

EI-134

MARTHA (ELIZABETH) KALLENS REININGER

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SIGRIST: Good morning. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Wednesday, April 15th, 1992. I am here at the Ellis Island Recording Studio with Martha Kallens Reininger, who came from Germany in 1924, on her thirteenth birthday arrived in New York Harbor, and was detained at

Ellis for about a month in 1924. Good morning, Mrs. Reininger.

REININGER: Good morning.

SIGRIST: Let us begin by giving me your full name, your maiden name.

REININGER: Martha Elizabeth Kallens.

SIGRIST: Can you spell Kallens, please?

REININGER: K-A-L-L-E-N-S.

SIGRIST: And what is your birth date, please?

REININGER: The 28th of August, 1911.

SIGRIST: And where were you born?

REININGER: In Weidenau, in the Black Forest. I was about a week or two old, then we, Mother and Papa and the two brothers, we moved to Düsseldorf, Reisholz.

SIGRIST: Weiden, the name?

REININGER: Weidenau, Weidenau.

SIGRIST: Do you know how to spell it, offhand?

REININGER: Not really.

SIGRIST: Okay.

REININGER: That was such a long time ago.

SIGRIST: May I ask why you were born in the Black Forest? Why there?

REININGER: Where my father worked in *Presse, Walzwerk* [press, rolling-mill], his company sent him to this town to, something with machinery that he had to adjust, or whatever he had to do. And he was there for I don't know how many months. And then when his job was done there, then he came back to the original place where he was sent from.

SIGRIST: So they lived in Düsseldorf then, generally?

REININGER: Düsseldorf, it was the, you know, the suburban of Düsseldorf, Reisholz.

SIGRIST: Vice, what...

REININGER: Reisholz.

SIGRIST: Reisholz.

REININGER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Okay. Can you tell me a little bit about your father? What was his name?

REININGER: My papa's name was Franz, Frank in English, of course.

SIGRIST: And was his family from Düsseldorf?

REININGER: No. I can't remember actually, because I didn't know my father's people, my grandfather and my grandmother. I think they had died before I was even born.

SIGRIST: What did your father look like to you as a child?

REININGER: A very handsome man. I always used to say, looked at his picture, I would say, "When I get married I'm going to marry a man just like my Papa." I loved him.

SIGRIST: What was his temperament like?

REININGER: An angel. Still, oh, I wish he was still alive. He was the type of man, I can see him now, sitting in a chair, in one of those wicker chairs with a wide, high back, like, you know? And we children, the three of us, would sit on the floor, and he would tell us fairy tales. He was a great reader of books and fairy tales. And he was always full of jokes, full of fun.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about his profession. What was it exactly that he did in Germany?

REININGER: What would you call him? He was a tool maker. He worked in a foundry, like, where they melted steel, and then like hammers, you know, they would make, or pipes or cannons or whatever. I remember Mother would take a little, they didn't make sandwiches for their lunch. Mother had like a little container with like two little pots with a handle, would connect the two little pots, and she would cook something and she would put it in there, and then she would walk. When their lunchtime came, Papa would come out and we would sit in the woods there on the ground and Papa would eat. It was beautiful.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

REININGER: Eva.

SIGRIST: And what was her maiden name?

REININGER: Domick.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

REININGER: D-O-M-I-C-K.

SIGRIST: Describe what your mother looked like to me.

REININGER: Well, they said I look a lot like my mother. She was short like me, a very religious woman.

SIGRIST: And what religion was that?

REININGER: We were Catholics, and I am still Catholic.

SIGRIST: You said that you remember your mother's parents, her family?

REININGER: Only my grandmother. She came to live with us. She lived with us for about a month and then she got pneumonia and she died.

SIGRIST: What was your grandmother like?

REININGER: I can tell, I mean, she was only, you know, lived with us for a month and I

was a very small child, but I was there when she died.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about that?

REININGER: I remember she sat up in bed and she said the three words, "Jesus, Mary and Joseph." And she died. (she is moved)

SIGRIST: Was your mother, did she have a job?

REININGER: No, never, no. No.

SIGRIST: When you think about your mother in Germany, what's the memory you think of first? What's the best story you can think of related to your mother?

REININGER: Well, Mother, you know, she was a very good housekeeper, of course. And she did a lot of work for the church. She would decorate the altar, and she made me help her, of course. And when we came to this country I had to help her too, in the church. Then a church, at that one time, I remember, it burned, part of it burned down. And to make money, you know, Mother would make cookies, bake cakes, and then they were sold, and then the money would go towards the new building. Yeah.

