

**EI-1451**

**ANN KRESSON**

**BIRTHDATE: AUGUST 14, 1928**

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**INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.**

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**TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: HALLIE BORSTEL**

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**CZECHOSLOVAKIA, 1937**

**AGE 8**

**SHIP: THE QUEEN MARY**

**PORT:**

**RESIDENCES**

**CZECHOSLOVAKIA: LUKOV**

**US: PITTSBURGH, PA**

LEVINE: Today is June the twentieth the year 2007, and I'm here in Pittsburgh, and I'm with Ann Kresson who came here from Czechoslovakia in 1937. So you were—

KRESSON: [superposed] I was eight.

LEVINE: [superposed] Eight. Eight years of age.

KRESSON: I got here in June and my birthday is in August, so, almost nine but not quite.

LEVINE: [superposed] OK. She was eight years old when she got here and she is

donating probably two sets of clothes—

KRESSON: [superposed] Mhm.

LEVINE: To the Ellis Island Museum, which will be part of our museum collection, and that's so nice. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. OK. Please, if we could start at the beginning with your birth date and where you were born.

KRESSON: All right. I was born in Czechoslovakia on August the fourteenth 1928.

LEVINE: OK. And where—

KRESSON: By a midwife, by the way.

LEVINE: [superposed] By a midwife.

KRESSON: Midwife. Which happened to be my aunt. But they didn't have doctors in those – in my community.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Was there anything about your birth that you've been told—

KRESSON: [superposed] Well, I – no, she didn't talk about that. All she taught me—my sex life—(laughs) don't kiss anybody or you're going to get pregnant (laughs).

LEVINE: Oh, this was the midwife?

KRESSON: No, my mother. (both laugh)

LEVINE: [superposed] Oh, your mother. Oh, that's funny.

KRESSON: I was – but – I don't know if you want all this, though.

LEVINE: [superposed] Beautiful, it sounds good to me. (KRESSON laughs)

KRESSON: You better cut some of it. No, I started my period at nine and a half and I just got here at nine almost, you know—

LEVINE: [superposed] Oh, uh-huh.

KRESSON: So that's when she told me this and it was funny. Because I didn't – from what I – what I learned from her, I had to do extreme opposite of what she did. You know, for my daughter.

LEVINE: Oh.

KRESSON: And that kind of tickled me. But going to Ellis Island, they kept me there for ten days, as – and Mother was across a bridge, and yet she was also on Ellis Island, in a room b – by herself, as a matter of fact. And she was scared stiff. We didn't know the language whatsoever, at all. And that was difficult on us 'cause we couldn't communicate to each other or to others when they would come to visit. For instance, a nurse came in chewin' profusely, chewin' and chewin', and she looked at me, 'cause I guess I must've had a puzzled look on my face, and so she opened one up and put it—it was a stick of gum—she opened it up and put it in her mouth to show me what she was doing. She started chewing on it and then she offered me a stick, so I opened it up and followed suit. And I chewed it up and swallowed it, I figured that was good candy, you know (laughs). And she stood by the window, looking at the ocean, chewing for all she was worth. She must've stood there for half hour (laughs).

LEVINE: Now who was this?

KRESSON: It was a nurse.

LEVINE: A nurse.

KRESSON: One of the nurses in the hospital.

LEVINE: Well, why don't we start back in the village.

KRESSON: OK.

LEVINE: Is that where you were right up until you left?

KRESSON: Uh-huh.

LEVINE: [superposed] The same place. OK, so, could you describe it as you remember it?

KRESSON: Well, sure. It was a small village but we had quite a bit of land, we made – we never – we didn't have stores, you had to grow your own, either animal or vegetable, and so that's what we – we did. And Mother, she came from a different little burgh, little tow – village, and so she had to get acquainted too. But there was a little creek, I remember, and a bridge going across it, and that was the main drag—the big street, where the horse and buggies went, you know. And my school was to the right, I remember so vividly going to school barefooted, and it was a Catholic school evidently because we had nuns teaching us and many (laughs) twigs—well, switches, I guess—were broken on my – back of my legs because I wouldn't listen. But the reason I wasn't listening was because I couldn't hear. I was born deaf on my right side completely, and my left side I only have fifty percent hearing. Nobody knew this until I came to America, and I was probably in second or third grade, which I was pr – (laughs) almost tw – no. They put me in – in kindergarten when I

was nine years old, so—and they kept me there until I got a few words understood in English—maybe three or four weeks, a month, whatever—and then they would, you know, move me to the second – ‘cause I did have four years of schooling in – in Europe, but then I had to learn to translate everything. And so eventually I did move up, and—oh, my train of thought is m – moving me—we went to school in Europe barefooted, like I said, and nobody knew that I was deaf. And we went to—

LEVINE: You got the switches on the back of your legs.

KRESSON: Yeah. That’s because I wasn’t paying attention, but it wasn’t that, it was just I didn’t hear it. If I – if you had my attention, I can, you know, either read lips or I’ll hear you on the one side, you know, but that’s some of the negatives that I remember.

LEVINE: Yeah. Were you a Catholic family?

KRESSON: At the time yes, and then I changed because it was – everything was in either Czechoslovakian or in Latin, and when we came to America we followed suit—Czechoslovakian and the sermons in – the priest, everybody spoke Latin. And we sang in Latin and everything, you know. And then I was pregnant, and I thought, “I can’t do this. I don’t want them—my children—not to know the language, American language.” So I started looking around for churches, and I went to a Catholic church, and it was, you know, kiss my ring and all that, in those days. And I went to another one and I didn’t know what the denomination was or anything but the gentleman—had the collar—came up to me at the door, welcomed me to the – he said I was a stranger, he welcomed me, even introduced himself as the minister of the church—D – Reverend Tishart [ph], I’ll never forget him—and he worked in Second World War as a minister, and we just became such total friends. He introduced me to his m – his wife, and his daughter, nothing that I was familiar with, you know. And

everything was in English, and I knew the language by now—not fluently, but I could muster it, you know, nobody could sell me no more (laughs). And so anyway, that’s – we became Lutheran after that, and that’s what we stayed with. So, that’s it.

LEVINE: [superposed] Uh-huh, OK. And, let’s see, what was your mother’s name?

