

EI-323

MILKA MOMCILOVIC BRDAR

BIRTH DATE: JANUARY 26, 1902

INTERVIEW DATE: 5/22/1993

RUNNING TIME: 57:00

INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

RECORDING ENGINEER: KEVIN DALEY

INTERVIEW LOCATION: ELLIS ISLAND RECORDING STUDIO

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 4/1994

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 6/1994

YUGOSLAVIA, 1921

BORN: MUCHLA, (CONTEMPORARY CROATIA)

AGE AT IMMIGRATION: 18

PORT OF EMBARKATION: FRANCE

SHIP NAME NOT RECALLED

RESIDENCES: MUCHLA,
YOUNGWOOD, PA

Oral Historian's Note: Mrs. Brdar incorrectly states the year of her birth as 1903. The actual year she was born is 1902.

Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of the Oral History Project,
6/13/1994.

SIGRIST: Good morning. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Saturday, May 22, 1993. I'm at the Ellis Island Recording Studio with Milka Brdar. And that's spelled Capital B-R-D-R.

BRDAR: No, B-R-D-A-R.

SIGRIST: Excuse me. B-R-D-A-R. Brdar.

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And she's asked that I call her Bubba. Bubba came from Yugoslavia in 1921, and she was eighteen years old at that time. She later returned to Yugoslavia and came back to America some time in the early 1930's.

BRDAR: Yeah, I think, if I'm not mistaken, it was '33.

SIGRIST: 1933.

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Bubba, can we begin by you giving me your birth date. When were you born?

BRDAR: 1903.

SIGRIST: 1903?

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And what month and day?

BRDAR: January 26th.

SIGRIST: You were born January 26th, 1903.

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me where you were born?

BRDAR: In Yugoslavia, but was not Yugoslavia at that time or not, I'm not sure. Was it Austria yet or not?

SIGRIST: Part of the Austria-Hungarian Empire.

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What town were you born in?

BRDAR: The town was called Muchla.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that? No?

BRDAR: Muchla . . . No.

SIGRIST: Okay. Say it one more time for me. Muchla?

BRDAR: Muchla, yeah.

SIGRIST: Okay. Can you describe what that town looked like for me when you were a girl growing up?

BRDAR: Oh, there wasn't much of a, much of a town, you know. Just about, oh, maybe a, maybe about two hundred residents and there was a church there. And like a City Hall, that's what.

SIGRIST: What did most of the people do for a living who lived there? Was there a major industry?

BRDAR: They, almost everybody have a piece of, a piece of land. And what you get out of that piece of land, that's what you got to live on.

SIGRIST: Did people own their own land or did they rent the land?

BRDAR: We owned our own.

SIGRIST: Was your father a farmer?

BRDAR: No. (she laughs) My father was over here in this country.

SIGRIST: When did he come here?

BRDAR: I was nine months old when he come. That's the way the

best to tell. And now what next.

SIGRIST: Why did he come to America?

BRDAR: Well, their country was poor. And he come to America, make a few cents and come, try to save some, and come back to try to help raise a family.

SIGRIST: So his intention was to go make some money and then come back.

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you know what job he had when he came to America?

BRDAR: Working on the railroad.

SIGRIST: Where did he go when he came to America?

BRDAR: To Youngwood, P.A.

SIGRIST: He went to Pennsylvania.

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did he like America when he came to America?

BRDAR: Oh, yeah. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Was he writing back and forth? Was he writing to your family?

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What was his name?

BRDAR: For a while.

SIGRIST: For a while.

BRDAR: He was writing for a while. And then whenever the war come, why everything stopped, see. And that way we wasn't, wasn't getting the thing for the, from him. After, in the meantime, my, he sent after my mother. And my mother come to this country like she was supposed to return back in two or three years. But, in the meantime, war come. And she wasn't able to return.

SIGRIST: So she came to America before the war broke out.

