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EMMA GREINER AND WILLIAM GREINER

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SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Wednesday, March 6, 1991 and we're here at Ellis Island with Emma Greiner and her brother William Greiner. Emma and William came to America, uh, well, this is sort of complicated. Emma came on

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the German quota from Italy actually, Fiume, which was Italy when she came in 1925, and she was eleven years old. William was on the French quota, also from Fiume, and he was twelve. Good afternoon. Welcome.

EMMA: Thank you.

SIGRIST: Let's start off, Emma, let me ask you your birthday, please.

EMMA: Oh, my birthdate was December 30, 1913.

SIGRIST: And where were you born?

EMMA: I was born in Hamburg, Germany, because my father was a coffee merchant and even though his home city was Fiume, he traveled and mother traveled with him. And so I was born in Hamburg.

SIGRIST: I see.

WILLIAM: Well, he meant to settle, first in Le Havre, then in Hamburg, to settle there because because the ships carrying coffee came from Brazil, the transatlantic ships, so that would have been the logical place. But very soon he didn't like Le Havre so he moved to Hamburg.

SIGRIST: I see. And William, where were you born?

WILLIAM: I was born in Le Havre, in, um, let's see, that's 1912, July eighteenth.

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SIGRIST: I see. Well, let's talk a little bit about your father. You said he was a coffee merchant. That sounds like an interesting profession. He came from Fiume.

EMMA: Yes.

WILLIAM: Three generations. By the way, even though we were Italian in culture, like people immigrate to the United States and become American, so we were Italian in culture but our ancestors were all Slavic. Uh, we had one great grandfather come from Poland. Brought the business of the family, which was, uh, what?

EMMA: Tapestry.

WILLIAM: Yeah, that was, we were the only ones who had that business in the town. And they, it was brought from Poland three generations before. The others were all from Ubliana, from Dalmatia. My mother was from Dalmatia. So we, we are almost entirely Slavic but with an Italian culture.

SIGRIST: I see. Well, let's talk about your mother then. What was your mother's name?

EMMA: Mother's name was Marquetta. And her last name was Matulovich, which...

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SIGRIST: Could you spell that please?

EMMA: Matulovich. M-A-T-U-L-O-V-I-C-H. And that, of course, is a Yugoslavian name. She was from Sebanieko, which was, uh, her papers say Austria, you know because of this complication. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Yes.

EMMA: That there were so many changes at the time. But that was her, she was from Sebanieko and unfortunately, uh, she traveled with father and unfortunately she died in 1916 in Hamburg. So, um...

SIGRIST: What did she die of?

EMMA: She died of tuberculosis.

WILLIAM: Which one out of every four people in those days had tuberculosis. It was very common, worse than AIDS today.

SIGRIST: I see. Do you know how your parents met?

WILLIAM: Yes. He used to tell. We had a breakwater because the town doesn't have a natural harbor. So they made an artificial one by having a long breakwater in front of the town...

SIGRIST: In Fiume?

EMMA and WILLIAM: Yes.

WILLIAM: So that ships could come in behind to the wharves, behind this breakwater, and they had rowing clubs there. Uh, what do you call these, like colleges have, uh...?

EMMA: Skiffs, I think you call them. Don't they?

SIGRIST: Sculling?

EMMA: Sculling, sculling.

WILLIAM: Yes, sculling. They were very devoted to that and so was my father. And he said that mother, who was apparently an orphan, uh, had a guard..., "duena" in Spanish, a guardian who walked with her back and forth. And I guess, ehr, like we did, we loved to go there to see the sights, the beautiful sea and so on, and look at the club practicing, getting on the boat. So that's how he met her, while walking there on this dock.

SIGRIST: I see. Emma, could you describe your mother? What did she look like?

EMMA: I don't know because I was only two years old.

WILLIAM: But very conservative, very conservative.

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EMMA: Uh, huh. We have a lovely picture of her. Yes. She was tall and very stately looking and very, very elegant. But that's as far... I've never known her personally. Just from the picture.

WILLIAM: Propriety was the main thing.

SIGRIST: Yes, yes. What did your father look like?

EMMA: Uh, (she laughs), uh, my father, Father, I think he looked, was a very handsome man.

SIGRIST: Did he have a moustache?

EMMA: Very..., uh, he did. When he was a young man he was in the Austrian Army. He was second lieutenant in the Austrian Army in the Calvary Division. And we have beautiful pictures of him with the horses and with the little cars that they used at that time.

SIGRIST: I see.

WILLIAM: You see, in the Austrian Army there was a situation that you wouldn't find here in the United States. If you had a college education, you were immediately some kind of big military chief because the privates were practically all illiterate.

EMMA: Uh, huh.

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WILLIAM: And so they were just, you know, they were the plebeians so on, so because he had this college education, he had a very...

EMMA: Prestigious.

WILLIAM: Favored job of being in charge of military stores. And he had a sulky with a horse, all kinds of privileges of officers, with an assistant who would do the driving. Every day he took these drives around the countryside and so on. And because Austria was very hard pressed in the war, in the First World War, because the Allies controlled imports and the seas, so, uh, being in charge of food supplies meant that we didn't suffer quite so much as other people because he would send occasionally a ham or something like that, send home.

EMMA: And he would also visit us occasionally during the war. He would have some time off and he would, yes. We were...

WILLIAM: By the way, this was, he was stationed only about what would be sixty miles away.

SIGRIST: So it was very close.

EMMA: Very close.

SIGRIST: You say that he lived a rather privileged existence because of his position.

EMMA: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: How did that reflect on your lives as children? What, what did you do that, that other children didn't at that time? What...?

