

EI-204

MARIA CATHARINA VAN DEN TOORN PERAGINE
BIRTH DATE: MAY 18, 1916
INTERVIEW DATE: AUGUST 25, 1992
RUNNING TIME: 1:00:30
INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D
RECORDING ENGINEER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D
INTERVIEW LOCATION: EFFORT, PA
TRANSCRIPT ORIGINALLY PREPARED BY: JANET LEVINE, 1993
TRANSCRIPT RECONCEIVED BY: CHICK LEMONICK, 7/1996
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 6/1993

HOLLAND, 1921
AGE 4
PASSAGE ON "THE ROTTERDAM"
PORT: ROTTERDAM
RESIDENCES: THE NETHERLANDS: ROTTERDAM: US: NYC- PARK
AV. & 60TH

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm here today in Effort, Pennsylvania. It's August 25, 1992 and I'm here with Maria Catharina Van Den Toorn Peragine and I am at here home. And Maria came from Holland when she was not quite five years old in 1921.

PERAGINE: Yeah, that's right.

LEVINE: Through Ellis Island. So let me say, first of all, I'm very happy to have found your house. (They both laugh.)

PERAGINE: Yes, I am very happy too. I thought you'd get lost.

EI-204/PERAGINE

LEVINE: I did.

PERAGINE: To tell you the truth, because I am not very
good in giving directions.

LEVINE: Well, it worked out okay, anyway. And, I just
want to say I'm very happy to be here and I'm looking forward to
hearing your story because I think I mentioned we don't have a lot
of people in our collection who came from Holland.

PERAGINE: No, that really surprised me because they did
come a lot of people from Holland.

LEVINE: Many came earlier.

PERAGINE: Yeah, that's true, too. That's true.

LEVINE: Okay, well, let's start put by your telling me
your birth date.

PERAGINE: My birth date was May 18th, 1916.

LEVINE: And where were you born?

PERAGINE: I was born in Rotterdam and the place is Hellevoetsluis, which means "a hell of a place." (They both laugh.) It sounds not too good but that's it, you know. And it was--

LEVINE: Can you spell it for me, please?

PERAGINE: Yes, h, capital H-E-L-L-E-V-O-E-T-A, no S-L-U-I-S. See it's H-E-L-L, which is already, the E-V-O id that, and you put it together and that's what you got (she laughs). I didn't know, my mother explained it to me. But the place, the place where I was born is no more because it was a fort where my father was stationed when he was in the service in the Second World War, eh, the First World War, yeah.

LEVINE: So, where did you spend your first nearly five years, before you left?

PERAGINE: In Rotterdam, in the city part. My parents had a apartment. Also my father worked for the biggest bank in Holland, the Bank of Mace, Macenson, which is one of the largest banks in Holland.

LEVINE: So he was a teller? What kind of position--

PERAGINE: No, he had the job of foreign money, bringing it from one bank to the other to have it changed into either American, Spanish, whatever and that's what was his job. He had a very good position, of course. He worked for them ten and half years and when he left they told him that if for any reason he wasn't happy in America, he could come back and his job would be open to him. But, as it so happens, my dad was only here about eight weeks and took his first papers out, as citizen. He had made up his mind then already he was going to stay.

LEVINE: Now, he came first, as I understand it.

PERAGINE: Yeah, he came in January, he left Rotterdam and, I believe it was the end of January because they didn't arrive here until February which was very bad the weather, storms and everything, and it took them eighteen days to arrive here. Now, he landed also in Ellis Island, naturally. But from there he went to Hoboken.

LEVINE: Did he write to your mother?

PERAGINE: Oh, yes. He wrote to my mother and told my mother that he had, had gotten a job, wasn't a great job. He was working in the bank mopping the floors, but it was a job. And also, he had gotten in a rooming house; he rented a room, furnished. He

tried to make it as comfortable for us as possible.

LEVINE: Let's step back a bit. Now, do you remember being with your father in Rotterdam before he left?

PERAGINE: No, that I don't remember, but I remember him saying to me, "I'll see you in America." That I remember and I also remember when we went on the boat.

LEVINE: Do you remember any other things, well, for example, when your father said that to you, "I'll see you in America," where were you?

PERAGINE: We were at the landing when he was leaving. He left but, see, what was with him is, he didn't go on to the boat from Rotterdam, he went on the boat from Belgium because he went by train. For some reason or other, we went from Rotterdam but he didn't. I don't know why but, was some reason or other.

LEVINE: Do you remember being a little girl in Rotterdam?

PERAGINE: No, no.

LEVINE: Do you have any memories of that?

PERAGINE: No, and that's sad because I went to kindergarten at age of three years old and I would have loved to remember that because that's something you never, you'd like to remember but wasn't. But what I do remember is when we went up the gangplank and all my uncles and aunts and grandparents were standing waving. and my grandmother was crying. I remember that.

LEVINE: Do you remember your grandmother at all?

PERAGINE: No, it's sad, I don't. I have a picture of her but that's it. You see, it's strange. I remember the trip. I remember going on the boat and being naughty. I was never around. My mother was furious about that. I was always in everybody's state room and I was up in the captain's quarters and everything because I was not the type to sit put, and that I remember. I remember arriving in Ellis Island, how the lines were, how we were separated, mother from child.

LEVINE: Before we get to the part about Ellis Island, why did your father, do you remember the circumstances around which your father decided to come to America?

