitchen. I must have been about four years, three to four years, and he had a sharpening stone. Years ago people had a lot of things like that. It was more country-like. And I remember, and he asked, he told her if she wouldn't keep her big mouth shut he would throw that at her. And my mother stood there. She said, "*Schmiede doch, Schmiede doch.*" ["Come on, just throw it!"] That's *Platt*, you know, *Plattdütsch* [North German dialect]. That's a different language [sic: dialect]. But she, we had a lovely life, and I mean it was beautiful. I wanted to go back home. I didn't want to stay in America, when I came here.

LEVINE: Really.

GRIMM: So, because the kids say, you know, they hated the Germans after the war and I was called everything under God's heaven here. And so then, finally, the teachers in school stopped and told the kids not to do it any more. See, the hatred of the war to the Germans was still in them. Oh, I wouldn't want to stay here. No siree. I wanted to go back home again.

LEVINE: Well, who were you closest to when you were growing up?

GRIMM: My grandmother, my father's mother.

LEVINE: And tell me about her.

GRIMM: Oh, she was aces high, I'm telling you. She was, how she ever did it, I don't know.

LEVINE: What did she do?

GRIMM: Well, she was so good and we had two little ones that didn't go to school yet, and my father got deathly sick, and he was sick from, let me see. The first of May, they had the May (?) there, the reds were getting up, you know. And he got sick, and he died the 29th of November. Deathly sick. The fifth of May they thought he was going to die and he lived till the 29th of November. I was only ten. So you see we had a good life and we had a hard, what should I call it, not a hard life, because we had Grandma. Because Grandpa had died. We couldn't move there because Grandpa was getting childish. So then he died. He died the same year my father died, only he died in January. I remember right around my birthday, and I couldn't have a party (she laughs) because we had to go to the funeral. But then Daddy sold our house and then Grandma said, "You move here." She had the two little ones. They didn't go to school yet, you know, they were very, I don't know, about four or five years old. At least they were a year apart, and that's when my mother died.

LEVINE: Well, now, how did your grandmother earn a living? How did, how was she able to...

GRIMM: Oh, my grandmother was the best butcher in, not the butcher, the best bologna maker in town. And people used to kill their own pigs over there, you know, each one had, and we had them, too. And she knew how to make bologna, and everybody wanted her. Even later years when she got in the seventies, she only took a few and she helped them. But she could make the best bologna you'd ever tasted. She must have had an amazing

good taste, and she, I can see her today yet, when she was standing there cooking the meat from the pigs and stuff like that. And grinding that up in the machine. And she didn't use any electric machines like the butchers did. She had the, I can see that machine. It was screwed on the table and she used to, and everybody wanted her. Everybody wanted her who knew her, wanted her to come and make their bologna. She must have had an exceedingly good taste. I think, I often think of her, I wonder why. I always wanted to be her. I said, "Grandma, I'm going to watch you and you tell me the recipe you have."

LEVINE: And did you learn from her?

GRIMM: No. She died when I was seventeen. You didn't have a chance, you know. And later on you changed your mind. I was a kid. And I know that was great, though, you see, when they had the pigs, they had their, everybody. It was not a country life, it was a city life, sort of. It was a town, but I often think back. But each one used to have their own pig. And then in the wintertime it had to be cold. It used to be around the holidays all the time when they killed the pigs. And then they used to, I can see that yet. They used to have the pigs on a big ladder outside that it froze during the winter overnight, you know. And we had dogs, and they watched them to make sure nobody was going to come and steal them because what we had in our town a lot of factories. And then they built a lot of houses. We had a lot of Polish people moving in. They came all from Poland and the Ukraine down that a way. I talked Polish when I was a little kid like nobody's business.

LEVINE: Now, what kind of factories did they have in the town?

GRIMM: We had when they made the tile, the *Wandplatten*, we used to call it. And then they had the *Steingut*. [Steingut means earthenware] They made all the ropes for the ships and the boats and that stuff. They had, we had factories, and *Wandplatten*, my daddy worked there. It was a terrible place, because from that tile the dust and stuff, that what have killed him, too. And then they had a *Steingutfabrik* [pottery factory]. I tell you the truth, I don't even know what they made there. And then they had a *Tauwerk* [rope factory] where they made all the sails and the ropes for the boats. We had a lot of factories. And then we had, they call it a *Fischerei* [fishing business]. You see, the boats came in and they delivered all the fishes there and they smoked them there. That was way down the river on the other end. And some cotton was there on the other end. They had a *Steingutfabrik*, a *Tauwerk*, a *Wandplattenfabrik* [a factory of producing wall panels], and then there was this *Fischerei*. They called it a *Fischerei*. I don't know what you call it here. Near the water, where the fishes come in and they smoke them and put them. I remember they had, what you call them. I don't see them here. *Bückling* [smoked herring], you know, they're tiny fishes like this here and then they put them in, they came in a little wooden box, row on row, and they used to be delicious. We used to love them.