KRESSON: Her maiden was Mary—well, Maria, but she changed that to Mary because when we came here, they had black—I get carried away—they black cars, they were called Mariahs—

LEVINE: Oh yeah.

KRESSON: OK, well, it soun – it sounded too much like her name, so she changed it to Mary, she wanted to be American, you know, broken English and all, but her name was Mary. Not legally, she didn’t change it, but everything – but her birth certificate says Mary on it. S – Sandala. S-A-N-D-A-L-A (clears throat) was her maiden name.

LEVINE: And your father?

KRESSON: Well, he was a sperm donor. Never met him. In the old country, her mother and his mother got together and they eventually got them two together and they got married, I mean they – they were legally married, and I don’t know how long he stayed, but she was seven months pregnant with me when he came to Canada. Now supposedly his intentions were to come to Canada while I was going to be born in two months, it’d be – in the meantime, he would get established over there, get a job, get an apartment or a dwelling of some sort, and then we would bring us over. That never came to pass because, the story goes, three weeks later he found himself a little girlfriend, and the rest is history. So I have a half brother there somewhere, and he was – he turned

into a coal miner over there, and while he was working, while he was on the job, there was an accident in the coal mine and they found him dead from the gases in—they used to keep birds in there, bring birds in with them and if the bird started dying you were supposed to go. Well, evidently he didn't see his bird (laughs).

LEVINE: This was in Canada?

KRESSON: I'm telling you, you're going to have to cut some of this.

LEVINE: Well now we never cut, so be careful. (laughs) We just take it as it comes.

KRESSON: Well, I – I mean they had canaries or something, you know.

LEVINE: [superposed] Yeah, I've heard that (laughs). Anyway, so, were your mother and father from Czechoslovakia, going back generations—?

KRESSON: [superposed] Into – yeah, in two – yeah, in two villages.

LEVINE: [superposed] Of their families?

KRESSON: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Yeah, OK. And, let's see, so were you the first – oh, you were the only child.

KRESSON: Yeah, the only – no time for more. Thank goodness.

LEVINE: Yeah. And so—

KRESSON: But I – I do have a half brother, like I said, by the father and the other lady. And he sent me a picture of him, riding on a horse with him, and he says, "This

is your brother.” Well, that kind of bothered my mother. And he never donated even a dollar. And she had me write him a letter one time, and she said, “She’s old enough to have a watch, why don’t you,”—oh – we – not that she’s old, I’m old enough to have a watch—why don’t – I would appreciate if you’d send me a watch for a gift, and my birthday is such-and-such, and so forth. And he wrote me back, “This sounds like a professor wrote it and not a little girl. You’re too young for a watch.” And that was – (laughs) that was the extent, never got a gift. So that was it. And then he was killed in a coal mine, like I said. I was eleven at the time.

LEVINE: So, in other words, they kept up a correspondence, or no?

KRESSON: No, not the two of them. I knew what he where he lived because he knew where we went, I guess through his parents, that I had come. ‘Cause we lived with them, now that’s – that’s another story. Living with your in-laws that have no priorities on you, you know, we’re not related, really, and the son left, so there was, you know, n – nothing communicable. And we lived with him for quite a while, well, I d – oh, I meant to look at it, ‘cause I’m sure I have all our papers, as to when they were married and so forth. But somehow, I’m almost afraid to look (laughs).

LEVINE: Well, now wait. You’re talking about in Czechoslovakia—

KRESSON: [superposed] Uh-huh.

LEVINE: It was that traditional that then you—

KRESSON: You lived with your in-laws.

LEVINE: You lived with your in-laws.

KRESSON: [superposed] Because then you worked for the in-laws. Mother was pregnant, she said, “My stomach was out to here,” and she said they put an apron on top of it with a big pock – no, that – they – she made a pocket out of it – picking up rocks off the farm—because evidently it must have been very rocky out there—in order to make smoother for hoeing and so forth, and working the garden, you know.

LEVINE: Oh, boy.

KRESSON: And she says she was carrying that si – could be that’s how I became deaf, I don’t know. All that pressure against her stomach, you know. I’ve thought about that lately, but I don’t know.

LEVINE: So your mother was not having a good time with—

KRESSON: [superposed] Not a bit, no. And she had a half-brother over here—they have a lot of halvesies (laughs) in my family—and a sister, and another half-sister. And the half-brother decided that he would—they were communicating—and he said, “If you can pay your own way, to Am – for the boat,” he says, “I’ll – You’ll have a place to live with me until you get your own.” So he signed up for us, and in those days—and I think that’s a good idea—they had to show that they had enough money in the bank to support you for five years. And in – within five years, if you were a good citizen and not in jail, you could get your citizenship papers, providing you can pass a test. A verbal test. And so he—at that time, he was a – five thousand dollars, you know, (laughs) big money. And, so, and then he got her a job—we were here five days—and she tr – he took her to a restaurant and she was washing pots for two dollars a day, and ten hour – ten hours a day they worked, in those days. So, and then – I think she paid rent to him (laughs). But he didn’t pay rent, he was – he was living with my mother’s sister—now she was mother and father the same, so she was the only tr – true blood relative—and that was her house, and her

husband's and her little girl, and he moved in with them. And then he charged her rent – my mother rent, you know, that was weird (laughs).

LEVINE: And where was this?

KRESSON: Up in Allentown, over here in Pittsburgh. Near Mount Washington, and M—

LEVINE: Did you say Allentown?

KRESSON: Uh-huh. Well, there's a Allentown, Pennsylvania, so that's—

LEVINE: [superposed] Yeah, right, but this is different.

KRESSON: Yeah, definitely.

LEVINE: Yeah. OK. So, let's see, those first eight years. Is there anything, like when you think back to Lukov, what you remember about it?

KRESSON: I remember where everybody lived. In fact, the next – next-door neighbor was my mother's best friend, and she – and both of them were pregnant at the same time. Now this is a story my mother gives me, I don't remember this one—but her – her daughter was born maybe four or five days prior to me, so naturally her milk came first. Mother didn't have any, so she used to take me over next door (laughs) to the feeding station. Those are some of the funny things that I remember.

LEVINE: Yeah.

KRESSON: And across the street was a cousin of mine, and her brother—they lived together—and her mother used to live there, in fact that was my mother's maid – delivered the baby.