WILLIAM: I would say nothing special. He was so far away from us and the relations were, you know, we were brought up by his two sisters. And our lives were mostly dependent, uh, concerned with living with our aunts. They were our daily...and it was a very, my childhood, a very happy one.

SIGRIST: Yes.

EMMA: But I would say that, uh, we were considered a middle class family. There seems that at that time there were distinctions. There were some children that they would call "street children" that were not of the middle class and that were, played on the street and did many things that we were not allowed to, to do.

SIGRIST: I see.

EMMA: We, when we went out, we were always accompanied by our aunts, you know, or a sitter that father had engaged to take us for walks. So that was, I would think, that was an important part of our childhood.

SIGRIST: Do you remember having a lot of toys as a little girl?

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EMMA: Oh, yes, yes. I had...

WILLIAM: Plenty of toys.

EMMA: Lots of toys.

WILLIAM: At Christmas...Christmas time.

EMMA: Yes. A doll. I remember a beautiful, beautiful doll and...

SIGRIST: What did it look like?

EMMA: Um, it had a beautiful, beautiful face. And it was, unfortunately, it was breakable. And...

SIGRIST: Was it china? Was it a china doll?

EMMA: Yes. A china doll. And we had a little backyard where we would play. Unfortunately I put the doll on a horse, you know, and the doll fell off the horse and broke in smithereens. And that was one of the terrible tragedies of my childhood. (she laughs)

WILLIAM: You have to understand that life was very different from here. For instance, children never played in the streets. You never saw, the streets were absolutely deserted. They had to play at home or in school. And then, so they would, you didn't have the social problems that you have with street crime and so on. Very, very safe. And we

were especially, if we went out we were always accompanied, uh, by one of the aunts. And we had this park. Was once a prince's private park but now it was public and it was magnificent in every... better than any of the parks in New York, for instance. And every day our aunt took us there to play. Not in the streets or down by the port, which was way, way down. We lived up the hill. In winter, when the park was closed, then we played along the harbor there. Uh, uh, weather is not so cold there. It's, uh, it was, I remember when we ran out into the street to touch snow. For the, it was such a rare sight. So, uh, winter was maybe thirty five or forty, but we were required by my father everyday to have fresh air and sun.

EMMA: Yes. And at seasons we went to different places. For instance, the city is built on a hill and very often we were accompanied to the top of the hill where the cemetery was. And our grandmother and our uncles were buried there. Or the other times we would go to, for instance, there was a beautiful, beautiful, uh, street, like a parkway on the other side of the town. So the aunts would kind of vary. And, also, another interesting thing, Yugoslavia was right on the other side of the river, which was called, Fiume was called from that river. And we would go over to a different country, which was only only a few blocks away. And we would go there for a walk. And they had a magnificent sea, uh, seashore there. And we would go there. So we had a very, very interesting childhood I would say.

WILLIAM: Uh, some friends, husbands send the family and the children out in the country. So, for two summers at least, we were sent the whole summer

in a little primitive village in Yugoslavia. The countryside is very much like Pennsylvania, but very primitive and, um, with little...what they call them...

EMMA: Wayside shrines.

WILLIAM: Little houses in a , don't, single row on a dirt road. No cars and so on. And, uh, lots of flowers and fauna. We stayed, we rented a room with a primitive farmer and watched them do their chores. It could have been a hundred years before, eh.

EMMA: Uh, huh.

WILLIAM: I remember the great pop...red poppies, for instance, in the yard. The plum trees, the cows, uh, one or two cows each farmer had. So that was a very, very happy time for me. The cyclamens in the woods, highly perfumed, the crocuses in the fields. So, uh, I know that, I, my love and understanding started there a great deal.

SIGRIST: Did you enjoy this time, too?

EMMA: Oh, yes. One of the highlights of my childhood was the farmer had a cow. And they would bring the cow up the hill in the morning to graze. And then in the evening the cow would pass by the farmer's house and in order to, for him to make me feel important, I was only three years old, he would give me the whip and the cow would go to drink water, say maybe a few blocks away down the hill. And he would say, "Now

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you take good care of that cow." And I would walk and I would look up at the cow, (she laughs) because I was small and I felt I was bringing that cow, you know, to the water. Whereas that cow knew how to go. She would go and she would drink, you know. And then she would turn around and come back. But, (she laughs) you know, I felt so important to think that at my age I was in charge of a cow, you know! (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Did both aunts go with you in the summer?

WILLIAM: No.

SIGRIST: Or did you go by yourselves?

WILLIAM: Well, let me tell you the two were very different in function. One was a, like a housewife, but...

SIGRIST: Let's just explain to the listener that your mother died when she was twenty-six.

EMMA: Yes.

SIGRIST: Then what happened?

WILLIAM: We were shipped to my father's home town, where the sisters were living.

SIGRIST: This was Fiume.

EMMA and WILLIAM: Yes, yes.

WILLIAM: And they brought us up.

EMMA: Uh, huh.

WILLIAM: Fortunately they, they were available. They were single. They never married. As, uh,...

SIGRIST: Were you in Hamburg? Where were you when your mother died? You say you were shipped...

WILLIAM: Must have been in Hamburg.

EMMA: We were in Hamburg, I believe.

WILLIAM: This was on the QT. My father, middle class people were very much ashamed of somebody having TB in those days. So it was hush hush. And so that the children wouldn't blabber...

EMMA: Uh, huh.

WILLIAM: To somebody else, we weren't told anything. I, I grew up not knowing that there was such a thing as a mother.