LEVINE: Now, were you located on the river, or were you located on the ocean?

GRIMM: Well, yes. We had a river down below, and we had a little mountain there. We called it a mountain. My brother came once visiting, you know, from America when he was here. I say, "Oh, your mountain, yes." (she laughs) So it was really hills, you know, but they were high, and we had fun. We used to up there and run down. But there was up, but that was near the water.

LEVINE: Now, what water was it?

GRIMM: The Lesum, where the crest came into the Weser. The Weser you know because that goes to Hamburg [sic: the Weser goes to Bremen and Bremerhaven not to Hamburg] and all the big boats leave from there. (a doorbell rings) But this boat, no big steamer could come in. The water wasn't deep enough for that. It was a Lesum, we called it.

LEVINE: How do you spell that, a Lesum?

GRIMM: L-E-S-U-M. Lesum. And they had Lesum *Bruch* [marsh]. That was the farmers on the other side, and this side we were. And then they had the hills. We used to call them Iffelsberg. You know, Iffels mountain, but my brother, when he came visiting from America. Oh, he said, "Your mountains. Hills." (she laughs)

LEVINE: Well, can you remember back to the town, what it was you liked to do, what kinds of activities you loved when were young.

GRIMM: We really had, and especially from school you learned everything. We had, oh, what you call it, and you have against other towns.

LEVINE: You mean games?

GRIMM: Yes, games, you know, a ball playing and running, and I know I was a good runner. I know I was so proud. I know what happened to them. Everything disappeared. I even brought my, but I won, you know. If we won first, and you'd get gold acorns, you know. It was artificial. And oh, my God, when you're a ten-year-old or twelve-year-old you're so proud because you think it's the whole world coming down.

LEVINE: And so what did you win for? You won for running?

GRIMM: For running, running, yeah. We won first prize. So you, one school it was all the neighbor, the towns, you know, from all around. They used to call it, what do you call it here now?

LEVINE: Like a meet? Like a track meet?

GRIMM: You belong to New York, don't you, or Nassau, Long Island. See, and we had, like, say, for instance, to hold all these different schools and one had to run against the other. It was a big meadow. It wasn't easy running on, you know, because you used to have the cows and stuff there. Not at that time, but I mean they usually had it before. Well, we used to run, and I was a good runner. We won first prize. (she coughs) And you can imagine a twelve-year-old winning. Oh, my God. You thought you had run the big prize. But we were real happy. I came home with, together, everybody who was in the running got a whatchamacallit...

LEVINE: A medal?

GRIMM: A corsage, an artificial corsage with gold acorns on it. Like the leaves. I had it all the time. It disappeared, I don't know. (she coughs) I know I brought that to America because that was so, God, you don't know how happy I was when we came home. They had, I think, I don't know how, six or twelve children. We were children. We went to school yet. And across a meadow you had to run, you know, they run against the other classes to see who was the best, and our school, our teacher, had the best runners last. I mean, even with the best, they are slower and heavier, you know. I know I was the second or third from the end to run, and we caught up, and

we won. Oh, God. You don't know. (she laughs) You think you won the gold medal or something, you know, instead of a gold acorn. (she laughs) But coming home to show that to my grandmother, I tell you. That was about the best thing I did. I mean, it was nice. I didn't like America when I first came here.

LEVINE: Well, tell me, before you came, what had you heard about America when you were still in Germany?

GRIMM: Oh, wonderful. My sister was here. She was married. And I had an aunt here, but the aunt had died. And I mean, so I had come, I thought maybe you picked this money off the streets.

LEVINE: Well, what did your sister write to you? Did she write letters to you when you were still there?

GRIMM: Oh, yes. My grandmother, yes. My grandmother.

LEVINE: And do you remember what she said about America before...

GRIMM: No. They never talked about America. I mean, we just figured they're all rich. Every American, there is no poor people in America. That's the way we felt.

LEVINE: So when you decided to come, was it your sister who made the arrangements?

