

EI-1368

MARIE A KRAMER

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ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Today is January the 6th, the year 2005. I'm here in Newport Ritchie, Florida with Maria A. Kramer who came from Romania in January of 1938 when she was 16 years of age. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service.

ROMANIA, 1938

AGE: 16

SHIP:

PORT:

RESIDENCES:

- **USA: NEW PORT RITCHIE, FLORIDA;**
- **ROMANIA: SAINT ANNE**

LEVINE: So if we could start please, if you would say your name, when you arrived at Ellis Island and your birth date.

KRAMER: My name at the time was Maria Kappes. K-A-P-P-E-S.

LEVINE: And your birth date?

KRAMER: Was October 29th, 1921.

LEVINE: Ok, and where were you born?

KRAMER: I was born in Saint Anna, Saint Anna in Romania. It's a very large town which has now become a city.

LEVINE: Uh huh.

KRAMER: But Saint Anne.

LEVINE: Saint Anne.

KRAMER: Romania.

LEVINE: Uh huh, Romania.

KRAMER: That's in the German section of Romania on the border of Hungary.

LEVINE: Oh, ok. And did you live in Saint Anne up until the time you left?

KRAMER: Up until the time I left I lived there, Ok, on and off because I went to boarding school for four years in Timisoara which is the town that the big city that the convent was in that I attended boarding school for four years.

LEVINE: Could you possibly spell the name of that town?

KRAMER: Timisoara. It's T-I-M-I-S-O-A-R-A.

LEVINE: Ok. And –

KRAMER: And the name of the school was Notre Dame. N-O-T-R-E D-A-M-E. It's a very well known school in Romania.

LEVINE: So that would have been a Catholic –

KRAMER: It was a Catholic boarding school, yes, yes.

LEVINE: Ok, what was your father's name?

KRAMER: My father's name was Frank.

LEVINE: And your mother?

KRAMER: My mother was Rosa (laughs).

LEVINE: And what was Rosa's maiden name?

KRAMER: Faulhaber. F-A-U-L-H-A-B-E-R.

LEVINE: Ok, and you were an only child?

KRAMER: I was an only child.

LEVINE: Ok, now were your mother and father from that area in Romania going back generations there for parents grandparents?

KRAMER: Yes from back generations yes.

LEVINE: Yes

KRAMER: They were both from Saint Anna and married there and then after I was born then they moved away but up until that time they were living in Romania. They didn't want another family, didn't want another –

LEVINE: Oh, oh, ok. And probably that's how they met because before they had all these new –

KRAMER: The parents arranged it (laughs).

LEVINE: Oh really. Uh huh.

KRAMER: Yes, yes because there was quite a bit of money involved. And so on my father's side of the family both mother and dad were dead and so the uncles arranged the marriage with my grandfather with my mother because it was equal amount of money of (laughs) you know that's the way they arrange these things.

LEVINE: How did they, yeah could you talk about that, how did they arrange that?

KRAMER: Well of course because everyone knew everyone else in town and so they knew what they're conditions were how much land they owned and how well off they were. And so they tried to get somebody that had the equal amounts that they would be very well off, which they were. But my grandfather had five children so of course it had to go five ways. And my father came from a family of three. So dad had a little more than my mother but they arranged it and there was a ten year difference in their ages, my father was ten years older than my mother.

LEVINE: I see. Well now did they, was, is that by way of saying when they arranged these marriages they tried to, in other words someone from a very wealthy family wouldn't marry somebody from a very poor family.

KRAMER: No.

LEVINE: They kind of matched them as even wealth wise.

KRAMER: Oh yes, money made a great – and land! Not so much money but only land was the epitome of living -- at that time. It's not anymore but at that time that was the great thing, you know, and naturally depending on who you were then you were associated with the people on your level. See there was a class distinction which still exists to a degree today but not as bad as it was when I was growing up.

LEVINE: I see.

KRAMER: I was not allowed to associate with just anyone, it was, my friend's were picked: the doctor's wife, the doctor's daughter, the dentist's daughter, you know, the merchant's, all the people that were, they were called the intelligencia.

LEVINE: I see.

KRAMER: That's what, in my time. That was sixty, seventy years ago. But that's the way it was.

LEVINE: Yeah.

KRAMER: And of course when I came to this country that was the first thing that impressed me, that there was no distinction. That everybody was on the same level more or less. But that made quite an impression on me.

LEVINE: Was it a positive one or a negative?

KRAMER: Very positive, yes, because I lived next to a girl whose parents were kind of, not as wealthy as my grandparents, but I was not allowed to associate with her. Because she was not what an education was, she was not on the same level as we were so I was not, and I adored her! I thought she was the greatest girl alive. But I was not allowed. So when I came to this country, anyone could be your friend, and that's what impressed me on a positive level.

LEVINE: Yes. Oh, interesting. Ok now you knew your grandparents on, was it your mother's side or –

KRAMER: My mother's parents.

LEVINE: And what could you say about them, what were they like, what was their temperament, how did they treat you?

KRAMER: Well my grandfather was a very strict perfectionist. But being that I was the child of his youngest daughter who left in his grace to go to Canada, he just sheltered me with everything and adored me because I had no parents as he put it to everybody, even though his daughter was alive and my father was – but he considered his daughter dead because she disgraced the family.

LEVINE: Now talk about the disgrace, what was so disgraceful?

KRAMER: They lost, they lost everything they inherited. They lived a very, very beautiful life, my mother and dad. I remember as a little girl there were parties all the time. Dad had his own business and I mean he was a hunter, my mother went vacationing and my father couldn't leave the business so he stayed home so whenever they left someplace, "Take the

child to Grandma!" So I was with my grandmother and grandfather. And when they finally decided that all of the money was gone the property was all sold, was gone, and my mother told her parents that my grandfather said, "You are no longer my daughter, don't come near this house."