LEVINE: Your mother's sister?

KRESSON: My mother's aunt.

LEVINE: Your mother's aunt.

KRESSON: Yeah. Her – the aunt's mother and my mother's mother were sisters, so they were aunts. But they lived there together, and Aunt Sofie came to America first, and then Mary and John, the two kids—well, they weren't kids, they were in their twenties, they live – they still lived across the road. And, like I said, we were very poverished, and I used to go over there—they'd invite me, of course—and we didn't have tables, per se, we had big long tables like cafeterias in schools, and then a bench on either side of it, and that's where we all sat, the family. And she would invite me to sit down at the table, and she would pour granulated sugar on the table, and give me a slice of black bread because that's all we had—we only had white bread at Easter and Christmas, twice a year. And when I came here we were eating white bread every time, they were complaining because they had—what was it? My mind goes blank – well, I mean, my age.

LEVINE: Take your time.

KRESSON: Help me.

LEVINE: You came here, and people were eating white bread all the time, complaining—

KRESSON: [superposed] Yeah, well they – they were suffering here, they were so impoverished, they were saying. What was it? I'm not coming through to you. 1940s, thirties—late thirties.

LEVINE: Yeah. Oh, rationing?

KRESSON: Prior to that, what caused the rationing?

LEVINE: Oh, depression.

KRESSON: That's the word I'm looking for. I get depressed myself (both laugh). But I thought, "My goodness, they're talking about depression, they don't know what depression is!" I mean, we ate—we didn't have three meals, we had breakfast and supper, and it was always the same thing. Cooked sauerkraut. We made our own sauerkraut—no meat in it—onion and sauerkraut, and then they would make a roux, course they didn't call it that, but they would mash up some grease and flour together, mix it in with that, and that was our meal. And the black bread. So when I came over here and they had eggs, they had milk, they had meat, I thought, "My God,"—and white bread (laughs).

LEVINE: Yeah.

KRESSON: Coffee, we had twice a year—we didn't have coffee over there, not in my house, you know. So there were a lot of things that were different.

LEVINE: Yeah, well, in other words, you must've grown cauliflower—

KRESSON: No, I don't – kohlrabi we had, we had carrots, of course, parsley we had. I never remember celery at all, until we got here. Potatoes—oh my goodness—but only white, I never knew there was a yellow, or yam (clears throat).

LEVINE: So all these things were being grown.

KRESSON: We grew all our own vegetables—from seed to seed, from one generation to

EI-1451 KRESSON

the other—you know, we would save seeds, we – certain ones we would let mature until they would go into seed, same thing with potatoes we would keep certain ones—the best grade, the – you know. So—

LEVINE: [superposed] Mhm. Wow. So it was a farming community of—

KRESSON: Definitely.

LEVINE: Of not so many people, I take it, a little village.

KRESSON: Several hundred, I'm sure.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

KRESSON: Yeah. Or possibly in the thousand. But – and the only we had, we had no stores, so we had a huckster – well, not even a huckster, I don't know what they would be called. But he came with a truck and he would have thread and needles and fabric.

LEVINE: Oh.

KRESSON: Anything that we didn't have he could supply us and we in turn gave him what he didn't have, 'cause he was living in sa – in a city, so we would give him produce. And he came—he loved raw eggs—and we would, you know, give him so many eggs for certain things, and he would just break it and—

LEVINE: Ew.

KRESSON: I – I – he would just drink it right out of the eggshell. I wonder what his cholesterol was (laughs).

LEVINE: Although they've debunked that, you know. Now they're good.

KRESSON: I know, well they did that with coffee, and everything else, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah. (KRESSON clears throat) So did you help on the farm, or on the—

KRESSON: I had to work in the kitchen, as – I remember as young as five years old, I was paring potatoes, with a knife—in fact, I still have cuts on them, on my thumbs for some reason—and I had to do the prepare work for the meal, you know, 'cause we had potatoes with our sauerkraut.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KRESSON: And that was it. So. And, yes, I did have to work out there. Oh yeah, they break you in early.

LEVINE: Yeah.

KRESSON: They get their money's worth out of you (laughs).

LEVINE: And so your mother was living with her in-laws, and she was working hard.

KRESSON: [superposed] Uh-huh. Oh yeah. Definitely.

LEVINE: Yeah. What were your grandparents like?

KRESSON: Stern, but they loved me, I remember that. Because every time my mother was going to the village, which was about fourteen miles, I understand now, and we walked that distance through the woods. And she would want me to go along with her, of course, to see her side of the family, and they would try to bribe me to stay there, you know, at – with her – with my paternal

grandparents. They would try to tell me that they would do something special with me, you know. And I remember my f – well, my first and last thing that I stole while I was there, there was a carnival in Europe—in our town—who the man was, I have no idea, whether – he wasn't related, but my mother's friend, let's say. He came and took me to this place, 'cause Mother was busy on the farm. So he held my hand—I must've been around four or five years old, probably about that t – the time of the picture—and it started raining, so she t – gave me an umbrella to take with me. And, not a penny—of course, we didn't have any money—so I didn't have anything to eat, nothing. And we were walking around all these places, and they had a lot cookies with pictures on them – holy pictures on them, and decorated with icing—beautiful, I never saw anything like that. And I was so hungry, and nobody was offering me nothing, so I took one. And I was going like this, and the man caught me, and he saw – he spotted me, he was away fr – the owner, I mean, the proprietor. So I stuck it my um – closed umbrella, 'cause I didn't want to get caught—evidently I knew I was doing something wrong, I just didn't know quite what—and he made me open the umbrella and let the cookie fall to the dirt. He didn't even want it, but he taught me a very, very good lesson. That was the best thing that could've happened to me. As – and I never forgot it, as you can see (laughs). At seventy-eight, I remember. I can still see myself. It was like this, I was facing—oh (laughs).

LEVINE: Wow, it was a holy cookie.

KRESSON: Yeah, that was very memorable.

LEVINE: Yeah.

KRESSON: That and eating the chewing gum (both laugh). Oh, and an orange too, I did the same thing with an orange. I didn't know what that was; I just chewed everything all up. And to this day they taste bitter to me (laughs).

LEVINE: With the skins?

KRESSON: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: OK. Was that here or there?

