

EI-327

JOHN MATTHIAS MAIER

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AGE 6

PASSAGE ON "THE ARABIC"

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SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Wednesday, May 26, 1993. I'm at the Ellis Island Recording Studio with John M. Maier, M-A-I-E-R. Mr. Maier came from Germany in 1925. He was just shy of age seven. He was six years old and eleven months. Mr. Maier, can we begin by you giving me your full name, and include a middle name, if you have one, please.

MAIER: John Matthias Maier.

SIGRIST: And what is your birth date?

MAIER: April 26, 1918.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me, Mr. Maier, where you were born?

MAIER: I was born in Munich.

SIGRIST: And are there any stories associated with your birth?
Did your mother ever talk about anything?

MAIER: I can't recall anything. Only that I was born there,
then they came from that little town, that they
brought me in there. I mean, my mother came in to
give birth in Munich. That's where the hospital was.
In fact, I even visited the church I was baptized in
in 1982. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: I see. What town did they live in?

MAIER: Feltmochen. I don't know if you'll ever find it on
the map. I couldn't find it. I asked over in Germany
some of the people. "Feltmochen? Eh?" They looked
at me.

SIGRIST: Can you say it slowly, please?

MAIER: Felt, like felt, mochen.

SIGRIST: Mochen.

MAIER: Yeah. M-O-C-H. Something like . . .

SIGRIST: E-N, maybe?

MAIER: I-N-G, maybe. I couldn't spell that. I was too young. I didn't even know.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about that town that they lived in?

MAIER: I know I remember, I went to, maybe there must have been, I don't know if they had kindergarten there, but like the first grade. I remember myself, I used to, in them days we already had those knapsacks on the back, I mean, the shoulders. Now they got them over here. But that is all I can recall, until I came over here.

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

MAIER: Not very well, no. I couldn't remember that. I know I fell in there. That's where I got this thing over here. My mother, (he laughs) something on my head.

SIGRIST: How did you fall?

MAIER: I hit the edge of, from the chair, I hit the edge of the windowsill.

SIGRIST: Do you remember them treating you medically or?

MAIER: No.

SIGRIST: Nothing like that.

MAIER: All I remember, I had an aunt there. And when she, I used to dread when she minded me, took me when they went out or something, because she was very strict. I used to get quite a few fannings from her. I hated her. Once I met her over, she came over here ahead of me, two weeks ahead, she moved, she went to Milwaukee, my aunt, my father's sister. And . . .

SIGRIST: Did she live in that town also? She lived in the town that your . . .

MAIER: Oh, no, I don't think she lived there. When she came to visit or something, she used to stay when something, my parents had something to do, she would mind me. Oh, I dread that.

SIGRIST: (he laughs) Can you tell me what your father's name was, please?

MAIER: The same, John, but no middle initial.

SIGRIST: What did your father do for a living in Germany?

MAIER: He was a butcher.

SIGRIST: Do you have any memories of his place of business?

MAIER: No, he worked for someone, I believe, because it was, I think his father had a butcher business or something. Because he, he had to go through one, in them days you had to go to apprentice school, and he used to have to get up four in the morning he told me to go there and learn the trade. So he knew it inside out by the time he came over here. He was a young man then, I guess twenty-five or so.

SIGRIST: What was your father's personality like?

MAIER: He got along with everyone. He was very jolly, more or less jolly. He loved to dance and everything. He was just the opposite of my mother. I don't know how they got together. My mother was no live wire. But he, when he went to a place with her, he danced all night long.

SIGRIST: What was your mom's name?

MAIER: Marie.

SIGRIST: And do you remember her maiden name?

MAIER: Yeah, Wallner, W-A-L-L-N-E-R.

SIGRIST: And so your mother wasn't quite as vivacious as your father.

MAIER: Well, she was brought up in a convent. She came from a family of, they had about eleven kids. They had a big restaurant business, I think.

SIGRIST: Did she ever talk about what it was like . . .

MAIER: Kirchsean, I don't know if you know that. Kirchsean, like churches, Kirchsean. That's what the name, that's where she came from.

SIGRIST: Did she ever talk about what it was like growing up in a convent?

MAIER: Oh, yeah. She told me they were very strict there. In fact, she used to always tell me how many times, all the scissors and sewing equipment she brought over here, and she had it till the day she died here.

