

EI-249

MARIE TANCIBOK VITOSKY

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INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: JOHN MURIELLO, 1/1994

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 1/1994

AUSTRIA, 1905

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Oral Historian's Note: Mrs. Vitosky was sick at the time of this interview and coughs throughout the interview. -Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of the Oral History Project, 1/14/1994.

SIGRIST: Good morning. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Friday, February 19, 1993. I am in West New York, New Jersey, with Marie Vitosky, who came from Austria-Hungary in 1905 when she was nine years old. Also present with us in Mrs. Vitosky's apartment are Grace Oflazian, student intern from Pace University, and Kevin Daley who is running the recording equipment. Mrs. Vitosky, good morning.

VITOSKY: Good morning.

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SIGRIST: And I just to begin by you giving me your birth date.

VITOSKY: My birthday is January 23rd. I was born 1896.

SIGRIST: And what was your maiden name?

VITOSKY: My maiden name was Tancibok. T-A-N-C-I-B-O-K.

SIGRIST: And what was the name of the town that you were born in?

VITOSKY: Well, the way I, I know it, I say it my way, Leware.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

VITOSKY: No, I ca-, I can't spell it.

SIGRIST: No? "Leh-var-ay?"

VITOSKY: Leware. Yeah.

SIGRIST: And is that in Austria proper?

VITOSKY: Wait a minute. It's Leware. And then there's Little Leware, you know. But

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Leware, that's where I come from.

SIGRIST: But it begins with an "I", "leh?" Leware?

VITOSKY: "Leh." Yeah. Leware. Yeah. Leware.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me approximately where that is?

VITOSKY: Well it must be very near Germany, because (she coughs) that man that took me over the, the mayor of the town, he took, brought me over. We went over the bridge and we went, it was in Germany.

SIGRIST: So you think it was fairly near the German border?

VITOSKY: Yes. Yes. Yes.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me what that town looks like when you were a little girl?

VITOSKY: Very, very small. And doesn't have alot of people in it. When we went to school we had to learn to speak Hungarian, to learn to speak Hungarian. I cannot speak Hungarian, but I can speak Slovak. I'm a Slovak, I'm not a Czech. But a Czech and a Slovak is almost like the Northerners and the Southerners. It's in their speech. But it's the same thing. We understand each other.

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SIGRIST: And, of course, this is all under the Austria-Hungarian Empire at the time.

VITOSKY: That's right. Yes. Yes.

SIGRIST: What was the main industry in this town?

VITOSKY: (she pauses) I don't know. There, there was nothing there. All I remember is once in a while they would, like where the school is, they would bring a lot of dishes and they'd put them all on the ground, and there they would be selling them. You know, chinaware. Cups and saucers and things like that. But that was not the original business. There was no business in there. The women went out into the field and dug, you know, they would, the, the potatoes and, and all the different things, they would plant. And then they would, you know, dig around and, it was mostly that.

SIGRIST: A lot of farmers, then, in this area.

VITOSKY: Yeah, far-, yeah, farm work. My, my, my mother went out to, to do that kind of work.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

VITOSKY: Johanna Meislik. But I don't know how to spell it.

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SIGRIST: Meislik. Maybe M-E-I-S-L-I-C-K, -C-H, maybe?

VITOSKY: Meislik. Meislik. Yeah, Meislik.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me what she looks like in words when you were a child?

VITOSKY: Well, she was tall and thin. Very smart. And there was a grocery store there that must have owned by the town or something like that, or the mayor. And once a week one of the ladies would have to go in that store and be the cashier. And being my mother was smart, the women would pay my mother so to take her place, so that, that she wouldn't have to go. And that's what my mother used to do. Then that would be the day that she didn't go out in the field, you know. She'd leave three little children home to go and work out in the fields, so when she was in that store we was right there.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the store specifically?

VITOSKY: It was a regular grocery store that you went and got all your food.

SIGRIST: The fields that your mother worked in, where they owned by your family?

VITOSKY: No, no, no. They were owned by the town, by the, the mayor of the town was, was everything. It was owned by the town.

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SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

VITOSKY: My father's name was Martin Tancibok.

SIGRIST: And what did he do for a living?

VITOSKY: Well, as, as far as I remember he went to America very young, when I was young.
So I don't really know what he did.

SIGRIST: Do you know what he did in America?

VITOSKY: Yes. He was a, he landed in Guttenberg. And down at the bottom of the
Palisades there was a, they called it a lardy, a factory there. And he worked there.
He used to walk from, and then he'd go down, and go to work there. And then
after that he got a better job in Niagara Falls. So then we moved up to Niagara
Falls, and we stayed there until he died.

SIGRIST: But this is after you came this country?

VITOSKY: Oh, that's right.

SIGRIST: But he was in Guttenberg when you were still in Austria?

VITOSKY: Oh, yes. Yes, yes.

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SIGRIST: Do you know what his job was in this factory?