KRESSON: That was on Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Oh, oh my gosh. (KRESSON clears throat) OK, so (LEVINE clears throat) is there anything else about life in Lukov that you remember in particular, or—?

KRESSON: Nothing strikes me, other than what I'm, you know, spewing here.

LEVINE: [superposed] Yeah, sure. Well, OK. So then—

KRESSON: Oh, I remember catching fish!

LEVINE: Oh, OK.

KRESSON: By hand. This creek that we had to cross over on the little—each family had their own little bridge, and there was a little running water creek, and there were rocks everywhere in there, and the little fish, like minnows probably, would hide under these rocks, and the way would catch them is like this. With my hands, cup your hands around them – around the stone, and then catch the fish. And then I would bring them home, and they would – we'd have a treat. Same thing with my mother, my mother had, I think, now that I look back, probably pneumonia, at one point—she was very ill—and for some reason I got the idea that frog legs—'cause that was a delicacy, I mean, meat—would make her feel better. So I went out and caught frogs, I remember teasing my children when they were little, how I used to catch the

frogs by the backs and then take the leg, and hit them—get them out of their misery—and then I would bring them home and they would, you know, cut the back legs off, and that's what you would use, and then you stripped the skin off. And when you'd put the salt on it, they would still move.

LEVINE: Oh.

KRESSON: The – the salt would do something to the muscle, you know. See the things I remember?

LEVINE: [superposed] Yeah, great, right.

KRESSON: (sighs) I should've been a doctor, maybe (laughs).

LEVINE: So you—

KRESSON: [superposed] I remember those things. So I would give it to her, to make her feel good, and one time when she was—we were in America already—and she was sick again. Any time she got sick she would come to my house—once I got married—and I would care for her, you know. And that came to me, and my son when, I don't know where he found them, some delicacy place I'm sure, he paid an enormous price for these frog legs. And I prepared them the way we did in Europe, and she says, "Oh, this is so good. What is it, chicken?" Everything tastes like chicken, you know. I said, "No, it's a frog leg." Well, that made her sick (laughs). And yet she used to devour them in Europe. It's all in the state of mind that you're in (laughs).

LEVINE: Oh, that's funny. OK, so when you decided to leave, what prompted you and your mother to leave when you did?

KRESSON: Well, they were getting ready for war number two, big one, and that wasn't the

issue with us, but the opportunity came. The half-brother of hers, Uncle Bill, wrote Mother a letter and said, "If you would like to come to America, if you can find passageway—" moneywise, she borrowed money from her sister and her husband—half-sister, about a [not understood]—and that's how we paid our way. And then – that's how we got here.

LEVINE: Well now—

KRESSON: [superposed] But when we were – when we were in Prague, waiting for our ship to come in, they were already (clears throat) – they had trenches dug alongside of the road, and if you heard or saw an airplane—if you saw one—you s – you were supposed to dive into these trenches and the airplanes would dump flour, and if you got any flour on you—that's F-L-O-U-R, you know, flour—that means that you would've been dead, because that would've been a bomb hitting you. And that's how they were practicing to preserve yourself, save yourself. So that was an interesting thing.

LEVINE: Yeah.

KRESSON: And then when we came over, of course, in '37, and in '41 the war broke, so—

LEVINE: So really you weren't fleeing from the impending war, not necessarily—

KRESSON: [superposed] No no, uh-uh, no.

LEVINE: You were just wanting—

KRESSON: [superposed] It was just a matter of circumstance; it came up and we took it. So that was good, 'cause otherwise we wouldn't of been there. And then when I was – in fact, when I was getting married—the day of the marriage—my uncle didn't show up for the wedding—his wife was there, but not him—because he

EI-1451 KRESSON

worked on a boat on our rivers (clears throat) and he fell into the water and he drowned. And that was a terrible thing, that's a terrible way to remember him, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

KRESSON: But that's what happens sometimes.

LEVINE: So, in other words, did you say you weren't sure which port – where did you go from Prague? To leave?

KRESSON: Well, the – the boat came.

LEVINE: To where? It didn't leave from Prague, did it? (KRESSON sighs) [pause] I'm wondering if you went through Germany—

KRESSON: [superposed] I wish you would've briefed me (laughs). No, we went through Germany, but that was on the boat.

LEVINE: Oh.

KRESSON: I think. Because we – we – we got on the boat in Czechoslovakia, is – is there a ocean there?

LEVINE: I'm thinking—

KRESSON: Pacific, or Red Sea—

LEVINE: I'm thinking maybe you took a boat to a port—

KRESSON: I know we took a train at one point, but I don't know which end.

LEVINE: Hm.

KRESSON: I mean, they just shoved us, you know, we didn't – nobody spoke to us, so we really didn't know where we were going.

LEVINE: [superposed] Yeah. Where you were going. Right.

KRESSON: [superposed] Right. The only thing I remember, there was a man that spoke a little Slovak, and he told my mother—when everybody was leaving the ship, and they kept us on—that – because I was diseased, although that's not the word he used, they were sending us back.

LEVINE: Oh.

KRESSON: And that was ct – oh, catastrophic to us. And it wasn't so, you know, I think he thought he was being funny.

LEVINE: Oh.

KRESSON: And so then they took us off the ship and onto Ellis Island, you know, like I said, to the hospital.

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you know what ship it was?

KRESSON: The Queen Mary.

LEVINE: Oh, right, it was the Queen Mary. (KRESSON clears throat) But what were you going to go on? What was the ship you were going on, do you remember?

KRESSON: No, it was just a Cunard line.

LEVINE: OK.

KRESSON: C-U-N-A-R-D.

LEVINE: Yeah, right. (KRESSON clears throat) OK, and so, how about the voyage, what was that like?

KRESSON: The voyage was (laughs) very nice. We had a – a bunk beds, Mother got terribly sick, 'cause we never had ice cream, and she thought that was the best thing going. She made a oink-oink out of herself, (laughs) and so she got seasick from it. Four and a half days, we ate at the dining room; they gave us big menus that we didn't know how to read but someone—probably that same man—said, "Bacon, eggs." So we remember those two things. So every morning, every lunch, every supper, "Bacon, eggs." So that's what we did because we didn't know how to order anything else and nobody did – did anything for us that way, you know.