SIGRIST: So she worked a lot for her community.

REININGER: Yes, she did.

SIGRIST: Brothers and sisters?

REININGER: I had two brothers, Frank and Ernest.

SIGRIST: And were they older or younger than you?

REININGER: They were older, two years. My brother Ernie was two years older and my brother Frank was four years older than I.

SIGRIST: I see. So there are the three kids.

REININGER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Kind of describe for me your household as you were growing up.

REININGER: Well, my two brothers were very protective. I couldn't go out the door, you could say. They would be after me. We would turn around and one of them would be there. And I remember the first time when I, my girlfriend, she had a cigarette and she said, "Let's go and smoke." You know. We went behind the tree. Before I knew it my brother Frank said, "Sis, what do you think you're doing!" Did I throw that cigarette down so fast and I ran. They were always protective.

SIGRIST: Was that hard for you as a little girl, not...

REININGER: Kind of, but it was wonderful, lovely, though. When I think back now, they were great, both of my two brothers.

SIGRIST: Did you live in the same house for a long time? When you think back in Germany, which house do you remember?

REININGER: Oh, there was a beer garden on the first floor. And in the back, you know, there was a big, beautiful garden. And we lived right above that. Talking

about that, I remember one day my papa came home and he had his hand in his pocket and he said to me, "Come, little one. I want to show you. I brought you something." And he took his hand out and he opened his hand, and there was a little white mouse in it. Mother says, "Get that little rodent out of here!" Papa says, "No." And I loved all, all kind of animals. So Papa made a little cage, like, and I had the little mouse in there.

SIGRIST: Did you name the mouse?

REININGER: Not really. (she laughs) And I remember this here one day we heard screaming downstairs and I looked and people were running out, especially the ladies, of course. My little mouse had disappeared, and the next day I heard the little mouse was on one of the ladies' table while she was having a beer, I guess. (she laughs) I laughed.

SIGRIST: How many rooms did you have in this apartment?

REININGER: Let's see. The rooms were big, and the ceilings were real high. Because if you, my brother Frank would sit on top of the door, and if he would be up there and you walked along, you couldn't even see the child sitting up there. It was one bedroom, and we all slept in the same bedroom. That's how big it was. And then there we had a dining room and a kitchen, and then there was a hall. That was it, yeah.

SIGRIST: What did your parents like to do for entertainment?

REININGER: Papa was the type that loved the outdoors. Always, like on Saturdays or Sundays, Mother would make a picnic basket, you know, and we would go out in the woods. Papa would lay under a tree and take a nap. My two brothers, they had made out of a stick and a string, a little fishing pole.

They were sitting there by the river catching those tiny little fish and putting them in a jar. And Mother and I would be walking through the fields picking the great big buttercups and daisies. And then we'd have our lunch, and we'd go home again. Most of that time, yeah, we would have to do that. That's all there was.

SIGRIST: Why do you think your father liked the outdoors so much?

REININGER: I really don't know. I guess that's why I like it so much, because I'm so much like my Papa, with the animals and the outdoors.

SIGRIST: How would you describe yourself as a little girl?

REININGER: A freshie little kid.

SIGRIST: Freshie. Why do you say that?

REININGER: Well, like when we were here on Ellis Island, right. And the men were not allowed to be with the women. My two brothers were with the men. So I hear that the men, after they took a shower, they didn't have bath towels for them to dry themselves with, they had paper towels. So I said to Mother, "How could you dry yourself with a paper towel?" Mother says, "Well, see what you can do about it," you know. So I says, "Okay." So I found one of the guards and I said, "Could you give me a couple of towels?" He says, "Sure, little one." So he gave me towels. I walked through one of those big, long halls, knocked on the door. The guard opened the door and he said, "What do you want?" I says, "I have my two brothers here. I want to give them the towels so they can wipe themselves, dry themselves with." He says, "Sure, you can." I just called out their names and they came and took the towels. That's why.

SIGRIST: You were fearless.

REININGER: Yeah, kind of. And do you know, too, what I felt was so nice? You know, when we ate in the dining room there was a family-type food that was put on the table, you know, not individual little ones. So some of it was gone, and Mother would say, "Are you still hungry?" The boys, of course, you know. I says to Mother, "I will go to the kitchen and get some." I would pick up a plate, go into the kitchen. Sure enough, the cook would always give me some more food. And if on Fridays naturally we couldn't eat meat, right. The Jewish people, they were sitting at this one table. They had herring and gefilte fish and stuff like that. I walked over to them and asked them. And they gave me herring or other things, you know, but not meat. And I would come back, and so they had it. That's right.