LEVINE: You mean they spent the money and –

KRAMER: Well they lived on a big scale which they should not have had.

LEVINE: I see.

KRAMER: It was beautiful, believe me, it was a very lovely, lovely life. But, it went. You know and of course times change too where things were not as good as it was when they first married. But Grandfather never forgave my mother for leaving. That was a disgrace for having to go to America. You're leaving your homeland because you can't manage it and you have to go, only the very lowest of the low went to America.

LEVINE: Well now did your mother and father decide to go to America because they no longer could afford to live in Romania? I see.

KRAMER: In fact what their plans were to come to Canada, get jobs, and my mother never worked so I don't know what she thought she was going to do, but they would save their money and when they had enough money they would go back. Which never happened. thank goodness.

LEVINE: Yeah.

KRAMER: I'm glad it never did happen because it would have been a disaster.

LEVINE: Why do you think it would have been a disaster?

KRAMER: Because things changed drastically in Romania. It was not the same anymore. The Romanians became very communisitic and we as the minority of the country, we were Germans, we were not liked at all. In fact we were hated.

LEVINE: Mhmm. So I guess your mother and father thought they could make a lot of money in America, recoup.

KRAMER: Well they heard from other people that money could be made in America, you know. You just, if you're hard working and you saved your money you could make it and some people did and came back. And then this of course was an enthusiastic thing to do and so they left for Canada. By the way, it was very difficult to even get passage. My father had to be able to prove that he was a laborer otherwise they, because somebody had to vouch for you over here. Someone had to ask for you and so Dad went to, was digging in the yard just to get his hands dirty and that's how they went to the consulate to get permission to leave the country.

LEVINE: Well now what did your father do before he –

KRAMER: My father had a business, electrical business, you know, with, and they just started with typewriters at the time and of course the grammar phones, you know, with the big speakers so it was the old fashioned thing, and radios, but not radio the way we know radio. It was with a um –

LEVINE: Crystal?

KRAMER: Yes. And naturally they also installed. My uncle was an engineer who was in business with my father and they installed these wells, electric

wells that ran electrically because electricity was just coming in to being. This was in 1924, 25, as I was a little girl (clock begins chiming). So the business went quite well but my uncle was not a very trustworthy person and he took, he fixed our wagon, he took everything we had (laughs). He was my, my father's brother in law. His wife was my dad's sister.

LEVINE: Sister, oh, I see. So they would, they had like a shop? Did they have a shop and then they would go places and do the electrical work?

KRAMER: Well if anybody build a new home and they had the money to have this well done electrically, this is how then, he would examine it, give them an estimate, and then have people do the work. You know. But he cashed, he took the money and never put it back into the business.

LEVINE: I see.

KRAMER: And Dad, not being a very good businessman, he just never caught it. And so everything, everything was gone.

LEVINE: So what year did your mother and father leave?

KRAMER: 1927.

LEVINE: 1927 Oh ok, so you were there for eleven more years.

KRAMER: Yes well, I did visit my parents in Canada.

LEVINE: Oh.

KRAMER: In 1928. But I only stayed a few months and didn't care for it and missed my grandmother.

LEVINE: Oh I see. Now why did they decide Canada? Was it easier to go into?

KRAMER: Couldn't get into the United States. There was no possibility. And then when Mom and Dad decided to leave Canada to come here it was a very difficult thing to do. They had to hire a lawyer who was doing this for people that wanted to come for a very high fee but he managed to get Mom and Dad to be employed by someone who had a big estate. They never even met my mother and dad. All they had to do was be able to prove that that's what they were going to be: working. But they came over the border and then my parents came to New York right away.

LEVINE: And they never had to work for that person?

KRAMER: Oh well when they go to they had to (laughs). But they never saw the people that vouched for them. This was an arrangement with the lawyer, maybe it was an underhanded way of doing it but he made a lot of money and he made a lot of people happy by bringing them over here.

LEVINE: Now do you know anything about how, what was involved in their getting into Canada?

KRAMER: For my parents?

LEVINE: Yeah.

KRAMER: Well the only thing that was involved that you had to be able to be accepted, a farmer in Manitoba, I think, or Nova Scotia, I forget which area, asked for my parents, so on the way over on the ship they were traveling with other people who had been, already been in Canada and went back for a visit and they said to my mom and dad, and they knew

Mom and Dad, and they said, "You don't want to go there. You just stay with us and we will get off that ship and we'll disappear in Montreal." And that's exactly what they did (laughs) which again was an illegal thing to do. But apparently they were not the only ones and so they landed in Montreal. And they put them up in this home where the women shared one kitchen. I think they were like six couples and so everybody was told how many hours they had time to cook their meal on the stove, you know, if they had enough money to buy anything with, you know. So it was a very difficult time but Mom and Dad managed, thank God, and my father because very resourceful and so was Mom. Mom never did any work, Mom had servants over there, when she came to Canada she was scrubbing kitchen floors.

LEVINE: Uh huh.

KRAMER: But she had to, there was no other -- couldn't speak the language (laughs) so what else can you do?

LEVINE: Right, right, so excuse me but were they, did somebody in either Manitoba or Nova Scotia have to vouch the same way they did to get into this country?

KRAMER: Well they were supposed to, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh huh.

KRAMER: But apparently again maybe they had a connection with, you know, it may have all been underhanded I don't know too much about it but I do know that much, that these two women that were in Canada went home to visit their parents and they knew my mom and dad, and they knew my mother never did any work or anything and, "You're not gonna go live on this

farm, that's way out there and the weather is terrible. You come with us and we'll disappear!" (laughs) So that's exactly what they did.