SIGRIST: What kinds of, what kinds of things were there to do in this town in Germany for fun? You mentioned dancing.

MAIER: Well, no, not dancing much. But, I mean, he did that more. I seen them do that more here. I didn't see them do it over in Germany. (he laughs) But there was no future there in that town. I mean, and this was only, what, about seven years after the first World War. Things were pretty bad. And it happened to be that this young, not young, they were middle-aged people, they were, they were from Germany, but they lived in America, and they came over to visit. My mother used to send them over something to eat, cook something for them and all. And they got to talking, and then they asked my parents would they like to come to America, they'd sponsor us. Oh, my father, zoom. He went right away, because he always wanted to. In fact, he just missed the boat. He was going to join the circus, and he was headed for South America. It's a good thing he never made it, because that boat got sunk, it sunk, that boat. (he laughs)
Just lucky.

SIGRIST: Did, so your father was very much aware of how limited things were in Germany.

MAIER: Oh, yeah, he did. He says, "We're in the butcher

business, and people could hardly buy any meat." He said years after that war they still suffered.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about the suffering after the war, perhaps, do you remember the inflation in Germany of the currency?

MAIER: Not at six, no.

SIGRIST: No.

MAIER: No. I didn't have much to do with currency yet.
(he laughs)

SIGRIST: I thought maybe your parents might have told you.

MAIER: Oh, yeah, yeah. The German mark wasn't worth that much right after. My mother had a suitcase full of money that she couldn't use for nothing.

SIGRIST: Because the inflation was so . . .

MAIER: My parents were, I wouldn't say they were rich, but they were good. They lost a lot of things.

SIGRIST: Did your parents have their own parents in this town?
Do you remember any grandparents in Germany?

MAIER: No. My father's mother, but I don't remember her

much. I've seen pictures of her. And she, in fact, I have a half-sister over there, my father had an affair with somebody. (he laughs) And naturally, we didn't get together quite often. I mean, I'd get to visit her. She came over to visit me. And that's where . . .

SIGRIST: And she still lives in Germany.

MAIER: Yeah. She was with the, with my father's mother. She didn't want to leave. My father wanted to bring her over after she, we got settled and everything. It was just before the next war started. My father said, "Come over here. What are you staying over there for?" No, she liked, and then Grandma died anyhow.

SIGRIST: Do you remember celebrating holidays at all in Germany? What religion were you, first of all?

MAIER: Catholic.

SIGRIST: Catholics. Do you remember celebrating Christmas when you were in Germany?

MAIER: I don't know. No, I don't recall much about Christmas. I did both, I made both my Communion and Confirmation here.

SIGRIST: In this country.

MAIER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember going to church in Germany at all, or any part of religious life in Germany?

MAIER: I really don't, no.

SIGRIST: Did your parents, were they religious people?

MAIER: My mother was, but Daddy, my father didn't believe much in anything. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: He just wanted to get a new life going somewhere else. Do you remember ways, you said your mother was religious, do you remember ways that you practiced your religion at home? Did she have prayers that she taught you, or anything like that?

MAIER: Maybe when we sat down to eat we'd say a short prayer. My father used to say, "What are you saying that for?" But she wanted, so we said it. That was only a short time, I remember.

SIGRIST: Did you have brothers and sisters?

MAIER: No.

SIGRIST: Other than the half sister.

MAIER: The half sister, yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit, you mentioned you remembered going to school. What else do you remember about school other than your backpack? Do you have any other memories of school in Germany?

MAIER: Well, not much.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the building?

MAIER: Maybe one time I was a little mischievous, and I got a couple across my hands. They were strict in them days.

SIGRIST: What would you do that would make you be punished? What, did you talk out of turn?

MAIER: You talk, or you didn't pay attention, horsing around, you know.

SIGRIST: Did you go to a Catholic school?

MAIER: No. That I don't remember. I might, if I couldn't remember that. I didn't see any nuns or sisters there, so I don't believe so. That's the only reason

my mother, I think, was so religious, she was brought up in the convent and everything. That's why, she was very sheltered. She was the last of about eleven children.

SIGRIST: She was the youngest.

MAIER: Yeah, and the doctor never thought she'd survive, because she was so weak and always sick. She lived to be ninety-three.

SIGRIST: The doctor was wrong.