VITOSKY: Well, when he, when he came here he was boarding with some lady with the same nationality as, as he was. And then when he got enough money - he didn't have quite enough, but the man and lady that he was boarding with, he said, he said to them, "Martin, you need to get your wife over here." He said, "We'll lend you the money. And when your wife comes over here she could go and make, get boarders in and make the money and you pay us back." So that's what he did. So then when he sent the ticket to my mother, and it was just in the fall, and we were just, my brother and my mother and I, we were all digging a hole to put the potatoes in for the winter. And the mailman came, and he's waving this thing here, 'cause we were way in the back. You know, the back yard was way (she laughs) in the back. It wasn't like a back yard here. And so we all ran to see what it was. And it was the ticket from my father. So then when my mother read it, oh, she was excited, oh boy. And then when she found out I couldn't go because I had eczema here all over my forehead. Even to this day I always have some kind of a, a dry skin problem. And, so (she pauses) they left me there. And my mother got my little sister. My, my little sister was only about four years old. And my brother was, well he was three years older than me, so (she pauses) he, he must have been about eight, eight. No, he must have been about nine or ten. So, and the mayor got a carriage, a horse and buggy, and they drove off. And I ran after that carriage screaming and screaming. Oh, my heart was broken because they were going to America and they left me there with my aunt. And my aunt, she was, she was not,

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not a very nice lady. She, when I, when I came back from running so far after them, I came back, and my mother had given me some, some money. And I had it in my, I sat down by the house. And I'm sobbing and sobbing. My aunt came out and she said, "Let me see what you got in your hand". So I said, "Momma gave me some money." She said, "Give it to me. I'll put it away." And I never saw (she laughs) that, money after that. So, well, then after, that was during the, see, my mother went, they got here just Thanksgiving. Of course, they were on the boat for two days on Thanksgiving because the boat couldn't land.

SIGRIST: How old were you when your mother left you with your aunt?

VITOSKY: Well, I was, I came over about ten months later. Yes, so...

SIGRIST: It was just the turn of the next year,...

VITOSKY: Yes. Yes. Yes.

SIGRIST: ...so they must have come in 1904.

VITOSKY: Yes. Yeah. And, so, then, what were we talking about?

SIGRIST: Let me ask you some questions about the house that you lived in Austria.

VITOSKY: Yeah.

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SIGRIST: Can you describe the house for me, and what it looked like?

VITOSKY: Well, (she laughs) one room, one room, my mother when she'd go to work, she would leave us there with my brother and my little sister. My little sister was two years old. And she would make stuff to eat for us. And so you have one big room. That would be like the bedroom, you had nothing but beds in it. And then you'd have a kitchen. And in the kitchen, on the kitchen floor they would put sand, sand on the floor. So my little sister was hungry. She climbed up on the chair, and here she saw the food there. Well, my mother had made with potatoes and flour and egg, I guess, I don't know, and rolled them up and put them in the bread crumbs, and that was supposed to be our food. Well, she picked it up and she, the thing was too heavy for her, it dropped on the floor. Everything was full of sand. We couldn't use it because the potato absorbed all the sand. So we had nothing to eat all day long. So then (she coughs)...

SIGRIST: How did your mother cook the food? How was food cooked in this house?

VITOSKY: Well, the coals, you know, a stove, wooden stove. They used to have to, have to go hunt for wood. Yeah. Get wood. And do it that way. Yeah. Winters were very bad with, always cold. All right, come in. It's open.

SIGRIST: We're going to pause the tape just for a moment. (pause in tape) We're now resuming with Marie Vitosky. You were telling us about winters and about how

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bad the winters were.

VITOSKY: Yes, they were.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about surviving during the winters?

VITOSKY: Well, we just stayed in the house. And I remember my, my brother running out with bare feet (she laughs) out in the snow. But he came in very quickly. Yeah. Winters were very bad.

SIGRIST: Did you heat the house with the stove also?

VITOSKY: Well, the stove was, in the kitchen that heated the big room. It would be almost similar to this. (she gestures) This is a big room. And it would be nothing but beds, because, one for my mother, and one for the kids and, so, that's the way it was.

SIGRIST: Did you keep any animals?

VITOSKY: No. We had no animals. (she laughs) We couldn't afford to feed them.

SIGRIST: When you think back about being a little girl in Austria, tell me a pleasant memory. What did you do for fun as a little girl?

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VITOSKY: Well, (she pauses) the town is very Catholic, you know, everybody's Catholic there. And they have a big statue in the middle of the road. And this little girl and I would go out in the field, and we would pick flowers, and we would make a wreath. Well, this is seven year old kid, or eight year old kid. You know, to make a wreath you put on the, well, that was what we used to do. Go out in the field, 'course there was beautiful flowers there. If anybody would see the red poppies, that's the most beautiful thing you ever saw, when you see a field with all these poppies there. And the poppy seeds, we would eat the poppy seeds (she laughs). Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember other things that your mother cooked? You talked about this sort of doughy potato thing...

VITOSKY: Yeah. Yes. Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Is there anything else that you remember?

VITOSKY: Well, she, when she'd come back from working, she would have to go to the, to the mayor, all the people went to the mayor, and they all ate there. And then, of course, when she came back, she had to feed us. So whatever that she could get up, then she would feed us. We never had enough to eat. If we had bread, do you know to this day I never put butter on my bread. I just don't like it, I just, I eat, they look at me and they say, "Don't you put some butter on your bread?" I said, "No." Because I'm so used to eating it without butter, and that's the way I ate it.