LEVINE: And so you, was it at your mother and father's urging that you went to visit them in 1928?

KRAMER: 1928, yes.

LEVINE: So uh –

KRAMER: I was escorted by someone. A friend of my mom also came to visit her husband and she took my along with her children. So I was not traveling alone.

LEVINE: And so when you got to Canada what was it like for you?

KRAMER: Well it was strange, naturally, we come into, this is Montreal, it's a city, I'm from a big town, not knowing the language, very difficult. But as a youngster I don't think you really realize any of that but I right away was enrolled in school and apparently I probably did speak English, I don't recall that anymore. Whether I learned to speak the language, I probably did, but I didn't stay there very long, I was only there eight months and I went back.

LEVINE: So you were actually in school and then were they conducting school in English or French?

KRAMER: English.

LEVINE: And then what precipitated you going back?

KRAMER: I was very unhappy, Mom was working, Dad was working. And the place where Mom and Dad lived, they had two children and the girl was a tomboy from the word go and she was somewhat older than I was and she would have me do things and then I was blamed and of course they came and complained to my dad and Dad only once smacked me. That was the end because he sat up with me all night, I never stopped crying because my father never, never ever did that to me, and I was very close to my dad. I was not close to my mother, I was very close to my father. And so he decided that this was not a place to raise a child. They couldn't do it the right way -- "Send her back to Grandma." And I was delighted to do so, it was a very, a charmed life. I lived a charmed life, very nice.

LEVINE: So when you got back to Romania were, you were happy to be there?

KRAMER: Yes, I was delighted. I went back to school, naturally. And I mean, I spoke the language so there was no problem and after four years of elementary school I went to the city that I mentioned, Timisoara, to Notre Dame, Notre Dame, and stayed there for four years and by that time it's 1938. And that's when Dad decided, or '37 was the last year I was there, and that's when Dad decided that I was not going to stay, I had to come because there's going to be a war.

LEVINE: Did you see any buildup to the war when you were there?

KRAMER: None whatsoever. In fact you see, the nuns would read the mail that would come from Dad. My mother never wrote but Dad wrote. And she said to me, "Why is your father talking about war?" And I said -- we had absolutely no knowledge. We knew about Hitler, we knew about him because we got that on shortwave and of course being persecuted by the Romanians, we thought that he was going to be our savior.

LEVINE: Oh.

KRAMER: No, I mean we knew nothing about what he did or what his tactics were but all we knew was that he was trying to save all the German people that lived in that part of Romania. Because we were hated, I mean they hated us like the, you know, like the Germans hated the Jews. The same thing, I mean, we had absolutely no rights whatsoever so when we heard about Hitler, "Oh my goodness he's going to rescue us!" So, but Dad knew different. So of course he kept writing that but he never mentioned Hitler or anything but he just said, "I want you here because there's going to be a war."

LEVINE: Mhmm.

KRAMER: "Aunt Elizabeth will have to bring you because I don't want you traveling alone. We will pay for the ticket, for the passage and you come with Aunt." So I did. Not that I wanted to (laughs), believe me, I didn't want to. Because that summer I was going to dancing school and I started to, you know, enjoy the dating and all that. Because I was always chaperoned. I was never going anywhere without someone older than myself. No.

LEVINE: Well before we talk about leaving, what are the things you remember about living in Romania. What were the things you did or what went on there?

KRAMER: Well it was everyday living. We didn't have electricity so that meant that we had petroleum lights, you know, a lamp hanging from a chandelier, very pretty. The well was in the backyard, you know, you had an outhouse. There was no electricity so therefore you couldn't have indoor plumbing. You know, anything like that. But everybody else was in the same boat so you didn't feel as though you were being, you were singled

out if you didn't have those things. But it was a very, very nice life, you visited your friends that were pretty much the same as you were. In the summertime we went away for the summer to the wine garden, which you know, was quite a distance away. We had to take the train and of course that was real country where the grapes were growing, you know the beautiful homes on these balconies and spent the whole summer there and in the fall when it was time to come back to go to school, we would come back and resume whatever we had to do.

LEVINE: You would go with your grandmother?

KRAMER: Oh yeah, I always.

LEVINE: Describe her, what kind of temperament?

KRAMER: She was a beautiful looking lady. A very, very lovely person, a very beautiful woman. Not only her character but her face. She was a very pretty lady. And very, very good to me, because as I said I was considered an orphan because Mom left me there with Grandma. So very, both of them, my grandfather and my grandmother were very good to me and so was my Aunt Elizabeth who was my mother's sister and she lived with my grandparents. So between the three of them they were trying to do their best to make me feel comfortable and I was always the first one to be mentioned because, "She has no parents," you know.

LEVINE: Was that, did that make you feel a little bad? That your mother was disgraced?

KRAMER: Yes, as a youngster, as a very young girl it didn't bother me. When it started to affect me was when I went away to school. And there was maybe some recitals, I play the piano, and being asked by the principal to

invited the Bishop to come to the recital, which was always an honor, and I could never share it with my parents. And playing the piano, I remember, the very last year, and I said, there was nobody here from my family. That's when it hit me. That's when I resented my parents. Up until that time, no. It didn't bother me but I became older, naturally, and I realized everybody else was having a mother and a father and a grandmother. And nobody showed up. My grandmother was too old to travel and my Aunt Elizabeth just wasn't in the mood to do so. That's when I felt, I felt like an orphan.

LEVINE: Well now, who was in the school. Were they orphans or were they just children?

KRAMER: No. They were very wealthy girls. They were all very wealthy girls.

LEVINE: And were you a Catholic, were you raised Catholic?