MAIER: That's how wrong those doctors were. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: Do you remember your mother as an adult being ill or anything like that? I mean, was she sickly into her adulthood?

MAIER: No, not much. You know, she had colds or something like that, you know. I remember one time she had a fever. Not too often she was sick. She gained quite a bit of weight when she come here, though. She was very frail when she came here, but when she lived here a couple of years she blew up a little, got heavy.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what kinds of foods you ate in

Germany? Was there something that your mother made you as a child that you particularly enjoyed?

MAIER: You mean like cereals or something, you mean breakfast? We didn't have much.

SIGRIST: Well, what kinds of foods did they . . .

MAIER: We didn't have no cereals, I don't believe.

SIGRIST: What kind of food did you eat in Germany? What was a typical meal?

MAIER: My father, we'd have pork chops, when he brought them home from where he worked. And, you see, he used to make, when he worked in, he'd make like blutwurst, and that stuff, liverwurst, he made, you know. He made all that stuff. In fact, he had a pork store over in New York here.

SIGRIST: Once he came to this country.

MAIER: In the Bronx. When we landed, we came up to the Bronx.

SIGRIST: I see. Well, so your father wants to come to America. What do you, what do you as a six-year-old, know about America when you lived in Germany? What did

that mean to you?

MAIER: Something I never heard of. I didn't know where it was to begin with. The reason, they didn't teach us much about geography yet in the first grade. They teach you mostly how to write. You'd better do it right, too.

SIGRIST: Did your mother want to come to America?

MAIER: She was a little hesitant. She didn't, they all told her, "Oh, you'll be back in six months." Yeah, my father said, "Baloney." (he laughs) He never did. "Oh," they all said, "ah, you'll be back." Because he had a brother. He says, "What are you going over there for? What are you going to do there?" My father said, "Well, what are you doing here? There's nothing here for me." You know. Unless there's a little job as a butcher here. I ain't going to survive here all the time. So he took the chance. My father was a guy who would take a chance.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you packed when you took with you, when you left for America? Do you remember what you took with you?

MAIER: Well, we couldn't take too much. Just the clothes that we had and, well, my father maybe had a suit that he probably got married in. (he laughs) I don't know. But they were not well-off.

SIGRIST: Do you remember taking something, like a toy, that was yours, something that you would remember Germany by?

MAIER: A little wagon, I think it was. I used to pull around a wooden wagon. Like we have here, we had those wagons here, too, but they weren't made out of all wood like over there.

SIGRIST: Do you remember leaving your town?

MAIER: Yeah. I remember we went to the, to Munich to get the train to go to Hamburg. It was like an all-day trip, a long trip.

SIGRIST: Did people, did people say goodbye to you when you left your town? Do you remember there being like a dinner . . .

MAIER: Only the relatives, like his brother, and he had a half-brother. His mother there, she was still alive. Her real father had died, and then he had a step-father, which my father could never stand, so he

wouldn't bother, don't bother coming.

SIGRIST: So you went to Munich, and then from Munich you went to where?

MAIER: Hamburg.

SIGRIST: To Hamburg.

MAIER: Hamburg.

SIGRIST: And you said that was a long train ride.

MAIER: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you have any memories of that train ride?

MAIER: Oh, yeah. Well, it was very tiresome. And I was getting on their nerves, I guess. I didn't know what to do. Running up and down in the car and everything. How can a kid sit for all that time, you know. I had to get up. And then we were going through that rigmarole in Hamburg.

SIGRIST: There was just the three of you, right? Mom, Dad and you.

MAIER: That's all.

SIGRIST: And when you say the rigmarole in Hamburg, what is it that you remember?

MAIER: Oh, you get there with your passport and everything, your visa, to get on the ship and all.

SIGRIST: Did you have to stay overnight in Hamburg?

MAIER: I don't remember. I don't think so. Maybe we did, because we got in later. We had to stay till the day after or so before we got everything straightened out to get on board ship.

SIGRIST: Did you have to undergo any kind of medical exams in Hamburg?

MAIER: Not much, I don't believe. But he said, he looked like he wasn't sure, the doctor was. But he says, "Yeah, we're only going to be gone. It will only take about two weeks. It might not pop out yet." Like, what do you call it, smallpox, not smallpox.

SIGRIST: Measles?