SIGRIST: Getting back to Germany, you're such a spunky little kid, what was school like for you?

REININGER: Well, school. There was a teacher, a man teacher. He was nice. But I kind of liked the lady teachers better, because they could relate to you more because, you know. But school was just...

SIGRIST: Can you describe the actual building for me?

REININGER: They're just the same as here, really. Yeah. The same. (she laughs) The head teacher there, he always had a stick stuck in his sleeve. And I remember one of the fellows, the boys, a big boy. I don't know what he did, but the teacher went after him with the stick. You should have seen that fellow. He grabbed that stick, broke it, and ran. I laughed. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: What was your favorite subject in school?

REININGER: Arithmetic, yeah. Because Papa always said, "If you know how to count your money, see where you stand," you know, "Then you always will never be poor," like, you know. You will always have something. Arithmetic was the best.

SIGRIST: Were your mother and father, were they educated also beyond a high school level, say?

REININGER: No. They didn't have all that at that time. Because Mother was born in 1885 and my father was born in 1883, yeah.

SIGRIST: Were they supportive of their children getting an education?

REININGER: The war came along, and then we came to this country. I mean, you went to school, of course, but you have no idea what it is like when you, in the evening when you can see, they didn't bomb right where we were, but you could see, it was dark, you could see all the lights, like when a bomb goes off, you know. And Mother said, "It's coming closer." And then I still have the cross that Papa gave my mother for an engagement present. That was my job to take care of it. It has a glass globe over it. It was packed, and she said, "Now, when you go to America you have to take care of that." And that's the first thing. Each child had to do a certain kind of chore in case we had to get out.

SIGRIST: In case you had to evacuate, in Germany.

REININGER: Yeah, uh-huh.

SIGRIST: And you took care of the cross.

REININGER: Yeah. I have it, still have it.

SIGRIST: Talk to me about what it was like being a child in this kind of environment, this very threatening kind of environment.

REININGER: Terrible. It was terrible. Nobody knows and understands unless you went through it. Like I said about the potatoes.

SIGRIST: Tell me that story again, please.

REININGER: Like, you know. But then, like, there is rye, corn and wheat growing on the field, like. And then the men would come and tie them in bundles, cut it and tie it in bundles. They took it away. Then you were allowed to go on the field and pick, you know, whatever you can get, and then take all those little kernels out. You put it in a coffee grinder with a little water and make patties and put it on top of the stove, because there was no food. In the evening Mother would give me a pitcher. I would walk I don't know how many miles through the woods and all to go to a farmer to get milk. Many a times when you'd get there you'd stand in line, by the time it's your turn there was no more milk. The farmer would say, "I'm sorry, there is none." And I remember so well, this here, one day, and there are, they came, soldiers, from England, Scotland, and then came American boys. The American boys, it's the God's truth, they were the nicest and dearest people, boys. I remember I went out there and one of the American soldiers said, "Would you like to have a bar of chocolate?" To me that was a beautiful thing. But the others they were not like that. And I remember, too, this here, one day, with the pitcher, going to the farmer. And you were not allowed to be on the street after six o'clock. And the farmer, that's the

time they milk their cows, right? I have my pitcher. I'm outside, and a soldier comes with a bayonet right in front of me, and I held the pitcher in front of me. He says, "Where do you think you're going?" And I says, "I'm going to get some milk." He was nice enough, and he walked me all the way to the farmer, and I got some milk.

SIGRIST: Is this a scary time for a little girl, or is this kind of a fascinating, exciting time?

REININGER: It's very scary. But that's when you get your spunk and you try to fight back, and say, "I'm not doing anything wrong. My family, they want something to eat or to, you know, milk, or whatever. Sure."

SIGRIST: Can you repeat on tape the story about the man and the potatoes, please?

REININGER: Oh, yes. There was the potato field, and they come with the machines to dig out the potatoes. And then, you know, as you know, some of the potatoes, they get cut in half. That's just how the machine cuts it. And there are guards standing all around the field. And this one man, he had a little bag of whatever he had. And all the potatoes are on top before the people come and pick them up, you know, the farmers' helpers or whatever. And this man ran and picked up some of the potatoes and one of the guards shot him. And that is a terrible thing to see for a child, especially you don't know, you think to yourself do you dare grab some too, or do you want to run home? But then you stay until they're all gone, and I had a little shovel, and I dug some. I couldn't dig up, you know, half of ones, little ones, and brought them home.

SIGRIST: How did the war affect your parents?

REININGER: I remember Mother walking the floor a lot and crying a lot.

SIGRIST: Did your father have to serve?

