

EI-138

WILLIAM ROGERS (WOLF ROGENSTEIN)

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INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

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ENGLAND (BORN POLAND), 1909 PORT: LIVERPOOL

AGE 7

RESIDENCES: POLAND: DOBRZYN;

ENGLAND: LONDON

PASSAGE ON "THE CARMANIA" US: NYC – EAST 121ST STREET

SIGRIST: Good afternoon, this is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Saturday, April 25, 1991. I'm here in Washington Heights in Manhattan, with William Rogers;

ROGERS: Isn't it '92?

SIGRIST: '92, I'm sorry. Thank you. 1992.

ROGERS: I was wondering.

SIGRIST: I'm here with William Rogers, who came from Poland in

1909 when he was seven years old. Good afternoon,

ROGERS: How do you do.

SIGRIST: I'm sorry I made that date mistake.

ROGERS: That makes no difference now.

SIGRIST: Mr. Rogers. Can you please give me your full name as it was in Poland.

ROGERS: In Poland, it was Wolfe Rogenstein. Should I be speaking to you? Oh, because the thing, the mike is here.

SIGRIST: Yes, you can speak to me. Can you spell the last name, please?

ROGERS: R-O-G-E-N-S-T-E-I-N

SIGRIST: And what is your date of birth, sir?

ROGERS: My date of birth was April 28, 1902, approximately.

SIGRIST: Thank you. Where were you born, in what town.

ROGERS: It was called Dobrzyn in the Polish manner, and it's spelled more or less like D-O-B-R-Z-Y-N, or I-N.

SIGRIST: I see. And where about in Poland is that?

ROGERS: It's about in the northwest corner of Poland, and a very short distance from Germany because my parents used to tell me how they used to cross over to Germany very casually any time we wanted to. There were no guards, apparently, or anything of that sort, border guards. There was just a little stream apparently separating the place where we lived from Germany. It was up in the northeast corner, up there if you

have that geography in your mind. And they used to go back and forth very constantly over apparently a little stream, whose name I don't recall, over a little wooden foot bridge. There were apparently no guards anywhere and no formalities of that sort, no border guards.

SIGRIST: What were they doing in Germany? Why would they go over?

ROGERS: Well, they used to go over to buy things. It was so close and there were things there that they couldn't get apparently in the place they lived in. It was, I understand, (the telephone rings) a very poor village and so they used to go in Germany and get all sorts of things that they needed. (tape is paused, Mr. Rogers answers telephone)

SIGRIST: We are now resuming, with William Rogers. Tell me, what the town looked like in Poland. What was the town like?

ROGERS: I haven't got the slightest idea because I understand that when I was about nine months old, they took me to England. My father went to England. He went first, by the way, because he had been promised a job in England. Oh, not England, what am I talking about, wait a minute he had a job here in this country rather. He went to this country because a cousin here had offered him a job. Now let's see, I did spend my childhood in

England. My father left before we did you see trying to get enough money for passage, steamboat passage to join him in England, where I did spend my early childhood.

SIGRIST: So you went to England when you were nine months old basically.

ROGERS: About nine months old, at that time I didn't realize where I was but there I was anyway.

SIGRIST: Where did you move to England. Where in England?

ROGERS: London. In a very poor slum neighborhood. We had no money to speak of. And my time in England was a period of poverty, great poverty. At that time gas lighting, there was no such thing as electricity, certainly not for us. So we had gas lighting, I remember. And sometimes we had no money for the gas, we used to put a penny, one of those big English pennies into the meter and many is the time I recall, that I watch the light flicker and then go out and we'd just sit in the darkness,yeah.

SIGRIST: I see. Now before we get into your life in England, let me just ask you about your parents. What was Dad's name?

ROGERS: Solomon Rogenstein.

SIGRIST: And what was he like as a person? What was his

temperament like?

ROGERS: Oh, he was a very jolly person. The ladies loved him, by the way, because he was a good looking person. And my mother didn't like that at all and showed it by the way she spoke to him. And as a matter of fact, my childhood, when the two were together was a very unhappy one because they were constantly bickering with each other. She'd be jealous of him, in plain English, and suspicious of where he was going and what he was doing. And he was a very convivial person and people loved him. Also, he was a handsome guy and they invited him to places where, well, the reason was, in the first place, my mother would refuse to go with him because she detested the people he visited. And so it got to be that he would go alone to visit neighbors and so on. And my mother was really a so-called homebody. Her house was (Yiddish).

SIGRIST: What was her name?

ROGERS: Lena.

SIGRIST: And her maiden name?

ROGERS: Sperling. S-P-E-R-L-I-N-G. Yes, she came from the Sperling family.

SIGRIST: She was Polish, also? Where they both Polish?