BRDAR: Yeah. And then she wasn't able to return, and my sister and me and a granddad left.

SIGRIST: You and your sister and your grandfather.

BRDAR: Yeah. And we just had one cow, and we have a horse, like a pony, we got. And when the war started, why, the government come and take that. We didn't have

anything. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: What else do you remember about the war? Was that a difficult time for you, when World War I broke out?

BRDAR: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: What else do you remember about the war?

BRDAR: Well, I remember one thing, that if I want to eat a piece of bread I have to work for it before I put it in my mouth. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Do you remember there being fighting?

BRDAR: Oh, we would, where we was living we would hear ammunition going on. But that wasn't nothing like, it wasn't like there then, but we could hear it, you know.

SIGRIST: Was that scary? Was that a scary time?

BRDAR: Oh, yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing soldiers in your town?

BRDAR: Oh, yeah. Passing by us.

SIGRIST: Just marching through.

BRDAR: Yeah. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

BRDAR: Mitar.

SIGRIST: Mittel?

BRDAR: Mitar, Dimitar.

SIGRIST: Oh, okay. And what was your mom's name?

BRDAR: Militza.

SIGRIST: Militza. And do you know how your parents met?

BRDAR: No.

SIGRIST: No? Do you know what your mother's maiden name was?

BRDAR: Yes. Gusmanavich.

SIGRIST: Oh, dear. Can you spell that? No? Well, we can look it up later.

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me what you remember about your mom before she went to America? What sticks out in your mind

about your mother before she left?

BRDAR: Well, she often tried to keep us on after she was left by herself. Dad was in this country, and she tried to work, keep a piece of bread for herself and two girls and her father-in-law.

SIGRIST: What kinds of vegetables and, what did you grow in Yugoslavia at that time?

BRDAR: Oh, you could grow corn and wheat and, you know, almost all the, almost all kind of grain, granary you could grow.

SIGRIST: What kind of foods do you remember your mother cooking for you when you were a young girl?

BRDAR: (she laughs) Well, most of it was like a soup, bean soup or potato soup or stuff like that, and mush for breads, like.

SIGRIST: That would be made, like, out of grain.

BRDAR: Yeah. You make that out of cornmeal. Mush you make out of cornmeal.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me the kitchen in your house?

BRDAR: The kitchen? There would be a, mostly over there there's a fire in the middle of the floor.

SIGRIST: An open fire.

BRDAR: Yeah, an open fire. And there would be a kettle that you could hang the kettle if you want to cook something, hang it right above the fire and that's where you cook on time, you know, cook almost anything. Cook, like I tell you, make the mush. And make, if you want to make a pot of beans you cook it like there. But there would be just that one place, see.

SIGRIST: Did you eat a lot of meat?

BRDAR: (she laughs)

SIGRIST: No meat. No. Where did your mother store her food in the house?

BRDAR: (she laughs) There would be, like, like I said, upstairs, like, would be.

SIGRIST: Like a little attic, sort of?

BRDAR: Yeah, yeah. Like, not like over here now you have a garage, and up about there you store some things. That's where she stored.

SIGRIST: What kind of foods did you have that you could store

for the winter, say? How would you store foods for the winter?

BRDAR: I don't know how. We just, you just don't, like I said, hang them up there, like dry them up or put them into jars and stuff like that, for the winter.

SIGRIST: Were the winters hard where you grew up?

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you get snow?

BRDAR: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the snow when you were a little girl?

BRDAR: Yeah, we have, I walked to the neighbor and snow would, the crust, like, on the top of the big snow, my feet fell in and my knees got cut through here. (she gestures)

SIGRIST: Oh, you cut your knees on the crust.

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you have a sleigh that you would travel through the snow with?

BRDAR: Ah, not very many. People have it, but people who have something more than we do. But we didn't have it.

SIGRIST: Did the open fire that was in the kitchen, did that heat the whole house? Or did you have a, how did you heat the house in the winter?