REININGER: No, because he worked in the place in *Presse, Walzwerk* where they were making things for the, for the wars, I guess. No.

SIGRIST: And let's talk a little bit about your religious life in Germany, also. For instance, you said you were Catholic.

REININGER: I am, yes.

SIGRIST: As a little girl, what kinds of things were expected of you in terms of church?

REININGER: Well, like I said, Mother was a very religious woman. Every day, as far as I remember, we, family, we had to be together. And every night we prayed the rosary together. And in school during the mass, if somebody had died, they would, Mother would say, "Martha, you have to go and pray the rosary." And I would kneel at the coffin and pray out the rosary out loud. And then the people that was there would, you know, follow and answer. And when I came to this country naturally Mother told Father Hilsebusch in St. Augustine's, and I had to do the same thing here, but not for the people that I put in church, because they were teaching German, the children here, German. So that's why I had to do that.

SIGRIST: In Germany was your school connected with the church?

REININGER: Yes. It was a Catholic school. But other children, non-Catholics, could go

there too, yeah.

SIGRIST: Were nuns teachers there, or were they...

REININGER: Some, some. You know, some were and some were not.

SIGRIST: I see. Well, as a little girl in Germany what did you know of America? What did America mean to you?

REININGER: Oh, yes. The stories I heard. (she laughs) They roast ducks and pigeons that fly through the air. All you have to do is pick them out of the sky. And the street is full of, runs with milk and honey. That's how beautiful it is. Actually, when you stop to think, you have to work for everything here, but you do have an opportunity if you are willing to work, where other countries, uh-uh.

SIGRIST: So why, who decided that your family would come to America?

REININGER: My uncle lived here.

SIGRIST: When did he come here?

REININGER: Oh, I don't know. Before I was born.

SIGRIST: What was he doing here?

REININGER: I don't know. All I remember, we were here a month and the dear man died.

SIGRIST: Was he writing to you in Germany? Was this your mother's brother?

REININGER: My mother's brother, half-brother.

SIGRIST: And who in your family decided that this would be...

REININGER: No, my uncle. My uncle John wrote and said, "There is nothing in Germany for you." You know, he said, he liked my mother even though he was, you know, she was his half-sister. But he says, "Come to America and you can live with us here for a while." He had more than a one-family house. "Then you can buy your own home. You have opportunities and all." So Mother says to Papa, "What do you think?" Papa says, "I think that's a good idea." So Papa came here first.

SIGRIST: What year did he come?

REININGER: A year, it must have been in '23 then, in 1923. Because he was here a year before us.

SIGRIST: And when he came, what job did he get?

REININGER: He worked at the Stanley Tool. The next day he got the job when he was in this country.

SIGRIST: Of course, he had a trade in Germany. I mean, so. Did he live with your uncle?

REININGER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And what, do you remember your father writing you back from America?

REININGER: Of course.

SIGRIST: And what kinds of things did he tell you?

REININGER: What did he tell me? Naturally what kind of, a child, I would say, the first thing I would say right to Papa, "Oh, Ernie did such-and-such a thing, and Frank did such-and-such a thing to me." You know, I was complaining, in other words. And Papa would write back and he would say, "When you come to America I'm going to take you bear hunting and the boys are going to stay home. Just you and I, we'll go." (she laughs)

SIGRIST: So this is exciting for a little girl, right?

REININGER: Oh, it was beautiful.

SIGRIST: Especially if you were close to your father.

REININGER: I was, very.

SIGRIST: Did you miss him when he left, when he came to America?

REININGER: Of course, of course.

SIGRIST: How was life different for you for that year when he was in America? Did your mother have to get a job?

REININGER: No, no, no. Papa would send money from here to us. Yeah. With that, the American Dollar. Everybody wanted the American dollar. Like if you say, five dollars, we'll say. You go to the store, you know. And another German would see the five dollar bill. They would say, "Oh, I'll give you seven

dollars for that." Everybody wanted the American money.

SIGRIST: What was the economy like in Germany after the war?

REININGER: Well, when I was there, right, Mother would go the day Papa gets paid. All the women would. Papa would give Mother the money. She would rush to the store to buy food, when there was still food to be bought, at that time. The next day that dollar, we'll say, they would turn that dollar over and stamp "five" on there. The following day they would stamp "ten." So the money was no good.

SIGRIST: Worthless.

REININGER: Worthless, yeah. Terrible, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember your mother telling you and your brothers, "We've decided we're going to be leaving for America."

REININGER: Yes.

SIGRIST: How did you feel?