GRIMM: Yeah, my sister and my brother-in-law, you know, she had three children then, and they got the papers for me and I came over here. And she also met me at Ellis Island. I was so glad, because some of them their tears

are running down. I guess they had, you know you have to go through a lot of rigmarole there on Ellis Island.

LEVINE: But tell me first, when your sister, why was it decided that you would come?

GRIMM: Well, she wanted a sister over there, and I was about the only one ready, old enough for this, you had to come. I was working at that time. I mean, I was about twenty, twenty-two, I think, when I came to America. And . . .

LEVINE: And what were you working at when you were in Germany?

GRIMM: I was a domestic. I worked for lots of people. I think I worked in a town there at that time, and, of course, the factory girls didn't have a good name. I often think what a dope I was. I should have entered a factory and worked myself up, but no. They had bad name, they had a bad name. So you went out working and you became a maid for somebody else. And we had gotten a new *Apotheke*. Not a drugstore, an *Apotheke*. You know, what is that there, he has to be like a doctor?

LEVINE: Apothecary, or pharmacy?

GRIMM: Pharmacy, I think, yeah. Because drugstores we had to, this one. And I worked there. They needed somebody. They had two little children, and I had come from the farm. I got tired work and then I got that place there. I worked a couple of years with them till I got tired of it and the children got bigger. And it was nice, it was home, and I could always run over to Grandma. Till she died, I mean, she died in 1917. Then we had nobody any more.

LEVINE: I see. So do you remember getting ready to come to America? Do you remember packing your bags and all that?

GRIMM: I didn't care very much. I don't think so. I just packed my suitcase I think. I had a, we used to have, what you call that, the...

LEVINE: A valise? A trunk?

GRIMM: Like weeds, you know, that you...

LEVINE: Oh, wicker.

GRIMM: Wicker, yeah. But it was a big one, and it was packed up and shipped out.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything you took with you besides your acorn medal?
(they laugh)

GRIMM: I took everything and I made sure I had my clothes and I thought I had enough, when I came over. That I did. I have plenty of clothes. But Grandma had died, and I think if she hadn't died I would have never left. But then my sister was here and she wanted somebody in Brooklyn, you know. And so it was me. I always had wanted to go to America because I thought America everybody was rich. Oh, God, what we didn't dream! Oh, God. Till you get here, and you get, and I had to take a lot of insults, believe me.

LEVINE: Yeah. I want to get to that, but first do you remember when you left, was there any kind of a sendoff, or how did you, what happened?

GRIMM: Well, my married sister and my brother-in-law, her husband, took me all the ways down to where they felt I was safe, so nobody would kidnap me or do something wrong. Because there was a, at that time there was a lot, what you call them, I don't know what you call them here, those who got girls so they could make a whorehouse, we used to call it.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

GRIMM: Use the girls so they could have them for the men here. And he made sure that I got safe on to the boat, and he knew I was picked up here, that nobody could talk to me. And I know what he meant later on, because it had happened quite a bit. The news had come back. Girls went over there and they were used for what you call it, in those houses, you know, where they had those. And they were just waiting for some young girls to come over, so they had some for the men so they could make money.

LEVINE: Well, now, where did you leave from?

GRIMM: I left from Bremerhaven.

LEVINE: Bremerhaven.

GRIMM: Bremen, really, you know, Bremen. I was from Bremen, and then you took the train to Bremerhaven and there you went onto the boat.

LEVINE: I see. So your brother-in-law and sister took you to Bremen by train?

GRIMM: My brother-in-law, yeah. To Bremerhaven. They got, and then they took me into the hand of a man who had been here and was going back and who had visited Austria. (a clock chimes) He was an Austrian. Mr. Fuchs

was his name. I'd never forget it. And he, my brother-in-law said that I'm a little, you know, new that he should just keep an eye on me. And everybody thought we were married on the boat. This was the funniest thing, you know. So we had like a gang together. We had one fellow, he came from Bavaria, I think. Seppel [nickname for Joseph], we used to call him. I used to have the pictures. I don't know if I still have them. He was funny. But he was so afraid, and we had such stormy weather, which that never happened before for I don't know how many years on the route these boats take. We thought sure we were going to go down to the bottom of the sea. The boat went right in and it came back again. Because Germany was not allowed to have first class passenger boats, no big boats. So it was just a, the Hanover. I think they had it here for a freighter or something later on.

LEVINE: Were you down in the hold of the ship? Were you down in the bottom?

GRIMM: Yeah. They were such, you're all downstairs. You didn't, who the heck wants to be up there when the waves crash across. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Well, was everyone seasick then?