MAIER: Chicken pox.

SIGRIST: Chicken pox. You had chicken pox.

MAIER: Yeah. It was on the floor coming. So my father, "Oh, Jesus, that's all we need now." So we got here, the guy was, he looked at me, I don't know. He pulled my father over to the side and everything. I don't know what they talked about, but somehow they let me through.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the boat that you got in Hamburg?

MAIER: S.S. Arabic, A-R-A-B-I-C.

SIGRIST: And tell me what happened on the boat.

MAIER: (he laughs) You want me to repeat that? I went a few days out, I got friendly with another young kid like me, you know. We played together and everything. And we saw this gate open, you know. We didn't realize, you know. Two were squeezed in there. And all these electrical things were there for the whole ship. Some of the crew members left it open, and the captain and the first officer were on the deck on top, and they hollered, "Get them kids out of there!" We didn't know what the excitement was about, and they came charging down, and they got us out. And good thing, before we touched one of those wires. He says, "You would have been fried." That's why I say, I made

it.

SIGRIST: What else do you remember about the boat ride? Was it a smooth trip, or a rough trip?

MAIER: It was a little rough because, see, March, it was pretty windy in them days.

SIGRIST: You left in March.

MAIER: Yeah. It was the beginning of March, and we got here the 27th.

SIGRIST: And did you get sick?

MAIER: No. I don't recall getting sick, but I think my mother got a little seasick. Not my father. I might have been. I don't know. I wouldn't remember.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me where it was you slept on the boat?

MAIER: Well, we weren't down in the hold. I know that. We were up further. And we had, like, a cabin, I think it was. We were only us three in there, I remember, nobody else. I don't know what part of that ship it was, but it might have been up above. Because I never remember going down in the hold. I never remember

going downstairs.

SIGRIST: Do you remember being up on the deck of the ship?

MAIER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What would you do if you were up on the deck?

MAIER: That's where that box was. (he laughs) That's what I did. I shouldn't have been up there. (they laugh) That's why he saw me. The captain was right up on top there, and the thing was right below him.

SIGRIST: How did you feel as a young boy being on this boat? Was this exciting, or was this scary?

MAIER: Well, when I saw those waves once in a while, it was a little scary. I used to see the waves come up over the top in the front. (he laughs) That's why my mother got sick. We only had one day of that, I think.

SIGRIST: Was this the first time you had ever seen the ocean?

MAIER: Yeah. Where I was there was no water.

SIGRIST: There's no water. (they laugh)

MAIER: I mean, nobody ever took me to a lake or something, I

don't know.

SIGRIST: Did, was there a dining room on the boat, that you remember?

MAIER: We ate, but it was a, it must have been a dining room because we, some people I noticed they had lunches in brown bags or something. I never recall that we ate anything out of a brown bag. We got there, I don't know what kind of class we were in, really. They had second or third class, I think, in steerage. It might have been second. I think we were way on the top.

SIGRIST: Do you know what your father did during the day? If he didn't get sick, what was he doing on the boat?

MAIER: Well, he made, he got acquainted with a bunch of, a lot of people there that came from the area, too, from Munich and all, around there. We got to talking to them. In fact, the day after that we met some, when we landed here we got settled, one of them were settled right near us, and he opened up a barber shop there. And I used to go there and get my hair cut all the time. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: So your father's kind of a friendly sort of guy.

MAIER: Oh, yeah. He gets around, you know. He used to get around, he used to make friends easy.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how long the trip took, on the boat?

MAIER: I'd say, in '27, I think it was about ten to twelve days, at least.

SIGRIST: And then do you remember coming into New York Harbor at all?

MAIER: I don't know if they let me out. (he laughs) If I seen it or not. Maybe I saw the Statue. I might have seen that.

SIGRIST: What about your chicken pox? Did they ever break out while you were on the boat?

MAIER: No, not on the boat, thank God. I didn't have a problem. Might have shipped me back, I guess. So when we got here they were still, you could see some of the blotches, you know. Right now the doctor must have turned around. (he laughs) Thank God, make all the trip and expense and have to go back home, oh!

SIGRIST: You don't happen to know how much your tickets cost, do you?

MAIER: Oh, I don't know.

SIGRIST: Do you . . .

MAIER: I wasn't with the finance yet. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: So it was at Ellis Island where the doctor was looking at your smallpox.