REININGER: Wonderful. That was, oh, all the things, the wonderful things you hear about this country, who wouldn't, especially when you're starving there. Oh! No, that was the best thing. God was good to us.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you took with you? Do you remember packing is what I should say?

REININGER: Like I said, I had to take care of the cross, right? And all the essential

things, that's all. The rest of the stuff was all left there.

SIGRIST: Did your mother go with the intention that she would some day come back?

REININGER: No, uh-uh.

SIGRIST: Closing the door.

REININGER: I never went back and I never want to go back. No. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Did your father send you the passage money also?

REININGER: No, my uncle did.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how much that was?

REININGER: I wouldn't remember, no.

SIGRIST: But your uncle, of course, he was established and all here in the country.

REININGER: Yeah, of course. But then Mother paid him back, of course.

SIGRIST: Once you got here.

REININGER: Of course.

SIGRIST: All right, let's, let's start the immigration process. Where did you leave from?

REININGER: *Hamburg-Amerikanische Linie* [Hamburg-American Line]. That's where it was.

SIGRIST: So did you have to, how did you get from Düsseldorf to Hamburg?

REININGER: By train. Yes, by train. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: You'd been on a train before, or was this the first time?

REININGER: Oh, yes, yes. We used to go on the train to visit my grandmother, my mother's mother. It took us three days and three nights to get there.

SIGRIST: To visit your grandmother.

REININGER: Grandmother.

SIGRIST: Do you know how long it took to go from Düsseldorf to Hamburg?

REININGER: I think it was a, just a few hours.

SIGRIST: Were you kids well-behaved, or did your mother have her hands full?

REININGER: We were very well-behaved, really, and that's true. Mother never had to say, "Frank, Ernie, sit, stop!" She only had to look at us. She was the type of woman that talked you to death. She never touched us, and my father never, we never got a spanking. But talk! We would say, "Oh, hit us already, but stop talking."

SIGRIST: How long were you in Hamburg before the boat left?

REININGER: Oh, a couple of days. Because we were examined.

SIGRIST: How were you examined in Hamburg?

REININGER: A regular doctor, you know. From top to bottom you were examined. And I remember the doctor saying, I wish I could say it now, "I never saw a girl, a child, so healthy as you, that child is." But that was so many years ago, see. But now...

SIGRIST: Were there a lot of other people who were leaving?

REININGER: Of course, yes.

SIGRIST: Did your mother, she obviously had all her papers in order.

REININGER: Of course.

SIGRIST: Do you know where she had to go to get her visa and everything? Was it in Düsseldorf, or did she have to go somewhere?

REININGER: I think she had to go to Berlin, I think. Because I know she said it took, you know, longer. It wasn't that in Düsseldorf, no.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the boat?

REININGER: The Westphalia.

SIGRIST: Was this a big boat?

REININGER: No, only one stack they used, you know. Smokestack, I think they call it,

right? Only one, yeah. What a storm we came, we went through. Everything was tied down. I was seasick from the day I got on the boat until the day I got off. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Was this the first time you'd been on a boat?

REININGER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: We're going to pause right now, and Kevin's going to flip the tape.

END OF SIDE ONE
BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: Okay. So you're on the boat.

REININGER: Yes.

SIGRIST: Can you describe your accommodations on the boat for me?

REININGER: Yes. We had one cabin, of course. Bunk beds. And the two boys and Mother and I, we were all in the same, you know. And, like I said, I was seasick from the day I got on there. And the boys, they didn't get seasick. They would grab a hold of me and say, "Sis, you need a little walking." You know, one on each side of me. I didn't get very far, over the railing of course, you know. Oh!

SIGRIST: Was your mother sick?

REININGER: No, only I. And so the captain, Mother said, "The captain's worried about you. You should eat something." I says, "I can't." So the captain came over to me and he says, "Your mother told me you love cherries." I says, "Oh, I love them, yes." He says, "I'll tell you what. If you eat a little bit of something, I'll give you cherries." I said to him, "You don't have cherries on a boat like that." He says, "Yes, I do." I ate, I don't know, a piece of toast or whatever. And he gave me the cherries. I wolfed them down, like. And sure enough, the next minute, up they came. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: What else do you remember about the boat? What did your brothers do all day?

REININGER: Oh, they had a good time, of course. They played around. They had shuffleboard and stuff like that on there, you know. Oh, and then the storm, though. Everything was tied down. If you wanted to walk you had to pull yourself on, so you could just make one step at a time. Even the boys, you know, they, but, uh-uh. That was a terrible one.

SIGRIST: When you traveled to Hamburg, were there other people from Düsseldorf who was immigrating with you?