PERAGINE: Come to America? Well, he was working in the bank but he was a man who always wanted to work with his hands, either in what do I want to say--

LEVINE: Carpentry or something like that?

PERAGINE: No, like electric, plumbing, things like that or any kind of machinery. He was a man very fond of machinery. But in Europe--it's funny--your parents decide what you're going to become. And his father had two things he wanted him to be, either an undertaker, which he was, or work in the bank. So he decided to go to the bank and work in there. He wasn't happy. My father was very discontented. He'd rather work hard to something he enjoyed rather than have something that was very simple and easy for him because he, the work that he did in Europe--it's a funny thing--in years later it came upon him because he worked in a church and he had to count money. And that's something that came right back to him because he was excellent at it. He could feel it, if it was a dollar or a hundred dollars. He was very well trained in that. But, no, he was never unhappy that he arrived, never. And he struggled because they didn't have it easy when they first came here. It was right after the First World War and things weren't that great, I mean as far as jobs were concerned and living quarters. And that was another thing he ran into after he set

everything up, the landlady decided she'd rather have it for her son and threw him out three weeks before we arrived.

LEVINE: Did you have any other family here?

PERAGINE: No, we had just friends. that's all. No family. The only family that we had were out West, in Michigan, and that was my father's sister. But outside of that, no. But see, being in banking, dealt with so many people of different nationalities, it was the people mostly that said to him, "Bill, why don't you go to America? It's the land of opportunity. It would be great for you?" Because he was a man that was, he never stuck to banking. He was in everything. He was an auctioneer. He was in everything. He used to repair things for people. So they seen right away something in him that he could make a go of it in America, you know. And, thank God, he did, he did.

LEVINE: What was your father's name?

PERAGINE: William. William, it's William Henrik. That's, no, it's William Adrania, anus, which is (she laughs) very unusual here. A-D-R-A-N-U-S is a man, when it is I-A it's a woman; but in Holland it's Adranus. William was his first name, yeah.

LEVINE: Van Den Toorn? And your mother's name and her

maiden name?

PERAGINE: Chatrer. C-H-A-T-R-E-R, French.

LEVINE: That was her maiden name?

PERAGINE: Yeah, her maiden name was Chatrer, C-H-A-T-R-E-R.
R.

LEVINE: And what about her first name?

PERAGINE: Her name was Adriana. Adriana, yeah.

LEVINE: Oh, I see.

PERAGINE: And her name was Catharina, see, that's why I
was named, the middle name, after her.

LEVINE: Were you an only child?

PERAGINE: Yes, I was an only child.

LEVINE: Now, when your father went to America and you
and your mother were still, were you living just together or were
you living with grandparents or--

PERAGINE: No, we lived together, Mom and I. We had still our apartment and my, well, everything was sold by, a man came in and put prices on everything. Everything was sold that way. But it wasn't taken out of the house till about two weeks before we left. And then I think we stayed with my grandparents. I'm not positive about that but I'm pretty sure we did. (Police siren heard in background.)

LEVINE: Was your mother happy to be coming?

PERAGINE: My mother wanted to come to America but the funniest part was, you got to remember, when she left for America she had a wonderful home, a beautiful home and my mother was a very clean person. Her cleanliness was her main name, we often said it. And when she came here there were things that she had to face she had never faced in Europe, roaches, bedbugs, things like that. So the first six weeks, my mother cried her heart out and everybody said to me, "She's going back home. She's not happy." But as soon as we found a decent place to live, which was on, they became like caretakers, on 69th Street and Park Avenue, New York, right by the park. These people were going to Europe for six months and they had what they called a brownstone house. Beautiful house, and we were given the, in the basement was like a kitchen and off the kitchen was an apartment. So if we stayed there that's all, they paid us to

take care of the house and the living was for nothing. It was beautiful. Oh, what a gorgeous place! The kitchen was so big that I'd say it took this room and that room and this together. (She laughs.) It was one big kitchen. It was beautiful. Oh, it was gorgeous and my mother was happy there. And then she finally decided she was going out to work. Of course--

LEVINE: When you still lived there?

PERAGINE: Yeah, I went to kindergarten. And, uh--

LEVINE: Well, wait, let's back up for a minute and just say when you, do you remember your house at all in Rotterdam?

PERAGINE: No.

LEVINE: Where you stayed with your mother?

PERAGINE: That's something I don't, no.

LEVINE: You do remember though your relatives bidding you goodbye.

PERAGINE: That I remember, yes.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you were wearing or what
your mother was wearing?

PERAGINE: Yeah, right what I had on. I showed it to you
on the passport. A sailor outfit.

LEVINE: Was this something that was bought for the trip?

PERAGINE: That was bought for the trip, yes. My parents
bought me that for the trip.

LEVINE: Do you remember your mother's outfit?

PERAGINE: No, I don't, but I have a picture of her even
bigger than this, and she's wearing the
same blouse with the high neck. I have a
similar blouse now, that she gave me, oh, about
ten years ago she bought for me, and she
mentioned it. She said to me, "You know it was
funny, that's what I wore when I came on to
America." And I said to her, "You did?" She
said, "Yep, that's what I wore." (She laughs.)
I said, "Oh, my goodness," I says, "that's how
the styles come back," you know.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything that she packed or that you brought when you came?