GRIMM: We were all seasick, including me. So the doctor got me and sat me in the sunshine. There's nothing you can do. I was even seasick, yeah, for a few days. The one day I was so bad, so he had made them move somebody else and put me in the sun. You see, when the sun shines in certain places, it was near the cabin, the sun. But it wasn't too bad. You get over that. But it's a pain in the neck.

LEVINE: Well, now, how about food? Did you go to a dining area, or did you bring your own food on?

GRIMM: Oh, no. You have a dining room there. You don't get anything. You get your breakfast, you get your lunch, you get your coffee in the afternoon and you get your supper at night. That was very good. We had very good food there, and as long as you can eat, and it was a small boat, because Germany was not allowed to have first class passenger boats. The Americans wouldn't allow that, my God. After all, we were the, oh, what names I was called. Ach!

LEVINE: Now, did that start on the boat, or were there mostly German passengers?

GRIMM: No, there were Austrian and Hungarians, you know, all immigrants, but they all had to come from there. But when I first came here to America, my sister lived in Ridgewood in Brooklyn where there's plenty Germans, but the children, "You Hun! Go back where you came from." I said, "I should stay here where people get brought up this way? Never." I says, "We never said one bad word over America when America went into the war." And I could not understand it. So my brother-in-law and my sister said, "Don't worry about them. Those kids are ignorant. They don't know anything." But I think finally the teachers in school stopped them. Because oh, I had insults. Oh, I said, "This is America? And I should stay here? Never." But I was really independent (she laughs), you know. Even though I know we were in the war, and stuff like that. But that was the cruelest things that ever happened to me I think in my life.

LEVINE: Really.

GRIMM: But the children didn't know any better, I guess, so I forgave them. But I, I don't know. I was going to take the first boat back home again.

LEVINE: Tell me about when you got to the New York Harbor. When the boat you were on, the Hannover, came into the New York Harbor. Do you remember that?

GRIMM: Oh, yes. Very well.

LEVINE: What do you remember about that?

GRIMM: Because it was a nice day and I was glad to get off the boat, off the water. (she laughs) It's funny. And then I figured, I see my sister, which was my whole, because I'd never seen my sister. She was over here by an aunt. I think she was twelve years when she came over here to America, so I was glad to see her, you know.

END OF SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

LEVINE: Did you see the Statue of Liberty?

GRIMM: Oh, yes. We all did. That the boat didn't come over, I'm surprised. Oh, yeah. We all saw the Statue of Liberty as you came out to the sun. It was a nice day. We were glad. And we knew we were going to be soon there. We were getting off the water.

LEVINE: Did you know what the Statue of Liberty was?

GRIMM: Oh, yeah. We had pictures. We had a lot of American things, because we had flags and we had tablecloths. In fact, we had a tablecloth, you know,

like rugs that years ago they used to sell them here in the five-and-ten and stuff, that you used on the kitchen table. And I had a Statue of Liberty right in the middle. I knew her. From, for years my sister had sent it over for a gift, you know. And they came out with them, you know, there was a time when they had the, in the five-and-ten or wherever, they had the tablecloths. The Statue of Liberty was right in the middle, oh yes. And that's the first thing when we saw it. Oh, God, I remember that. That was very, then you knew you were soon there. Because you get tired when you're a long time in the water, and don't forget at that time Germany was not allowed to have first class passenger boats, so we had to take, we had the Hanover. But we had two singers over there with us, for the first time, in the Schrodin Hall in Brooklyn. They had, I guess, asked these people that came over. They were big singers. I have the pictures somewhere of them, and they came over on the boat with us. So he made a nice poem, you know, about the storm and everything, and then you bought, they sold it then, on the boat, you know, for ten cents, I think, apiece. If you had money you could buy it for them.

LEVINE: Did they give concerts on the boat then, on the way over?

GRIMM: Oh, yeah. They played a lot of music for us. It was very nice. They had, you know, they had a big dining hall.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And that's where they played, in the dining hall?

GRIMM: Yeah. That in the evening, then late afternoon, evening. We had a very nice time coming over. I couldn't complain about it. So except when the boat was in the storm and you can't chase that away, and your boat goes from one end to the other, and you think, and we weren't sick any more because you were over your seasickness by that time. And I know finally

the captain, the first officer or somebody came up. They were the five or the six of us. We stood there, they had the, they have like a stool, a cabin there where you can buy stuff, you know. And there was the door open, and we stood against it there, and the boat was going from one to the other. And we were told, "You can't be out any more. You've got to come down." And the storm was so bad. So we had to be good children, or the good people. We were all young people. There was five of us up there, my roommate, and I think three other fellows were there. The one, I don't know what, we used to have all the names. I forgot that.