REININGER: No. Not as far as I remember. No, they were all strangers to us.

SIGRIST: Do you know how long the voyage took?

REININGER: Yes, ten days.

SIGRIST: That's a long time to be sick.

REININGER: Uh-huh. That's for sure. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Well, do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty and coming into New York Harbor?

REININGER: Oh, that was a beautiful day. I woke up during the night, towards morning. And I thought, "What is wrong?" You know, just going through the storm and all. Everything was so quiet. I got dressed, ran up on deck, and it was my birthday. I was thirteen years old that morning, and the first thing I see is the Statue of Liberty. What a beautiful sight. To know that you don't have to go through another storm, of course, that you are finally here, and to see my dear father again. Oh, that was beautiful! So then, though, you get off the boat, where do you go? To Ellis Island. So the doctors examine you again. That's all they ever did. No matter from the day you want to come to this country everybody's examining you, you know. And so they said that my brother Frank had heart trouble. So Papa comes to take us off, you know, to take us home and he's told that we can't get off. So then my uncle comes, and then he's told to get a sponsor besides him. And I guess it took that long for him to find somebody.

SIGRIST: How long were you here?

REININGER: We were here a month.

SIGRIST: Tell me...

REININGER: But it was nice, though. I don't regret it. It was kind of nice that we couldn't go off right away. Like, in the morning we, the women all were together in one place, and the men all together in a different place. And there were bars between us, the women and the men. And then you get, you wake up with somebody, you hear them say, "Mangiare," and the bell is ringing.

And I wanted to see where this here voice came from or whatever. It was a young man walking through the halls ringing this big bell and calling out, "Mangiare." So I wanted to know, "What is he talking about?" Of course I couldn't understand him. He said, "Eat, eat." "Oh, okay." So we got dressed, went to this big, big dining room. And big long tables. They put the food right in the middle of the table, family style, like. And if you didn't have enough, like, you know, they say you can go and ask for more. The ones that worked in the kitchen, they were very nice people. I have beautiful memories of being here. And in the morning, you know, between breakfast and lunch a little milk wagon would come through the halls into the room, and the women, the children, we would get a cup of milk and Uneeda Biscuits. The men didn't get that, though. So I would go put one of the cups of milk on the table and go back and get another one and get two more Uneeda biscuits and go into the other room where my two brothers were and put it through the bars there and give it to them.

SIGRIST: So your brothers were separate from you.

REININGER: All the men would be separate, yes.

SIGRIST: How did your mother feel about the boys having to be separated?

REININGER: That's, I mean, that's the law, that's it. I mean, after all, they weren't doing anything to them. They were all being well cared for and everything, sure.

SIGRIST: Did you have any communication with them, or were you allowed to be with them during the day?

REININGER: The bars between us, though. You just walked up to the bars and they're on the other side and you talk to them, of course.

SIGRIST: What did you guys do all day here?

REININGER: Well, like I say, women talk, of course, you know. The children, they would bring, like, for, somebody would come in. They would, they gave me a doll, and a little material, and thread and knitting and somebody would be there to show you how to cut things to make a little dress for the doll. Or, and they gave us a bunch of beads. I would make a little bracelet or a necklace or anything like that. It was nice.

SIGRIST: Did your brother that they had suspected had heart trouble, was he admitted into the hospitals here?

REININGER: No, uh-uh. He never had any heart, I mean, nothing. I never had no trouble with it. He died when he was seventy-two, seventy-three.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about what all this looked like? What did this look like to a little girl?

REININGER: Real big. Everything was big, but very friendly, very happy.

SIGRIST: Were there a lot of people here?

REININGER: Of course. Everything was just packed full with people, of course.

SIGRIST: Did they ever supply any entertainment for you, any movies or performers?

REININGER: No, uh-uh.

SIGRIST: Did you make any friends?

REININGER: With the children, of course you make friends with children.

SIGRIST: So there were other kids here?

REININGER: Of course, yeah.

SIGRIST: Was your father allowed to come and visit you?

REININGER: Yes, like once a week he could come. Uncle would come once a week, sure, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did he ever, when you were at Ellis Island did you ever see anything that you had never seen before?

REININGER: Yes. When we walked into the dining room I saw this great, big long green thing. And naturally I asked what it was. It was a watermelon. I never saw a watermelon. Cantaloupe, honeydew. I never saw anything like that. Bananas I never saw. With Mother, you know, when, she says, "Oh, yes, I've seen it." But they were too expensive to buy, you know. We had cherries, of course, plums, apples, pears, you know, things like that. But all the other fruits, I never saw that.