LEVINE: You know, I'm not sure you said it when the tape was on, about you were going to take another ship—

KRESSON: Mhm.

LEVINE: And what happened?

KRESSON: It just didn't show up. It was running lately evidently, and – but Queen Mary was I think only three or four years old at the time, and it came before, but it was a Cunard line, so that's why it was OK for us to get on – they told us to get on that one. 'Cause they didn't know when the other one would be there.

LEVINE: OK. Do you know if you were traveling first or second class? Do you know

that?

KRESSON: [superposed] Oh, no.

LEVINE: Third class.

KRESSON: Third class, oh definitely.

LEVINE: But you still had a dining room with a menu, which is—

KRESSON: [superposed] Oh yeah, mhm. Yeah. And ice cream—they brought ice cream.

LEVINE: How about you? Did you like it?

KRESSON: I liked it, but I – now I do, I like – I like an ice cream cone, other people like banana splits and sundaes and things, I like the simple thing. One little ice cream cone, that reminds me of my being a little girl, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KRESSON: And – well, even there, that's another one (laughs). We won't go into that one.

LEVINE: (laughs) So the voyage was pretty tame?

KRESSON: Yes, it was. Other than that we didn't know what we were doing, you know, and nobody – nobody talked our language, so that part was, you know, kind of negative. But I was too sick to care, you know, I had a fever and Mother wasn't with me, so that – (laughs) I really – first time away from Mother (clears throat).

LEVINE: What was your mother like, how would you describe her?

KRESSON: Mother was a lot of fun, she liked a lot of people—preferably men, but she liked them, she was a flirt, you know, she – she – prankster. But she never mar – remarried, well she did remarry when we got here. She met a gentleman that was visiting our next-door neighbor when we lived in Southside, and—he was from Jamestown, Pennsylvania—and they – they got together, as friends, and they were having a – in the fall they have—they still have it, as a matter of fact—where the men grow their hair and their beards, they're not allowed to shave during the summer if they want to participate in this. So they don't shave for a whole year for the coming off – event, and then they give awards to the longest hair and so forth—little boys growing up, you know (laughs). Anyway, she – he said that they were having this thing and we should be interested in coming out. Now, he lived with his mother and father – step-father, so she thought it would be fine, and Mrs. Cameron, the neighbor, said the same thing, you know. In fact, she was coming out, too, they had their own place. So then that – she got to know his family and so forth. So she stayed there for a weekend, I imagine, because she was working—she was a chef in one of the restaurants, things – came from pot-washing to a chef. She worked for Dutch Henry's downtown on Diamond Street eventually, across from the burlesque theatre (laughs).

LEVINE: Oh.

KRESSON: So I was an usher right across the street, and she was a cook at Dutch Henry's. That was cute (laughs). We would allow the girls from the burlesque theatre—the strippers—to come over and watch our theatre, whatever the movies were, and we in turn could go to their place and watch theirs on our lunch hours, which – when they were practicing, you know (both laugh). I grew up weird.

LEVINE: You must've had very close ties with your mother.

KRESSON: Yes, I did. And then I would go over there for lunch, and one time I remember – (laughs) it was so funny, I still laugh about it. I sat down at the table, I felt like a dignitary and a new waitress came up to me, and she says, “May I help you?” And I says, “Yes.” And she says, “What would you like?” And I said, “Just tell my – I’m my mother’s daughter.” That’s – (laughs) the words just spewed out, and I started laughing. She didn’t know who I was. I said – what I wanted to say is, “Tell my mother I’m here, and she’ll fix me up a plate,” you know, so, “I’m my mother’s daughter,” (laughs). I thought that was cute (both laugh). Oh—

LEVINE: So, when you first got here—

KRESSON: [superposed] Uh-huh.

LEVINE: What happened? You got – you came – do you – were you – did you see the – when the ship came into the New York harbor, were you looking?

KRESSON: We were aware. We saw the Statue of Liberty, which was very impressive, and we got – well, like I said, we stayed on there for – for a while, on the boat, I think at least over night, for sure. I guess they were getting ready for me, you know, getting a room for me. And then they took us off of it. And then we had to take a train to Pittsburgh, P-N-L-E, what is now the station square, in my memory, of course (laughs). Do you know where the station square is?

LEVINE: I haven’t seen it.

KRESSON: [superposed] Oh they’ve got – that’s a beautiful place, they’ve got restaurants there, and shopping malls—

LEVINE: Oh.

KRESSON: And everything. But we got there and then my Uncle Bill came and got us, and we had to take an incline—the tallest incline in the United States, for sure, might be in the world, but it's not – no longer working—but he lived on top of the hill – mountain, and he got us, with our little bags with our clothes. They told us to bring clothes but that's not the wording they got, because my mother thought they meant bedding. So she brought – that – we – she loomed—that's another thing they do, make their own cloth—and she – we had a great big loom, we only had one room, in Europe, one room. And there was Mother and I, we slept on one bed, and the mattress made out of straw—try that sometime—then my grandmother and grandfather, they slept catty – catty corner from us. And then there was a cot underneath where their one son slept, and they had another son who came to just visit, and he would sleep in the loft in the barn, 'cause there's no room in the inn, (laughs) at that point. So that – there was no – no privacy whatsoever, you know.

LEVINE: But she loomed her linens, or whatever.

KRESSON: Yes, they had a – a loom in the kitchen, and they would make their own cloth. And – and she made big bold bright red stripes, and the – the dye, you didn't buy it, you – you used material that grew, a – you know, like beets, and things that were colorful, so it was white and red stripes. I have two pillowcases and then what they called a *perina* [Czech: duvet], P-E-R-I-N-A. It was made out of down, of chickens, and just – no – no center part, you know, just down—

LEVINE: [superposed] Right, just feathers.

KRESSON: And – for the pillows, and for the big cover, like a coverlet for the bed, and then this cover—the red and white thing would go over it—but it bleeds terribly if you try to wash it, so I don't use it, it's in with the – the – in the trunk with the clothes, you know.

LEVINE: Oh.

KRESSON: Never brought it down yet, it's still up there. So.

LEVINE: So your uncle told her to bring, he probably meant—

KRESSON: [superposed] Clothing.

LEVINE: Cloth.