EMMA: We knew nothing. As a matter of fact, when I went to the first grade and the teacher asked, "What is your mother's name and your father's name?", I argued with her that I did not have a mother, you know, and she insisted. And I said, "How can you insist. My aunt told me we never had a mother." You know, so my aunt had to come to school and get that straightened out.

WILLIAM: And I understand that my mother was in a sanitarium in those days, TB sanitarium, from the time shortly after she was born (gestures to Emma) to the time she died. And she may have been in Hamburg so, because we would have heard something if she was in Fiume. But when she finally died we were shipped to an orphanage for about two months, as special guests, so that we wouldn't hear any of the commotion, the relatives coming, the talk of the funeral. So we were completely out of the, of her death. And later on, years later, when I asked my father what about my mother, he would say, "Oh, let's not talk about foolish things."

EMMA: Uh, huh, Uh, huh.

SIGRIST: I see. So you were, you went to the orphanage. And then from there you went to Fiume.

EMMA: Yes, until...

WILLIAM: No, no.

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EMMA: No.

WILLIAM: The orphanage was only, no, the orphanage was only two months until...then we went, went back to home.

EMMA: And that was in Fiume. The orphanage was in Fiume.

WILLIAM: Just outside town.

EMMA: Yes.

SIGRIST: But how old were you when your mother died?

WILLIAM: We were always a year and a half apart.

EMMA: Yes. I was three and he was four and a half.

SIGRIST: He was four and a half. I see. So, uh, now the aunts were already in Fiume.

EMMA: Yes.

SIGRIST: Let's talk, they sound, I mean they're obviously a very important part of your childhood.

EMMA: Very much so.

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SIGRIST: What were their names?

EMMA: Very much so. The younger one was Irma and she was a wonderful, wonderful housekeeper.

SIGRIST: Were these your father's sisters?

EMMA: So...Father's sisters. We never knew any relatives on my moth..., our mother's sides.

SIGRIST: No relatives.

EMMA: Never. We never knew. There were some in Fiume at the time, but we were not, for this reason that he explained, we were never allowed to meet them. And so Aunt Irma kept home, kept house. And she took very good care of us. She took us on the walks and all.

SIGRIST: How old was she about this time?

EMMA: Well, she was, uh, I guess in her late, uh, thirties...would you say, maybe?

WILLIAM: Now the older aunt, she was a professional. She worked as a very fine seamstress, dressmaker. And in those days this is the way it worked. Some rich lady in town would hire a dressmaker like that, there were no stores. You hired a dressmaker to come to your home and make dresses for the following year and for parties, uh, fancy things with

sequins and pearls and so on. And that's what my aunt did.

SIGRIST: This was the older aunt.

EMMA: Yes, the older...

SIGRIST: And what was her name?

EMMA: Olga.

SIGRIST: O-L-G-A?

EMMA: Yes. O-L-G-A.

WILLIAM: And she did, by the way, quite a bit of that here in the United States. She got into the dress business. And then she did extra fine dresses for parties and so on, which required special skills.

EMMA: And also, even though she didn't know the English language, because they were older and it was difficult for them to learn, she was hired by Milgram's, which is a very prestigious, uh, couture store, company on 57th Street.

SIGRIST: Milgrams.

EMMA: Milgrams. I believe they are still there.

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WILLIAM: Are they? I doubt it.

EMMA: Uh, no. I'm not sure, but I know it was a very, very prestigious...And she was so gifted that she didn't have to measure anything, like the pleats or anything. She had such wonderful skills that she could just match them and they were perfect. Everything was perfect.

WILLIAM: So she contributed to the family income because my father, despite his education and so on, there were so many ups and downs in his financial situation working for a bank. Uh, there were depressions, uh, that, that came in very handy, that extra income of my older aunt.

SIGRIST: I see. Well, let's get back to Fiume. The aunts lived together?

EMMA: Yes. Uh, huh, uh, huh.

SIGRIST: And can you describe a little bit about how you felt to go, when you went to live with them? Do you remember?

WILLIAM: Oh, we were, I, I was so young that, as far as I'm concerned I was born with them. I didn't know...

EMMA: And I also.

WILLIAM: I don't remember the transition at all.

EMMA: No, no.

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SIGRIST: Now was your father around a lot at that time? Or was he still off in the military?

WILLIAM: No.

EMMA: No.

WILLIAM: He, he was a great deal in principal cities of Europe establishing business, trying to restart. For instance, in 1920 they had a devaluation. All of a sudden if you had one hundred thousand dollars you found yourself with only fifty thousand over night.

EMMA: I still have them, by the way. I have a sack of Austrian bills this big, (she gestures), of tremendous amounts of money which have no value, you know. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Oh.

WILLIAM: You would remember there came 1923 where people to buy a loaf of bread went with a wheelbarrow full of money.

SIGRIST: Yes, yes. I've heard other people...

WILLIAM: Yes. There was in Germany.

SIGRIST: Yes. In Germany, yes.

WILLIAM: Our situation wasn't quite as bad, but was bad enough.

EMMA: And because of this situation Father left after the war in 1919, he left about 1919 or 1920, he left in order to come to the United States. So then again we were separated from him, you know. So before he was in the war and then later on he was, so we didn't see very much of him. But when he was at home he was very, very interested in the children. I still remember him teaching me the "Our Father" when I was a little baby in a youth bed. You know, he stood over me and he always said to me, "You know, God is greater than your father," you know, for us he was almost a god. He was the only one we had.

SIGRIST: Except for the aunts.

EMMA: Yes.

SIGRIST: Because that was your whole family.

EMMA: Right, right. But the aunts were so, more of a subservient position, you know. He told them how to bring up his children, you know. They didn't have very much authority as far as making decisions. He made all of the decisions and they carried them out.