SIGRIST: Did you like them when you ate them?

REININGER: Yes, I did, yes. I still do, yes.

SIGRIST: Did your father ever bring you anything when he came to visit that sticks out in your mind?

REININGER: No. I remember my Uncle John. He gave my two brothers a quarter. You must think now, you have to remember, that was a lot of money at that time. You know, after all. But for me it gave me a half a dollar, and I felt special, like, you know. Naturally, being a fresh kid, I would say to my brothers, "Look, mine is bigger than yours, see?" (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Mrs. Reininger, tell me about when you first saw your father, that first day you were here, whenever the initial sighting was. What was that like for you?

REININGER: I ran up to him and gave him the biggest hug you ever saw. Uh-uh! I loved him.

SIGRIST: What about your mother and your father? Do you remember how they greeted each other?

REININGER: They were very devoted to each other, very. Uh-uh. Not like nowadays, one goes one way and the other one goes the other way.

SIGRIST: What do you think is going through your mother's mind during the stay at Ellis Island? What do you think she's preoccupied with thinking about?

REININGER: Like I said, she was a very religious woman. And I suppose she thought, you know, when you pray the good Lord will hear you. And He did.

SIGRIST: Did they offer religious services out here for you that you can remember?

REININGER: I don't remember that, that they had mass here. No, I don't think so.

SIGRIST: Well, let's get you off of Ellis Island. (they laugh)

REININGER: In fact, I'm back on here again!

SIGRIST: Exactly, so many years later. Where did you go when you left Ellis Island?

REININGER: We went to my uncle's house.

SIGRIST: Did your father and your uncle come to take you off?

REININGER: Yeah. We went to Newark, it was on Newark Street.

SIGRIST: In Manhattan?

REININGER: In New Jersey.

SIGRIST: Oh, in New Jersey. Newark. And talk to me about your uncle's house.

REININGER: Well, let's see. There were, like, three, like a three-family house, yes. A cousin of mine, she lived on the top. An uncle and aunt, Uncle John and Aunt Theresa lived on the second floor and we lived on the first floor, yeah.

SIGRIST: How long did you stay with your uncle?

REININGER: I think we lived there about three years. Then this lady, we went to St. Augustine's Church.

SIGRIST: In Newark.

REININGER: Yes. When we were here about a month, my Uncle John died, and Mother naturally was dressed in black, and she was in church. And this lady came up to her and said, and at that same time a little girl was killed in an automobile accident. And this lady, her name was Mrs. Rossner, and she said, "Was that your little girl that was killed?" Mother said, "No, my brother died." "Oh," she says. And she spoke German to her, you know, to her, because none of us spoke anything but. And so that's Mother and Mrs. Rossner got acquainted. And so naturally Mrs. Rossner said, "I have a son, Victor." You know. So I got acquainted with him through the years, and that's how I married her son. I was married to him for thirty years.

SIGRIST: I see. Can you talk to me a little bit about what it was like being a German kid fitting into an American...

REININGER: That was hard. It was hard. See, I went to St. Augustine's School.

SIGRIST: Catholic school?

REININGER: Yes, yes. And there was a little girl. Her name was Rachel Popoli. Well, I couldn't understand her, and she couldn't understand me. So they had the sisters there, and everybody spoke English. You can't understand nothing. So Sister Sanforosa, that was my teacher, she said to one of the girls that must have, you know, spoke a little German, and they had a book there, translated from English to German, you know, like that. And the girl, sister made the girl, like, once a day in the afternoon for about an hour tell me the different words which, from German to English, you know, like that. And so that's, little by little, you know how girls, they're children, they learn fast. Well, anyway, with Rachel, we went out for recess, and the children were playing ball. And Rachel says, "Come on, play ball with us." I says, "Yes, I would like that." You know, sign language, of course. The children,

they turned and they said, "No, she cannot play with us." So I walked away. But Rachel, she came and stood next to me and she refused to play, too. So then I got a ball and just Rachel and I would play. But then after a while, you know, children forget quickly anyway. So we played all together again. But that's the one that hurt me, kind of.

SIGRIST: And this was because you were...

REININGER: German.

SIGRIST: German. You think that there was anti-German sentiment after World War I. But anyway, you were a foreigner.

REININGER: Yeah, of course.

SIGRIST: How about your parents? How did they learn English?

REININGER: From us children, after a while, I would say.

SIGRIST: Your father, of course, had been here.

REININGER: Yeah. Well, I mean, you know. And then my two brothers, they went to night school and learned, you know.

SIGRIST: Let's talk about your mother and how she adjusted to America.