ROGERS: They were both Polish, he had met her in Poland and they were married in Poland, of course. I travelled from Poland to England with my father, with my mother rather, I'm sorry.

SIGRIST: Right, because he had gone first. What did he do when he was in England, what profession did he have?

ROGERS: Oh, profession, don't call it a profession, just a job. A tailor, that's it. Someone in England had promised him some work and he had this very poorly paid job of being a tailor. And that's what he was until he was offered another job in this country by a cousin.

SIGRIST: Well, let's go back and let's discuss what you remember about growing up in England. So you moved when you were nine months old, did you move into the same place where you lived for a long time?

ROGERS: I lived in a very poor neighborhood in London. This was in London, England. In a very poor neighborhood, it was the dock area. And incidentally, I might add parenthetically that resulted in my becoming very interested in ships, and the water, because I used to watch boats, we must have lived right near the Thames, on the banks practically. And I used to watch ships from my window, moving down, it must have been the Thames river, of

course; This is London. I became so interested in boats that, unquestionably, it resulted later on, when I had lots of money, in my buying a ship, and boats, I now own a sail boat, a forty-two foot lovely sailboat, which I can't use any more for obvious reasons. There's no one, my children are both gone, died. The three of us used to manage the sailboat and go every where, from Florida to Maine, all the way.

SIGRIST: As a child what do you remember about the dock area? What intrigued you the most?

ROGERS: (he laughs) Don't ask me what intrigued me the most. What I remember the most was going to school in England and being constantly assaulted by non-Jewish kids who used to bother me and oh, you know, sort of punched me around in England.

SIGRIST: Was there a lot of anti-Semitic attitude in this town?

ROGERS: Oh, I certainly encountered a lot of anti-Semitism. On my way to school in England they constantly would bother me, you know, punch me around a bit and then let me go. Of course, today they might of used knives and other things, they just used their fists and showed me that I was "persona non grato" as far as they were concerned, you see.

SIGRIST: Was this a Jewish neighborhood that you moved into?

ROGERS: I lived in a, you mean in London?

SIGRIST: In London.

ROGERS: I don't recall much of that neighborhood, because as I say we moved away from there after my father left and sent us passage money, we moved to this country.

SIGRIST: What year did he leave?

ROGERS: Oh, he left about three or four years before we joined him, because he had to work and get enough money for both of us. Not both of us, there were two boys, there were next brother and myself.

SIGRIST: What was your brother's name?

ROGERS: My next brother, next to me, is Charles, Charlie.

SIGRIST: Was he born in London?

ROGERS: Now let me see, yes, he was born in London. And another one was also born in London, that made three of us. Then there was one more brother, the youngest one, Milton, who was born in this country and a sister who was also born in this country.

SIGRIST: I see.

ROGERS: Five children altogether.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me the dwelling that you lived in, in London, just kind of walk me through it.

ROGERS: I can describe it in one word, slum. I lived in the dock area of London. That's where I saw the ships, as I told you, constantly, and, which prompted me eventually to buy a vessel of my own, you see. I became interested in the ships, very much so. I lived in the dock area of London, a very poor and very desperately poor area.

SIGRIST: Was this a one room apartment that you lived in?

ROGERS: Believe me, yes. It was just a one room apartment with a fireplace. I remember my mother with an outside toilet out in the yard somewhere, an outhouse. There was no inside plumbing. My mother used to fetch pails of water from a, you know I don't know from what. There must of been a well of some sort, outside of course, or maybe a faucet, I don't know, but she used to bring, or lug pails of water, I recall, inside, into the house from outside, in our one, not the house, our room, our one room, which was gas lighted, of course, at that time.

SIGRIST: How did you do your cooking?

ROGERS: There was a large, rather large fireplace, I remember. A working fireplace, oh, it must of been about this size. (he gestures) And cooking was done over that and also there was a kerosene stove which was a very temperamental sort of thing. I remember once it caused us to have a fire in the place. We were burned out to the point where I had to, I had no clothes. My clothing was all burned and such, whatever there was of it. My mother used to scrounge from the neighbors. We didn't have money to buy our own, or my own. And there was a kerosene stove, I recall, and that was our source for cooking and there was also, however, a fireplace.

SIGRIST: What kind of foods did you eat? I mean, how did your mother feed you?

ROGERS: I do recall, well, I really don't recall eating any meat or there must have been chicken, because I can't imagine a Jewish person going without chicken. Funny, I don't recall much about food. I remember bread, of course, which sometimes was quite scarce. I remember going for two days without any food at all. We were very poverty stricken. Bread was a staple, I recall. I don't recall, any meat or anything of that sort.

SIGRIST: Where did you all sleep in this apartment?