SIGRIST: Were they, would you say they almost acted more as governesses than as...

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EMMA: No, not really governesses because...

WILLIAM: But here is where we see things differently. Because he was very seldom around, but I didn't particularly like it when he was around because to my mind he was, uh, dictatorial, very dogmatic especially, more repressive with a girl. For instance, they didn't bother, as far as I can remember, they didn't bother with prayers with me, so on. But I felt, especially resented his being dictatorial. For instance, he wanted her to play two hours piano. Every day, whether she had a calling for it or not, because that was the thing to do for a middle class family. The girl must learn how to play the piano, things like that. So I was very happy when I was alone or when I was in the park.

SIGRIST: I see. Let's describe the house that you lived in. Or was it an apartment?

WILLIAM: Modern.

EMMA: Apartment house, yes.

WILLIAM: Six, what would be six, um, two apartments on each floor and probably four floors. Quite a modern house.

EMMA: Uh, huh.

SIGRIST: Did you have a bathroom?

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EMMA: Oh, yes.

WILLIAM: Yes, very much.

EMMA: Oh, yes, yes.

WILLIAM: Yes. And opposite us very modern, almost high rise houses in front of us. But it was a mixture because if you went on the, quarter of mile outside of the main town limits, you were practically in the country, little farms. And let me tell you one strange thing. I guess psychiatrists would be interested. For many, many years, up to maybe twenty years ago, I had very happy dreams. And these dreams were always about walking in the countryside there, in the little house, country homes, going because sometimes our aunts took us to visit somebody there. And to me, this is very interesting, that throughout adulthood this memory of little villas and little houses, little, uh...

EMMA: Hamlets, like.

WILLIAM: Little ways and narrow streets but here and there private homes, uh, I, that has been one of the happy things in my childhood. Reliving those, even in dreams.

SIGRIST: Wow, that's interesting. Did you each have your own bedroom?

EMMA: I don't recall. I don't recall whether we did or not.

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WILLIAM: Well, we had, uh, well I remember when I had my own room, that much I remember. But sometimes I think we were in the same room but kind of far apart. And I remember in the dark wondering whether she's there or not. (they laugh)

WILLIAM: But, uh, incidently, the stoves were the old, uh...

EMMA: Ceramic.

WILLIAM: Ceramic. And you, you put the coal in from the hallway. So once in a while, early in the morning, I could hear my aunt putting more coal in the thing. But very efficient that was. We didn't have many cold mornings but, uh, if there was a chill you could heat that way. No steam heating, for instance. In that sense we were old fashioned.

SIGRIST: What was the layout of the apartment?

WILLIAM: Straight hall with rooms on both sides. And...

EMMA: And a very large kitchen.

WILLIAM: Bathroom at the end because we had to heat our own water. And bath time was only once, like American old fashioned houses, once a Saturday and, uh, both children were washed at the same time.

EMMA: Uh, huh.

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WILLIAM: And I remember when I was very upset because there came a time when my aunt said, "Turn away. Turn your back to your sister," you know, (Emma laughs heartily), because up to that time I had never particularly noticed or cared the way she was built, uh, but anyway she (referring to Emma) mentioned the courtyard behind us. There was actually a big garden, what with formal flower settings and so on, which was wonderful for us. But it was owned by a rich Hungarian family that came to our town. They owned the floor above us, a condominium, the first condominium. And they owned the whole garden. And they had fancy parties. But when they weren't in town, uh, because the rest of the year they were in Budapest. They were publishers of the biggest newspaper there. So then we used the garden and that was one of the happy...

EMMA: yes.

WILLIAM: Features of our lives, that we could, um...

EMMA: Play outdoors.

WILLIAM: Use this lovely garden that was kept. The flower arrangements were kept up by the super, I believe.

EMMA: Beautiful oleander trees, you know. They are like semitropical. They don't grow, you know, in this particular zone here in the United States. They grow down in the South. So it was almost like a semitropical...

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WILLIAM: Yeah. We had the fig tree.

EMMA: Yes.

WILLIAM: We had the laurel, which is....

EMMA: Uh, huh.

WILLIAM: The Roman, uh, war, poet laureate, and so on that you find in warm, fairly warm, not tropical but fairly warm.

EMMA: You didn't have to wrap the fig tree as I do now. I have a tree in my yard now. (she laughs) But I have to wrap it up each fall, otherwise it would freeze.

WILLIAM: She lives in City Island, by the way, now.

SIGRIST: Yes. You mentioned that you had a big kitchen.

EMMA: Yes. We had a very large kitchen.

SIGRIST: Describe it for me.

EMMA: Well, we had a very large stove, you know, a , um...

WILLIAM: Brick stove.

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EMMA: Brick stove, I guess. It was brick, yes.

SIGRIST: Wood fired?

EMMA: And a very large table and it was like a family room. We practically lived in the kitchen, you know, first floor, because it was warm. And anyway we used the parlor for visitors, you know, when people came. But most of our life was in the kitchen. It was a very pleasant and comfortable place.

SIGRIST: Which of the aunts did the cooking?

WILLIAM: Only...

EMMA: Irma.

WILLIAM: Only one was a housewife.

EMMA: Aunt Irma.

WILLIAM: The other one was strictly a professional dressmaker.

EMMA: Except...

SIGRIST: So Irma did the cooking and Olga did the...