MAIER: I think so.

SIGRIST: Or, chicken pox. What else do you remember about Ellis Island?

MAIER: That big hall there, we went to how many different rooms, check here, check that. And I remember having the tag on me with my name on it. My parents had it, too, because we couldn't speak the language. That was the tough part when I first went to school here.

SIGRIST: Yeah, learning the language.

MAIER: And they put me, you know, down. I'm behind already a year, because I was almost seven. I'm sure I was seven by the time I got into school, and it was near the end of the term, in April. I only had a month or two to go, and school was over for the summer. So I didn't learn much English yet.

SIGRIST: How did you finally learn English?

MAIER: Through school.

SIGRIST: Was it hard to learn English?

MAIER: Well, she (?) me. I never had an accent, never.

SIGRIST: Well, you were so young, too. Did someone meet you at Ellis Island to take you?

MAIER: People that sponsored us. They came down, and they brought us up to the Bronx. That's where they lived at the time.

SIGRIST: Do you remember as a young boy impressions of what New York City was like, seeing this for the first time?

MAIER: It was fascinating, immense, you know. From the place I lived in, it was so small, you know. All I know, I remember in our town there was a big, uh, excavation, like. Us kids used to play around there, that's all.

(referring to the microphone) Hey, is this off?

(a rustling noise is heard)

SIGRIST: No, it's . . .

MAIER: It's against me. I thought maybe you ain't hearing

anything. (they adjust the microphone)

SIGRIST: Tell me about what, how your father got his first job.

MAIER: It's coming off. (referring to the microphone)

SIGRIST: We're going to pause just for a moment. (break in tape) We're now resuming with John Maier.

Mr. Maier, tell me how your father went about getting himself established in this country.

MAIER: Well, he, the party that sponsored us told us about different locations of the butcher firms, you know. So they mentioned this one firm down, it was on Third Avenue and 127th Street right over the Willis Avenue Bridge. It wasn't far from where we lived, 139th Street at the time, in the Bronx. So he went down there with a bunch of fellows. Oh, they're looking for butchers, you know. My father said, "I want to try, this is the nearest house, you know. Go right there." He was standing there, and everybody was saying, as soon as the guy came up to choose somebody, they all rush up. My father stood in the back. He said, "I'm not knocking myself out." So he went through all of them, he told my father, "I want you."
(he laughs) He picked him, and all these other

guys, they were up there breaking their necks to get the job, so he got that job right off the bat.

SIGRIST: And he was working for someone.

MAIER: Yeah, Stahl & Meyer. It was a butcher company, but I don't think they're in business any more.

SIGRIST: Stahl & Meyer?

MAIER: Yeah. S-T-A-L, H-L, and Meyer, M-E-Y-E-R. So he worked there for a good number of years until 19, at the time they had a strike in 1931 or '32, Depression. They went on strike. My father heard what he said. He was already like a foreman there. He says, "Well, I'm going on strike now." "Don't, I'm scared . . ." So he went out, too. He says, "I was a fool, but I didn't want to be a scab or something." He was out of work quite a while then, you know. During the Depression things weren't so hot. He got, like, jobs for a week here, a week there. Cutter, here, that's another big butcher outfit. They would hire him for a week or so. Swift & Company, some of them. They worked with most of them, and they wind up, after he got a job in Horn & Hardhart, in their commissary.

SIGRIST: Horn and harder?

MAIER: The automat. I don't know if you ever heard of the Automat cafeterias. My father worked for them for nineteen years until he died.

SIGRIST: I see. What about your mom? When you came to this country, did she get a job?

MAIER: No, she didn't work, no. She was a house frau. He didn't believe in her. (he laughs) He says, "You stay home and watch the children."

SIGRIST: Did she like America when she got here?

MAIER: At the beginning. I think she was homesick. She kept writing all the time to home.

SIGRIST: Were there lots of German . . .

MAIER: She had some sisters here, over there. So she kept in touch with them for a while, and then by and by, you know, you finally get accustomed to it. She knew my father would never go back.

SIGRIST: But she wanted to go back.

MAIER: But she got over it, too, I think, in the end, after

she got settled down and he was working and all.

SIGRIST: Did your father learn English?

MAIER: Oh, yeah. He learned, he got, he was a citizen. He became a citizen.