PERAGINE: I had a Dutch doll and that I remember somebody giving it to me when I left. But what happened to it, I have no idea. I never found, I thought I still had it when I got married but I couldn't find it. I don't know what happened to it. Maybe I gave it to someone or, I don't know. But it was like a rag doll and it was dressed in a Dutch costume with a little apron and a little hat with a thing. And, I would have loved to have kept it because it was a memento, but I have, as you see, I have Delft. In that cabinet is all Delft and I have a piece that my mother brought here to America with her.

LEVINE: What was that?

PERAGINE: It was a plate like that, but the real, the real Delft. And that is now, well, we're here now seventy, seventy-one years, right? Of course, I'm seventy-six now. So seventy-one years, and that plate was given to my mother as a gift, when she got married. So that's how old it is. And I wouldn't part with it for anything. A lot of people have said to me,

"It's an antique." I said, "Yeah, and it's going to stay an antique. I'm not going to give it away because it's something you never get no more." And she brought that and then when she died, I thought, "Well, that's my gift now."

LEVINE: Did your mother tell you anything about America before you got here? Do you remember about the boat or--

PERAGINE: No, no. She did say something about, I was running around and she, on the ship, and she was saying, she said, "You're going to get lost and you'll never see America." They used to call on the (she laughs), on the bull horn, on the thing, and say that they found me again. I was down in the galley with the boys, you know, where they work. She couldn't keep from nothing. We were ten days on the ship. But we were lucky, our trip was fantastic. We had no storm, nothing, the weather was perfect. Perfect.

LEVINE: What do you remember, just from your childhood, what you actually experienced as a child on the ship? What was it like to be on the ship when you were practically five years old?

PERAGINE: It was, being that I was free to do what I

could. A lot of people were sea sick. Now, we had a table of twelve people. My mother and I were the only ones at the meals. And I remember that and many times the way they used to say to my mother, "You people are made of carved stone." (She's laughing.) "Everybody else is sick. You're not." We had our three meals everyday. And I also remember that the waiter, and it come in my mind that the waiter said something to me in Dutch and I turned around, I said to my mother, "Don't he speak English?" And I said it in Dutch to her because I couldn't speak a word of English. I couldn't realize that he was on a ship, he was speaking Dutch. But I was only here three months, in America, and I spoke English just as fluently as you could.

LEVINE: After three months!

PERAGINE: Three months. I didn't want to speak the Dutch language. My mother would say something to me in Dutch and I'd say it back to her in English.

LEVINE: Do you know why? Why didn't you want to?

PERAGINE: Because the children on the street, that I played with, made fun of me. See, the only thing I remember, my mother, in Europe, you call her "Muder," right? And I used to say "Muder," and they'd go 'Moo moo.'" (She laughs.) And it got me so mad that I used to come in and say, "I'm not going to say it no more. I'm going to call you 'Mother.'" And my mother would say, "No, you're not. You're going to call me 'Muder.'" "No, no, no, no." I didn't like it. No. She said she had a hard time with me. I was almost eleven years old before I decided I was going to speak Dutch again. But when the person came from Europe, my aunt, I felt so foolish. I was sitting there and everything she said I understood, but I couldn't answer. Well, when she left, I made up my mind, I says, "I'm going right back to it." And I did. Now I can speak it and I can write it and I can read it.

LEVINE: That's great.

PERAGINE: It's fantastic, believe me, because it's come, in the United States, the other day I was in camera place, in Strassberg. Now, I haven't heard Dutch in years and I hear these two people and they are speaking it fluently, about the camera and the store, how much equipment is in it. And I went up to the woman

and I says, "Are you from Holland?" And she says, "Yes." I said, "From where?" She says, "From the hague." "Oh," and I started to speak Dutch. The Woman grabbed me, she hugged me, she said to me, "Oh, you speak Dutch?" I said, "yes I do." She says, "How long you here?" I said, "Seventy-one years." The woman couldn't believe it. She said to me, "You speak fluently!" I says, "Well--." It's wonderful. And I've come across it more. And especially people who travel. It's very difficult for them. When they get in America, it seems to them America is so big that it scares them. I've had more people say that, people that have visited us from the other country, you know, say, "Oh, I'd be scared to do this. I'd be scared." I said, "No, you get used to all this." But I can understand it. They come from a small, Rotterdam is small. It's not big. It's not a big town.

LEVINE: Well, tell me anything else about the ship, like
 where did you sleep?

PERAGINE: We had what they call these second--

LEVINE: Second class cabin?

PERAGINE: Second class cabin.

LEVINE: Were you and your mother the only ones in the cabin?

PERAGINE: Yeah, yeah, Mom and I had the cabin. We didn't go first class. We went second class.

LEVINE: Uh huh, and did your father send you tickets or how did that work?

PERAGINE: No, we got all our stuff before he left. We had shots. I had four injections this arm and four injections in that arm.

LEVINE: And were you examined by the steamship company?

PERAGINE: Oh yes, yes. We were even examined, we had to go to our own personal physician, get papers for examination and everything. Then we were examined before we left Holland because we had to get the shots, and they had to be checked

to see if they took and everything. Then when we came to Ellis Island, we were checked again. But I had no problem because everything was perfect. See, we had already taken care of everything.

LEVINE: I see.

PERAGINE: My parents did, too.

LEVINE: Well it sounds like your father was, I mean, you must have been solid middle class. I mean you weren't--

PERAGINE: Oh, yes, we were.

LEVINE: You were comfortable?

PERAGINE: Oh, definitely, my father made very good money.

LEVINE: Uh huh, so he really went for more opportunity to do what he wanted to do.