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SIGRIST: Did she bake her own bread, your mother?

VITOSKY: No. No.

SIGRIST: Where did the bread come from?

VITOSKY: My mother was not a good cook. She was a very poor cook. But she was smart in, in writing. She would write all the time. Things like that. She was educated. But she lost her mother when she was about twelve years old, so of course she never learned to cook.

SIGRIST: Do you know how your parents met?

VITOSKY: No. That I don't, I don't know.

SIGRIST: Did you have grandparents in this town? You said your mother's mother was dead, but...

VITOSKY: Yes.

SIGRIST: ...were there grandparents near by?

VITOSKY: No. I had no grandparents. I never saw grandparents. No. Oh, my aunt. In fact, there were two. Well, my brother, no, my uncle and, my uncle, that was my

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mother's brother, and then my, my aunt that I stayed with. And then I had cousins. They even came to America.

SIGRIST: So there's some family.

VITOSKY: Oh yes. Yeah, yes.

SIGRIST: I mean, there's somebody around. Can you talk to me about church life? What was your religious life like? First of all let me ask you what religion were you?

VITOSKY: Yeah. Catholic.

SIGRIST: You were Catholics.

VITOSKY: Yes. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you talk about how you practiced your religion at that time, if you practiced your religion?

VITOSKY: Yeah. Yeah. Well, that I don't remember too much. But I know we went to church.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the church for me maybe a little bit?

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VITOSKY: No. No. I can't. I don't remember.

SIGRIST: This wasn't an important part...

VITOSKY: No. No.

SIGRIST: ...in your life growing up?

VITOSKY: No. When your little like that you don't, you don't think of things like that.

SIGRIST: Let me ask you, what was your brother's name?

VITOSKY: My what?

SIGRIST: Brother's name?

VITOSKY: My...

SIGRIST: Your brother's name?

VITOSKY: My brother's name?

SIGRIST: Yes.

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VITOSKY: (she coughs) Frank.

SIGRIST: And you said you had a sister, too?

VITOSKY: Yes. Yeah.

SIGRIST: What was her name?

VITOSKY: Her name was Wilma.

SIGRIST: Did you all get along when you were little kids?

VITOSKY: Yeah, we got along. Yes. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you remember a story, perhaps, or an incident happening, where maybe you all didn't get along so well?

VITOSKY: No, but I'll tell you a story. They were digging a well right near like where we lived, because we had a great, you know, we had to go and get our drinking water. But the well was water for cooking and for washing and things like that. So they were digging the well, and this little girl and I (she coughs), we wanted to see what they were doing. And the man says, "Get out there, you! Get out of there, you! I'm gonna hit you!" And we ran, we got scared. Well the next day her mother and her family, they were way out in the back, and they were thrashing wheat. And we

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saw this man coming, and we thought, oh, he's gonna hit us now. So they had, there was a little, we were out there picking flowers, and there was a little, little brook. And this brook had cattails in it. And they had cut them down. And when we saw this man coming, we start to run. And I ran, and I just got into the, into the cattails. The cattails went right up my leg here (she indicates), and came out up here. And, so I couldn't run. The blood, blood would start to run. So the man when he got to me, well he picked me up, and brought me to the people that were thrashing the wheat. (she coughs) So they got out as much as they could. Then when my mother came home at night, she had to put me on her back. I guess I was about seven years old. She had to put me on her back and go to the next town to the doctor to get the rest of it out. I have a mark that shows you here (she indicates), and where it came out here. That was a bad thing. And then, of course, I couldn't walk for a while. I used to have to creep around. So...

SIGRIST: Do you remember how they treated that? How did the doctor treat that wound? Do you remember?

VITOSKY: No. That I, that I don't remember what he did. But I know that my mother carried me to that next town. And that next town is Gayare. The next town is called Gayar.

SIGRIST: Gayar.

VITOSKY: Gayar. Yeah.

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SIGRIST: Do you remember, perhaps this brings up an interesting question, do you remember any kind of medicines or folk remedies that your mother might have used for maybe a headache or a wound, or, you know, if the children had fever, perhaps? Anything like that?

VITOSKY: No. No.

SIGRIST: Because obviously you're very poor.

VITOSKY: Yeah, very, we were very, very poor. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Everything had to be done sort of at home, I would imagine.

VITOSKY: Yes. Yeah, yes, yeah. But I guess we were not sick. We probably were, were very (she pauses), whatever we had to eat (she laughs) was probably good for us.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

VITOSKY: But I don't remember being sick or anything like that.

SIGRIST: Do you remember perhaps the type of clothing that you wore as a child in Austria?

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VITOSKY: Well, I tell you, when, well, we had dresses just like, I don't, I don't remember what kind of dresses - it was material, you know, and, and, but we never wore panties, that's one thing I can tell you. (she laughs) Nobody wore panties there. And there was a lot of linen because the women used to weave...(her microphone falls)

SIGRIST: We're going to pause just for a second. (pause in tape) We're now resuming. Mrs. Vitosky, you were just telling us about linen.