BRDAR: There would be another room, and we'd be, like, like built-in stove, see. And you would used to get into it through the wheels, through the top. Lift, you have a thing, and you lift the wheel up and you stuck some wood in and stuff like that. And that thing have a, sort of a hole like flowerpot built in, maybe about, oh, three or four on each side of it, see. And we'd be three sides that you could get in. You get in this way and this way where you fire and this way and back, like.

SIGRIST: Was the stove big? It was very big?

BRDAR: No. It would be, about, let's say, like about like this table. (she gestures)

SIGRIST: Where did you get the wood to heat the house with?

BRDAR: Well, you have to go in a woods and chop the tree. And you have to find one that kind has started getting rotten because, you know, a law to chop the good trees.

SIGRIST: Oh, there was a law, you couldn't chop good trees.

BRDAR: Uh-huh. And then we picked the twigs, and started a fire with that.

SIGRIST: When you were a little girl, when your mother was still living there, what were your chores around the house? What did you have to go to help out around the house?

BRDAR: I don't remember that there was anything that I had to do. There was nothing.

SIGRIST: Did you ever help your mother do the laundry, for instance?

BRDAR: There is not much laundry. (she laughs) The laundry, why, there is, you just had two changes. And you put the one on and another one you wash. (she laughs) And when you changed, that's the same thing goes again. You just to put the one on and another is in wash.

SIGRIST: Did your mother make your clothes?

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, can you describe one of your dresses for me, what it looked like? Do you remember?

BRDAR: Looks like a nightgown over here, you know. And the, she put it on. And have something to tie up around. And that's all.

SIGRIST: That's all you wore. Tell me about church. You said there was a church in the town.

BRDAR: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: What religion were you?

BRDAR: Religion, Serbian.

SIGRIST: Serbian.

BRDAR: Yeah. And now they, uh, wait a minute. What they call? They not, they wasn't called Serbian. They wasn't called, they wasn't called Serbian. They wasn't called Croatian. They called Plauslauny. What that means, that means that was the first one of a religion, see. And after that, why, religion comes different, see. There would be, you know, like Serbian and Croatian and Italian and stuff like that, see.

SIGRIST: Was your mother a religious woman?

BRDAR: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about how you practiced your religion at home?

BRDAR: Well, we don't practice much home. We go to church on Sunday and that's just the one time, one time in a week. Let's say like that. And the rest of it, why, everybody's on his own. We pray by the table, when we get up and when we, I mean when we sit down and when we get up. And that's about all.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of the prayers that you would say, like before you ate? Do you remember?

BRDAR: I don't think.

SIGRIST: No? Okay. Let me ask about school. Did you go to school in this town?

BRDAR: (she laughs) No. I wouldn't. And who was closer to the town, maybe they would have went to school. But we have too far to go and, being girls, two of us, didn't want to go to school.

SIGRIST: That was customary at that time.

BRDAR: Yeah, uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Did anyone teach you how to read or to write?

BRDAR: My uncle was a schoolteacher. So what I ever learn, if I get a chance, to go there and sneak on behind kids. And I hear when he's teaching the kids, then I learned something like that.

SIGRIST: Kind of had to be sneaky about it to do it.

BRDAR: Yeah. That wasn't much, but anyways I learned some. I would kind of have an idea what's what.

SIGRIST: Could your mother read and write?

BRDAR: No.

SIGRIST: What about your grandfather, who lived in the house?

BRDAR: No.

SIGRIST: You said your grandfather was your mother's father-in-law, your dad's father.

BRDAR: Yeah, my dad's father.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about living with your grandfather?

BRDAR: Oh, I don't know. It wasn't, it was very poor.

SIGRIST: What did he look like?

BRDAR: Uh, he was a wonderful man. That's one more thing, and he was an honest man. In the city, he was constable of a city, like. I don't know what would you name that. But anyways, he was, he was, he knew about the city good.