ROGERS: We all slept in one room. We all slept in one room.
(a siren goes off outside) I assumed that my father and mother
slept in one bed, which is the usual thing. And, I don't recall,
there was no separate bed for me, nothing. That would have been
a luxury in a one room apartment.

SIGRIST: What floor were you on, do you remember?

ROGERS: I must have been on an upper floor because I remember a
friend of my mothers, Mrs. Goldberg, who lived downstairs, below
us. Oh, by the way, which reminds me, I used to have long curls
at that time, which my mother didn't cut off, didn't have them
removed for quite a while afterwards until other boys began to
jeer at me, naturally. Getting back to the cooking and all that,
there was just this kerosene stove for cooking. I don't recall
that the fireplace was used for anything but heating this one
room apartment, apartment, one room which we lived.

SIGRIST: Was it coal burning, the fireplace, or was it wood
burning?

ROGERS: Wood burning.

SIGRIST: Where did you get your wood from?

ROGERS: They used to buy packages of wood, little bundles of wood. I don't recall that there were coals, I have no remembrance of any coals being used. They used to buy little packages of wood already cut, you know.

SIGRIST: As a child, do you remember any specific chores in the house that were your's?

ROGERS: No, the chores were all performed by my mother. I don't recall that she ever asked me to help her with anything. I

remember she used to scrub the bare floors, the wooden floors.

There was no finish of any sort on them. I remember seeing her on her hands and knees, scrubbing the floors with a brush and a pail and water. And she did keep the place immaculately clean.

That's one thing that she was very particular about, you see.

SIGRIST: How did you and your family practice your religion. Was there a synagogue?

ROGERS: Let's see, there must have been a synagogue because my mother was a very religious person whereas my father very loudly proclaimed himself an atheist and would jeer at my mother when she prayed for example on Saturdays and holidays, Friday nights. He thought he was being very noble and, what would you call it, very much a man of his own mind and he used to jeer at

her for practicing her religion. I remember that very clearly.

She went right on and it didn't make her swerve away from it, you know.

SIGRIST: What about holidays? Did you celebrate Passover...

ROGERS: Oh very much, my mother was very religious and my father did go along with that, not because he was religious but because he loved music. I guess that's where I inherited my love of music. I myself play the clarinet, which I studied by myself and do it fairly well now. I remember I was always singing and humming in the house and they used to remark about that. My father was very fond of music. He played the fiddle badly, poor guy, very badly. It used to hurt me to hear him play that thing, and he never learned to play it well.

SIGRIST: Was your mother musical?

ROGERS: No, not, the only music I ever heard from her was humming lullabies to the children. Singing them to sleep, that's all. She never sang, nothing of that sort. My father was the musical one in the family. As I said, he played the fiddle and that was that, not well.

SIGRIST: Where there other family members in this town?

Grandparents, or anything like that?

ROGERS: I never saw my grandparents. The only recollection I have is a grandfather, not a grandmother, but a grandfather is a photograph that they had in the album, which I don't have, my sister has that, of him in a hospital somewhere. He's up against a brick wall in a hospital gown, garb. I don't know what for, and I never saw my grandparents at all.

SIGRIST: And there were no other family members in this town, in London.

ROGERS: Yes, we lived with, we had an uncle I remember, Aaron.

SIGRIST: Mother's brother, father's brother?

ROGERS: Let's see, I had an aunt, who was my mother's sister, and Aaron was my father's brother. He was a brother of my father, so he was an uncle. He's the only one I recall, is Aaron.

SIGRIST: Did you go and visit them, is that why you remember or he came to see you?

ROGERS: No. they came to see us. I don't recall we ever went visiting them.

SIGRIST: What sticks out in your mind about Aaron, anything?

ROGERS: He used to bring us two things, it's crazy. He used to bring us bananas I remember, and once I remember, he, there was, we had rats, of course, around there. I remember once they somehow trapped a rat, I don't know how and killed it, and I remember his wrapping a towel around it and making, performing a mock service over the rat. A big thing I remember, about as big as that. (he gestures) That was my uncle. He was a kind of a joker, of course. My father was a wise guy also and a joker. And as I said, people, especially the women liked him which caused my mother to dislike that whole business, naturally, which I mentioned before.

SIGRIST: He was a lot of fun, your father.

ROGERS: Oh, everybody loved him, he was very nice guy, very lovely guy, and a handsome guy. He was very convivial. He loved to be with people which was anathema to my mother. She never went to see them.

SIGRIST: So they really didn't get on that well.

ROGERS: Well, they got on very bitterly. They didn't get on at all, actually. They used to fight bitterly, quarrel bitterly. I remember my whole childhood, when they were together, was one of listening to them bickering constantly. She accusing him of all

sorts of things, infidelities, of course, because women liked him. I remember that very clearly.