VITOSKY: Yeah. Yeah, the linen. It was very coarse. Very coarse linen. But then afterward when it would get washed it'd start getting softer and softer. I know there was a lot of that.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me how your mother would wash the clothing?

VITOSKY: Well, they, they would get the water from the well, because the well, well was near, so they would put the, you know, bring the water up in the pail, and put it in the big container, and then soak the clothes in that and wash them that way. Because we sure got dirty because we'd play out in the yard all the time. And we were not allowed to go any place. We had to just stay in the, in the, in the yard all time.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit, after your mother left, which is as you say roughly ten months before you finally came...

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VITOSKY: Yes. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me what those ten months were like living with your aunt. You said she was not a pleasant woman.

VITOSKY: No.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about what you went through at that time.

VITOSKY: Yes. Well, my aunt was very greedy. And she used to take little babies in. The mothers would be out in the field. My aunt would strap the baby on my back, and I would have to go out there in the field. It wasn't close, it wasn't close to the house. It was way out. And I had to take the baby to the mother so the mother could nurse the baby. And then I'd have to bring the baby back. Then I would have to go and get the water. Now this was, I was going on nine years old, and I would have to go to the, well, to (she pauses), well, it would be like a square. And there would be there like a fountain, not a fountain, but a thing where you could get nice fresh water. And I would have these two jug, jugs, these earthen, like the, like the flower pot, like that. I'd have two of those. And when I would go there, there would be gypsies stationed there. They would be all around there. And the kids would used to hit me. So then when the gypsies came to the, where we were, then I would hit them (she laughs), so, you know, go after them. So that I remember. That was not a very pleasant thing (she laughs), but anyway that's what we did.

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SIGRIST: Did your aunt have, was there an uncle with this aunt? Was she married to someone?

VITOSKY: No, he was here in America.

SIGRIST: I see. So were there cousins, too?

VITOSKY: Yes, there was cousins.

SIGRIST: Did she treat her children like she treated you?

VITOSKY: They were much older than me. They were, they were like, almost like young men and young lady. Yes. Now my cousin, the young lady that I'm saying, she was here. She died a few years ago. And her son is an, he's in Florida. He's an artist, and he does regular portraits of people. And, 'course he's older than I am, and I don't know whether he does it now, but my sister writes to him quite often. And she just told me he was sick. He's got cancer.

SIGRIST: What was your aunt's name?

VITOSKY: (she pauses) Angela.

SIGRIST: And did she live in a house that was similar to the one that you lived in?

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VITOSKY: Yes. Yeah, yes. Same thing. Everybody had the same, same thing. Yeah.

SIGRIST: So she basically thought that you were household help for her, sort of?

VITOSKY: Yes. Yeah, that's right. And when, when somebody would come, from Europe, come here to Guttenberg - that's the next town - my mother would say to them, "Why didn't you bring my daughter?" "Oh, we didn't know that your daughter, we didn't know nothing about her." My aunt didn't want to let me go because when they send ten dollars from here, that was like a hundred dollars over there. And she just wouldn't let me go. So one she said to my father, "Martin," she said, "I'm going write a letter to the mayor of the town, and he'll get her over here." So she did, and she wrote this letter. And he went over to my aunt. He says, "Now get her ready. She's going to go to America." Well, we had to order a pair of shoes for me, because we didn't wear shoes. We wore, they called them "Pantoffel." You know, just like slippers. And, so, they had to order this pair of shoes for me. So then he brought over two dresses of his daughter. Nice dresses. Of course, they were wealthy. So he brought these two dresses so that I would have something to wear to come to America. So that, I, that's what she did. So then he took me over, as I said, with the buggy, and we went to Germany. And he bought me a doll. And to this day I love dolls. And there's a doll over there (she indicates) that I just got for my birthday from my little girl friend. She's six years old. Because she comes over here every day. And, but her grandmother's in the hospital now, so she's home with her mother.

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- SIGRIST: Do you remember saying good-bye to your aunt? Do you remember any of that exchange?
- VITOSKY: No. I don't, I don't remember saying anything.
- SIGRIST: Do you remember, when you were living with your aunt, were you receiving letters from your mother? Now obviously your aunt's keeping the money, I guess.
- VITOSKY: Yes. Yeah, yeah.
- SIGRIST: But was she at least letting you receive letters or anything like that?
- VITOSKY: No. No. Nothing.
- SIGRIST: So did you feel really abandoned?
- VITOSKY: Yes, I did. But, you know, I never held it, never, like held it against my mother, because I know what it is to be able to come to America. And when she had the chance she took her two children, and she went. So she left me. She knew that I would be coming over soon. But she thought that somebody was going to bring me. But my aunt being so greedy, she didn't want to let me go.
- SIGRIST: Did your aunt allow your eczema to be treated? Do you remember anything about

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that, how that was...

VITOSKY: No. No. I, I think they put salve on it, some kind of a salve on it. Yes. And then it all disappeared. It disappeared very quickly because, because, well, when my mother left it was in the winter because they landed here Thanksgiving. So, so all winter, I guess that it just, they treated it with this salve, and then it all disappeared. And then of course then the summer came, because it was in August that I arrived here. So I started right like from the first of August to get ready to come here.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what else you took with you? You've got your dresses, do you remember taking anything else?