PERAGINE: That's right. He, that's right. He wanted to better himself. The bank was fine. My mother liked it because he

was a white collar man. His job was, he was dressed up always. He only worked from nine to four, and four o'clock in the afternoon he was through. He only worked five days a week. Saturdays and Sundays he didn't work. And they had a good life, which meant a lot, but he wasn't happy. He wanted, what he wanted to do was, when he came out of the service, he was, until he was twenty-one, they have to have four years of service in Europe. You have to. That is a compulsory, that time. I don't know now, but that time. And when he came out of the service, he wanted to go on a ship and be an engineer, and his father said, "No." Now, if that was America, he would say, "Well, I'm going to do it or else." (She lowers her voice.) But not in Europe.

LEVINE: He really needed to get away from his family so he could do what he wanted.

PERAGINE: That's right. They were married, well, they got married in 1914 and I was born in 1916. So they were married only six years when they really, they decided that they had enough, then already.

LEVINE: And your mother was willing to go?

PERAGINE: Oh, yes.

EI-204/PERAGINE

LEVINE: Because your father wanted to?

PERAGINE: Yes. My mother gave up a lot. My mother gave up a beautiful home, a piano, everything you can think of, the best. Her own sisters and brothers told he she was crazy because they said, "You have to start from scratch." Oh, she was willing and she did. She pitched in when she came here.

LEVINE: So, tell me when you got to the New York Harbor. Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

PERAGINE: Yes, yes, I do.

LEVINE: What was that like?

PERAGINE: That's, that's, even now it's a funny feeling. I went with the Senior Citizens a couple of months ago, and it still is a thrill. I'm sorry, it's something you'll never forget. I seen that and I seen the torch when we left at night and I thought to myself, "I remember it as a little girl."

LEVINE: Do you remember what you thought when you saw it as a little girl? Can you recall that?

PERAGINE: It's a funny thing. It's something you can't

explain. You can't. I now my mother said I often Talked about it, afterwards, like it was something of a dream. I loved it here. Oh, I was free to go on the sidewalk and play and everything. In Europe we went with your mom and, you know. Then, when I went to kindergarten, I was a little bit, my parents were a little angry because I had been in kindergarten at three years old. But, of course, in America they didn't want hear that. Now, they have nurseries. At that time they didn't. And I had to do it all over again.

LEVINE: Well, tell me about Ellis Island. How did you get there and what--

PERAGINE: Well, Ellis Island is, it's strange. If I come to think, I remember the ship going to the part where it lands. But now it wasn't like this, that it's now.

LEVINE: You went to Battery Park and then took a ferry to Ellis Island.

PERAGINE: Right. Right. You didn't go with the ship. You had to go off the ship.

LEVINE: Yes.

PERAGINE: And then to Ellis Island. And that's the scary part because you have an idea you're never going to go back on that ship. Why, I don't know, but you have that feeling. It's hard to explain. When you come into this place and you see all these people, you really, it's a hard thing to explain. You wonder why are all these people here and the way they are dressed, the way they are, some of them very poor. We came in, and a lot of people were sent back. And you hear them crying and everything. It's heart breaking. Now they don't have any of that no more. At that time they did. They had a lot of it. (Mrs. Peragine's grandson enters the room and says, "Hi.") This is my grandson John. This is Mrs.-- (Tape is paused.)

LEVINE: When you say that it's scary, in other words, you get off the ship and you're on Ellis Island--

PERAGINE: That's right and then you go in lines. There are ropes. They don't have that no more. There are ropes and they line you, just like cattle. It's the same idea. Only your mother holds your hand to a certain spot and then you go one way and she goes another. And

one thing is, they put like a stick about that long, (she gestures) they go through your hair and they check it. I had curls, as you can see, so it took a little longer. And it's, you think that you're not going to see your mother no more, you know. And then when you do come through it, then you see all these people crying and you wonder, as a child, you wonder what's going on, why are these people, I'm sure I asked my mother many a question and asked, "Why is this going on? Why are people being sent back," or why, you know, because you're curious to know.

LEVINE: And it must have been a very new experience.
All those new people--

PERAGINE: It's a big experience. The experience is, you see these ladies with little cloths around, right, and they got a little bundle. They haven't even got a suitcase. They got a bundle. And for a child that is curious. I mean, why is, you have suitcases, you have trunks, they don't, why? Are we any different? That's your imagination. That's what you really

think. And, as I said, I probably asked my mother a hundred and one questions. Why? Because I always was very curious of everything like that. And many times it bothered me.

LEVINE: Okay, so what happened to you there, exactly?

PERAGINE: From there you go back onto the ferry. As soon as you're checked out, everything's all right, you go back to your mother, you go back on the ferry and you wait. You don't go back right away on your ship! You've got to wait for other people and then you go back on your ship. Then after that you go to Hoboken, which is another experience.

LEVINE: What was that like?

PERAGINE: Hoboken. Well, now Hoboken's not as bad but that time you see people laying on the street. This, we had never seen anything like this, you know, drunks all over the place. I'm sure my mother said to me many times, "You held my hand like you were going to break it." I was scared. You know, as a child, you never seen this, this is frightening. Then when we came in this place where my father brought us, and--

EI-204/PERAGINE

LEVINE: How did you meet up, where and how did you meet up with your father?

PERAGINE: At Hoboken. He picked us up. He picked us up at the port. Yeah, he was there waiting.

LEVINE: He didn't come to Ellis Island?