KRAMER: Oh yes.

LEVINE: And that's how you happened to go to that –

KRAMER: Well there was no one else in my town but Catholics.

LEVINE: Ok. So how about enjoyment. Can you say anything about what was enjoyable for you or for your grandparents in Romania?

KRAMER: Well there was a great deal of music and anytime there was any function there was music and Grandma would drag me along. I was never allowed to go anywhere by myself. But they had, and family reunions. They were very great at having the family together. And Grandma would put on a big meal, you know, for the family. And there was, there were a lot of cousins

and I clung to them like they were my sisters and brothers. To this day I'm in touch with them because of that. And then there was, sometimes they had, a troupe would come into town that would put on a show or there would be a movie being shown, naturally it was silent, you know, and the (laughs) film was so bad that it was jumping all over the place but it was a movie so we had to go see it.

And that was about it, there was a lot of celebration, a lot of church celebration. The Church was very active in having picnics, in having once a year on July 26th a big celebration because that's Saint Anne's day and the town was Saint Anne. So there was a big celebration. So there were things and then you traveled into the city by train and you did your shopping in the city, you know, if you have the means. So there were any number of things that were very good. You know, and of course the young people stuck together and we would go to each other's homes and those that played the piano played the piano, they'd have a sing a long or they would play cards. So it was a, it was a nice, I thought it was a great life.

LEVINE: Mhmm.

KRAMER: In retrospect I think it was the best years of my life, the four years that I was away in boarding school.

LEVINE: Oh.

KRAMER: Very, very elite, very, very nice.

LEVINE: Can you describe the school or maybe the handling of you with nuns in the school? Was the school run by nuns?

KRAMER: Oh yes. Nuns and also lay teachers (clock begins chiming). We had the teacher that taught us French, she was a lay teacher and after about four, three or four weeks you were expected to understand what she was saying in French. Naturally very plain of course, but I spoke French fluently when I came to this country. I forgot the whole bit. I spoke Romanian fluently, I don't speak it anymore. I speak Hungarian, and German, and of course English.

LEVINE: How is it that you speak Hungarian?

KRAMER: Well you see that part of Romania where I came from, that was the Hungarian empire. The Austro-Hungarian Empire before the first World War and that sort of rubbed off and the Germans that lived there, my grandparents didn't speak Hungarian but their children did. And so we just kept it up. And they were the ones that kept the intelligencia level at it's highest point because they didn't like the peasants which they called the Germans, they were the peasants. And so that's why, and my aunt was just determined that I was to speak Hungarian and she taught me Hungarian, I never took it at school. But she taught me at home and I still speak it to this day.

LEVINE: Uh huh, wow. Ok, so your father sent you the passage?

KRAMER: No. They sent us the money. We bought the tickets in Romania.

LEVINE: Did you have to go through an agent?

KRAMER: Well, we had to go to the American Consul in Bucharest to get permission, well, I was naturally there was no problem with me but my aunt, because she was a Romanian citizen and she was – in those days, it's, you know, it's a very difficult situation for Americans to understand,

but they did not want you to leave the country. So my aunt had to be able to prove that she owned 500,000 lei, which the Romanian currency, in property for her to be able to leave the country and that property was confiscated.

LEVINE: Oh.

KRAMER: So nobody could touch that property. So then that made sure she would come back, which she did, she was only going to escort me and then go back. And so we had to wait for her permission to leave. I got my passport almost immediately but –

LEVINE: Was that because your father had become a citizen?

KRAMER: Because my parents were here, my father was not a citizen yet.

LEVINE: Oh. But they were both here so you could come.

KRAMER: Both here. My father had his first papers. Because you know in those days you had to get your first papers first and then after two years you applied for your final papers but you had to be here five years before you got your final papers. So that's the way that was. You know, and Mom also, she also had her first papers. So when we finally got the permission to leave it was a very quick get up and go because we waited so long for this passport to arrive and the ship [not understood] was sailing at a given time and we hoped we could make it because it was a big ship and we wanted to be on that ship.

LEVINE: So did you sail on the Brehmin [spelling]?

KRAMER: Yeah.

LEVINE: And did you go from [not understood]?

KRAMER: [not understood], yeah, mhmm.

LEVINE: And do you remember actually leaving?

KRAMER: I sure do. I remember walking up the gang-plank and just being delighted because we were assigned a – one night, during the cruise, we were assigned to be sitting with the captain. And everything was going to be, you know, long gown and the whole bit! You know? And I ended up in sick bay (laughing).

LEVINE: Oh! Oh. Well do you remember leaving home, your grandmother's home?

KRAMER: I sure do, to the backstreets. Nobody knew that I was leaving.

LEVINE: Oh.

KRAMER: I wouldn't tell anybody.

LEVINE: Why?

KRAMER: Because it was a dis– because it was a terrible thing to have to leave Romania. You know, to leave your country because things were not going well or whatever. And of course I was quite popular and I didn't tell anyone that I was leaving.

LEVINE: Uh huh. Well that's an interesting twist that it was really, you know it wasn't like, "Oh boy, she's going to America." It was more like –

KRAMER: "Poor Marie, she has to leave for America." They, they felt sorry for me.

LEVINE: Wow.

KRAMER: And I remember when I finally got here I kept in touch with my very best girlfriend and she said, "Oh we felt so bad when we found that you left." After the war that very same girl wrote and said, "We envy you because you have such a good life and we have such a miserable life." Things changed, you know.

LEVINE: Wow, yeah. Let me just see if I can understand. Why did they think, "Oh poor Maria she has to go." What was it that made children feel like, because what, because life was so good?

KRAMER: Well life was good, yes. And the only ones that left were the lowliest of the low.