VITOSKY: Yes. Nothing, nothing. I just had a little bag of things that, that I carried with me. And then I had a little bag with all my papers. That was hanging around my neck. That I had to be very careful that I wouldn't lose it. Yes. But I had the doll, and I had this little bag. I don't know, it was a cloth bag with a few things in there.

SIGRIST: As a little nine year old girl, was it a big honor to have the mayor take this kind of interest in you and escort you to Germany?

VITOSKY: Well, yeah. Well, I guess so, but to me (she laughs) I was just glad I was going. That's all I remember.

END OF SIDE A

BEGINNING OF SIDE B

SIGRIST: What did America mean to you as a little kid? What did you know about America when you were a little girl in Austria?

VITOSKY: Not much. The only thing is I remember when the men would come back, and they would come back steerage, because it would be cheaper. They didn't want to spent the money for second class. And I used to hear them say, "Oh, you have to be so careful. They steal everything on you. You have to be careful." So, of course, when I got the brand new shoes, I never had new shoes before, I said, "Oh, they're going to steal my shoes." Do you know that I went to sleep with my shoes on? I was so afraid that they were going to steal my shoes. But when, when we got, when the man brought me over to Germany, he put me on the train. And there was a young couple. You know the trains, they have little cabins, like, you know? Well, this young couple, I think they were, I think they were American. And so this mayor of the town asked them (she coughs), would they look out for me. And we rode on the train for two days to go to Hamburg. And we landed in Hamburg, and, so I stayed there two days before the boat. Of course, the big boat didn't dock at the dock like they do now. So for two days we had to wait, and then there was a small boat. But, when I was there for two days in this hotel, they told me, "Don't go any further than the, you know. Just stay here 'cause you'll get lost." And so they kind of looked after me.

SIGRIST: Had you ever been on a train before?

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VITOSKY: No. No.

SIGRIST: Can you remember any of how that impressed you as a little girl?

VITOSKY: Well, I tell you (she laughs), I was so afraid that I would wet my pants. That was thing that I remember so well. I said, Oh, I'm there, and I'm on the train. If I wet my pants - that was working on me, that made - that was so important that I wouldn't do that. And (she laughs), of course, I didn't. But that was, because, you know, little kids used to wet their pants a lot, and we didn't have no panties to wet. But that's what I mean. I was so afraid.

SIGRIST: This is a lot for a little nine year old girl.

VITOSKY: Yes.

SIGRIST: I mean, that's a lot of responsibility to put on you.

VITOSKY: Yes. Well, I must tell you, then when we got on this little boat, we stayed at this, it was just like a house. And...

SIGRIST: You're still being escorted by this couple?

VITOSKY: Yes. Yes.

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SIGRIST: You're their ward at this point.

VITOSKY: Yes. And we got on this little boat. And I remember they bought what they call hot dogs here. Frankfurter, you know. They bought that for me on the, on that boat. Well, then we went over in the middle of the ocean on this small boat. And they put this great big gang plank down. And I'm walking up this great big gang plank, and the man says, "Let me see your papers". So I showed him my papers. "All right. Go on." So I went up. I was second class, and the couple was up, up on the top. There were no other children. There was one little child about four years old. There were no other children for me to play with. But when I saw the toilet, I was scared to go on the toilet, because I thought a fish was going to come up and bite me. And my shoes, of course, I kept them on, because I was afraid they were going to steal them. My friend said in the thing when she filled it out, she says I put them under my pillow. (she laughs) I didn't. I kept them on.

SIGRIST: So actually being on this boat, this is not a pleasant experience. There's a lot of anxiety involved in this.

VITOSKY: Yes. Yes, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the boat, do you remember?

VITOSKY: Well, it was the Hamburg-American line. I don't remember the name of the boat.

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SIGRIST: Can you describe for me what it looked like?

VITOSKY: Oh, it was huge. Because one day we had to walk all around the boat. You know, everybody had to walk around the boat. This was on the second class. And I think steerage was down below, and the second here, and the first class was up on the top. And they use to throw candy down to me, to me and the little girl. And pennies and things like that. They used to throw money down. Yeah. Well then after while on the boat, I got sort of, I was really, you know, I got used to it. And the food, I don't remember the food, I don't remember eating. That I can't seem to remember.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, can you describe the accommodations, where you slept, what it looked like?

VITOSKY: Yes. It was, it was, it was a big room. And it had like, like a double decker. Like double deckers?

SIGRIST: Bunk beds?

VITOSKY: Yeah. Yeah. And I know I slept on the bottom. I slept on the bottom. So I don't know who slept up on the top. I don't know. It might have been a lady, because a little girl probably couldn't climb up to the top, so they put me down on the bottom.

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SIGRIST: And the couple is not with you at this time?

VITOSKY: No, no. They were up on the top. No, no. But they would see me every day. They would go out because it was August. Beautiful weather. We had wonderful weather travelling.