PERAGINE: No, no, no, he didn't come. He came with a, and it's a funny thing, he came with his friend that now, his daughter and I, we are, well, we're friends. Well, she's two years older than I am, and from the day we arrived in America we've been friends. I've been to her house in Florida about five years ago. She wants me to come back again. I stayed with her three months. And we have so many memories as children, you know.

LEVINE: Was she--

PERAGINE: She came, she lived in New York City.

LEVINE: She was never born in Holland?

PERAGINE: No, no, no, her parents were. Her parents were my mother and father's best friends in Europe growing up, teenagers.

EI-204/PERAGINE

Right? And It's really, he, they had to, what I understand, like a bond, they had to put up for us because you can't come in to the United States otherwise.

END OF SIDE A

BEGINNING OF SIDE B

LEVINE: Well, you know, it's curious to me, because if you were a first or second class passenger, generally speaking, you didn't go through Ellis Island. I don't know why you did.

PERAGINE: They still did it then! They don't no more!

LEVINE: No, I know, but even then, it was the steerage class of passengers.

PERAGINE: Yeah, but you had to go. You had to.

LEVINE: I'm wondering if it's maybe because you went to Hoboken afterward, that you went to Ellis Island first.

PERAGINE: That's possible, that's possible, yeah, that could be because the ship landed in Hoboken on, what's that, 5th Street? I think, 5th or 4th Street. I know it like if it was

yesterday because I've been there more. We've taken people off ships. A cousin of mine worked on a ship and we went to pick hi off and he says, "I can't get off." My mother says, "No, this is America. This is not Europe." So he says, "No, no, no." She says, "I'm going to your captain." Oh, he was afraid. He says, "No, you can't Auntie. You can't go to the captain." My mother says, "I'll go to the captain." She went to the captain. She says to the captain, "I'm taking my nephew off. I'll bring him back tomorrow morning. What time does he have to be here?" He looked at her. She says, "Look, this is America. This isn't Holland." (She laughs.)

LEVINE: He was working aboard a ship?

PERAGINE: He was working. He was working in the galley, down. He was only fifteen years old. Yeah. You know how young these kids used to be, go on the ships and then cross and this way they seen what they wanted to, more or less. And he had wrote us that he was coming to America and that he would land in Hoboken. So my mother got right a way on the phone and called Hoboken. When was the ship due and everything. And it was a passenger ship and when the ship came in she went to the captain. And she got him off.

EI-204/PERAGINE

LEVINE: How long do you think you were at Ellis Island?

PERAGINE: Not long. No. We went through very fast
because all our papers and everything were in order.

LEVINE: Well, it sounds like your mother became quite
Americanized.

PERAGINE: Oh, yeah, you want to see how Americanized?
(Shows a photo of her mother.) There she is. (She
laughs.)

LEVINE: Oh, yeah.

PERAGINE: She was in America, I'd say six months, she had
her hair cut. (She whispers.) My father
had a fit, ow, because she had hair down to
here. As you can see, she wore it quite
different. And then she went for her citizen
papers. She went to school at night, night
school, to learn the language and to learn about
the government and everything. She was very
proud, yeah.

LEVINE: And did your father become a citizen?

PERAGINE: Oh yeah, here it is. (Shows papers.) Here's
his papers. That's how I became a citizen.

LEVINE: Oh, on his papers.

PERAGINE: See, my name is right there.

LEVINE: So he became a citizen.

PERAGINE: I think five years.

LEVINE: First, first day of December, 1927

PERAGINE: '27. And she became citizen, ah, '42. In '42.

LEVINE: So, tell me when you first got off in Hoboken.
Do you remember the reunion with your father?

PERAGINE: (She whispers.) Yes.

LEVINE: What was that like?

PERAGINE: Definitely. Oh, it was great. My mother cried.

Oh, God, did my mother cry. And my father said, started to explain that he had the room and then he had to change it, and then it isn't the greatest thing. But my mother was very good about it. She says, "Well, we'll make the best of it." But we didn't know what we were going into. But we only stayed there, as I said, six weeks. And the landlady had a fit because we moved out. And my father turned around and he says, "My wife won't stay in this mess." Roaches. You couldn't open a closet. The roaches ran over your clothes! And that was (she chuckles), I even went like this (she gestures), I says, "Oh, no, " you know. Was dirty! And then another thing, I went outside one day, and this is what my mother told me, she says I came in crying and my mother says, "What's wrong?" I says, "All the children have such dirty faces and dirty hands." I wasn't used to that. You see, it's a different culture and it's a different. Now, I don't know about suburbs or anything like that. It's a different thing. It's just like going downtown New York. I mean, it wouldn't be much better, right? But then, and my father was still, "greenhorn" we called them, because he didn't know America. He didn't know the ways and where to go and find an apartment and everything. As I said, after they got the caretakers job, that's what helped.

LEVINE: Well, tell me where you went first. Where was the furnished room?

PERAGINE: In Hoboken.

LEVINE: Oh, in Hoboken, I see. And then you got the
caretaker job..

PERAGINE: Yeah. My father got that through his job where he worked in the bank. They said that someone had come in the bank and had asked, that they needed somebody because they were leaving for Europe for six months on business and they needed somebody to watch the house. But they wanted a live-in person. So, I don't know if my dad spoke about the problem or what. But he came home and he says, "We're packing up." And my mother was, oh, she was in her glory when he said it.

LEVINE: So then you lived in the apartment downstairs.