EMMA: Except that Olga was a wonderful baker. And she would bake on

special occasions and her specialty was apple strudel, you know, which was delicious. And I would help her. We would, we had a very, very large round table. And she would get the dough so you could practically see through it, you know, and then she would throw all kinds of goodies on it. You know, the apples and different flavorings and butter and so on and so forth. And then she would take the table cloth and just roll it to a very, very large roll, you know, and then she would fold it. And I would help her with that. She was really a, uh, super on that. I have never tasted apple strudel, (she laughs) you know, anywhere, that was tastier than that. (end of side one)

SIGRIST: O.K., what sorts of things did Irma cook on a daily basis? What sorts of things did you eat?

WILLIAM: Uh, soups, especially stews. Soups, uh, very, very...

SIGRIST: Was there something that she made that you really liked?

WILLIAM: Yes, yes. I liked all the things, like minest..., what's called "minestrone" here. Very good with beans and celery.

EMMA: Uh, huh.

WILLIAM: And so on. Very healthy, too. We were able to have a good, what Americans would consider a very good general diet, plus these goodies like, uh...

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EMMA: Apple strudel.

WILLIAM: Strudel, um, yes. Despite the fact that we were Italians, we were so close to Austria that we had many names. We called certain things by their Austrian names, Germanic rather than Italian, like schnitzel or, uh...

EMMA: Weiner schnitzel.

WILLIAM: Strudel and so on. Those were regarded more or less as Germanic foods.

EMMA: Uh, huh.

WILLIAM: But we were very definitely Italian.

SIGRIST: You were very international children.

EMMA: Yes.

WILLIAM: Oh, yes. Uh, huh.

EMMA: We were. She would make these dumplings, you know.

SIGRIST: This is Irma.

EMMA: Yes. She would make these dumplings with fruit, you know. She would

put fruit inside and that, that was a very special treat.

SIGRIST: Was that a dessert or was that a main course? Or...

EMMA: Well, it could be a dessert or a main course. It could be used either way 'cause it was pasta, you know. It was what we would call "pasta" here.

SIGRIST: And you said you helped sometimes.

EMMA: Oh, yes. Sometimes, yes.

WILLIAM: But I almost died in 1918 from the Great Plague. One hundred, I think, million people died in Europe at the end of the war from dysentery. In those days they didn't know how people get it. But actually now we know because they use human fertilizer (he laughs) on vegetables, we got them directly from the farmer's market. And so probably, that's how it communicated all over the place. So that's why in America you are not allowed to use human fertilizer on vegetables. But anyway, I was bleeding internally for a month but I came through I guess with the strength of a little boy. And then, for another month, I could only, was allowed to eat chocolate and rice, chocolate and rice. (Emma laughs heartily) Pudding, uh, huh. And I liked it. I enjoyed it. And, uh, cod liver oil. I remember I loved cod liver oil. They had to hide it from me. (Emma laughs again) You...

SIGRIST: An unusual child.

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WILLIAM: Yes, uh, a very unusual, yes, uh, huh. (Emma continues to laugh)

SIGRIST: Let's talk about your father going over to America first.

EMMA: Yes.

SIGRIST: Now what year did he go? I, I don't remem...

EMMA: It was around 1919 or 1920.

SIGRIST: And what did he do when he got here?

EMMA: Well, he spoke five languages and so he was able to get a job in the Italian Commercial Bank in the Foreign Department.

WILLIAM: Wall Street.

EMMA: Um, yes. Where, where he could help the people that came in with their money orders, checks, and also with their correspondence. He was much interested in people and he was anxious to help them, you know, with their letters, you know, if they didn't know how to write. He was very good that way.

SIGRIST: Well, and more fortunate than most because he spoke all those languages.

EMMA: Yes.

WILLIAM: He was in love with Wall Street.

EMMA: Uh, huh.

WILLIAM: And his fondest hope was that I should be a lawyer on Wall Street and so on. And his greatest disappointment was that I went into science where, especially in those days, there wasn't much money to be made. There was none of the biology development today, ecology and so on. As a result, there wasn't much money in it. But, uh, he was very disappointed that I didn't become a corporate lawyer.

EMMA: But he lived in furnished rooms and he was very, very interested in the culture and the arts and music. And he met some of the people from the Metropolitan Opera House and he lived with some of the tenors and, uh, (she laughs) and artists from the Metropolitan in furnished rooms. By 1925 he became very lonely for his family and that's when he wrote to the aunts to make prac...to start, you know, to come to the, for us to come to the United States. And because our aunts were our only mothers, you know, we didn't want to be separated so he said, "Well, you come." And also it would have been very difficult for Father to take care of two teenagers, you know. So he said, "Well, let all four come together." But when Aunt Irma, she was the business woman, she went to the Council and the Council said, "You're out of your mind if you think four people can come from one country!" You know, as Bill explained before. But he said, "Bring the papers anyway and we'll, we'll

put it through for whatever it's worth." And then he noticed that they were born in Austria, he was born in France, I was born in...and he said, "That's the solution to our problem. You, where each one will come in a different.." the two aunts on the Austrian quota and he on the French quota and I on the German quota. And that settled it.

SIGRIST: Do you remember your aunts telling you that you were going to America?

EMMA: Oh, yes, yes. Very much so.

WILLIAM: Yeah, because we had to give notice to the school that we were leaving. And then there was a period when we were supposed to leave a month earlier, then that was delayed another month.

EMMA: Uh, huh.

WILLIAM: So there was, came around Christmas time, unfortunately. So, um, there was all, yes, we, um...but I can tell you this. Now here is where we differ. She got used to it, she liked it very much, uh, I hated over here because...

EMMA: Oh, here.

SIGRIST: Let's save that 'til we get here. We're not here yet. We've got to get here. (they laugh) Well, how did you feel about coming in general? Were you happy that you were coming?

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WILLIAM: No, because I had the first girlfriend.