SIGRIST: Did they offer any kind of entertainments on the boat that you recall?

VITOSKY: No. Nothing.

SIGRIST: Did you get sea sick?

VITOSKY: No. No. I didn't. But when my mother came over she was deathly sick. Oh, she just was so sick. My, my mother was telling me how sick she was. I wasn't sick at all.

SIGRIST: Do you know how long the trip took?

VITOSKY: I think it was about ten days, just on the boat coming over.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit then about when the boat arrived in New York Harbor, and what happened at that point.

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VITOSKY: Yeah. Well, we arrived in New York City and I was there for two days. And, as I remember, the dining room...

SIGRIST: This is at Ellis Island?

VITOSKY: This is at Ellis Island. Yes. Well, I tell you, you know, I don't remember seeing the Statue of Liberty. Nobody pointed it out to me. So that was one thing that I said I did not see. But, of course, I saw it so many times now. But I did not see that. Probably it was pointed out to me, but it didn't mean anything to me.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how you got to Ellis Island?

VITOSKY: (she pauses) I don't, I don't remember how, how we got off the boat, that they took us over there. I don't know whether the boat, I don't think the big boat, big boat docked there. I don't think so. And we were on the, on the, on that boat, on that, Ellis Island. But I remember the food as I said. I remember they had, it must have been oatmeal. And, and four prunes in a dish, because they were black, and the dish, I just remember seeing them so plain. But the dining room was just like, like if your were out in a picnic. The tables were picnic tables, and the, and the benches. And that's what you sat on, on these picnic tables. It was inside, but it was very, everything was very rough. Very rough. Yes. And then the sleeping quarters, they were not too, nothing was too comfortable. And (she pauses) then they had to send a telegram to my father. My mother couldn't over, because she wasn't, she was still what they called greenhorn. (she laughs) She couldn't come

to New York City, she wouldn't know where to go. But my father knew. So he came over the day that, the next day, he got the telegram and the next day he came over. So I was there for two days. And they put me in, as I remember it, it looked to me like a little cage, like an elevator with the, with the openings, you know. Like an old fashioned elevator. It was like a little, it was like an elevator. Small. I was in there, and then my father was out there, and then the men were at their, at their desk. And they would ask me questions, and then they would ask my father questions. And things would have to correspond. Because I didn't remember my father. I didn't remember him. So then they let me go. And so the first thing when we got into New York City, he bought me bananas. And I never had bananas. I tasted them, I thought, Oooh, I, I didn't like bananas. Ach! And then he showed me the, the machine where you put the penny in for the chewing gum. We never had chewing gum. We didn't know what chewing gum was. But he had two jelly doughnuts in the bag. And he said, "Do you want it?" I said, "No." I was still a little bit leery, you know. And so then, of course, if you remember the ferry boat used to, down in Weehawken. So we get, got on the ferry boat to come over here, and then the trolley. And then we got to twenty, twenty, twenty-ninth. I think it was twenty-ninth, Twenty-Eighth Street in Guttenberg. And then there was my mother there. Oh, everybody greeted me. The first went the shoes. The shoes went off and I was so happy. I ran outside, and you know sidewalks, we never had sidewalks in Europe. And the sidewalks were hot. And I'm jumping around. And I was so happy, because I had my sister and my brother, you know. And I remember jumping around, I was so happy. And so then in September they had to put me in school. Well, in Guttenberg in was just a small school. But on

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the, on Park Avenue there's a fire house. And up over the fire house they had kindergarten and first, first class, first grade. And so they put me in there, not being able to speak. But I must have learned very quickly, because the teacher would always ask me, "Tell us more. Tell us more of the stories in Europe." 'Cause at that time everything was fresh. I could tell them, but not now. I can't remember all things that I told them. But I must have learned very quickly. And I remember when I'm jumping around, I said - see, because, in my language your fingers and your toes is the same thing. So I said, "Oh, my fingers." They said, "No, that's your toes." Well, I remember that. But I remember that anybody corrected me, then I would remember that, that I don't say it the wrong way. And then, of course, after we moved to Niagara Falls, the people up there speak a little bit better than they do down here, you know. They have, use a lot of slang here. So...

SIGRIST: Let's back track just a little bit. I want to ask you a question about seeing your father at Ellis Island. Of course, this is a man you don't know...

VITOSKY: No. That's why I say, that's why they separated me.

SIGRIST: What was your reaction? When you saw him and they said, "This is your father." What were you thinking?

VITOSKY: I didn't know him. That's why I was still leery when I got on the ferry boat. I was still leery when, when he bought me the bananas and, and I didn't want to take the

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jelly doughnuts, because I was still, still a little, because I didn't remember him. But being that, what I said - and he didn't hear what I said, you know. And then they would ask my father, and then they would ask me. You know, it would go back and forth. And, of course, that way then they knew that that was my father.

SIGRIST: How did he behave towards you at that first meeting.

VITOSKY: Very nice. Very, my father was, he was very gentle. He was, to the day that he died he was very gentle. He was never nasty. He was, he was the nicest father. My mother was, she was the one. She was the domineering one. Yes. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you describe perhaps in a little more detail what it was like to see your mother for the first time, you know, in almost a year.