SIGRIST: How did he learn English, did you know?

MAIER: From people working in the job, you know. Not everybody spoke. All the Germans worked as butchers, you know. Like in Stahl & Meyer, that was no good for him at the beginning because they all talked German. He says, "I ain't going to learn anything over here." But then finally he got around and go to different places. He was one who observed a lot of things, and he tried his best to do it.

SIGRIST: Well, and he made friends easily, so that helped.

MAIER: Oh, yeah. He belonged to some kind of German clubs out in the Bronx there. But he never belonged to the Bund. He says, "They ain't catching me out there. I ain't stupid. They're taking your license plate numbers."

SIGRIST: What about your mom? Did she learn English?

MAIER: Yeah, she learned pretty good, not as good as my father, but she got around. I mean, she went to the store and everything. She can go shopping.

SIGRIST: Were there a lot of German people in the area where you were living?

MAIER: No. That's where, Yorkville is the section in New York that is where a lot of German people were. We lived in the Bronx, like 149th Street, at that time. I think we were part of Alexander Avenue. There were a lot of Irish people there, a mixture. Not many Germans there. My father was one the moved like a gypsy. The landlord didn't want to paint the apartment. The next month my father was out, he go look for another apartment that was painted. (he laughs) He didn't mind moving. I said, "Gee, you're going to get me, I'm never going to finish school if you're going to keep this up."

SIGRIST: So how often did you move, would you say?

MAIER: Oh, we came here, we were 139th Street, and we lived in (?). My father got a job, he wanted his own place. We lived right near them, too, 139th Street. And then from there we moved up to Brook Avenue between

146th Street and 145th Street. We lived there a couple of years, and then from there we moved to, I think it was Katonah Avenue, up about 176th Street, pretty far up, by the park there, Katonah Park. And from there we moved back, we moved back to 149th Street between Brook and St. Ann's.

SIGRIST: So you were all over the place.

MAIER: Yeah. From there we went up to (?). The last time was up to Third Avenue and Clemham Parkway, Third Avenue, right underneath where the Third Avenue El was running.

SIGRIST: Was this common for people at that time to move frequently?

MAIER: Yeah, because you could always get an apartment. There were always signs out for apartments. And the landlord give you everything you want. A month's free rent when you first come in, and all that. That's what my father did. (he laughs) From there we moved downtown. When I went into the service, we moved down to 47th Street between Tenth and Eleventh, I think it was, or Tenth and Ninth, I think now. And he could walk to work on the (?) factory. The

commissary right on Twelfth and 50th, 50th and 49th, so he could walk to work. He didn't have to take the train no more.

SIGRIST: How did your mother feel about all this moving around?

MAIER: Oh, she didn't care for it too much, I don't think. And then she had to make new friends again, you know, she wasn't too good at that.

SIGRIST: So she had a much harder time than your father.

MAIER: Yeah, she was the shy type or, I don't know. That's why I say my father and her were such opposites.

SIGRIST: Did they have any more children once they came to this country?

MAIER: No, she couldn't have any more, I understand.

SIGRIST: I see. Well, we're going to pause for a second and Peter's going to flip the tape, and we'll talk a little bit about what happened to you after you got to America.

MAIER: We didn't do the half hour over yet?

SIGRIST: We're at the half an hour now.

MAIER: Oh, charge us extra.

SIGRIST: We're going to pause.

MAIER: Okay.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: Mr. Maier, let me ask you, what was the first job you ever had that you were paid for?

MAIER: I worked down in the garment district at a leather company where they made leather belts for ladies and garments and pocketbooks and things like that. I was like a delivery boy there.

SIGRIST: How old were you?

MAIER: Just, I think, at that time I got out of school. I didn't go to high school there. I finished junior high. And from there I went to what you call, uh, I know that you have to go until you reach eighteen or something before you can get out of school. You had to go and finish, you've got to go there for so many months before you can be discharged. All right, I did that, I completed that. And I got into, my father got

me into Horn & Hardhart, then, got me a job in there.

I'll never forget it. Night work, you know.

SIGRIST: What did you have to do?

MAIER: I worked in the bakery department. I was the chief
Parker House man. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Parker House biscuits?

MAIER: Parker House biscuits. Yeah, I used to make them a
lot. And . . .

SIGRIST: How did you learn how to do the baking?