KRESSON: No, he meant clothing. It was his sister, sister Theresa said, bring—but the way she worded it, she misunderstood it in the letter, and probably in English they probably wrote it, for all I know. But anyway, she thought that they meant, you know, bedding, and that's what she brought. But she had – well if you had a br – she wore the black one to America, and the good one for good, figuring in case she went to church or something, she'd have something to wear, you know. Because the black one is more like for mourning—in fact, I wrote on the back of the pictures, for mourning or for – M-O-U-R-N, you know, death. And going to store – to store – to town, or visiting someone, and then the dressy one was for celebratory things, you know, weddings and fun things. So.

LEVINE: So she brought that with her.

KRESSON: Yeah. And that's how it came to be here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, when you got off the ship, did somebody say—

KRESSON: What they said – I have no idea what they said.

LEVINE: Oh right.

KRESSON: [superposed] Because the – the only way I found out eventually was they had sent my Uncle Bill—that brought us here, signed for us (clears throat)—they sent him a telegram stating they were going to keep us and I was in quarantine ‘cause I had the nine-day measles. And for some reason he kept it and gave it to me – gave it to Mother, I still have it.

LEVINE: Oh.

KRESSON: And it’s in a cedar chest. And that’s how I knew what was wrong. But that was terrible, not to tell us, you know. ‘Cause we didn’t have measles in Europe, we didn’t have mumps in Europe, at least not to my knowledge.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KRESSON: So I had no idea what I was coming down with.

LEVINE: So all of the sudden you had these blotches all over you—

KRESSON: [superposed] Yeah, and I had a fever, and I was listless, and eating chewing gum (laughs).

LEVINE: Well did you – how was your hospital stint at Ellis Island?

KRESSON: (clears throat) Well, it was very lonely because I had nobody there with me—

LEVINE: You were the only one—

KRESSON: Only one in the room, mhm.

LEVINE: Oh.

KRESSON: Yeah. And for some reason—well, I was quarantined, that's why.

LEVINE: That's right.

KRESSON: It just dawned on me (laughs). We're not thinking.

LEVINE: Yeah, right.

KRESSON: Yeah, so I had nobody, other than the visitors. And then they would wear masks to come in, and they put a mask on my mother—they brought her over once, it was a fatal thing, almost, because she ripped that off, she didn't know – she didn't understand why she was wearing it—she ripped that off, and came storming in and they grabbed her and pulled her back out. They're trying to tell her something, and probably to put it on or you're not seeing your kid—

LEVINE: Yeah.

KRESSON: But she didn't know what they were saying, you know, she didn't know what they were saying. So, I don't know how – I can't remember what happened, but I didn't see her after that. And then when they took me, I was walking between two nurses and I was so weak because I had been in bed for all that time, and I was so weak that when we were crossing that bridge, I started blacking out. First thing you know, my legs went under me, and I remember I was falling and they grabbed me under my armpits, and then they dragged me at that point. But prior to that, they sat me down and they put my head between my knees to wake me up, and then they picked me up and they – I was really weak, you know. I – I weighed somewhere in the fifties or sixties. I was very thin – very thin.

LEVINE: Mhm, yeah.

KRESSON: From the good eating that we had (laughs).

LEVINE: So when you got out of hos – were they nice to you at the hospital?

KRESSON: [superposed] Oh yes, they were pleasant. I got offered gum and an orange (laughs).

LEVINE: [superposed] And that was the orange, you ate—

KRESSON: Uh-huh, yup. That was my experience with an orange. I'm glad that they didn't give me a banana, 'cause I would've eaten that thing too (laughs). Skin and all. Well, I had never had—or seen—foods like that, you know, and nobody showed me what to do with it. They gave it to me and they left the room. And that was it, you know. With a mask on (laughs). I couldn't even identify them.

LEVINE: So then—

KRESSON: [superposed] Now that I look back, it's very funny to me, you know.

LEVINE: So that's how you developed your taste for orange peel?

KRESSON: (laughs) No, I detest it.

LEVINE: Oh, you detest it?

KRESSON: I hate it.

LEVINE: Oh.

KRESSON: I don't even like oranges, for that matter, anymore. And orange juice tastes bitter to me, when I use – drink it out of a can. I'm on Meals on Wheels now. My son gave me six months; I don't know what's going to happen in August (laughs). But it is very nice, I don't have to cook, 'cause my – I'm very limited for walking or doing steps. I cannot do steps, for some reason I fall, I can't pick my feet up. I've got a lot of mech – medical problems with my back, I've got herniated disks in my back, and they're – oh, when I get up I feel like nine hundred and n – seventy eight in age. And I have a lot of problems. Blood pressure—

LEVINE: [superposed] You're really vivacious sitting down.

KRESSON: What? Yes, (both laugh) I can go on and on. You better watch for me in that little tape. Oh.

LEVINE: OK, so, (KRESSON clears throat) when you left the hospital—

KRESSON: [superposed] Mhm.

LEVINE: And then you were—

KRESSON: [superposed] They took us on a—

LEVINE: Thinking you were going to faint, really—

KRESSON: [superposed] Yeah – oh, yeah.

LEVINE: And then they dragged you and then your mother came—

KRESSON: Uh-huh.

LEVINE: And then they gave you—

KRESSON: [superposed] But we – they took me to my mother’s room, and then I stayed there until somebody else came and took both of us, with our bags ont – and put us on a train. So evidently they put – prob – put us in a car and took us, I don’t remember that part. But I remember being on the train and then coming to Pittsburgh.

LEVINE: OK. And did your mother say anything else about what those nine days were like for her at Ellis Island?

KRESSON: Are you sure you want to know? (laughs)

LEVINE: Yeah.

KRESSON: OK. She opened the door, she didn’t know – she went out to eat and then she opened the wrong door—this I remember because she’s told me this story so many times—and there were two nudes, and there were nuns in the room—whether they were dressing or undressing remains to be seen—but she was mortified. She had never seen a nun in the nude (laughs).

LEVINE: Well, not many of us have.

KRESSON: So I remember that incident. Other than that, I don’t remember anything because I – well, I – even when I got out I was still very weak, so I really, you know, didn’t inquire about her, you know. And she didn’t inquire about me, either, for that matter (laughs).