VITOSKY: Oh, well, my mother and my brother, and them I knew, and you know. And then, of course, I was, you know, hugging each other and all of that, you know. So that part - but when we got on the ferry boat I said to my father, I said, "Can I have the jelly doughnut?" Oh, and there was a baker in Guttenberg that made those. And, oh, it tasted so good. So then I said to my father, "Can I take my shoes off now?" He said, "No. This is America. You can't take your shoes off here. You have to wait." So, of course, (she laughs) my shoes were still on my feet. And, so...

SIGRIST: Can you describe the apartment that they were living in Guttenberg?

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VITOSKY: Yes. It was, it was like a railroad room. And we had no toilets. The toilets were outside. You know, a row of wooden toilets. Each one, each apartment had their own, own toilet, door to go into. This was all outdoors. And that's where we had to go in the winter time. But, of course, in the winter time they would have a potty inside. (she laughs) You couldn't go out in the winter. But that's the way it was.

SIGRIST: Was there running water in the apartment?

VITOSKY: Yeah. There, we had running water. And we had, we had a tub that would separate. And I remember that's where my mother washed us, in the tub, like, to give us a bath. We didn't have no regular bath tub, but that was in the, in the wash tub.

SIGRIST: How was the apartment lit?

VITOSKY: Gas light.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the gas light?

VITOSKY: The gas, it would be a hanging chandelier, you know. And then they would have these things on it. And then you light the gas on there. And then you would put this little thing on it. And that was, a little glass thing you put on it to make the, to light. Or, or a (she pauses), what do you call it, a lamp, a lamp, you would use a lamp sometimes.

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SIGRIST: Is this a dangerous way of lighting an apartment?

VITOSKY: Oh, of course, that, you had a lot of fires with that.

SIGRIST: Do you remember anything like that? Anything bad happening because of the gas?

VITOSKY: No. No, nothing. No, there was no, nothing bad at all.

SIGRIST: When you saw your brother and sister, did they look different to you somehow?

VITOSKY: No. No, they didn't. They didn't. They looked the same. Yeah. My sister, she was four years old when she left. And she, I guess she grew a little bit, but to me they looked the same.

SIGRIST: What was the most wonderful thing about America, say, in that first year? What was the thing that you loved the most about being here?

VITOSKY: The food. We had plenty to eat. We had enough to eat, because in Europe we didn't have enough to eat. We had, I remember Europe we had bread. Bread. A lot of bread.

SIGRIST: Did your mother get a job, too?

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VITOSKY: No. No. Well, she had the boarders. We had, imagine, we four rooms. And they were railroad rooms. And then she would get two boarders in. And that meant she would have to cook and feed them, and wash their clothes, and there'd be, and that would pay that my mother didn't have to go to work. Because where could my mother go to work. She couldn't speak English. And what could she do in America but go out and scrub floors, maybe. But she didn't do that. She had to boarders. And that's what they, that's what, and then, of course, my father worked. As I said he went out to the lard factory at that time. Yes.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about living in the house with boarders? Do you remember any of the boarders specifically, or how...

VITOSKY: Well, one was, one was my uncle, and the other was just another man. Yes.

SIGRIST: Was that inconvenient to have these people...

VITOSKY: Of course, because, we would, my mother and father, they'd have the first room. And then that would be like the front room. And then the, it'd be four rooms. And, so there'd be beds in every room. Yeah. It was very, well, that's the way everybody lived at that time.

SIGRIST: Did your father speak English?

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VITOSKY: Well, I don't know whether he spoke English enough to, but he must have, because (she coughs), to be able to, to know how to get over to New York City. And probably he learned enough to, to get around.

SIGRIST: Do you have a story that sticks out in your mind about you learning English?

VITOSKY: Yeah, well, like, what I said, I, I said, when people would, when I would say my, my finger hurts, or something like that, they'd say, "That's not your finger. That's your toe." Well, then I would remember that.

SIGRIST: You said you started school in September?

VITOSKY: Yes.

SIGRIST: What grade did they put you in?

VITOSKY: Well, I don't know. (she laughs) It must have been either kindergarten or the first grade, because that's all there was there.

SIGRIST: Did your brother and sister speak English when you got here?

VITOSKY: I don't know. But they didn't go to the same school as I went. They went to the regular school.

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SIGRIST: What was the school that you went to?

VITOSKY: Well, I told you, I went over to where fire house is on Park Avenue.

SIGRIST: Was that specifically for incoming immigrants, this type of school?

VITOSKY: No, no, no, no. Because there was no room in the big, in the big school. And then, of course, later on they built this new, new part of the school after. Yes. But I think I must have, I must have picked up English very quickly because they'd always kept asking me the stories, to tell them the stories.

SIGRIST: Were there a lot of immigrants in the neighborhood that you were living in?

VITOSKY: Oh, yes. Yeah. They were all, they were all from Europe, from around where we lived.

SIGRIST: Did your mother like America?

VITOSKY: Oh, yes. My mother died, now, she died about thirty-five years ago. She was ninety when she died. Oh, yeah, she enjoyed it. When we moved to Niagara Falls my father died there.