PERAGINE: Yeah, we lived in, it was like a sub-basement apartment, what we would call ow a sub=basement apartment, but it was beautiful. We had everything, two bedrooms, living room, everything. But all they wanted us was to take care of the house and the surroundings, you know. They had a beautiful garden and everything. And they had a very, very high fence.

LEVINE: Do you remember those people?

PERAGINE: No, the people, I don't. I remember the house. Because I was in the house I'd say three weeks, and we had these great big steps, right, these marble steps, and I was playing ball and I lost my footing. And I hit the back of my head right on the point of the step. Put a hole in my head. Now my parents, my father had been in First Aid, so he knew all about it. When he came home he cut my hair and he patched me up. And because that happened I wasn't allowed to go and play. He bought me a bicycle. Remember years ago the little, little, three-wheeler bikes. But the tiny one. And I used to ride around the kitchen. (She laughs.) It was great! It was so much room. I didn't have to go in any other room. That was like a speedway. Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, when you started school were you living in that caretaking house?

PERAGINE: Yeah, yes. I started in New York City on, what

was it now, my mother told me, I think 60th Street and, now we were on Park Avenue.

LEVINE: So that would be East--

PERAGINE: East, yeah, ah, I would say 4th and 5th Avenue. That's about the best I can place it. I went to school there, to kindergarten.

LEVINE: And do you remember school? Do you remember going into school there?

PERAGINE: Oh, yeah, I remember that.

LEVINE: What do you remember about that?

PERAGINE: I remember my mother leaving me and saying she had to go to work, and I had to behave myself. And the lady next door to our place where we were, she used to come and pick me up at half past twelve, because kindergarten was only half a day then. And she used to take me and give me a glass of milk until my mother came home. But my mother only worked until two o'clock in the afternoon.

LEVINE: What did your mother do for work?

PERAGINE: She was in the rooming house cleaning, cleaning rooms. She did that for a while and then somebody got fresh with her (she laughs) and so she decided she wasn't going to go back. And then, meanwhile, we, we left after, well they came back from Europe and we left, and we went to Bear Mountain. My parents were caretakers there. We left in February, yeah, it was still cold. And they opened up the dorm there and everything for the people and we took care of the inn, you know, cleaning it and getting it ready. And then in, around April, the people started to come in, you know, the chiefs and everything. And we did that two years, my parents did that.

LEVINE: So that was in the summer? And then did your father keep the job in the bank or he left that?

PERAGINE: No, no, no. He left that. Then when he got through with the caretakers job, after going back twice, because he made enough money. I mean they gave him a nice bonus, too, at the end of the season. They were so happy the way he took care of everything, and her too. He decided that he was going to go and look for something in machinery or something. And he came home and he had a blacksmiths job, which my mother wasn't too happy about.

LEVINE: This was in New York City?

PERAGINE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Why wasn't she happy?

PERAGINE: Because he used to come home black (she laughing) as coal. She wasn't used to that. That's what I'm trying to tell you. In her eyes, she always wanted him as a gentleman, and my dad didn't. My dad wanted to work with his hands. I married a husband the same way. he didn't like all this fuss, you know, white collar and wear a tie and everything. My dad was the same way. After the blacksmith job, we went out West. We stayed there for three years. We were out in Michigan.

LEVINE: Now, that's where somebody's family was from.

PERAGINE: Yeah, my father's sister lived there and that's what made us go there.

LEVINE: We're stopping for a minute. (Tape pause.)
Okay, we're resuming now after a small interruption. Mrs. Peragine's, it's Peragine, pronounced "Peraginee," right? (Peragine's

grandson leaving) Okay. You were saying, you went to Michigan where your--

PERAGINE: My father's sister lived. Yeah, and there my dad became foreman for Ford Company. He had a good job, but, eventually, like everything else, things got bad and the factory started closing up.

LEVINE: This was now, what? In the thirties?

PERAGINE: No, that wasn't in the thirties yet. It was in about twenty, let's see, I was about seven, yeah, about seven years old, and I went to school out there. Oh, I've been in every school you can think of. I went there and we bought a home and everything. And we were out there three years, and we had to come back because things got very, very bad. Factories started to close down, so my dad turned around and he said, "There's only one place that we can make a living, and that's in New York." So, we went back home after three years. Well, to tell you the truth, I wasn't happy on Michigan and neither was my mother. You see winter from September till April. You see nothing else but snow and storms and blizzards and everything and, that time they were bad. They're not that bad no more, but that time they were very bad.

LEVINE: Were there many other families from Europe, and from Holland in particular, where you were in Michigan?

PERAGINE: My aunt, who was living there, her husband's sister lived right next door, they came from Europe, too. In fact, now my aunt came before us, but she went right away out West. She didn't stay in New York.

LEVINE: I want to go back to something you mentioned before about your learning English so quickly. Do you know how you learned it so fast?

PERAGINE: Picked it up off the street from the kids mostly, because anything I'd say, they's make fun of. And it bothered me. I was a kid like that who couldn't be made fun of. I'd make sure that I'd straighten it out or find out why, especially when I used to talk to my mother. They'd, you know, they'd make fun and they'd say, "Oh," because we talk, the Dutch talk through the throat as (she makes sound) kuk and, you know, children when they hear that, they say, "Oh, all she does is kuk, kuk, ." which was it, you know. But I was never sorry. I would have loved to go. My parents didn't want it but I would have loved to make a trip. In fact, my aunts, cousins, living yet, they would love to see me. I

don't want to go alone. And my daughters, they got families, I can't expect them to put the money out. I don't have it to give it to them. If I had it, be a different story. But I would love to go and see because everybody has told me Rotterdam is the most beautiful city. Since the war, it was all built up into modern, you know.