SIGRIST: Ah, hah! (Emma laughs)

WILLIAM: I wrote poetry. And by chance she was at the railroad station. That broke my heart. She was at the railroad station when I was, we were leaving. But I was just dreaming that I would soon come back on my own and marry her.

SIGRIST: (to Emma) How did you feel about , about when you came over?

EMMA: Well, I...I was heartbroken because I had quite a few friends. You know, eleven and a half years old, you have...

SIGRIST: You were older children.

EMMA: Yes. You have friends. And also each year we received an award, like we were at the top of our classes, you know, and I always received a beautiful certificate, you know, and a book or something, some kind of an award. And I felt now we're going to a different country where I, well, don't know the language and I will no longer be head of my class, you know. I will be, you know, I would have to learn the language and the other children will be way ahead of me and that will, you know, devastate me as far as my scholastic position was concerned.

SIGRIST: Were you excited about the possibility of seeing your father or was he

so removed at this point that it didn't really play into it?

EMMA: No, I was very excited. I really missed him, you know, so I was really looking forward and he promised us all kinds of things. He said, "When you come here you will go on horseback and you will go sailing in the bay or the rivers around New York." He promised us all kinds of very interesting experiences.

SIGRIST: You had great expectations.

EMMA: So, I really did, yes. I really looked forward...

WILLIAM: I, uh, the only ideas I had of America was that I read in Italian, I think it was a school prize, "Uncle Tom's Cabin." And so I knew about slavery, about the West, uh, the Indians and so on. We, even at twelve years old, we had a lot of books, uh, the French, uh, they were romances for kids. Uh, but had Salgar in Italy and Verne, Jules Verne in France, but we had Italian translations. So we had all these great romances and adventures all over the world. And that was, that fielded a lot of dreams in my life.

SIGRIST: I see.

EMMA: Uh, huh.

SIGRIST: Do you remember packing to leave? Packing...

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EMMA: Yes, yes. It was very disrupting, you know, to pack and break up your home.

SIGRIST: What did you take?

EMMA: Oh, we took, of course, our clothing and some pieces of like china that were very, very special. And maybe a blanket or two also that were real good wool, that we felt maybe we may not be able to get here in the United States.

SIGRIST: I see.

WILLIAM: Well, there were a few personal things. Of course, there was pressure to leave things there but they accommodated us kids. And I brought a lot of things that (he laughs) I now wonder why I was so attached, for instance, to greeting cards. They were very, very romantic in those days and they were through the years birthdays and so on. And a few toys. My tin soldiers, for instance. I don't remember whether I brought anything about my small railroad, um.

SIGRIST: But you had one?

WILLIAM: Huh?

SIGRIST: You had a toy railroad?

WILLIAM: Oh, yes, yes. And then I had, uh, what we called a "Magic Lantern." It

was a...

EMMA: Movie, like a movie...

WILLIAM: Projector.

EMMA: Projector.

WILLIAM: Very, very primitive, (he laughs) compared to today's.

EMMA: And I was hoping he wouldn't bring those soldiers because when we played together at home, you see I was German and he was French, you know, and he would always decimate all my soldiers, kill them all off, so we had quite a...(she laughs)

SIGRIST: What port did you leave from?

EMMA: Trieste.

WILLIAM: Trieste.

SIGRIST: Trieste. Do you remember the name of the boat?

WILLIAM: Yes. "Wilson."

EMMA: "President Wilson."

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SIGRIST: What were your accommodations like?

EMMA: Well, uh...

WILLIAM: Simple.

EMMA: It was very simple at the time because they didn't have all the modern conveniences. And as William mentioned before, we would be sitting at the table and all the dishes would fall on the floor.

WILLIAM: Slide off of the table because we had ten days of the maximum storms. Just unbelievable. Looked like nothing but Everest Mountains in the distance.

EMMA: And the very, very poor people, some very poor people there, with us on the journey, and they would sit on the floor, they would be so frightened that they would sit on the floor the whole day long. And some of them must have been ill because I developed an infection in my eye which was a very serious and traumatic experience for me, (she laughs) because the aunt took us, took me to the doctor on the boat, to the ship's doctor. And the doctor said, "Oh, this is very serious," you know, "And unless we can clear this up you will be sent back." And at that time the people that were sponsored, as my father sponsored, our father, they didn't have to go through Ellis Island. But we had to go on account of me because I had this infection and they said, "If the infection is not cleared up, you will be sent back." So that was a tremendous...

SIGRIST: I see, and it developed on the boat. That's when you first noticed it?

EMMA: Yes, on the boat. Oh, yes. I never had anything like that.

WILLIAM: It, uh, we, there was, it's hard for people to understand today what it was like to be on a boat then in a storm like that. Tremendous noise. It sounded as if the boat was heading for some rocks. The great waves would smash, the noise tremendous, and I thought we would flounder at any moment. And besides, uh, they pasted a "Captain's Messages" up. At that time it was Morse Code, of messages received from other ships in the ocean, sending "S.O.S. We are floundering!" and so on, "Help!" and the captain let us know that he couldn't get out of the way. They were hard pressed, too. So they wanted to get to New York as soon as possible. And I remember how happy I, how all the other people were so sick, they couldn't, they didn't know what was happening. But I get over very quickly any sickness. So I would go up on the captain's deck because I had friends there and I enjoyed the sight, of this wild sight, and especially looking at the prow of the ship going way, way down under the sea and then lifting up. And the waves coming, rushing right up to the captain's...to live...that's a terrifying scene but, as a boy, I enjoyed it and because I wasn't sick either.

SIGRIST: How about the aunts? What were they doing during all this?

EMMA: We were, we were not allowed, of course, up on the deck at all. We absolutely, the ladies were not allowed and, I guess, other people, too.