LEVINE: Oh, oh, oh.

KRAMER: You know, it was the bottom of the barrel that left, that had absolutely nothing and couldn't earn anything. They were just absolutely, they were illiterate of course, most of them. And so they came to Canada because here they could make money. See that was the whole thing.

LEVINE: I see.

KRAMER: And that's what my grandfather objected to. That only the lowest of the low leaves.

LEVINE: I see, I understand.

KRAMER: And that was the problem. Not anymore, of course. Then later on -- [tape ends]

END SIDE A, TAPE 1

LEVINE: You ended up in the sick bay. Was there anything else about the passage on the Brehmin that you recall coming here?

KRAMER: It was the worst passage that this captain, who was an elderly man, he said, "I've been traveling the seas ever since I was a young boy, I have never experienced weather like what we went through. The ship was, I think, two days late coming into New York because of the weather. And they had one picture that apparently somebody took aboard the ship. The waves were coming way over everything, I mean it was unbelievable. He said, "I myself was seasick," -- the captain. It was a very, very bad crossing. Well, in January, you know, weather is a little iffy.

LEVINE: Did you ever have the captain's dinner?

KRAMER: No, I ended up -- the English Channel did it. It was rough and I had had, see the country where I came from was sort of locked in. There was no fishing or anything. And this was a Friday when we sailed. So in those days we ate fish on Friday so I said to my Aunt Elizabeth, "Oh wonderful, we're going to have fish for dinner." Then I see on the menu ice cream! Well now we only had ice cream in Romania in the summertime, not in the winter! Well I just had to have the ice cream. And I blame the combination of the fish and the ice cream. That wasn't it, it was just the very bad weather. And I ended up in sick bay and my aunt woke up with a face like this, she had an infected tooth (laughing) so she was running a temperature so she was lying in one bed and I was laying in the other bed

and I was there for, I guess it's, seven days because five days was usually the crossing but we were two days late. Seven days in sick bay.

LEVINE: Oh my god.

KRAMER: I never, I never, I remember seeing the cabin because we put our suitcases in there and that's the last I saw. And then the night when we arrived in New York that I couldn't get off the ship because my parents were not there to greet us. I ended up sleeping in the cabin for the first time.

LEVINE: Oh, now were you first or second class when you came over?

KRAMER: It was not first class, second class.

LEVINE: Second class, uh huh. So it was just you and your aunt in the cabin?

KRAMER: Oh yes. Private rooms. You know, with the bathroom and all that. It was very, very nice, it was a lovely ship. Very, very nice.

LEVINE: Do you know why your parents didn't meet you?

KRAMER: Well, they, I wrote them a card saying that if all goes well, we will be on the Brehmin. However we had not had my aunt's passport but it came at the right time and we had enough time, we had exactly one day left to make the ship. So we got on the train and we made it. But that postal card was on the same ship with me. So I said to my aunt, "Don't you think we should send them a telegram?" She said, "No," she said, "If they're not there we'll surprise them, we'll take a cab." (laughing) Not knowing what the rules were. No. But that's what you would do in Romania, you know but of course you couldn't do it (laughing).

LEVINE: Uh huh.

KRAMER: So anyway we get to New York and it was the most beautiful sight -- to see the Statue of Liberty. Because, you know, you heard about it and all that was beautiful. Everything was as it, cities lit up of course, New York is beautiful at night, anyway.

LEVINE: You arrived at night?

KRAMER: Yes. And so we're standing up there waiting and they're calling the names as the people ask for their relatives and everybody is gone and we're still standing there my aunt and I so the captain comes over to me and he puts his arm around me and he said, "[Romanian] Looks like you're going to have to spend the night with us!" So I looked at him and I said, "When are you sailing back?" He, this was Friday we arrived, he said, "Sunday." I said, "I'm going to be with you." I said, "I'm not staying." First of all, I didn't want to come and then my parents not here to greet me? I'm going back (laughing)! So needless to say we called on the telephone. We had a telephone number.

LEVINE: Oh.

KRAMER: No answer! My father worked nights and Mom was a great knitter. She was making, she was knitting a dress for me and she was at the knitting store and after the knitting store she went to visit somebody. So she didn't rush home and in the morning of when we arrived the card was there in the mailbox and she called NorGermanLeid [spelling] and they said, "Well since the tickets were not purchased here in the United States, we don't have a passenger list." I mean they were not as quick on the trigger as they are today, you know.

LEVINE: Mhmm.

KRAMER: So Mom says, well I guess we didn't make it because on the postal card I said, "If all goes well."

LEVINE: Mhmm.

KRAMER: So naturally Mom went off again to the knitting store to get further instructions and Dad was sleeping because he worked nights and when my dad slept you could take the house away and he wouldn't wake up! And so we kept calling, even from Ellis Island we still kept calling. There was this elderly gentlemen there, black man, who spoke German and he said to my aunt, and I'm crying and I'm still sick, I'm still seasick, and when I hear this bell ringing and these men are dashing into the dining room they're serving on a metal plate, believe me it was awful. I have never seen anything like that before.

So this man said to my aunt, "How 'bout if we send a telegram?" So my aunt says, "Well could you do that?" He said, "Sure." So my aunt said, "Well I have money," she had American money, so she – he said, "Sure I'll send it, nevermind." He sent the telegram to my parents. Mom comes from shopping and she finds a telegram under the door. Well she went and took a glass of water and poured it on my dad to wake him up. "You have to get up!" And they called me Munsie because that was my nickname. "Munsie's here!" Well they got out of bed, called their friends who had a car and they made the last ferry going from the Battery over to Ellis Island. And so we finally, finally got there and we were questioned individually. We were taken into separate rooms, my aunt was taken into a separate room, I was taken in a separate room, and my parents were to make sure that we're the right people for whoever is claiming us, you know.