LEVINE: Were there ways that your mother and father kept of Dutch--

PERAGINE: Of Dutch cooking?

LEVINE: Oh, how did they cook?

PERAGINE: The food. My mother, my children even talk about it now, my daughter, my mother cooked a lot with cream sauce; everything creamed. This is the Dutch way. And I have been here, in Pennsylvania, what they call The Good and Plenty is a restaurant. They cook exactly like her, exactly. And the food is cooked like that. In the cream, even the cabbage. Now, we cook the cabbage and ham. My mother used to cut it up, make a, after it was done, she'd make milk and butter and some corn starch and creamed it! I got the same thing in Good and Plenty. (She laughs.) I couldn't believe it. It's the real Dutch way of cooking. But she was not the type to go for exotic foods or anything like that. I think because she

was brought up in an area, I think because it was city, now it's different. Now everything is oriental and everything like that. That time there wasn't. So I think that's the reason.

LEVINE: And how about your father, did he become very Americanized?

PERAGINE: Oh, yes, he joined the national Guards in the Second World War. Oh, yes, he was National Guards. He was a cook in the camp. He cooked for three hundred and fifty men.

LEVINE: Well, did he cook at home ever?

PERAGINE: Oh, that was his specialty when he was off. And when he was on vacation, when he, well, he used to get sometimes three, four weeks vacation, he was the cook everyday.

LEVINE: And did he cook in the Dutch way when he was home?

PERAGINE: Yeah, a lot, because even in camp, when he was in the National Guards, he made the gravy the same way as my mom makes it. And the boys, the men, went crazy. They liked the gravy (she laughs) better than the meat, they told him. And they

actually asked him to come back the following year because they enjoyed his cooking so much. But he was, yeah, he was real Americanized, oh yes. Oh, in fact, he was so Americanized, if he went to, if there was a parade of any kind, we were in New York City, regardless if it was raining or what it was. He had to go to that parade, oh yeah.

LEVINE: You mean a parade of a, nationality, of the United States of some kind.

PERAGINE: Anything that had soldiers or sailors or marines, he was there. I often said, he should have stayed in the service because he was the type.

LEVINE: Was he strict with you at all?

PERAGINE: No, no, he was the type that, he'd say to me, "We trust you and, if you do something wrong, you are the one that's going to pay for it, not us." And I was brought up that way. I was not brought up that I got everything I just wanted, either. A lot of people think, you're an only child and life goes very easy. Uh huh, my parents weren't that way. I had to earn what I got.

LEVINE: Do you remember any other things that your

says, "If we have to live like that, we will."
And we did.

LEVINE: Where were you then?

PERAGINE: I was here. We were in Astoria, living in Astoria. My father had a good job. He worked in the hotel, the Parkside Hotel. He was an engineer in the hotel. Not, uh, assistant to the chief. He had a good job.

LEVINE: In the Parkside Hotel?

PERAGINE: Parkside.

LEVINE: Is that in Astoria?

PERAGINE: No, that's in New York City. Parkside's right on Gramercy Park, 18th Street. He had a good job. But, when the time came, and they got cut, he had to get a cut just like anybody else.

LEVINE: And about what year was that, do you think?

PERAGINE: That was in 19--29, no, was, yeah, was about '30, 1930, between '29 and '30. He was making an average of forty,

I think it was forty-five dollars a week. Now that was good salary then. And he was told that he had to cut it at least to eighteen dollars. And he did it. He came home and he told my mother and my mother says, "Fine. If that's the way it's got to be, that's the way." But she was a person, everything went first, the rent, the insurance, the electric bill, anything. Then, if there was something left, you got something. I mean, I think that's because she was brought up in Europe that way, too.

LEVINE: Now, how about you? How long did you stay in school?

PERAGINE: I? High school.

LEVINE: And then what did you do?

PERAGINE: And then I did nothing. Then I started to, well, I worked. I worked in a big store. I was like assistant to the manager. I did that. But I was lucky. When I graduated, it was a time that jobs were starting to get very less. And you had to take a lot of things you didn't like. I worked in the hotel as a room service girl for about nine months.

LEVINE: In the hotel your father was working in?

PERAGINE: Yeah, yeah, the Gramercy. And that was rough because you have to take some dirty things, believe me. Men had no respect for you in so many ways, but it was a job and I was glad to have it. It paid for my clothing and for whatever else. And from there I went to, well, we moved from, my mother became ill and we had to move from Astoria. It was too noisy and too (sound of door) so we, I think that;s my daughter, possible. Yeah.)Tape is paused.)

LEVINE: We're resuming again.

PERAGINE: Yeah.

LEVINE: (Mrs. Peragine's daughter having just come in.)
And you were saying that you were working and had the job at the hotel. Now, when did you meet your husband?

PERAGINE: I was twenty years old when I met him.

LEVINE: Now, is this after you had the job at the hotel?