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But there, anyway, so until one day. One day the captain announced that we're entering the harbor of New York City and that there was a marvelous statue there that would greet us and they invited us to come up to the decks. So that was one of the happiest days of my life.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing the Statue?

EMMA: Oh, I remember it very well. And it was...

WILLIAM: For me it was wonderful two days before that because I saw the first gulls and I knew that land couldn't be far away because there were sea gulls flying. So, and then I saw the clouds were getting brighter and brighter. It was very dark all along, uh, stormy. So I was looking forward to see the first land.

SIGRIST: Well, you had enough of the boat ride. (they laugh)

WILLIAM: And then the first land that I saw was Brooklyn covered with snow, because in those days we had much more snow than today. We had three months of snow and the mounds along the sidewalks. Sometimes they had to make a tunnel to cross the street.

SIGRIST: And you had seen very little snow before that.

EMMA: We had seen...

WILLIAM: Oh, practically nothing.

EMMA: No, practically none because Fiume, I think was in the way of a, a wind that was called "the Bora", which came from Africa. It came from Africa and...

WILLIAM: No.

EMMA: It came...

WILLIAM: That came from the north. Uh, where Africa was "Scirocco."

EMMA: Oh, "Scirocco", oh, all right. And, uh, but that kept the climate very warm, even though we were quite a ways north, you know, like in the northern part of, across Italy. If you would draw a line we were practically in that geographical area there. But the climate was very mild on that account.

SIGRIST: So there was snow here. What season did you arrive in America?

EMMA: January twenty-fifth.

WILLIAM: Twenty-fifth.

WILLIAM: Do you know the lake in Central Park was frozen for two months. Unheard of. Two or three months. I used, I took to skating very soon and, and, but today you don't have enough, hardly any ice in Central Park.

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SIGRIST: Did, uh, when, you said, when the Statue of Liberty, when they said the Statue...

EMMA: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Did everyone come up on deck?

EMMA: Yes. And they explained to us, you know.

SIGRIST: Who explained?

EMMA: Well, I imagine the captain. I don't recall the details but imagine, or some of his officers. And they explained how France had given the United States this wonderful statue and it would welcome, that it was there to welcome, you know, the people that came from other countries and...

SIGRIST: How did people react to this?

EMMA: For me it was a tremendous psychological experience, you know, except that I still had this terrible, terrible worry about my eyes, that we were going to Ellis Island and that there they would make the decision whether I would be accepted or whether I would be rejected, which was something frightening for an eleven year old girl. (she laughs) And...

SIGRIST: Well, let's talk about that. Talk about Ellis Island and what happened

when you got here.

EMMA: Yes. I remember the Great Hall. I remember that. I remember the Great Hall and I remember how we had to stay on line in order to see the doctor because many people were referred to the doctor for one reason or another. So we had to stand on line and, of course, Father wasn't there, you know, because he wasn't allowed to come until they decided whether or not I would be allowed to remain. But then they examined me and they said that the infection had been cleared thanks to the doctors on board who put drops in my eyes every single day in the infirmary. So, of course, that was another tremendous high, to think that I could (she laughs) see Father, you know. We could be, could be united with him after six years.

SIGRIST: Was it crowded here?

EMMA: Oh, very, very crowded. Yeah.

SIGRIST: You said you had to wait in line?

EMMA: Oh, yes, there were hundreds of people on our own ship, you know. There were hundreds of people. And maybe other ships, too. I don't know.

WILLIAM: The main thing, I don't remember very much except the big hall and so on. But there was one thing that I resented very much as a kid. They asked the men and the children to form a line and take out their

penises. And the doctor went from one man to the other and I didn't know...First of all, I was brought up very conservatively. That, that's very private and I resented showing somebody there. (Emma laughs) And besides, they didn't tell us what they were looking for. Now I realize they were looking probably for sexual diseases and so, but a twelve year old boy. I don't thi...that was ridiculous, looking for a sexual disease in a little boy. But, anyway, I remember that. Being very puzzled and very indignant at the same time.

SIGRIST: Uh, huh. And everyone, you said everyone passed, you know, your aunts were fine.

EMMA: Oh, yes. I don't believe they were even examined. You know, I think that I was the only one examined.

WILLIAM: And the one thing I remember...

EMMA: And Bill.

WILLIAM: When we got to the elevated train that was the Columbus Seventh that doesn't exist anymore, the elevated train, and we didn't know what it was like to be on the trains, so I remember when the train slowed down suddenly and we all fell down in a crowded train where there were many standing.

EMMA: And the people laughed, you know...

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WILLIAM: Yes, the people laughed.

EMMA: Because at that time we were called "aliens," you know, even though we were people that had a considerable education. Aliens were very much looked down on, even in school. And I remember he (gesturing to William) wore short pants because they were in style in Europe whereas here the boys wore knickers. And when he would walk on the street the boys would run after him and pull his pants down, which was a very embarrassing experience, you know.

SIGRIST: Before we leave Ellis Island completely I just want to ask you a question. Do you remember what you were wearing when you got off the boat?

EMMA: I think I was wearing a large felt hat which I had for many years after that, you know, and a woolen coat.

SIGRIST: Yeah, because it was cold here.

EMMA: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Were you prepared for it to be cold?

EMMA: Well, yes, because Father told us it would be but we had no idea it would be that cold. Uh, we had never seen, as he had mentioned before, snow, and at that time the Sanitation did not clear the streets as they do now. They just pushed the snow into tremendous piles and

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those piles would stay there until spring, you know. They would be like under the elevated structure there would be piles. And with the cold they would turn to ice all over the place, which made it even colder.