SIGRIST: Growing up in that kind of environment, tense environment, what did you do for fun? What did you do to enjoy yourself? You mentioned going down to the docks, is there anything else that sticks out in your mind as a child?

ROGERS: Well, to enjoy myself, I remember I am very skillful with my hands, I am very good at modelling for example, those things on the piano. There are things that you didn't notice, but I did them. Those are heads that I modelled out of clay and had them baked and so on. I was very good, and I used to, out of cardboard, I used to construct armies, for example. A whole, all the various kinds, cut out horses out of cardboard. I'd get the cardboard from the cardboards that the laundry used to put into the, when they sent a shirt they'd wrap it around cardboard. And I used that cardboard to cut out all sorts of things, whole armies as I said, you know, in the round, not just flat bit standing up. The wheels, I very carefully cut that all out and how I glued it together I don't know. There must have been some glue or paste around somewhere.

SIGRIST: Where your parents supportive of your creativity at a kid?

ROGERS: Yes, my father. My mother, I don't recall that my mother ever said much about it. My father was kind of proud of my ability that way, which has continued to the present day. And they used to, he did a lot of singing, and I had a very good voice at that time. As a matter of fact, he hunted around, my father was very fond of singing, and he hunted around for the best choirmaster that he new of. He did pick a very good choirmaster to whom, he introduced me to him. For quite awhile, until my voice broke, at age fifteen or so, I went to this choir and sang in the choir in the religious organization, until I was about sixteen or so.

SIGRIST: So music was very important growing up.

ROGERS: Ah, yes, through my father yes.

SIGRIST: Now you said your dad came to America, three of four years before you came. What did he do when he got here?

ROGERS: Well, he had been offered a job by a cousin who owned a cigar factory.

SIGRIST: So you had relatives in America.

ROGERS: Yes, I had them already, when we got here. He, though

he was originally a tailor as I told you, in this country he was offered a job in a cigar factory that my, that his cousin had. That's where he stayed. He became a cigar packer, not a very skilled labor it was, but he packed them in the boxes and nailed up those cigar boxes, you know.

SIGRIST: Was that here in New York?

ROGERS: Yes.

SIGRIST: And where did he live? For those years before you came over.

ROGERS: Let's see, yes, where did he live? That's kind of shady, he lived in various places. Incidentally, because of his unhappy life with my mother, twice he left home and went to travel to Chicago where he knew somebody.

SIGRIST: This is after you guys arrived here?

ROGERS: Yes.

SIGRIST: Well, did he come to America, not only for this job, but also to sort of get away from that domestic situation.

ROGERS: I'm sure he did. We never discussed it, but when I think of the things we never discussed I'm curious about how

incurious I was. My situation with my father was, it wasn't one of complete affection. It was a strange thing. I felt a bit awkward with my father. Possibly because of the constant bickering between him and my mother, I don't know.

SIGRIST: Once he went to America, how were things different in your household in England?

ROGERS: They were worse. They were terrible.

SIGRIST: Why was that?

ROGERS: Well we lived for example in one room, we didn't even have a closet, no such thing as a clothing closet. I remember seeing my father's old clothing that he had left behind, trousers, coats, hanging on nails that were driven into the wall. You had no closets for clothing. We lived in one room, you see, and things were very bad. I remember, as I said, we were extremely poverty stricken and there were times, as I think I mentioned when I really had nothing to eat.

SIGRIST: How, with your father in America, how are you supporting yourselves? Did your mother get a job?

ROGERS: No, my mother wasn't the type to get a job. I don't know really. I suppose he sent money, I suppose, after he got

here and collected something or other. There was no other source of money, my mother never worked outside. She just kept the house very clean. She was very fastidious about that.

SIGRIST: Do you remember your father writing to the family back and forth, once he was here?

ROGERS: I remember, I was the one who because I'd been in school and could write, I was the one. I was the amanuensis. I was the one who, who they gave the job of writing letters to relatives, which I remember having done, and to my father and so on. Though I don't recall specifically any letter that he sent to us while we were in England, while we were in England and he was away. I don't recall.

SIGRIST: When you were a little boy in England, what did you know about America?

ROGERS: Nothing.

SIGRIST: Did you have any idea of what it.

ROGERS: I don't even think we ever discussed America. Oh yes, America. I remember the people around me, my relatives and so on, always talked about America as, the phrase they always used, as "America the golden land." They looked at America as the

place were there's every kind of opportunity to rise and make something of yourself.

SIGRIST: I see.

END OF SIDE A.

BEGINNING OF SIDE B.

SIGRIST: Tell me, talk a little bit about how, what the final decision was to bring your mother and your brothers over to America.