SIGRIST: What year did you move?

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VITOSKY: What happened to him, where he was working, (she pauses) there was a load of cinders, and this colored man, and they were together standing there, and the cinders, the thing let go and buried the both of them. But the colored man got out quicker. And he took a shovel to start digging my father out. And when he started digging he hit him in the back, and his liver, it affected his liver. So he, he had to be tapped all the time, water all the time. And then, of course, he died. And then my, my mother didn't want to stay up there because there were no Czechoslovak people up there. She wanted to go back where she knew everybody. And that way she could go ahead and get work and do something like that. So, so I as a, I was fourteen years old then, and there was an ad in the paper saying they wanted a girl to take care of two children. So we answered the ad. My mother took me over to the house. And the woman said, "No, I don't think she'll do yet. She's not strong enough." Because I was a skinny little, you know - and, so, well anyway, I guess she couldn't get anybody else. So she came over to our house, and she to me, to my mother, she says, "I'll take her. And, she'll do." So I was there for seven with them. The little boy was seven months old, the little girl was about four years old. But I was just like a kid. I played with them just like a kid. But there is where I learned to cook, and learned to clean, and she taught me everything. And as I say, my mother was not a very good housekeeper and not a good cook, either. And, so...

SIGRIST: Was that your first job when you were in Niagara, when you were...

VITOSKY: Yes. That's when I...

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SIGRIST: ...being a nursemaid.

VITOSKY: That was my first job. And so then when my mother and my brother and my sister, they wanted to go back to Guttenberg. So I said, "No, I have it good here". And I used to go with them. We used to go to, go to, like a whole month for a vacation to a, to a place. A beautiful beach in Canada. (she coughs) And I enjoyed that. So I didn't want to go. So I stayed there. And then when I was about, I think I was about twenty, then I said, "Well, I think I'm going to go, I'll go down to my mother." I used to go down to visit them quite often.

SIGRIST: Did your parents ever want to go back to Europe?

VITOSKY: No, (she laughs) no, no, no, no. No. My mother here, she was like a, oh, she enjoyed it. She just, and she learned to speak English very quickly, and she, used to write letters to my sister. I have another sister that was born here. And she's ninety, no, she's eighty-seven. She down in Spotswood, New Jersey. And, and then I had the other sister, that, the one that was, came from Europe. And she use to write letters to them all the time. And she used to write as it sounded. You could read it, and you knew what it said. And that's what she used to do, liked to do. She was more of a, a typist or something like that. If she would have been, like, taught here, she could have been a, a secretary or something like.

SIGRIST: Did she ever become a citizen?

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VITOSKY: Yes. Yes, she became a citizen. And do you know that my father took out the papers. And he died before he got the second papers, because you had to wait about five years before you got your second papers. So (she pauses) he didn't, he didn't get his papers. So, but, but then when my mother got her papers - but I thought I was a citizen. And do you know after I came down here to live, I, well, of course I got married. And I was working on the election board, and I wasn't even a citizen. We found when I wanted to go to Germany. We went down to, down Jersey City, and they said, "Oh, no, you're not even a citizen." I says, "Oh, my God, I've been working on the election board all these years." (she laughs)

SIGRIST: That must have been quite a surprise.

VITOSKY: Surprise? Yeah. So I had to wait till I got my citizen papers. Then down in Jersey City when all the people were there we got them, got our citizen papers.

SIGRIST: I have one final question for, because our hour is just about up. Are you happy that you came to this country, or are you...

VITOSKY: I sure am. (she laughs) Because right now I have it so good that I thank my, thank God, that, that I don't have to live off of my children like my mother had to. My mother had to, one would give her some money, the other would give her some money. She would live with one person, she would live the other daughter. And we never had enough rooms, because rooms were, even then they were, they

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were scarce. And so, finally she got a room by herself, and then she was happy, just like I got a room here. I don't have to depend on my son. I have a daughter that's, that lives in San Antonio, Texas. And I have a grand daughter, she lives in Houston. She does a lot of work, she did a lot of work for Bush. She is a, that fancy writing, what do you call it?

SIGRIST: Calligraphy.

VITOSKY: Calligraphy, yes. She does that kind of work. She did a lot of work for him. And even some of the work went over to Europe with him. The last time we went over there, all that, that work. And he even sent her a letter, thanking her for the beautiful writing that she does. He said, "I wish I could write like that." (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Well, we need to complete the interview here. We're just about out of tape, so, I want to thank you very much for allowing us to come out and giving us your time to tell us your story. I think we could probably be here for a lot longer maybe. You've had a very full life. But this has been a wonderful interview. You have a wonderful memory and I thank you very much.

VITOSKY: Yes. That's one thing that, that, my hearing is very good. My eyes, I have macular degeneration. I have side vision, but I can seem to read. And that started when I was about sixty. Started in one eye, but at least I could read and write. And then after while the other one went. So I can get around. I can see enough to

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do work, but...

SIGRIST: But your memory's still good. (he laughs)

VITOSKY: Yes. My memory's still good. Yes.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Marie Vitosky in West New York, New Jersey on February 19, 1993. Thank you.