WILLIAM: Imagine what would happen if that were to happen today. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: It just couldn't happen.

WILLIAM: Yeah. Everything would stop.

EMMA: Right.

SIGRIST: In our remaining, we have about five minutes left...

EMMA: Oh.

SIGRIST: Let's talk about those early years in America. What, where...?

WILLIAM: Well, my father had an apartment already prepared.

SIGRIST: Where was it?

WILLIAM: In 92nd Street, near, uh, Central Park West, which was a great thing for me because then I walked every day in the park and got to learn the trees because there were labels on the trees, and then the Museum of Natural History was nearby so I spent almost every afternoon in winter there learning about natural history.

SIGRIST: I see.

WILLIAM: But we were both sent very soon to parochial school. She liked it very much but I resented it enormously for two reasons. One because it was all Irish, one hundred percent, so they had a, I was used to a different nationality number one and certain ways and so on they had. And the other thing, they were all interested in baseball and that was not my thing. I was interested in the arts and culture and so on. And then they spent eight years in grammar school when I had made it in four the same thing. And I thought they were wasting their time.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the school?

WILLIAM: Holy Names.

EMMA: Saint Gregory's first. When we were together it was Saint Gregory's in 89th Street.

WILLIAM: No, Holy Names.

EMMA: And then because we moved...

WILLIAM: Oh, yeah.

EMMA: One block...

WILLIAM: That was public school.

EMMA: No, no. We were at Saint Gregory's where we had Sister Grace. And we were in the same class because they had boys and girls in the same class. And then, when we moved from 92nd Street to 93rd Street, just one block, they had parish boundaries and then the sister told us we could no longer stay at that school, that we have to go to Holy Names way up at 96th Street and Amsterdam Avenue. And then we were separated because there they had the brothers for the boys and the sisters for the girls.

SIGRIST: I see.

WILLIAM: But where, you, you are, I think you are wrong about me because I remember distinctly being put in public school.

EMMA: First.

WILLIAM: And jumping five grades in the next four months.

EMMA: Yes.

WILLIAM: And I had a very famous teacher, McGuire, who taught for forty or sixty years first grade, so the benches were so little that I, I had to stand all the time. But the idea was to stay in each grade only maybe a month or less until I learned the language. And so by the time June came, I was in seventh grade and then, next year, I was placed in Holy Names.

SIGRIST: Let me ask you, how did you learn English?

WILLIAM: Um, very rapidly, but I really was against it because I was sure I would go back, that I wasn't interested in acquiring any knowledge or, uh, naturalizing here. I was just dreaming about going back. But then it was only after I went to public high school that I met kids of my own type, my own kind, because it was a, uh, the principal excused himself. He said, "Sorry. In the Dewitt Clinton High School, uh, you are late. We have no spot for your kid but we have a special experimental school just beginning for extra bright pupils. We have a spot there. And if you don't mind, we can put you there." And I jumped for joy. I said, "That's exactly what I want." So that in the next three and a half years we broke all the records, scholastic records, in the state of New York. And that's why I was the pupil two years after I came to this country. I was the first student to get one hundred percent in advanced Regents and, um, since a few in the history of the state got ninety-nine, they would send, they would send to a special committee to see if they could take off a point from one hundred in grammar or in English. And they couldn't find anything wrong with my English. So I got one hundred percent, I got all kinds of honors and a microscope from the high school, the keys to the high school and the use of a laboratory and I became an expert on protozoa.

SIGRIST: This made America a little more palatable to you.

EMMA: (she laughs) Oh, yes.

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WILLIAM: That completely changed the picture.

SIGRIST: (to Emma): How did you learn English?

EMMA: Oh, I...

SIGRIST: Did you have difficulty?

EMMA: No, no, I didn't. The first six months I could speak maybe one or two words and Father was very, very upset I remember and he said, "She'll never learn!" you know. But eventually, especially when we were separated, when we went up to Holy Names, that's one of the things, you know. Here they say "English, second language," you know and I'm very much against having special classes for people because when we were together we spoke Italian constantly. We spoke Italian at home so I learned very, very slowly. But once I was separated from him in Holy Names, then, of course, it was just a case of sink or swim, you know, and so I learned very quickly after that.

SIGRIST: In our remaining two minutes I just want to ask you, was your father glad that he came to America?

WILLIAM: Oh, yes.

EMMA: Yeah.

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WILLIAM: I think he liked it. Especially he, he loved Wall Street.

EMMA: Uh, huh.

WILLIAM: He was a Wall Street man through and through.

EMMA: Yes, uh, huh.

WILLIAM: But, incidently, by the second year high school, my reports in literature, in English class, they thought that I did so well in my reports they excused me from any further reports in English because they thought I was really superior in English and it was only three years after I came here.

EMMA: But I want to say something about Father in the remaining minute, that, when during the Depression, he was so wonderful. He lost the job in the bank but they hired him in the WPA program, which was for people who did not have any job, and he taught English to the foreign born in Roosevelt High School and he took them on many field trips to the Cloisters and to the Metropolitan Museum. And he taught them English while he also taught them culture. And then, during the war, the Second World War, his record was so good that the government hired him as a censor to read the letters from the foreign countries with which the United States was at war so that no information would seep through that would be inimical to the United States at war.

SIGRIST: Wow, what an interesting course of events, life's course.

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EMMA: Yes.

SIGRIST: Anyway, I just want to thank you both for coming here...

EMMA: Thank you.

SIGRIST: I think we could probably be here for another hour.

EMMA: Yes. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: You both have been just delightful.

EMMA: Thank you.

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

END OF INTERVIEW