SIGRIST: Did he ever play with you when you were a little girl?

BRDAR: No, he don't play.

SIGRIST: What did he do all day?

BRDAR: Oh, after working in the garden and something like that, see, prepare to grow something for the winter.

SIGRIST: So he was working out in the fields, then.

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Now, tell me what happened. Your mother went to America just before World War I broke out.

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when she left?

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how you felt when your mother left to go to America?

BRDAR: Well, when my mother left and another woman and, for me, I don't care if she wants to go or not, but my sister, she was crying. And she said to another lady, a neighbor woman, to hold my sister up till she go, till she get her out of her way. And she did, she hold her, and then my mother went. That was the last that I see my mother till I come to this country.

SIGRIST: Is your sister younger or older than you?

BRDAR: Older.

SIGRIST: And what is her name?

BRDAR: Sophie.

SIGRIST: Sophie. How did you get along with your sister?

BRDAR: We get along all right. She was a kind of baby me, see, because I was younger. And that's understood, I had to listen to her, what she said. She was good.

SIGRIST: She became kind of like your mother when your mother left.

BRDAR: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: So your mother left and then the war broke out and you didn't hear anything from your parents, did you?

BRDAR: Oh, no.

SIGRIST: Was that difficult not knowing what was happening, where they were, what they were doing?

BRDAR: What are you going to do? You just can't do nothing about it, and that's it. That's what we put up with it.

SIGRIST: When you were a young woman, what did you know about America? What did America mean to you when you were growing up? You knew you had a father there.

BRDAR: Well, we're thinking the same thing, like, in Yugoslavia, see. That would be a, not much difference.

SIGRIST: That America was like Yugoslavia.

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So the years of the war were difficult for you.

BRDAR: Oh, very much. Very much, if you ever have, anything you have raised home, government come and take.

SIGRIST: Do you remember that happening?

BRDAR: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: How would that happen? How would they do that?

BRDAR: They just come and take it.

SIGRIST: But who would come to do that?

BRDAR: I don't know what, who would be. I don't know much about it, see.

SIGRIST: Would soldiers come to the house?

BRDAR: No, no.

SIGRIST: No. What did your grandfather do during the war? He was too old to fight.

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So he's just at home.

BRDAR: Yeah, he used to stay home and take care of us, too.

SIGRIST: But he's not really bringing in any money, right?

BRDAR: No.

SIGRIST: No.

BRDAR: No. It used to, what we raised there was all right as long as he was living. But then when he died then sister and I kind of have a hard time.

SIGRIST: Did he die during the war?

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What did he die of?

BRDAR: He was old and all I really remember that he was laying down beside the fire, that open fire in the kitchen. And he passed away there.

SIGRIST: Did you have a funeral for him?

BRDAR: Well, they don't have it like over here. There the fellows come and make a casket there from the boards, like. And put him there, and there a few come, relatives, and take him to cemetery and bury him, have to carry him. There was no pride or nothing like that.

SIGRIST: Was that a sad time for you? Were you close to your grandfather, or not really? Yes? So that was sad for you.

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And you said that after he died things really got bad for you and your sister.

BRDAR: Yeah, uh-huh.

SIGRIST: What happened? How did you two survive after he died?

BRDAR: Well, if we want to eat we have to go ahead and work, see? If we don't go work we would stay hungry.

SIGRIST: So you had to go out into the fields and work? Because your sister, she didn't get another job, right? She just did field work.

BRDAR: No, uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Were there times when you simply didn't have any food?

BRDAR: Oh, yeah, very much time. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me when the first time you heard from your parents.

BRDAR: Well, when we, the first time here . . .

SIGRIST: The war was over in 1918.

BRDAR: Yeah, uh-huh.
SIGRIST: And then did you hear from your parents soon after that?

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What did you hear from them?

BRDAR: Well, they tried to get us here, but that kind of dragged, can't go right away. But somehow we did make it.