ROGERS: Well, my father presumably, we never discussed this again, presumably, he had gone first to pave the way for our passage to this country, you see. So he left first and worked for this cousin of his as a cigar packer, a very menial job anyway. But he apparently, he did raise enough money to get us eventually on a steamship and over to there. It was a very, I don't know, we were very destitute. I remember wearing frayed clothing. My mother was able, there were people downstairs, we lived apparently on an upper floor, they were downstairs, these other people, the Goldberg's was their name. They had a little boy who was about my age and size and therefore, and they gave me his cast-off clothing. (he laughs) I remember having sleeves, the sleeves of the clothing had been used to wipe the kids nose

this way, (he gestures) and they were stiff with this excretion from the nose, snot! They were stiff with that. I received just his cast-off clothing. We were desperately poor, you see.

SIGRIST: How did you feel about going to America as a kid? I mean, what, how did you feel about that?

ROGERS: I knew nothing about it, I didn't know, America was just a name to me, you see. I do remember, very clear, distinctly we were travelling on a railway train to Liverpool.

SIGRIST: Was that a long trip from London.

ROGERS: It was at that time a few hours. It took quite some time and I remember arriving in Liverpool and I remember that the railroad tracks continued on to the dock, where we embarked onto the ship the Carmania. I remember the name of the ship. Many years later, by the way, it was still in the service, I remember it had two funnels, because ships always interested me very much, so....

SIGRIST: Now whose actually taking the trip, you, your mother and two brothers, or one brother?

ROGERS: Charlie, my next brother, ah, I think it was just Charlie and myself and my mother. The three of us.

SIGRIST: What did you bring with you?

ROGERS: (he laughs) Well, we brought the usual. My mother brought a rolled counterpane with feathers, filled with feathers that she had carefully collected and had carried with her from Poland. I remember that. Some other little odds and ends and packages and so on, but we had no such thing as baggage, nothing like that, nothing like valises, nothing of that sort, just bundles and boxes that's all.

SIGRIST: Were you in Liverpool for any length of time?

ROGERS: No, we ah, I remember the railroad trip from where we lived to Liverpool to the docks. That was a long trip, probably a couple of hours I remember, and I recall it was a very black day. It was cloudy, the sky was black. There were clouds overhead and the sky was absolutely black. It was a stormy day. And I remember a lot of confusion there, being taken here and taken there before we finally boarded the ship, the Carmania.

SIGRIST: What was it like for you, especially with your interest in big ships, what was it like to be able to go on one of these boats?

ROGERS: Do you know what I remember most? Sea sickness

everyday. Throwing up a little bit into a jar much to the disgust of the women, you know, other passengers who saw me doing it. We were, we didn't travel steerage, strangely enough. We had a cabin. There was an upper berth, I remember, in which I slept in and my mother was down below. I remember being roused out of bed. I was very seasick all the way over and being roused out of there everyday when the one whom I called "the nurse" who was really a stewardess came to clean out the cabin and put things in order. She'd hustle us out. I was kind of miserable during that time being seasick everyday.

SIGRIST: How about your mother?

ROGERS: She apparently didn't get seasick. I don't recall her being seasick. But there were two berths, we were in a cabin. It was not steerage, we were in a cabin with two, an upper and a lower berth and I slept in the upper one, there was a ladder to get up there to the top, I remember.

SIGRIST: Did you go on deck at all?

ROGERS: Oh yes, we had to go on out on deck because they had to clean out the cabin everyday. They put it in order, put things in order, you know. Yes, I was out on deck but I'd be seasick on deck, also. I took a little jar with me for that purpose. And I remember being on deck very often, yes. I do remember the day we

left Liverpool, as I said, it was a very black day the sky was completely overcast, the sea was absolutely black. Yeah, I remember that clearly.

SIGRIST: You were sick most of the time, I'll ask the question anyway, was there a dining room, or how were you fed on the boat? You probably didn't eat much.

ROGERS: No, let's see, I'm trying to remember that. I don't recall. Isn't that strange. I don't recall a dining room or a some kind of a place where we, I don't remember getting together with other people to eat in any common hall of any kind, you know. (exterior traffic noise can be heard) I don't recall that.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any kind of safety drills on the boat?

ROGERS: Not on that boat, no I don't recall any safety drills at all.

SIGRIST: I see. How long was the boat ride? Do you know that?

ROGERS: It took seven days, I remember. As I said, I was seasick everyday and we were up on deck, though, everyday. I don't recall that I was particularly interested in this ship itself as a vessel, you know, as something strange and unusual. I do remember it had two funnels and I remember the day we left

Liverpool with the smoke, black smoke streaming from the funnels. That was interesting, the black sea and the black sky.