MAIER: Oh, they taught me. I learned how to work that
machine, mix the dough and put the ingredients in and
whip it up, and then form them, pop them over, and put
them in the long ovens. Man, about half a mile long,
put them all on big trays in there. And go upstairs,
sometimes help out making the pies.

SIGRIST: This is during the Depression, right?

MAIER: Yeah, after my father got in, my father got me in
when, because I didn't care for that job in the
garment district. I wanted to get out of there.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about being in New York during the Depression? What do you remember seeing in New York at that time?

MAIER: I see people line up for, to get welfare, not welfare, but something to eat. They'd be, and they'd also be selling stuff on the street corners, like pencils, apples, anything.

SIGRIST: Would you say that your family maybe was doing a little bit better than many families because . . .

MAIER: Oh, we had a hard time there, too, when my father had to take the, we moved to 149th Street at that time. He took a superintendent's job there, you know, had twenty-four tenants in there. So we had a free apartment, plus about thirty-five or forty dollars a month, besides we had the free apartment, and take care of the building, make the heat and everything, you know. And my mother would do this and that, mop down the stairs and things like that.

SIGRIST: So at least you always had a place to stay, and you always had a little money.

MAIER: It was a little harder till he got the job at Horn &

Hardhrt, then.

SIGRIST: When you were growing up, for you, did you feel more German or more American, when you were a young man?

MAIER: A young man?

SIGRIST: Yeah, when you were first starting to get out and work, did you feel more of an immigrant, or did you feel more of an American?

MAIER: I felt like I was a native here.

SIGRIST: Did you ever suffer any kind of prejudice because, of course, people may not have known that you were from Germany, but did you ever see in New York, in those days . . .

MAIER: Well, the kids, when I first got around, they used to call me "Dutch." (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Do you, do you ever remember feeling embarrassed that you had immigrant parents, or were you ever conscious of the fact that you . . .

MAIER: I know, that is strict. That's natural, that comes to you when people come see you. Sometimes they used to have to explain to my mother in German, you know, get

a man to talk to me in English, and I translated to my mother in German. At that time she wasn't too good with the English yet.

SIGRIST: And they still talked German at home?

MAIER: Oh, yeah, they did. Like, even when I, after I came home from the service I had to think twice how to talk any more, you know. I wasn't, I didn't use the language in over two years, then, two or three years before I came home from the service, on a furlough, I came home. And then over in California, I was stationed there for about a year or so. And then I went, from there they gave me the furlough, and then I went to the beautiful New Guinea.

SIGRIST: New Guinea, you went.

MAIER: Oh, that's a lovely country.

SIGRIST: Is this during World War Two?

MAIER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me a little bit about that.

MAIER: And then I went to the Philippines. I went in in, what was it, in '41, 1941, right after Labor Day. I

had the last big blowout on Labor Day, my friend and I, we had to line up in Camp Upton in Long Island. From there we went to South Carolina, Spartanburg, Camp Croft. From Camp Croft I got shipped back up to Camp Dix, put in the 44th Infantry. Went back to Louisiana. From Louisiana I went to Washington State.

From Washington State we were, we were sent down to California to, what's that, from Palos Verdes, the name in there. We were doing guard duty there.

(he laughs) (?) getting close. So from there, we stayed there. That was the problem with the joint, (?) in the army. (he laughs) I had a beautiful time there. And then, then they came, everybody got, one went to this one, one went to there, back. I was scheduled to go to Camp Chaffey to go to Europe. And when I didn't, my teeth had to get fixed. The next group I wound up going to the Pacific.

SIGRIST: Because of your teeth.

MAIER: Yeah. Maybe it was, I don't know, maybe it's fate. I don't know. Things were going bad over there. They were in the Bulge (?). (he laughs) I said, "I didn't want to go to the Bulge either." I might have gone there. I don't know why, but.

SIGRIST: How did your parents feel about you serving in the American military?

MAIER: They never really, my father, it never bothered him. I don't know if it bothered. My mother was just worried because I was in there, you know, in the army.

SIGRIST: Did they ever express any opinions about Germany's role during World War Two?

MAIER: Oh, yeah. My father, especially when he got, we got a notice from Adolph, you know, they'd pay for the fare, everything, come back to Germany. "Sure," my father says, "right away, I'll be over there." (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Well, that's interesting.