LEVINE: Mhmm.

KRAMER: And then of course it was a very happy reunion, you know.

LEVINE: Well how long did you stay at Ellis Island, then?

KRAMER: A whole day.

LEVINE: And overnight or no?

KRAMER: No, no, no. We stayed overnight on the ship and then the next morning, from what I was told, there were two FBI men that spoke German because we didn't speak any other language. And they came and told us so we're getting down the gang plank and I see black people, which I had never seen before. So that kind of scared me. But the man said, "It's ok, they won't hurt you." So we get into their car and now we're driving down to the Battery and when I saw that ferry and he said, "We're gonna –" I said, "No! I'm not getting on that ferry (laughs)!" I didn't want anymore ship or water because I was so seasick. They almost had to carry me on because I was not going to go on. And it was such, it was supposed to be a happy thing and it wasn't, you know. And then when I walked into Ellis Island and I see this, there was a tapestry hanging on the wall that I'm sure was so full of dust you couldn't see the colors. I can still see that tapestry hanging there. And cobwebs hanging from the ceiling. The carpeting was torn it was, it was a disgrace, really, but by that time I don't think people came too much anymore because things were happening in Europe, you know. And –

LEVINE: Was it crowded?

KRAMER: No.

LEVINE: No.

KRAMER: There were only a handful of people that couldn't go back because they would have been killed if they had sent them back, you know, they would have executed them so I don't know whatever happened to them but they were elderly men with beards and all that. I didn't see any women at all, I just saw these men. [clock begins chiming] But it was, it was awful. I can still see the [not understood] we sat on in the middle. The springs were coming out. It was awful!

LEVINE: Now, were you in the Great Hall? Do you remember? Were you in that great big room?

KRAMER: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: Mhmm.

KRAMER: Yes, and I understand, I think that tapestry is still hanging there or it's a different one but something is still hanging there.

LEVINE: Can you remember anything about that tapestry, what, was it a –

KRAMER: No, no I don't remember it was a beige-y color that's all I remember but I'm sure there were colors in it. But it was too full of dust or dirty, you couldn't see. It, it left a terrible impression on me.

LEVINE: And the place itself was just dirty?

KRAMER: Very. Well it wasn't that it was, it was not kept right, you know, they never took the cobwebs off the ceiling and they just hung there. And the furniture was in terrible shape and I came from a home where everything was in perfect condition, you know. And this convent that I was in which was beautiful! So then you see this and this is America. You know.

LEVINE: And then you had food. Tell about going to the dining room, did you go to the dining room?

KRAMER: No way. No they brought a tray because my aunt said, "If you think we're going in there forget it!" So they brought us something but I ate nothing because I was still seasick. I could not, for a whole week I couldn't eat anything. I got to the Bronx with my parents. Nothing stayed in my stomach.

LEVINE: So in other words, they rang a bell and then people went into the dining room, is that what you said?

KRAMER: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: And they had metal plates? Do you remember, I mean, did you look in, did you see?

KRAMER: No, I did not look in, no. To be very honest with you, I was so sick and so discouraged and wanted to go back. I just wanted to go back home. I did not want to stay. And I thank God that I didn't go back home. I often said that afterwards, you know, that it was the best thing that happened to me.

LEVINE: Well is there anything else you could say about Ellis Island description wise or impressions?

KRAMER: Oh the people that finally interviewed us, they were very, very kind. You know, they saw that I was not feeling well, you know. And they just explained why they have to ask us these questions and they kept it at a minimum with me because I really was not in any condition. I was sick, you know. But my aunt was really – because Aunt, my aunt had an attitude, you know. So I imagine that's why they questioned her a little bit more. But she never complained about it or anything. But what we said was, to my parents, why is this place in such disarray? And my dad said, "Well it's no longer being used like it was years ago." You know, but then you realize, all these people coming from all the various countries and some of them were ill. Some brought all kinds of sickness with them. And even, even bugs in their hair, you know, I mean, I can understand why it didn't look like a palace but it could have been cleaner.

LEVINE: Mhmm.

KRAMER: So then when [not understood] contacted me, you know when they were re-doing Ellis Island, I did send money.

LEVINE: Uh huh. Well what was your father doing for work when you arrived?

KRAMER: Dad, what was Dad. Dad worked for a Remington Rand. He was a night watchman for Remington Rand. Mom took on this brand new apartment building in the Bronx and she was managing the building. It was brand new, it was a lovely place. 2965 Valentine Avenue, I still remember.

LEVINE: Wow.

KRAMER: We had the, it wasn't basement, it was street level, we had the apartment there which was very, very nice. We had some very, very nice tenants who were very, very nice and good to us. But Mom took care of that

house so that we wouldn't have to pay rent. Because Dad wasn't earning all that much money, you know. And they were still paying off the lawyer that got them into the United States. He was getting \$3,000 and in 1938 that was a lot of money.

LEVINE: Right.

KRAMER: So they were still paying him off and so then when I came naturally I went to school, only to sit in on classes to learn English. And that was difficult.

LEVINE: Well you were sixteen so technically speaking you didn't have to go to school. But you did? You went to public school, did you go?

KRAMER: Well at first, how did I start, let me see, go back. Yes. Mom's friends said, "There's a school not far from where we lived in the Bronx." So Mom went to see the principal and we put me in sixth grade. And the kids all made fun of me, naturally, I'm sixteen years old and in sixth grade, you know. So Mom came for me at lunchtime and I said, "If I have to go back there this afternoon I'm going to jump off the roof." And I would not go back. Besides, I had my four years of high school. It was not high school it was [not understood] they call it over there which consists of eight years, not four years. But I finished four years. And I was not going to be subjected to that.