SIGRIST: So it took a couple of years for you to come?

BRDAR: No. About in a year time it took, yeah.

SIGRIST: In a year's time. Do you remember trying to get your visa or your passport? Do you remember having to get any of those things?

BRDAR: Yeah. We had a hard time for that. And I didn't know how, you know, really we did get it, but somehow that we get it and we could come out.

SIGRIST: Did you have to travel to a different town to get that?

BRDAR: Yeah. We, where we was, it was quite a bit away from a really main city where we could get the boat. And then after we get there, why, it wasn't hard from here.

SIGRIST: How did you feel about coming to America? Did you want to come?

BRDAR: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Things were pretty bad where you were.

BRDAR: Yeah. Yeah, we was glad that we, that we could have gone.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you took with you? What you took with you to America? What kind of luggage, or what did you pack?

BRDAR: There wasn't much packing. (she laughs) Oh, what you got on your back, and just about, that's all.

SIGRIST: Did you take any food with you?

BRDAR: Uh-uh.

SIGRIST: Do you remember saying goodbye to people in your town?

BRDAR: Uh, really, no. Because we was taken away, like we went from the town that we used to live. And we went to Zagreb, that they called. And there we might wait

for a while, and they put us in France, I think, and that's where we got the boat.

SIGRIST: We're going to pause now for a second. Kevin's going to flip the tape over, and we'll get you to America.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: Okay, Bubba. Let's get you to America.

BRDAR: All right.

SIGRIST: How did you get from your town to Zagreb. Do you remember?

BRDAR: Uh, I, no, I don't really remember. When we get from my town to Zagreb, horse and buggy would be going, you know, from the one city to the other, carry the mail. And we was putting on that and then we get to Zagreb. And when we got there, why, we was, I think, I think stayed a couple of days, a couple of, three days. And we come to France then.

SIGRIST: Now, how did you go, do you remember how you went from Zagreb to France?

BRDAR: Uh, no, I really don't.

SIGRIST: Maybe by train. That's a long way, isn't it, from Zagreb to . . .

BRDAR: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you have to stay in France for a while before you could get on the boat?

BRDAR: Uh, yes. Yes, I think we have to, we have to stay quite a bit. And (she laughs) ladies, there wouldn't be only us to stay, a houseful of ladies. And there's, they would have a fight. (she laughs) And one is in a fight, the other one's calling, "Rap the doors." You know, for the help. But nobody give anything. There was no help coming. So they have that problem.

SIGRIST: Was this exciting? I mean, you're from a small town, right?

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And here you are traveling through different countries, seeing different sights. Was this, were you excited about this? Do you remember how you felt?

BRDAR: Oh, we were kind of glad to get it, to get across and that's all.

SIGRIST: Just to get out of where you were, certainly. Do you remember the name of the boat that you took?

BRDAR: I don't remember. I don't know why I don't remember that, but no, I don't remember.

SIGRIST: So you left from France. What do you remember about the boat ride?

BRDAR: Oh, (she laughs) I remember this much. Very good. We got on the boat at night time. And when that boat start my sister got sick, seasick.

SIGRIST: Sophie got sick.

BRDAR: And she never lift her head. (she laughs) Or either starting to throw up, till we come to this country.

SIGRIST: Did you get sick? So, did Sophie have to stay in bed all that time?

BRDAR: Yeah. She never, she raised her head up, she throw up. And, poor thing, don't have nothing to throw up, just to gagging.

SIGRIST: So she had a miserable time on the boat.

BRDAR: Oh, my. Oh, my, didn't she.

SIGRIST: Well, what did you do on the boat? What was there for you to do if you didn't get sick?

BRDAR: Oh, I go all around. I examined it good. I go on the top and watch the sea, you know. And I go back down and I go every place around, you know, every place that I could put my foot I did.

SIGRIST: This is the first time you'd ever seen a big boat, isn't it?

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What did you think when you had to get on this boat?