LEVINE: But—

KRESSON: It was a nice vacation from each other. Don’t forget, I – from her womb, I

ended up in her bed and we stayed that way until I got married.

LEVINE: Wow.

KRESSON: S – you know, we had a double bed and that was it. We shared it, through thick and thin, whether we were speaking to one another or not (clears throat).

LEVINE: Well, now, she – did she say, like, was she treated well at Ellis Island, or she never told you that?

KRESSON: [superposed] She didn't say, she never told me about that. I – I'm sure it was fine, or I'd have heard about it.

LEVINE: Yeah (both laugh). Now what about the train trip to—

KRESSON: That I – I just remember sitting there, I didn't care for the smell—there was a sm – odor in there, and I don't even know what it is, maybe gasoline, or something that I wasn't familiar with—but it was fascinating because everything was going so fast past me, "Hi!" (laughs)

LEVINE: Should we pause here?

KRESSON: Yeah, go ahead.

LEVINE: Well, let's get you back here.

KRESSON: Yeah, OK.

LEVINE: OK, so (clears throat) we're talking about – you got on the train—

KRESSON: Uh-huh.

LEVINE: Then what was your first impression when you got – when you landed in Pittsburgh.

KRESSON: Well, Uncle Bill was there and we didn't know what he looked like, 'cause Mother left – or, he left when he was a kid and, in fact, the way he came over was on a boat where he shoveled the coal into the furnace—in fact, that's the way my father left, too—doing that, him and his cronies. I think there were two or three of them that went together, you know, and that's the way they came to America—well, he came to Canada.

LEVINE: They had jobs on the boat?

KRESSON: That's how they got it, yeah. And for the ride over, that's – that was their payment, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

KRESSON: So that's the way he came over, and – what was the question? (laughs)

LEVINE: The question was when your Uncle Bill met you, did you recognize him?

KRESSON: [superposed] Oh, no. But then we were (laughs) – we were very distinguishable. Looking around, not knowing w – and then we were in our – Mother was in her own clothes, you know, she had the black outfit on, as a matter of fact, and—the one with the big picture of the frame, you know—so that's the one she wore. And I was so frail, I just – I had a maroon shirt that was long enough to be a skirt, so I just had that one—probably a dress is what it was, now it looks like a shirt on me, but I can't get in it—but anyway, that's what I wore. So I was a little more American looking, but, you know, I – we stuck out like a sore thumb. How many Czechs come walking close to

Pittsburgh (laughs) at Southside?

LEVINE: (laughs) So what happened then, he took you home?

KRESSON: He took us home, he introduced us to a – Aunt Theresa, which is my mother’s right sister. And he introduced to his wife, and they had a daughter and Aunt Theresa had a daughter, so I lived with the thr – three cousins. And one was three years younger than me—which is Margie, we still are great friends—and Helen, unfortunately, died, and she was two years younger than me. And all three of us were in kindergarten. Margie was the only legitimate one there—she was five. My cousin was two years younger than me, and I was nine by then so she was seven—oh, I know my math. She was in kindergarten, but she was slow. And then, of course, me, the big cow, you know. I felt like – like a mother and I was the third one (laughs). I remember we were all sitting in a circle in kindergarten – (LEVINE sneezes) God bless you—

LEVINE: Thank you.

KRESSON: And the teacher was in the center reading to us—reading us a story—and I had to go to the bathroom so bad, and I didn’t know [tape noise] what to do, so I asked Margie—because Helen was a little slow—“How do you say you have to go to the bathroom?” So she tells me and I raise my hand, the teacher says, “Yes?” and I got up, and I forgot (laughs). Sat down, asked her again. Three times, I think the teacher caught on, she said, “Go.” Then there was another school I went, when I lived in Oakland for only nine months with my mother’s half-sister and—

LEVINE: [pause] Another school you went to—

KRESSON: School. The teacher. Thank you. Miss Lou Ellen. She was great. She loved – when I would come up to a person, I would curtsy—that was the custom, you

had to do that in Europe, if you didn't you got the switch, so I knew better—and when the door – we always had the doors closed at this school – schoolroom, and someone wanted to see you they would knock on the door, and Miss Lou Ellen would always pick me to answer the door because I would open the door, curtsy, and go like this, you know. And she just got – ah, she was in second heaven. She would laugh and everybody would—you know the – the older people that were coming in, another teacher or whatever—they would just love it, you know, because they got such a welcome to her door (laughs).

LEVINE: Well, that's a switch—

KRESSON: [superposed] Yeah.

LEVINE: That you did an old-world thing and you didn't get knocked for it, you got applauded.

KRESSON: [superposed] No, exactly. But then on the other hand, my first school that I went to – no, my second school in Southside, they – they instigated – they had a bunch of girls that were all together and they were troublemakers, and they were – somebody started a rumor that I said I was g – I could ta – the – the major one, the troublemaker one, said that sh – I could beat her up. But I came to school, they put me in the circle, and there – all right – “Hit me, hit me,” you know one of those deals. So I ran off and went home because I was afraid I was going to get beatened up. My mother takes me back into school the next day, grabs me by the arm, drags me in, and in her terribly broken English was yelling at them that why somebody want to beat her up, you know. So a lot of good things, bad things—

LEVINE: Yeah.

KRESSON: So I decided I was going to go with the good things and put a smile on my face

(laughs) no matter what I look like.

LEVINE: So – well that’s actually a good, actually, comment to go with. Do you think coming here, immigrating here as an eight-year-old girl, do you think it had an impact on you, on your personality?

KRESSON: Oh, tremendously.

LEVINE: In what ways?

KRESSON: Well, for one thing, they were – I was being put down in Europe, terribly, because of not hearing, and they thought I was being disobedient, so I had a reputation out of this world. And even when I came to America, the same thing happened. My mother’s half-sister – I was forever having to pick up fuzzballs off the carpet, that was my punishment for not obeying. I didn’t know what I was not obeying ‘cause I didn’t hear it, you know. So those kind of things were terrible for me, and that started in Europe, carried over, and that’s, you know.

LEVINE: So coming here you think changed you?