LEVINE: Did you ever keep contact with these people after?

GRIMM: For a while, but it dies out. No, no more. Every, well, you see, everybody goes one this way and one this way. I haven't known anyone from the boat.

LEVINE: Now, you mentioned on the form that you filled out that a baby was born on board. Did you witness that? Did you see that?

GRIMM: No. We didn't see the birth, because the doctor didn't let you in, but we knew about it, the woman, you know. She was pregnant. She came over from, I don't know, Austria, one of the smaller countries there. You see, there was a lot of people. And she was high pregnant, I'm surprised that she even took a chance to go, you know. So she was born, a little baby. Was cute. Everybody was so excited. I have, somewhere I should have the papers because we had those musicians on the boat. One was a fellow, he made out poems, then you bought them, you know. I don't know whether we paid fifteen cents or ten cents, if they wanted piece of papers like that. I had them for the longest time. But I don't know where anything

is today, because I'm not in my home and I don't know where anything of that stuff is. It's gone.

LEVINE: And how about, you said that upon arrival the captain required a check for missing silverware.

GRIMM: Yeah. They looked for some children, you know, I don't know. Because people steal children. You see, they have a lot of what you call them here, who steal the children and then they have funds, they go over there and they steal little children. They bring them over and then they sell them here or something like that. I think that's a crime and a shame. And they had it on the boat. The police came in there. Oh, yeah. Everybody was investigated. I don't know what they really did or who did it or not. Shysters were on there, too. They just go back and forth. What they had, what business they had, I don't know. I didn't bother with them.

LEVINE: Now, do you remember getting to Ellis Island? Do you remember when the boat took you to Ellis Island?

GRIMM: Oh, yeah. You get off.

LEVINE: And then what, what was your impression when you got there?

GRIMM: And then you have to go on a little, then they get a little boat you have to go on and then they shovel you over to Ellis Island and then you get nervous. You wonder, yuck! Why can't you get off here? No, your sister stays on the pier and stuff like that, but they didn't let you off. You had to go over to Ellis Island, every one of them. And then you stay there. Oh, my God. That's one thing I never forget.

LEVINE: What do you remember about that?

GRIMM: Oh, that room down there was full of people, and they get shoved around there, and there you had to sit in there. And then they brought food along. You know, long wooden tables from one end to the other in the room where you go in. And the stuff stays in front of you. And I say, "What kind of country is this here?" Because you're not used to that, you know. After all, you're only an immigrant, so what the heck. What they put in front of you, and they're pretty tough and rough, those people who work there. I wouldn't eat anything. I think I'd starve to death. But you're hungry, so you try to, instead, when you think of it, they gave you really, I guess, nice food. But the way they served it and the way they put it on, it was awful. I know, I complained about that, too. So maybe it's better now, because I know when we visited, her son took me and we visited, you know. It looked a little different now. So I think they cleared up and cleaned out, but they were, that was pretty nasty that time.

LEVINE: Was it dirty? Was Ellis Island dirty?

GRIMM: Well, I wouldn't say dirty, but we were spoiled and, you know, from home there. So I think to you, a wooden table, you know, you're just, you're a prisoner and everything was put in front of you. I don't know, it just was, I'd forgotten all about it, and now I don't forget. That's how many years ago, sixty some odd years now. How many years is it? Seventy, I think. I was twenty-two, now I'm ninety-two.

LEVINE: Well, tell me, do you remember the examination?

GRIMM: Oh, yeah. They were very strict.

LEVINE: What was that like?

GRIMM: It was all right. They were very good, the doctors, but they were a little rough. They're used to that, I guess, you know, they thought you're all, what did I think now. I can't remember what I thought of it, but I know they were rough. And I thought they didn't have to be that way. I mean, we weren't prisoners, or that we were robbers or something like that. We were human beings. And human beings liked to be, don't want to be catered to but liked to be handled decently, as if you go to a regular doctor. Some of them were nice. Some of them were nice. You have to give them credit. But some of them were just absolutely uncalled for. I think I complained about that, too. Maybe it's better now. I heard it's better. So maybe it did some good. Because if nobody ever says anything, they treated you as if you were prisoners or murderers or something. That's the way I felt. But today it's better. They have changed a lot.