BRDAR: Well, uh, like I tell you, we get on at nighttime, like. And we really don't remember when the boat, we got on a boat and the boat start. That's during the nighttime. And, so . . .

SIGRIST: How long did the boat trip last?

BRDAR: Huh?

SIGRIST: How long did it take to get to America?

BRDAR: Oh, uh, it wasn't long on the water. We was five days only.

SIGRIST: That was very fast.

BRDAR: Yeah. But then there was two boats before us unloaded, and we have to stay another five days on a boat there.

SIGRIST: That was once you got to New York.

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Oh, so you were in line, then.

BRDAR: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: You had to stay five days on the boat?

BRDAR: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Where did they feed you on the boat? Do you remember?

BRDAR: Hmm, no. I really don't, to tell you the truth.

SIGRIST: Were there other immigrants on this boat? Were there other people who spoke different languages than you?

BRDAR: Oh, yeah, yeah. Most of it, I think, was Italian people, it seems to me, most of it. And then they fight.

SIGRIST: What, when the boat, when you had to stay for five days once you got to New York, where was the boat? Were you in the harbor for those five days, or had you docked at a pier for five days?

BRDAR: I think we wasn't right on the end, because somehow that time I could remember the fellows, people come to see us that we was there, you know. If, and they, they all come there to see it, and I said to the friend of mine that was going with us, I said, "My goodness." I said, "Look at all of these young men." I said, "Seems for me, seems that they are young men. And where are their moustache?" (she laughs) She said, you see, a lot of times when you come to America she, this was her second time she come. And she said a lot of that kind of man don't ever, just don't have a moustache. Shaved it all, shaved it all.

SIGRIST: So that was surprising to you seeing moustaches in America.

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: After the five days were over did they take you to Ellis Island then?

BRDAR: Uh, yeah.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about Ellis Island?

BRDAR: Uh, I remember the lady question me. And my sister still couldn't be there. I was there myself, and she questioned me how old I was when my dad come to this country and how old I was when my mother come, and so forth. And I said, and then she said, "Would you know your dad if you see him now?" I said, "Yes. And I was nine months old!" I already told her that I was nine months, nine months when my dad left. And I said, "Yes." She said, "How could you know him? You were nine months old when he left. And you said you know, how could you know him there then?" And I said, "Here he is sitting out there," a picture of his dad. I remember that. (she laughs) Oh, boy. And that's about all, then.

SIGRIST: So your father looked like your grandfather, then.

BRDAR: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah?

BRDAR: Yes. Just a picture of him.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me what it was like greeting your father for the first time? I mean, you really don't know this man.

BRDAR: No, but it seems to sort of that I know him, that I feel like I would grow up with him, like he was there all the time. That's the way I feel.

SIGRIST: So you felt very warmly right from the bat, right off the bat.

BRDAR: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Did your mom come to Ellis Island too with him, to pick him up?

BRDAR: No. I didn't see my mother till we come to Youngwood.

SIGRIST: And where's Sophie through all of this? Is she still sick somewhere?

BRDAR: Yeah, she was, she wasn't, she was, when Dad come, Granddad come to pick us up, and then on the way, somehow on the way did they, did she come, too. And we all, from there we all went home to Youngwood together.

SIGRIST: Do you remember anything else about Ellis Island while you were here? How long were you here?

BRDAR: I think that we was eleven days.

SIGRIST: You were eleven days at Ellis Island.

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Oh, so you stayed overnight here, then.

BRDAR: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Where did you sleep at Ellis Island?

BRDAR: Oh, there was a, I wasn't the only one. There was a bunch, a bunch of people to sleep. They, they was in the one room, maybe fifty women. And you sleep, go ahead, sleep wherever you want. Go and look for bed.

SIGRIST: Did they lock you in at night, do you remember?

BRDAR: Oh, yeah. Yeah, they, oh, they, I think, locked everything in during the day, too.