KRESSON: Once I found out about my hearing problem—now, I didn’t tell the teachers because I was afraid they were going to send me to Europe – back, you know, ‘cause I was not good goods. And so I didn’t tell them either and I didn’t tell my mother either, but I figured it out and one time I went to an ear doctor, took a test, he says, “You have no hearing at all.” So now, of course, I’ve got a hearing aid but only for the one ear ‘cause the other one doesn’t hear. So now – even now, though I do have problems, I like to sit either across or someone on my left. If you sit over here I feel very inferior, I won’t talk to you and people will talk to me and I won’t even – even though I hear a murmur, I don’t want to turn around, and – because I can’t keep a conversation going. So I just ignore them and consequently I don’t have friends on my right side (laughs).

LEVINE: So how did you get to an ear doctor? Was it through your school?

KRESSON: [superposed] My husband – my husband.

LEVINE: Oh, so this was—

KRESSON: [superposed] This came real – yeah, after I got out of high school. That's when I – I got married right away, at eighteen I was married. Mother was so happy (both laugh). She lost her bed partner.

LEVINE: So how did you meet your husband?

KRESSON: He was an accordion player and he had a band of his own, just came out of Second World War, he was a wounded soldier and he didn't know how to go about getting a job—he just got out few days before—and he had a band before he left, and we was also working as a ra – excuse me, a river patrol person – patrolman. I called him a river rat (both laugh, LEVINE says something that cannot be heard over KRESSON's sentence). I was ready to say that. But – and, so, I went – I loved dancing, oh, that was – I would rather do that than eat. And I had a girlfriend who was of Polish descent, I could understand and she in turn taught me English, you know, back and forth, so we used to go dancing together, to different places, and this was – he was just out, he didn't – wasn't well known yet. So he'd go to churches, you know, on weekends and play, so soon as I was through—I was working Warner Theatre at the time—and I would go to a dance and meet her there, you know. So that's how I met him. And he – (laughs) he liked me. And so he had more intermissions than – well, although they did get in there for nothing so it didn't cost them anything – but one person, this kind of drunk, tipsy man came over and he said to me in his drawl, he said, "I'm going to make sure he never gets another job again, he has too many intermissions." (laughs) And he wanted

just to be with me, you know. So that was cute.

LEVINE: [superposed] Yeah. Well—

KRESSON: But that's how I met him. Mike. And he passed away, he had Alz – Parkinson's.

LEVINE: Oh.

KRESSON: And so I took care of him for many years, from sixty-five to eighty-four—

LEVINE: Oh.

KRESSON: Yeah, and he got progressively worse, and he started running out of the house; I had to watch him constantly, he kept falling all the time. Couldn't feed himself, couldn't bathe, you know. I was hundred percent with him—fed him all the time, cooked, and served and everything. Then my mother had a heart failure, in Jamestown—her husband died on Thanksgiving Day, of all days, but anyway, that was a few years back, so she was living by herself—and she had, like I said, the heart failure. So out of the hospital they brought her in an ambulance, took her upstairs in my house, put her into bed—I had air-conditioning, I had telephone there, I had cable television, so she had all the comforts of – bathroom up there, bath tub, everything (clears throat). And I took care of her for a year and a half before she passed away—at the same time.

LEVINE: Wow.

KRESSON: So I was running upstairs and taking care of her, same thing with him. Then I developed cancer of the uterus. First I had a – a plump [?] removed, that was OK, but then the cancer showed up. So I sent – she didn't want to stay at my

house, 'cause she would've had to do steps and possibly serve my – her son-in-law, she didn't want that. So she says, "Take me home," and I thought, well, she's got a friend – next-door neighbor, which is – we have five acres out there, so it's not exactly next door, but, you know, she drove and everything. So anyway I thought she'd be better off there 'cause she's familiar with her place. So my son drove her out there for, I think, two or three days, and I just stayed overnight, I told them, "I cannot stay," because I put food right next to his bed and I told him to just stay in bed, by this time he had a us – urethra, I forgot what it's called, but you don't have to go to the bathroom, you know.

LEVINE: Oh, like a bag?

KRESSON: Catheter. Catheter.

LEVINE: Catheter.

KRESSON: Yeah. It was a bag, you're right. So that problem was a – you know, solved. So then I came that night, you know they kept me long enough to make sure I wouldn't bleed – I wouldn't be a bleeder. And then I st – started – they brought her back up, they dragged her up the steps, literally, 'cause she couldn't make the steps. And we – they dumped her in there—well, put her down gently (laughs) in bed, and then I – they started – I – they took – the doctor said, "Now, you calm – pretend you're in a hospital and go to bed." I went home and I went into the kitchen and started cooking, because by then I had two people to serve again. That's the end of my story.

LEVINE: Lovely. OK.

KRESSON: [superposed] Aren't you glad.

LEVINE: Well, I think our time is—

KRESSON: [superposed] Yeah.

LEVINE: Really running out. Is there anything you want to say before we close, about coming here—

KRESSON: [superposed] I enjoyed your company.

LEVINE: Oh, that too (both laugh). And vice versa. And thank you for a wonderful interview.

KRESSON: Thank you.

LEVINE: And thank you so much for the donation, I'm sure you'll get something in the mail—

KRESSON: I am pleased – I think they're going to a n – news [not understood] – found a good place. And my husband's clothes, I – he started a p – being a park policeman after – after he came from Eur – the war, eventually he became one, for nine months—well, forty-four and a half years later he retired at sixty-five (laughs).

LEVINE: Oh. You mean a National Park—?

KRESSON: [superposed] They hired him – they hired – no, they hired him for park police in Pittsburgh, all the nat – all the city parks. And then they trans – they blocked that off and made everything all blue uniform. So he had a distinguished uniform where he wore patis [ph], like leather, they – when you put the shoes on and this leather thing looked like boots. I – it would've been easier to put boots on, now that I think about it.

EI-1451 KRESSON

LEVINE: [superposed] Yeah.

KRESSON: But anyway, and it was in khaki, as opposed to navy blue, you know. So every, excuse me – everything was different. So, they wanted – for posterity, and so he – we donated that to – to them.

LEVINE: Oh, nice.

KRESSON: To the police station. So it's on display there, you know. So we're scattering everywhere (laughs).

LEVINE: Well, thank you so much for a wonderful interview.

KRESSON: [superposed] You're welcome, my pleasure.

LEVINE: I've been speaking with Ann Kr—

END OF INTERVIEW