LEVINE: Now, do you have to stay overnight there? Did you?

GRIMM: No, thank God I didn't.

LEVINE: No. And were you afraid that you might be sent back for some reason?

GRIMM: Could be. You never know. Because I know I had, I had to, I was a witness to a woman who wanted to kill her husband, and I don't know, that was a little trouble. I didn't know for sure would they let me off the boat. You know what I mean? It's that they wanted me back there for a witness. So I didn't, so it wasn't there. So I was glad when I passed through everything and I saw my sister.

LEVINE: Where did you see your sister?

GRIMM: My sister came over with her little boy and she picked me up.

LEVINE: At Ellis Island?

GRIMM: Yeah.

LEVINE: Can you describe that, when you saw your sister?

GRIMM: I thought it was heaven. I was glad she was there, to see somebody who at least I knew cared because don't forget you're just, the hatred of the Germans was terrible yet when I came.

LEVINE: But did you know that then? Did you know that people were, were people mean to you because you were German even then?

GRIMM: Well, they did that, yes. They were very, in their words. And we, I always says, and I think back, we prayed. We were brought up that way. So you have to get used to it. But you're glad when you get off Ellis Island. Then you know you're free. (she laughs) That I know. When my sister was, and she could take me home. I was all right. But you had to go through all the doctors and examinations, you know. Well, after all, that was normal and right because they could have brought some sickness in here and that wouldn't be fair, either. But you was examined over in Germany so much, and you had all your slips there, everything was all right. But still you can't trust. And they didn't trust the Germans any more, you know. That was...

LEVINE: So in other words you had physical exams even before you left Germany?

GRIMM: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: On the ship?

GRIMM: On the ship, before the ship. Before you even get, they wouldn't let you on the ship unless you had your physical examination, if you were all right. If you had been sick you would not be allowed to go even on the ship to come over because you could, of course, at that time, there was so much of this, I don't know what they call it here. Some kind of a sickness...

LEVINE: T. B.?

GRIMM: T. B. too, but I know this was, we used to call it *Geschlechtskrankheit*. You know, the man who was sick who have women who have, it had something to do with women who were sick and then they gave it to other women. I don't know what you call that here.

LEVINE: A venereal disease?

GRIMM: Uh, yeah. I think that's it. And that's what they were really afraid of. You had a good examination, and I don't blame them because that was so bad after the war, even in Germany. It wasn't even funny any more. It was disgusted, disgusting. But I think they had the same trouble here, they got it, you know. So they had to be very careful. No, they were very strict, and for that I'm glad and thankful they did because if I get some kind of a sickness which can spread to everybody so very quickly and poor children get born sick. So they were very strict with that, very strict.

LEVINE: Now, when your sister met you, your sister and your nephew met you, and then you went from Ellis Island with your sister, and then where did you go?

GRIMM: To Brooklyn, on Woodward Avenue. That's where she lived.

LEVINE: Do you remember your first impression of being in the United States, on that trip from Ellis Island to your sister's place?

GRIMM: Well, it was a beautiful day and I was here. I saw my sister, alive for the first time.

LEVINE: What was your sister's name?

GRIMM: Frieda.

LEVINE: Frieda.

GRIMM: And then I, and the kids, you know, we had photos and stuff. This way you saw them in reality, and the children were very nice. In fact, they were so smart later, they were all big, two of them, the boys.

LEVINE: Now, you went to the Ridgewood section of Brooklyn?

GRIMM: Yeah.

LEVINE: And what was your sister's place like?

GRIMM: Very nice. Woodward Avenue, where she lived. And I know they had trouble and they had lived in a different place, and they had to move to this place, and they kept no, in this house they had no bathroom. They had to go out in the hall. This was bad times, see, that time. Then they couldn't get the place. Oh, nobody wanted her with her kids. Nobody

wanted children. And she had, I think, that time three. It was Heywood, Willie and Frieda. And so she had them at a place, it was on Woodward Avenue, 413. And they had a toilet in the hall, a double one. Each one had their own, but it was in the hall. But they had to take their baths in the kitchen, you know, they had like, they had no bathroom. And they lived there quite a while, but they had to take it because nobody wanted her with three kids, you know, the people were very, at that time here, independent. So, but then they moved out. They bought a house out in Jamaica. And then they were building the houses out there, the builder, so they bought a one-family house out there in Jamaica.

LEVINE: Now, how long did you live with Frieda?

GRIMM: Oh, I was there a while. They didn't want me to go out, but I wanted to pay the ticket off. You see, they had paid for the steamer.