SIGRIST: You were probably just too sick to be interested in the ship itself.

ROGERS: Well, it might of been, though I'd seen ships everyday from the time we lived in England because I lived near the Thames apparently, what else, sure, London.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the first sight of New York City, or do you remember pulling into New York Harbor at all?

ROGERS: Funny, I don't, yes, I remember the harbor, yet it's strange I don't recall the Statue of Liberty. I may have been on the other side somewhere. Certainly, nobody pointed out to us that here is the Statue of Liberty. So I don't recall having seen that at all. I remember seeing little tugboats going in all directions, loud tootings and hootings and so on. Incidentally, we didn't go into New York, into New York City. We landed, we took another boat after Ellis Island, after being processed. We took another boat that went to New Jersey because my mother had a sister living there who wanted us, had us lived there about four weeks or so with her.

SIGRIST: Where in New Jersey?

ROGERS: Jersey City, Jersey City. She lived there in Jersey City. She was my mother's sister, as I said. We stayed there

awhile and then we eventually, this must have been during the summer because when we left her we came back into New York City itself and I remember it seemed that it was very warm, so it must have been the summer time. There was no school at that time, though I had a transfer with me from London.

SIGRIST: We should back track and let me ask you about the processing. What do you remember from Ellis Island and that whole experience?

ROGERS: (he laughs) I remember, one thing, confusion, a lot of movement, people going around, the women wearing babushkas, those kerchiefs and boxes and bundles. I remember officers, officials rather, as I mentioned before, with blue coats and brass buttons going back and forth. Rows of benches, a very high hall by the way, and rows of benches and kids running back and forth in all directions dashing hither and yon and that's what I remember about Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: Was it strange for a little boy from England to see people of different nationalities? Did that strike you at all at that time.

ROGERS: No, it didn't strike me, though I do know that when we landed finally in Jersey City, I'm walking and finally we're on

land, and walking up the street to where my aunt lived, kids on the other side of the block, of the street rather, yelled across, "Greenhorn, greenhorn, greenhorn!" How they knew I was a green horn I don't know, but they may have been near the dock, I don't know, and therefore saw us getting off the boat, I don't know.

SIGRIST: How long were you at Ellis do you think?

ROGERS: It couldn't of been, it wasn't, certainly it was not more than a day. I certainly don't recall having spend a night there, no. I don't think they have any sleeping facilities, anyhow. So we stayed their for several, I remember several hours, with kids running back and forth, and people with bundles, as I said.

SIGRIST: Did you eat at Ellis Island?

ROGERS: No, no.

SIGRIST: Did someone come to meet you at Ellis?

ROGERS: Now my father already was here. He didn't, I don't recall that he met us until we landed, in, hey, maybe he did meet us in Ellis. No, I don't think so because he would have had to have taken a ferry across to the island and I don't think he

did that. My impression is that he, I didn't see my father until we landed in Jersey City. And then strangely enough, the one thing that struck me was the width of his trousers and how loose they were, flopping around his legs. That's what struck me at that time about him. He didn't pick me up or kiss me or show any affection for me, I don't recall that at all, you know.

SIGRIST: In Jersey City, do you remember that first night when you landed and, for instance, did your mother's sister have a dinner for you or any kind of celebration to welcome you?

ROGERS: No, I can only assume she must have given us food. I don't recall any meal that we ate, but there must have been and yet I don't recall it.

SIGRIST: Well, your father comes out to Jersey City and meets you, and then did you stay over night in Jersey City or did you go into Manhattan?

ROGERS: No, we stayed in Jersey City with my aunt for I think a couple of weeks. She kept us there for awhile. Then we, mean time I assume my father was looking for a place for us to live, which eventually happened. And I do remember we lived first on, he found a place for us first on 114th street and Lexington Ave, somewhere there. And there we finally landed a place of our own.

SIGRIST: Can you describe that apartment for me?

ROGERS: I don't recall how much of an apartment it was. I think there were a couple of rooms there and it wasn't very large it wasn't very spacious. I think it had just a couple of rooms, that's all.

SIGRIST: What was the neighborhood like?

ROGERS: Quiet. I remember it was very quiet. There were a lot of kids running around in the streets for example. It was very quiet, that was on 114th Street. Later on we moved, we moved to 121st Street where relatives who had been here for awhile, relatives of our's had located an apartment for us, about three or four rooms, you see, and that's where we landed and stayed for quite awhile on 121st Street. A very lively, noisy neighborhood of Italians, Jews, and Irishmen.

SIGRIST: Primarily an immigrant neighborhood then.