SIGRIST: Were you ever allowed outside?

BRDAR: Oh, no.

SIGRIST: Why were you kept here for eleven days?

BRDAR: There was two boats. There were three boats at the same time, but two was before us come, but they never was unloaded for some reason. So they have to get unloaded by the, by the way they, by the time they come in, see.

SIGRIST: I see. Do you remember where they fed you at Ellis Island?

BRDAR: Huh?

SIGRIST: Where did you eat on Ellis Island? Do you remember? No? Was it crowded at that time here?

BRDAR: Uh, yes, it was.

SIGRIST: And did you have to have any medical exams when you were here?

BRDAR: No.

SIGRIST: Nothing like that. All right. So you meet your father, and somewhere along the line you pick Sophie up.

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And he takes you to Youngswood, Pennsylvania?

BRDAR: To Youngwood, yeah.

SIGRIST: Youngwood.

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: How did you get to Youngwood?

BRDAR: By the train.

SIGRIST: And did your father bring you a little present or something when he came to pick you up? No. Okay. Tell me what it was like to see your mother again.

BRDAR: Well, it was all right.

SIGRIST: Did she come to the train station to meet you?

BRDAR: No. She, we have to go to home before she comes, rather, before I see her again.

SIGRIST: She was at home.

BRDAR: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the house that they lived in?

BRDAR: They, it sort of was, have a little, by the railroad they used to have by railroad tracks a little cottage, like, you know. And that's where they have it.

SIGRIST: Did they have any children? Had they had any children?

BRDAR: After they, yeah. They have three more.

SIGRIST: So this was a surprise to you.

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me what it was like getting adjusted to America. What was hard about getting adjusted to this country?

BRDAR: Oh, yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: What was difficult?

BRDAR: Oh, a lot of things, you know. You, I got used to it in, living like I was living, and there was the other way that I have to live then.

SIGRIST: Well, what was different about the way you lived in America compared to the way you lived in Yugoslavia? What was different about them?

BRDAR: Oh, what was different? Difference is everything. Over here, why, we have enough food to eat. That's one thing, which is, there was not enough there. And, uh, there was a lot of things like, that I have here that I didn't have when I was living out there.

SIGRIST: These are good things, though. This is a good difference between America and Yugoslavia.

BRDAR: Yeah. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: How did you learn English?

BRDAR: Oh, well, I used to try to talk to the kids and the friends that I go to church with and go to play with and stuff like that. And I pick up pretty good.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what the first word in English was that you learned?

BRDAR: Uh, no, I don't think I remember.

SIGRIST: Did your parents learn English?

BRDAR: Oh, my father know how to talk real good, that you really wouldn't be able to tell. But my mother never, ever learned.

SIGRIST: Why not? Why do you think?

BRDAR: I think she was slow, a little bit, on it. She and, they lived like other, connecting with the other people. They lived by the railroad train. My dad was a railroad man. And that day used to, you know, don't get to see much, and the other people and talk, like. And I don't know. My mother, I would have said, was a little bit like a backwards, you know. And she never, she never, that don't bother her. She never think that she want to learn.

SIGRIST: Was your mother, did your mother like America, or did she miss Yugoslavia?

BRDAR: Oh, no. She don't miss the Yugoslavia.

SIGRIST: Nothing to miss, huh.

BRDAR: Yeah. She don't have nothing to miss.

SIGRIST: Well, let me ask you this question in our few remaining minutes. If things were so much better here, why did you go back to Yugoslavia?

BRDAR: Oh, well, I really don't know. That was, why we go? And I don't know why in the world did we, I believe, seems to me like I forget a lot of those things. Seems to me like, that we used to going and coming back right away and that didn't work that way.

SIGRIST: Was it the whole family that went back? Who went back?

BRDAR: I don't know. No, the whole family didn't go.

SIGRIST: Did your mother and father go back?

BRDAR: No.

SIGRIST: They didn't go back to Yugoslavia.