LEVINE: Do you remember how much the ticket cost for the boat?

GRIMM: I think all together with the visa and everything it was a hundred and twenty-eight dollars, something like that. Maybe the fare was a hundred and eight dollars, and then twenty dollars or something you had to pay for your, this visa and that and the other thing. You had to have this, you know, in Germany you had to pay that, too. Uh-huh.

LEVINE: Now, what did you do for work, then, when you got here?

GRIMM: Well, I first worked in a knitting mill by (?). That wasn't too far away, you know. I did that. I liked that. They were very nice. They were Austrian, so they spoke German. Of course, after all, you don't speak English right away, you know. So I worked around there, and I thought, my God, what

did I make? Very little. I have to lie now, eighteen dollars a week or something like that. And I said to my self, "How in God's name are you ever going to pay the ticket off?" After all, you had, I didn't want to live for nothing. You see, I'm a terrible person. You're good to me, okay, fine. But I mean, I don't like to be a burden to you, and after all she had three children. So I said, "This doesn't go." So I had a German paper. They had the German paper there, and I looked in the paper, and I found for a maid. They wanted a maid. I figured at least, the month is up, I got the money. After all, a hundred and eighteen dollars, or a hundred and twenty-eight. Whatever it was I can't remember exactly. It takes a lot of money if you get only eighteen dollars or something a week you have to pay board. So I went and I, we went. It was very nervy of me though, too. They had advertised in the German paper there, my brother-in-law had a paper for a maid. And it was on Myrtle Avenue. And I know Myrtle Avenue. I had to go straight down, and then go down there. And I could find it, it was a store, Wolf's. I'll never forget that. But they didn't live there in the store. They lived a few streets further in. So I took a place and hired myself out as a maid. I don't remember exactly how much I got in a month, but at least I could pay my ticket off, a hundred and eighteen or twenty-eight dollars, I don't know what it was. But my sister didn't like the idea. She was a little, she was a nervous person anyhow, very nervous. And I was anxious to pay my ticket off so I wouldn't owe. Terrible. That's the way I was brought up from Grandma. So I did. I hired myself also as a maid by Wolf. They lived on Stephen Street in Ridgewood. That store was on Myrtle Avenue, very nice. In fact, they had one of the nicest stores there. I noticed everything was like that. So...

LEVINE: So after you paid your ticket off, then did you stay still living with your sister?

GRIMM: Well, I stood quite a while there, and then you get, you meet some girls and, you know, finally. So I...

LEVINE: When did you leave there then?

GRIMM: Oh, I don't know how long I worked there. Sure I forget dates. And remember, I don't know exactly. But I was there quite a while, and I was very nice. I remember when he came home from the store and brought me a sweater.

LEVINE: Frieda's husband?

GRIMM: No, I would never have bought it, the sleeves were kind of sloppy, but it was nice, yeah. So I think I left, a long time I was there. My sister didn't like the idea I did that, but I figured I cannot be in debt. We were brought up that way. You had to pay your debts.

LEVINE: Well, now, when did you meet your husband?

GRIMM: Oh, God, I met him right away almost, I think. We had an aunt. It was *Tante* [aunt] Dina, I remember *Tante* Dina. And we went there. She wasn't really a relation, but she was. And there was Marge, oh, Margie worked in the mill with me. That's right, Margie, Margie Scholl. And there was my husband's sister. They lived on the other side. And she says, and they invited me. They wanted to know the German girl to see what it was like (she laughs), as if she was some kind. And that's where I met my husband. And I did not want my husband at all. I said, "Who the heck do the people think I am?" I was a spoiled brat. I was a nice looking girl and I was a young girl and I was used to all nice looking young fellows. My husband was in the army, and they thought he was something good. And

he was very, when I think back I think, "God must have wanted." He has, I don't care what anybody says, God has his way. If He wants you to have something He does, unless you go directly against Him. And he was such a good person, it's not even funny. I can remember when I used to have a place on Eastern Parkway, I think. I had to take the Myrtle Avenue, DeKalb Avenue car to a certain street, I remember, and then take that car. And he used to, and he used to speak in his broken German to me.

LEVINE: Where was he from, your husband?

GRIMM: Brooklyn, Ridgewood.

LEVINE: He was born there?