ROGERS: Oh yes. I remember an Irish lady, Mrs. Doyle, living on the fourth floor, we were on the second, Mrs. Doyle. I used to play with her son, a boy about my own age. He called himself Eugene Muggins Doyle. He adopted the name "Muggins" I suppose, a real Irish looking guy. But, Mrs. Doyle took a great liking and affection to my mother and used to, she was a big burly husky

Irish women and she loved my mother and used to take her around. "Mrs. Rogenstein, I'll look after you. I'm your friend." And so

on, and she remained a friend of my mother's all the time that we lived there.

SIGRIST: Would you say that these different ethnic groups got along very well in this neighborhood?

ROGERS: Not too well. They were aware of their differences, and the point was that the ethnic groups were little local groups who had their own kinds of people living with them. That's how we got to our first lodging because we had relatives living their already on 121st Street, who found us rooms, I remember, on the second floor where I lived, by the way, when the Titanic sank, I recall, in 1912, yeah.

SIGRIST: 1912, Tell me, why do you remember that?

ROGERS: Remember which?

SIGRIST: You said when the Titanic sank you were living in that apartment, why do you remember that? Where were you when you found out that the Titanic had sank?

ROGERS: Well, there was a tremendous, lot of noise and houroose going on about it, because it was a tremendous event, hit by ice and so many people drowned and prominent people, the Strauss', I

remember, were very prominent people drowned. There were news events about it. How they sang, "Nearer my God to thee," as the ship sank lower and lower and they drowned. And that was some event in 1912 and it's been burned into my mind to the point where, I was good at drawing always, all these painting here are mine, you see. I got a big piece of this grocery paper, this white which they used to, they had rolls of it, you know, and they used to wrap up their bundles and purchases, bread and what not in this white paper. I remember I drew a big thing of the, picture, with crayons, they didn't have paints at that time, of the ship sinking, the Titanic sinking, and there was a lot of noise about it in 1912 when she sank, yeah.

SIGRIST: That's interesting that you remember that.

ROGERS: Oh, very much so.

SIGRIST: I want to ask you before we get too far into America, what was different about being here than being in London? Now, of course, you came from a society not unlike this, it's not as if you had a language problem or anything like that.

ROGERS: No, I didn't have a language problem, of course.

SIGRIST: But what was different about being in New York and

being where you lived on the docks in London.

ROGERS: Well, let's see if there was anything different. I'm not to sure, there was anti-Semitism in London and there was also anti-Semitism I recall in New York here. I remember when I, every time I went to school I somehow passed across a church yard, used to cross a church yard to get to my school, walk to it, of course. I used to be held up, as they said. At that time kids of each block were very, very conscious of their own block and very conscious of strangers, if any, they knew everybody on the block, you know, the kids played together and all that. And it was very common, the thing was when they had a stranger they talk up to him grab him by the scruff of his clothing (he demonstrates), as it were, and say "What block?, What block?" And if you were from another block, they'd punch you around a bit, and I was lucky. It happened to me very often, because I used to go, I had to walk to 118th Street from where I lived and I was always held up by these guys and it was unpleasant but I kept doing it anyway because I had to go to synagogue and all that, which was not near me. So there was anti-Semitism there, which is nothing new. So that's what I had to go through in going to school, you see.

SIGRIST: Did you, for instance, in the apartments that you lived in, in New York, did you have electricity as opposed to gas light or did you still have gas light here, too?

ROGERS: No, I had, yes I had gas light at first here. Oh sure, we didn't get electricity until many years later, I remember it was a great event for us, when we got electric lights and I figured I'd have all sorts of bulbs of different colors with different colored lights coming down. It was quite awhile before they installed electricity. I used to hear them drilling, the guys drilling with their long drills as they passed wires through under the apartments, you know, and through joists of the floors, you know, and waited impatiently for them to come to my own place, yeah.

SIGRIST: That was exciting.

ROGERS: Oh very exciting. We'd have electricity, finally. We had gas light at first only.

SIGRIST: Talk about how your mother adjusted to America. What was hard for her about being here?

ROGERS: We didn't discuss, I'm not aware of any adjustments she had to make. I'm sometimes surprised about the things we didn't discuss or seemed to be incurious about, you know.

SIGRIST: Did she and your father continue their tense

relationship here?

ROGERS: Oh yes, right up until the bitter end, oh yes. Because my father remained my father and my mother remained my mother, yes. The natures don't change, you know, fundamental natures don't change. He remained the gay blade, you know, people loved him. And he sang and he was handsome and he loved to visit people. My mother was just the opposite. As I said before, the more he persisted at being himself, the more she hated it.

SIGRIST: As a child growing up in New York, what did you really like about New York? What was something you really liked and were excited about?

ROGERS: What did I really like, I wonder. Let's see I sort of took it in stride, it seems to me. I don't recall that I had any special feeling concerning New York, living in New York. I don't recall anything of that sort, you see. I don't think I had any special feeling about it, I just accepted it, that's all.