REININGER: She loved it.

SIGRIST: What was difficult for her?

REININGER: Nothing really. No. I could remember, she fitted right in, I would say, yeah.

SIGRIST: Was she anxious to be an American?

REININGER: Definitely, oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Did she and your father sort of shun a lot of whatever German ways they had?

REININGER: No. They, like I say, they fitted right in. Because if that's the way they do it in this country, all right, we do it too, you know. Like the saying is, "When you're in Rome you do as the Romans do." And here you do as they do.

SIGRIST: The neighborhood that you lived in in Newark, was it an immigrant neighborhood?

REININGER: There were some German people there, yes. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did your parents fraternize with other Germans?

REININGER: No, but just with everything, as long as they could understand each other. Because they weren't that old either, my mother and my father, you know. So they learned fast, sure.

SIGRIST: Just kind of quickly tell me a little bit about, you know, what happened to you in those few years after you got here, school and that sort of thing.

REININGER: All I know is Mother was the type, like I said, you know. If there's, there were two old ladies living next door to where we were living with my uncle, and Mother would say to me, "Go. Scrub their kitchen floor for them,

because they're old, they can't do it. Do, go." You know, so naturally I would go. But when I went over there, the two ladies, they said, "Oh, no, we wouldn't want you to scrub our floor. You just dust." But, see, and that is good. That's what I would say. The mothers and fathers should tell their children in this country, that's why they are the way some of them are. Not all of them, of course. Help somebody.

SIGRIST: What was your first job that you got?

REININGER: My first job? I worked one time in a paper factory, I remember. To make, I wanted to make some money to buy clothes, of course.

SIGRIST: How old were you?

REININGER: I was sixteen. And the boss, he was German, yes. It was fun, though, to learn the machineries and all that. I enjoyed that. And then after that I got a job when the Depression came along. I took care of a little sick boy with eczema. They call it eczema or eczema, all over his body. His grandfather was Dr. Bingham of the Orange Memorial Hospital. I worked there for three-and-a-half years until I got married.

SIGRIST: And what year did you get married?

REININGER: In '35. Then I didn't work.

SIGRIST: How did the Depression affect your family, your mother and father? Did your father lose his job?

REININGER: No. When he worked, like I said, in Stanley Tool, he came home and he said, "The boss said instead of laying people off, let one group work three

days this week and the others that are there two days. The following week if you worked three days the week before you work two days, and like that." And I thought that was a good idea instead of just laying all the people off. That's what they did.

SIGRIST: What was the great difficulty during the Depression that you can remember in your household?

REININGER: In my household Mother didn't pay the building loan. That's why I got the job by Mrs. Bingham. I got fifty dollars a month to take care of that sick boy, and I gave every cent to Mother so she could pay the building loan. Her building loan was seventy dollars a month, she had to pay.

SIGRIST: Did your mother get work when she came to America?

REININGER: No. I said to Mother, "I'll go." Not her, no.

SIGRIST: I see. Well, I think that pretty much brings us through your immigration experience. And I just want to ask you one final question. I think I sort of know the answer to this. Are you happy that your parents made the decision to come here?

REININGER: Oh, definitely. Oh, definitely. Yes, I feel very, especially that God, you know, gave us this country. I can't imagine being over in Germany.

SIGRIST: How do you think your life would be different if you hadn't ever left Germany?

REININGER: I shouldn't say this. (she whispers) I don't like the Germans. No, I don't. I don't like the Germans. They are, to me, they're all like this. (she gestures)

SIGRIST: You like the Americans better than the Germans.

REININGER: Definitely. Oh, yes, definitely.

SIGRIST: Good. Well, Mrs. Reininger, I want to thank you for coming out to Ellis Island and telling us a splendid story of your immigration experience. It's been a pleasure talking to you.

REININGER: It was nice to be here. Because it was very pleasant to be here that month, you know.

SIGRIST: Well, you liked it in 1924.

REININGER: I did.

SIGRIST: I think you're the only person I've ever talked to that actually liked being at Ellis Island. (he laughs)

REININGER: I did, because, you know. There's nothing sad about this when I was here. I had a ball when I was here.

SIGRIST: Your circumstances were fortunate in a lot of ways.

REININGER: Yeah. Because I was coming out of misery and coming to something very happy. Because, I mean, after all, there was no food, no nothing. You know, you come here, you can eat, and then you see a great, big watermelon in front of you, so tasty, you never saw in life before, which was great. Sure.

SIGRIST: Well, this is Paul Sigrist signing off with Martha Reiningger on April 15, 1992.

END OF THE INTERVIEW