GRIMM: Yeah. And his parents were dead and he was with his sister. The elder sister took over the brood and stuff like that. They lived on Stephen Street before. They had a lovely house there. And his parents, they both died. His mother died first. But anyhow, God wants you to have it. I didn't want him in the beginning, but he was so good you just couldn't help it, liking him or loving him. I don't know. I worked on Eastern Parkway and he used to go down onto DeKalb Avenue car, and we had to take the other cars. What a dope, what a dope. But it was supposed to be like that. I've always prayed I wanted a good husband, never mind. And he was how many, Daddy was about how many years older, eight, seven or eight years older than I. I was a spoiled brat, period. And he, from Germany, you know, where always had a lot of fun. So, but it was supposed to be like that. It just didn't...

LEVINE: So then how many children did you have?

GRIMM: This one, the other, and then I have a son.

LEVINE: And now you have grandchildren, too?

GRIMM: Yeah. He has three, and she has three. So they adopted one, you know. Two boys and a girl. So I'm a rich grandmother. Even though, with my stupidity, I call it stupidity because I wasn't word bright or smart, but I was just brought up, and that's it. And my husband, well, I met him and I said to myself, "Who the heck do they think I am?" And that's how by the blood I was, you know, when I came over spoiled.

LEVINE: Well, tell me about ways you were brought up. Are there ways that you carried on into your life in America, ways that you learned in Germany?

GRIMM: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: What kinds of...

GRIMM: Sewing, cleaning and stuff like that. That I learned in Germany. Because to me they were a lot of bunch of slobs, some of them, here. And keep decent house and learn how to cook and then you get married, one husband, and treat him right and stick with him. We had no, I mean, you didn't learn of this go out and have flirt around with others.

LEVINE: Now, how about your grandmother? Were there kinds of lessons that she taught you that you learned to live by?

GRIMM: Well, she taught us to be honest, and if they have, when I first got out as a maid, she taught me. She says, "Now, look, if you see a nickel or a dime at least, leave it, don't take it. They put that there to see if you're honest or

if you're not." You know when you got out working, and I always remembered that. No matter where I am, even today, yet, because sometimes you see money there, you wonder why the heck that's laying around, but you should never take that, because they put it there for a purpose. And that's what she taught us. She was a very honest, hardworking woman, really. And she used to make the best bologna. It had a very good taste, because people wanted her no matter how old she was. She always had everybody wanted her. Because people used to have their own pigs, you know, it was sort of, it wasn't country and then it was. It wasn't a city. And then they used to, in the wintertime you always had a big cold, and then pigs used to be hanging outside on the ladder to freeze through in the wintertime before they would cut it apart. But she did, she was a very good bologna maker. Everybody wanted her. She must have had a certain taste, a good taste.

LEVINE: Well, now, are you happy that you came to the United States?

GRIMM: Yes, I am. I wouldn't want to go back no more now. I've been back, you know, for a visit. But there's nobody left any more.

LEVINE: I see, I see.

GRIMM: The only thing, I always like to go to the cemetery, you know, because we did. But then again it's so many years. Mother died in 1907. Daddy died in 1910, and Grandma in 1917. And the only, I think over there, they only allow you to have the graves unless it's sixty, or so many years. And then you don't own it any more. So we had a big plot. My mother was the first one there.

LEVINE: Well, now, the family that you have living now, you have your daughter Alice, and what's your son's name?

GRIMM: Henry.

GRIMM: And your grandchildren?

GRIMM: They got, there's Henry, his own son, the oldest is Henry, and then I have, now Nadine and Heather, the girls are.

LEVINE: And what is their last name?

GRIMM: Grimm.

LEVINE: Nadine and Heather?

GRIMM: Heather, and Nadine Grimm. And (?). He is a teacher out in where I was.

LEVINE: And you have grandchildren, great-grandchildren as well?

GRIMM: I do have great-grandchildren, heaven. I know, that's a little, not, I'm forgetful now. I'm getting, my age is catching with me. Lawrence, yeah. That's the little one, come on. Amanda. We always pray together here. She's the cutest little thing. She's so smart, I'm telling you. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Okay. Agnes, is there anything else you'd like to say before we close?

GRIMM: No. I don't know, what is there to say? I'm ready to leave.

MRS. GRIMM'S DAUGHTER: Did she tell you the children's names?

LEVINE: You're ready to leave? Okay. Well, I thank you very much.

GRIMM: Oh, you're welcome. I hope I didn't chatter too much.

LEVINE: It's wonderful to talk with you. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. And I've been talking with Agnes Grimm, and it's March 23, 1992 and we're here in Massapequa, Long Island, New York.

END OF INTERVIEW