SIGRIST: There wasn't one specific thing that you really liked about being here.

ROGERS: No, because anti-Semitism still existed here, so that was the same thing as I had come from in London. And anyway, we lived in more or less in our own environment, we lived in. Our

relatives had been here before us, many of them had come before us and so we had a little coterie, a little group of people of our own, and we more or less stayed within that group. So we were in our own environment that we were accustomed to, you see.

SIGRIST: Had your parents retained their ability to speak Polish?

ROGERS: Every once in awhile my father would utter some Polish phrases, but as a rule they didn't. My mother first spoke Yiddish. That was what she was accustomed to. My father would every once in awhile say something in Polish a sort of an impatient, curse of impatience, (Rogers speaks in Polish). I remember that. Those are Polish words, but I don't know what they mean. But it's a sort of a, not a bad curse but some kind of impatient utterance, that's what that is. Like we say, "Oh the hell with it!" That sort of thing.

SIGRIST: But they had rather thoroughly Anglicized while they were in England.

ROGERS: Well, yes, my mother in fact began to speak English fairly well, and my father went to night school to improve his English.

SIGRIST: In America or in England?

ROGERS: Here, in America, I even remember, the name of his teacher, he used to talk about Mr. Goldberg, his teacher, his English teacher. So he got to speak English fairly well and my mother, too. She began to use more and more English instead of the Yiddish that she had originally spoken. They retained the ability to speak Polish but there was no occasion to speak Polish anymore `cause, though their relatives many of them were originally from Poland, over here they, I think they took pride, this is my supposition in becoming Anglicized as quickly as possible. And so they, my mother in fact began to speak English fairly well.

SIGRIST: Was your name changed in England, or here?

ROGERS: No, we changed it here. I changed it and I regret that now. I'm sorry I did it but it happened. We changed it, I seem to remember because my brothers, except for one of my brothers, who didn't change his name, it still is Rogenstein, but the others, Sydney and so on changed it to Rogers for some reason or other. And as I say, I regret that.

SIGRIST: Were you an adult when you did that?

ROGERS: Yes, yeah.

SIGRIST: So your parents maintained their original name.

ROGERS: They did, yes. Oh, he was always known as Sol Rogenstein, yes. And my mother Lena Rogenstein, yes, sure, they retained their names. But everyone else became, as quickly as possible, became as American as they could.

SIGRIST: I see. Well, I guess this has been wonderful, I guess I have one final question for you and that is: Are you glad that you were brought to America?

ROGERS: Oh, yes, absolutely. Here's an illustration I can give you of how glad I am. In 1932 or three my wife and I visited England, Europe, we visited Europe, England certainly and some other countries there, we travelled around and I came across a cousin of mine who had remained here, my age.

SIGRIST: (Sigrist interrupts to clarify) Remained in England.

ROGERS: England, yes, I meant that. And what was he, what was his job? He was a house painter. And as soon as I saw him, he was my age and about my size, by the way, I said, "Here but for the grace of God am I," and I thank my lucky stars that we had come to this country because if I had remained in England, in the

first place, the moment I became fourteen years old I would have had to go to work. No college, there would have been no college, and I would have been like my cousin, whom I saw in London, still a house painter. I don't know what I would have been. I don't whether I would have been a house painter, but I certainly would not have been able to go to college. I would have had to go to work, I'm positive, as soon as I reached age fourteen because my father, not my mother, but my father would have insisted on it. I know that's so because over here I went to Townsend Harris, which is a high-grade school.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the school?

ROGERS: Townsend Harris High School. Townsend, (he spells the name) T-O-W-N-S-E-N-D. A high-grade school, my elementary school teacher sent me there because it was for high-grade students, which I was, and am I glad I went there. And from there it was an easy step to go into City College, because they were on the same campus, incidently. Otherwise, if I had come from another high school, I would have had to take an entrance exam to get into City College. And I will say this, in City College I received an education as good as, if not better than, many, many, the education received in many, many schools in this country. I'm very glad I went to City College. I received an very, very high-grade education there and met some very high-grade profs.

there. Very good. So I had an education equal to any that I might have gotten anywhere here. (exterior traffic noise can be heard) Yes, I'm lucky we came here.

SIGRIST: Well, Mr. Rogers, I want to thank you for having us up to your house, and for allowing us to record your immigration experience. It's been a splendid interview and I'm very pleased.

ROGERS: Has there anything else that occurs to you that you might want to ask.

SIGRIST: I think we got you up through those first couple of years in America, so I want to thank you again.

ROGERS: Oh, okay. You are very, very welcome.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off for the National Park Service.