So then a friend in the house said, "Why don't you take her over to the Catholic school and ask the nuns to have her sit in on the eighth graders?" They're more or less, you know, a little older. And so Mom went to see the Pastor and he said, "By all means, sure, no problem." I sat in on the class, just to hear the English, you know. And then I registered at Hunter College, I was going to go to Hunter College. I mean, I had control of the language to a point, not great but I could manage.

And so then my dad took a heart attack and he was laid up for several years he couldn't work. Then I realized that I cannot ask my mother to support both my dad who was at home, she wouldn't let him go into a hospital, she took care of him. And so I decided that I'd better get a job. And the manager of Remington Rand came to see my dad while he was ill and he said to my mother, "You send her in to me," he said, "I'll give her a job at Remington Rand." And he did.

LEVINE: Hmm. That's a typewriter company right?

KRAMER: Yes.

LEVINE: Remington Rand.

KRAMER: Well they make the shavers and all that, you know, but they were, business supplies, really. Office supplies, you know, office supplies for the most part. It was a very big company and I loved working for them, it was great.

LEVINE: Where was that located? Where did you have to go?

KRAMER: They were, at that time they were on 23rd street and 4th avenue I believe, if I remember correctly. But 23rd street, that I know.

LEVINE: Yeah, I should, just to backtrack a second. Were there any first impressions either the first few days or weeks or months of being in this country that struck you as something very different?

KRAMER: Well yes. The first thing that I thought was wonderful was that everybody was equal – there was no distinction. In other words, at least I couldn't tell that this person had more money than that person. You know, it was,

everybody was the same and that to me, meant a great deal because I was not allowed to do that over in Romania.

You know, that was one thing I was very much impressed with the buildings, naturally. I mean, these are all big tall building which we did not have over there. Not in 1938 anyway, they're different now but at that time it wasn't. And just the way the lifestyle was very different and of course everything was electrical, you know, and I still came from a country that didn't have electricity. The boarding school did but not my hometown did not have any. So, it was a different way of life and the way people dressed. I mean we dressed too but more conservative, you know.

LEVINE: Could you tell in Romania that someone was of a lower class by the way they dressed?

KRAMER: Yes, yes. And of course being in a town you know where, you know everybody. So you know right away, "Well that person is below you so you don't associate with --" which is stupid! I think that's terrible! But my aunt was very much for that and when she was introduced to these people that the superintendents across the way from us, who were illiterate people, came from Romania, German people -- she walked out of the room.

LEVINE: Oh, uh huh.

KRAMER: And I adored those two people. I thought they were the greatest living people, you know. They were so kind to me. And she looked grandmotherly, you know, an elderly lady. And I adored Mr. and Mrs. Schultz, they were great! And then when I finally, I got engaged to this young man and I said to him, "Would you mind taking me to the Bronx? I would like to see Mr. and Mrs. Schultz." And he know of them, he said,

“Sure we’ll go there.” And I mean, they, she was in tears when she saw us coming because we gave her the honor of coming. See, that’s what impressed me most. That was, to me, was a wonderful thing.

LEVINE: Yeah, well now how did you meet your husband?

KRAMER: Well, his father and my dad were school chums in Romania. They emigrated to the United States and I knew the Kramer family back home because my husband’s cousin and I palled around together. So naturally when you come to a strange country, Mom and Dad looked them up and we became very close friends and then when I came I was introduced to the boys, there were four of them. So out of the four, I got engaged to the one that was an only child and he was killed in the war. And then I also dated his cousin whom I eventually married.

LEVINE: Oh.

KRAMER: So I stayed with the Kramers. But it was a wonderful, a wonderful, wonderful marriage.

LEVINE: Oh, that’s great. What was your husband’s name?

KRAMER: Stanley. Stanley Francis Kramer.

LEVINE: Uh huh.

KRAMER: Beautiful person.

LEVINE: Wow. Ok, so, and you had children?

KRAMER: I had two boys, a son Stanley, whom I lost at the age of 30. And Jeffrey who is here in Tampa who, he is 54 years old now.

LEVINE: And how about grandchildren? No grandchildren.

KRAMER: He's not married.

LEVINE: Uh huh.

KRAMER: (laughs) He better not have any grandchildren if he's not married!

LEVINE: (laughs) Ok so how do you think coming here, immigrating as a sixteen year old – well first of all, how would you describe yourself as the sixteen year old girl who came to this country? What were you like?

KRAMER: Well, I was very reserved because I was told you speak when you're spoken to. And like I said I was chaperoned all the time and I just couldn't understand why people were not chaperoned here, young people, you know. And I remember this, Mrs. Kramer whose son I got engaged to and who was killed in the war, she had said to my Mom, "Bring Munsie (they called me), bring her into Manhattan." They lived on 96th street. He said, "And my son and another young man will take her to the Roxy Theater." Well, I didn't know Roxy from a hole in the wall, but anyway, Mom took me to the Kramers and I met Victor and Julius and they took me to the Roxy Theater. And I'm sitting in the theater at the most gorgeous show you have ever seen, you know, the girls came out in beautiful gowns – and I panic, "I'm not chaperoned!" Now, I'm almost seventeen years old by now. So we go back to the house and Mrs. Kramer is waiting, she's had me a bowl of Rice Krispies, I'll never forget it, with a banana in it. She says, "You're gonna have that." And I'm in tears, and I said, "Mrs. Kramer, can I call my mother?" And she said sure. So I called my mother

crying hysterically, "I did something terribly wrong." She said, "What did you do?" I said, "I went to the movies and I was not chaperoned." And she said, "You're not in Romania anymore. You don't have to be chaperoned!" (laughs) But you see, that's the way I was raised. You didn't go anywhere. And the people in my class, they didn't go anywhere unless they were chaperoned. So I thought this was terrible. So Victor is listening to my conversation and he's saying to his mother as I'm talking to my mother, and he understood Hungarian, and he said to his mother, "That's the girl I'm going to marry." You know, I mean, I had no intentions of, you know, I'm sixteen years old, seventeen years old, not going to get married! But that's what he said to his mother and he was away in college at the time. But that's, that's how, when you're brought up a certain way, that was a little hard for me to accept.