PERAGINE: Yeah, oh yeah. We moved from Astoria and we went to Glendale, where it's like a suburb. And that's where I, well, I think it was there, yeah, I met my husband. It was a funny

way of meeting him. A friend of ours has, or had, a diner in the area where he lived, in Whitestone and, somehow or other, his counter man became ill. So he called me in the morning and he says to me, "Are you working?" I says, "No, I'm not." He says, "Good." He says, "Can you hop a trolley and come to Whitestone?" I says, "Why?" "Well," he says, "you could fill in for me," he says, "because Jack is ill. He says, "I don't know how long he'll be out." Well, I wasn't working, so I figured well, that's great. So I packed my self and I went down to Whitestone and he told me what he needed, what had to be done. I got behind the counter and I worked from ten in the morning till seven at night. And it was around five o'clock and four of these fellows walked in and they had, they were workers of construction. Now, you know yourself, how they look (she laughs), filthy and crummy and everything else. And they sat down at the counter and they said they wanted coffee. Now, they didn't, they asked Frank, who was the owner, and he says, "Where's Jack?" He says, "Jack is ill, so we have Marie here." "oh." So he says, "Oh, all right." I says, "What would you like?" "Oh," he says, "we'll have coffee and we'll have piece of apple pie." "Fine." So I served them. And this went on for about a week and one day this young fellow came in and he says, "You know," he says, "John wants to meet you." I says, "yeah, why?" He says, "Well, he like you." I says, "Oh." "Well," I says, "let him speak. I'm not going to ask him." He says, "Well, he don't want to do that." "Well, I ain't (she's laughing) going to go and ask him. If he

wants--" So he came in from work. It was a Friday night and his cousin came in and started to curse. So he turned around and he says to his cousin, "Don't you see there's a lady behind the counter?" I'm saying to myself, "Oh,)she laughs) I can't believe this," you know. And he says, "oh, I'm sorry." So he says to me, "Where do you live?" I says, "Out in Glendale, Long Island." He said, "Glendale?" He says, "You mean you have to take a bus to go to Flushing and then you take the other bus to go, to go in there?" I said, "that's right." He says, "Well, are you working tomorrow?" I said, "I don't know. I have to ask Frank." So I asked him. He says, "Well, I'd like you to come in." I says, "all right. I'm not doing anything. I don't mind." So I went in. So he says to me, "I'm not working on Saturdays." This was Friday night. He says, "So, I'll see you." That was all he said. No date or nothing. So when I came in Saturday morning, he was sitting at the counter. And I said to him, "Good morning." He said, "Good morning." He says, "What are you doing tonight?" I said, "What am I doing tonight? (She laughs.) I didn't get off work yet." He said, "Well, you have any plans?" I says, "No." He says, "Good." He says, "What do you say we take in a movie?" He says, "And we'll go and get a bite to eat. So don't eat no supper?" All right. So Frank, who's the owner, he turned around and he says to me, "Did John ask you to go out?" And I says, "Yeah, he asked me to go to a movie and out to dinner." He says, "Oh, he's great, great guy." He says, "He comes from a big family." I said, "Well, that don't bother me. (She

laughs.) I don't care." So we started to just go out, maybe to a movie, to have a piece of pizza, nothing. And after three months, he turned around and said to me, "Would like to go steady?" I said, "What?" He said, "Would you like to go steady?" I'm saying to myself, "I'm twenty years old. Do I want to go steady (?) (she laughs) already?" You know? I was really not ready for it. I says, "Well, I don't know." He says, "Well, you can let me know?" I says, "Wait a minute. Why are you jumping? We're enjoying this, right? Going out." He says, "Yeah, I know." He says, "But this way I know that I can depend on you." And I'm saying, "Uh huh." This I don't go for. So anyway we started to go out a little bit more and a little bit more, and I liked him. I liked his ways. He was very. very polite, very respectful, which is good in a young man, you know. But the first time was funny, he had his car and he says to me, "I'll drive you home." My mother always told me, "When you get in a car, make sure who you're getting in the car with and make," you know, "but sit close by the door (she laughs) in case he gets fresh, you can get out." So, I says to myself, "Well, if he wants to bring me home, all right." So I went in the car and I sat all the way--he had a big Hudson so it's a wide car--and I sat all the way over. And when we got in front of my door he said, "All right, you can relax now." (They laugh.) I felt so foolish. (She laughs heartily.) I', twenty years old, you know, you feel like, what's the matter with you. We still laughed at it for years. We used to talk about it.

LEVINE: Well, now, we're just about out of time. Just tell me quickly, your husband's name.

PERAGINE: John Joseph Peragine.

LEVINE: And your children's names?

PERAGINE: I have one is Antoinette, her last name is, oh, Dougherty, that's her marriage name. And this one is Jeanette Constantino.

LEVINE: Okay, and you have grandchildren? Just tell me their names.

PERAGINE: Yeah, I got seven of them. (She laughs.)

LEVINE: Okay. And is there anything else you'd like to say about coming to America and being here for the rest of your--

PERAGINE: No, I'm very, very happy here and I have never regretted it, believe me, never. I'm proud that I'm an American and I'm also proud that I can serve it, things, many times. Of course, now, as a senior citizen, I do a lot of work with, volunteer work.

EI-204/PERAGINE

LEVINE: Okay, well, on that note we'll close. I want to thank you very much.

PERAGINE: I really appreciate it. I really do because it's something that I've always thought would nice to tell someone, you know, because it's in you and you say, "Who the hell are you going to tell? Who are you going to talk to?" Especially when I found this.

LEVINE: The passport, yeah. Well, I certainly enjoy hearing it.

PERAGINE: I'm proud to be Holland. I mean it isn't that--

END OF INTERVIEW