BRDAR: Uh-uh.

SIGRIST: But you went.

BRDAR: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: And did Sophie go back?

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: You and Sophie went back to Yugoslavia.

BRDAR: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: And how long were you in Yugoslavia before you came back to this country?

BRDAR: About three months, I think. That's all we was back in Yugoslavia.

SIGRIST: Were you married at that time when you went back to Yugoslavia?

BRDAR: I got married over here and went back.

SIGRIST: What was your husband's name?

BRDAR: Radeh.

SIGRIST: Radhe.

BRDAR: Radeh.

SIGRIST: Radeh.

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And what year did you get married?

BRDAR: Uh, lord. (they laugh) It was '23, I think.

SIGRIST: Soon after you got here.

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And did he want to go back to Yugoslavia? Did he want to go back to Yugoslavia?

BRDAR: I don't think so. I couldn't, I don't remember that neither.

SIGRIST: You just remember going back. (he laughs)

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you have any children at that time?

BRDAR: Yeah. I had three girls.

SIGRIST: Who had, how many children did you have at the time that you went back to Yugoslavia?

BRDAR: That's all I had, the three girls, that's all.

SIGRIST: Three girls. So you stayed in Yugoslavia for three months.

BRDAR: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: And then you came back to America.

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And did you have to come through Ellis Island again?

BRDAR: No, I don't think so. No, we don't, we just come to New York and come, come right away out of there. You know, we don't go through that.

SIGRIST: And when you came back to America, were you pregnant when you came back to America? Yes? And with which child were you pregnant?

BRDAR: This one that you see over here sitting.

SIGRIST: And what's her name? (they laugh)

BRDAR: Dorothy.

SIGRIST: So Dorothy was actually born in America.

BRDAR: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Soon after you got back?

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Let me ask you this question. When you went, when you were in Yugoslavia for those three months, how did you feel? What did it look like to you? You'd been in America for quite a while at that point.

BRDAR: It didn't look good. See, and we was really glad to get out of there and come to this country.

SIGRIST: When you went back to Yugoslavia, did you feel like an American?

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So you were looking forward to getting back to America.

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: You know, in our last couple of minutes I want to ask you, how do you feel about what's going on over there

right now? It's a bad situation over in Yugoslavia.

BRDAR: I think so, I think so, very bad.

SIGRIST: I mean, how do you feel about seeing the country all torn up that way?

BRDAR: Well, I know that's no good, and what could I do? See, you know that's no good, and you can't see, you can't do anything about it.

SIGRIST: And you wanted to get out of there anyway, so . . .
(they laugh) Do you think your parents were glad that they came to America?

BRDAR: I believe so.

SIGRIST: Did they ever, did they ever want to go back?

BRDAR: No, uh-uh. They never was planning to go back.

SIGRIST: Did your father work for the railroad all his life?

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And, well, I guess, let me ask you, are you glad that you came?

BRDAR: Oh, yeah. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: How do you think your life would have been different if you had stayed in Yugoslavia and grown up there?

BRDAR: I know it would be rough, so . . .

SIGRIST: Was your husband from Yugoslavia?

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: How did you meet your husband?

BRDAR: I don't know how I meet him. I forgot. (they laugh) He come, him and another fellow come to see us when we come from old country. And then I, he kind of have him on my mind, and he went back, where he come from. But later on my brother-in-law, he come to see my sister and then he come with him again. And that's when meet him.

SIGRIST: I see. What did you like about him when you saw him? What attracted you to him?

BRDAR: Oh, I don't know. I forgot. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: It was a long time ago.

BRDAR: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, Bubba, I want to thank you very much. You all have traveled quite some distance to be here today, and I want to thank you very much for giving us your time and for telling us your story.

BRDAR: Yeah. It's the time of my life.

SIGRIST: Yes, yes. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Bubba, otherwise known as Milka Brdar, right? And it's May 22nd, Saturday, 1993.