LEVINE: Right. Right.

KRAMER: But then, that's why I can't see this, dating here in this country at the age of twelve. You know.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. Ok so let's see. When you think about coming here as a sixteen year old, do you think the immigration experience, the fact that you started out in Romania and then lived out the rest of your life here, what impact do you think that had on you – on your personality, on your way of approaching things?

KRAMER: It didn't bother me, I don't think. After I was, I got used to my parents, you know. I was very happy with my parents, I adored my dad. My dad was a jewel. And I had very nice friends, I met the Kramer boys and you know things were getting a little bit better. But as I got older [clock begins chiming] and I'm listening to people coming into this country without any papers or just a visa, and they get lost. I mean, you can't find them.

That's what bothers me. To this day, that's what bothers me a great deal that we are not stricter, that we are not pursuing this more. I mean I, yes, I grant you, everybody should have a right to come to this wonderful country, but come the right way. I don't believe in this business, coming across the border and just getting lost here and then you're going to give them a driver's license? That bothers me because I couldn't get off the ship and I had my papers. I couldn't get off the ship because there's nobody there to claim me. Now it bothers me more than it did then. Because that I think was unfair.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh. Do you think you had any attitudes because you had started out in Romania that maybe you, if you had been born here, you might not have?

KRAMER: No I feel very fortunate from having that experience -- having had that life, having experienced that life and then having this life. I think I'm very fortunate to have had both. I've had the best of both worlds, I must say.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. What do you feel very proud of that you have done in your life or satisfied about?

KRAMER: Well I'm very happy that I accomplished what I did. I got married to a wonderful, wonderful person. I was engaged to a wonderful, wonderful man whom I to this day miss terribly because that was my first love but he was killed in the war. And I managed to raise two children and I've had nothing but compliments about how they were raised. To this day, I mean, anybody that I meet, somebody, they tell me, "What a wonderful way you've raised your son." You know. And having a husband that was so wonderful and so good and so appreciative, you know. And my parents, naturally, my mom was here for quite awhile and I made many, many, many, many friends and I'm quite well known in New Port Ritchie,

and I'm known in several clubs and have nothing but praises, you know, not that I like to talk about it because I don't want to praise myself. But I feel very fortunate.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. What are you looking forward to now?

KRAMER: I'm looking forward to having a great time.

LEVINE: Good for you.

KRAMER: I want to be able to enjoy life to its fullest, I don't wish to be entangled with any male nothing. I just want to do the things that I want to do if I can afford to do them and have my friends and go to plays and go to dinners. In fact, I'm going to see the King and I on Saturday with Stephanie Powers and then I'm going to see the Vienna Boys Choir later this month and I go to very lovely restaurants with my friends. And to anything that's going on, if we can get tickets (laughs), I'm there. You know, so I enjoy my life now because, you know, after all I'm 83. It's not going to be that much longer (laughs). So enjoy it to the hilt!

LEVINE: Wonderful. Now, we're at the end of the tape but is there anything you would like to say before we close?

KRAMER: Well, I appreciate having this opportunity to speak with you and I never thought it was ever going to happen. And I feel very privileged and I appreciate you coming and listening to me (laughs). No, it's been a wonderful experience and anyone I've told this to, they were quite impressed, you know.

LEVINE: Well I think you have given a beautiful interview, a wonderful interview.

KRAMER: Thank you.

LEVINE: And I thank you so much. This will be a real asset to our –

KRAMER: If you're interested, Clara told me if you have your passport, give it to Mrs. Levine.

LEVINE: Oh, look at that!

KRAMER: This is my Romanian passport (laughs).

LEVINE: Oh, that's beautiful. Great. Ok well we're going to close the tape.

KRAMER: Sixty seven years ago (laughs)! You know I don't believe it that I made it sixty seven years. The 23rd of this, I think it's the 23rd of this month, it will be sixty seven years.

LEVINE: Well you better celebrate! You better go somewhere good.

KRAMER: You know what? I did when I was here fifty years. I decided, I belong to two German clubs. And I said, "Well, I want to do something because I'm so thankful for being here and having achieved all the things that I did do." And so I went to Publics [a super market] and I ordered a big sheet cake for the members and on it I wanted the flags around the cake and fifty years in the USA. So when I went to pick up the cake with my girlfriend, the girl at the register said, "Oh that looks so pretty, can I see it?" I said, "Sure!" She said, "Fifty years in the USA?" She says, "Oh well where are you from?" I said, "Romania." [pause] I said, "Europe?" I said, "England? Germany?" She did not know anything. But this is about a nineteen year old girl. She says, "I don't know where that is." I said, "You mean to tell me you were not taught in school?" She said, "No." Either

that or she didn't remember, I don't know, but I was so shocked! I said, "Alright if you don't know Romania because that's a little bitty country," I said, "right next to the Black Sea." But I said, "The other countries are big countries, England, France, Germany!" You know, no! So that's how I celebrated.

LEVINE: Wonderful, wow. Ok well we're going to close off the tape here. I've been speaking with Marie Kramer and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I thank you very, very much.