MAIER: "No way," my father said. That's why I didn't go out there to the Bund either. I don't want to be known.

SIGRIST: Was it difficult to be a German immigrant, I'm speaking for your parents now, in America at that time?

MAIER: World War Two?

SIGRIST: During World War Two, was it difficult to be a German

immigrant in America?

MAIER: I don't think we had too much of, my father had, you know, the trouble at the job or nothing. As far as I know, I mean, I wasn't home any more. I was out for four years. And he had, he used to trade with them. At the gas station he'd bring them meat and the guy would give him gas. (he laughs) Because they had a country place. He couldn't, the only way he could go up there if he got the gas to go up to Peekskill. So, and he used to make it that way. He used to put a lot of stuff in the car and make out, because they examined the car, he can't go joy riding. My father used to have a lot of junk in the car, bring it up, bring it up to the country. That's how our vacation got stopped, you know. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Let me, Mr. Maier, we have just a couple of minutes left. Let me ask you, did you marry?

MAIER: Oh, yes. I've got two sons.

SIGRIST: What was your wife's name?

MAIER: It's a beautiful name. You'll never miss it here and again. Jansenia, J-A-N-S-E-N-I-A, born in Fargo,

North Dakota.

SIGRIST: What was her maiden name?

MAIER: Fedele, F-E-D-E-L-E.

SIGRIST: And what year did you marry?

MAIER: Oh, I got to think of that. '49.

SIGRIST: 1949. You said you have two sons. What are their names?

MAIER: One is John and one is Richard.

SIGRIST: And what do they do?

MAIER: Well, my son John, he's in Georgia. He's, what do you call it, he likes, the fact is he loans the people the money to buy the goods. What do you call them again?

I can't think of that name. My other son is a financial analyst up in, with the Philip Morris company in White Plains.

SIGRIST: I see. Do you have any thoughts about your life, having come from where you came from, and the life that you made for yourself in this country. When you think back, what is your most proud moment, your

proudest moment in your life?

MAIER: My proudest moment?

SIGRIST: Yes. What moment were the proudest, what thing have you done that you're the most proud of?

MAIER: I guess raising a nice family. My two sons never gave me any trouble. I was happy about that. No drugs, no nothing. They both went to college. And they never caused me trouble, and I never had to go to the police station and pick them up or anything. (he laughs) They kept, I mean, and they were deathly afraid, I knew they would never take, because they couldn't even stand a needle, couldn't even stand to look at it when they were getting the thing, you know.

SIGRIST: So your family would be your proudest achievement.

MAIER: I'm proud, I got a nice house, a two-family house, got a nice car.

SIGRIST: Tell me about when you went back to Germany to visit, you said in 1982.

MAIER: Yeah, I went, my first time.

SIGRIST: Tell me how you felt when you went back to Germany.

MAIER: I felt strange. I mean, I went, we landed in, I went to Munich, and from there I called them up and they said, "Okay, we're going to be down the next day." The next morning, because this was afternoon already. And I got up to the desk and told them I had reservations here, and first I said it in English, you know. I'm not used to talking, and he understood. He could talk English, too. And I said, then I mentioned that, translated, I put it in German. "Oh, you speak German." I said, "Yeah, I speak German, but it's about fifty years since I been here." "Fifty years!" "Yeah," I says. "1925, this is 1982." I got my half-sister and her husband came down to visit and pick us up, and we went to her place. She lives in a town called Grunwald. That's about, like White Plains is from New York City.

SIGRIST: Grunwald, you said.

MAIER: Grunwald. Yeah. G-R-U-N-W-A-L-D. Yeah, it's a nice little house there.

SIGRIST: Did you feel any connection with the country when you were there, or did it just seem very foreign to you?

MAIER: Well, you know, I was born here, after all, and I still, I mean, when I come to (?), it would be this country, but I'm glad I wasn't over there for that war.

SIGRIST: So you're glad, you're glad your father decided to . . .

MAIER: Oh, yeah. That was the smartest move he made.
(he laughs)

SIGRIST: Well, Mr. Maier, I want to thank you very much.

MAIER: I hope it's good. I don't know how much I can remember any more.

SIGRIST: Uh, this is Paul Sigrist signing off with John maier on Wednesday, May 26, 1993. Thank you, sir.