

EI-339

ANNA GROMALA EMBROS

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AGE 15

SHIP NAME NOT RECALLED

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Tuesday, June 29, 1993. I'm in Terryville, Connecticut at the home of Vicky Kucinskas, and we're going to interview her mother, Anna Embros. Mrs. Embros was fourteen years old when she came to this country in either 1912 or 1913. She's not exactly sure. Mrs. Embros, can we begin by giving your birth date. When were you born?

EMBROS: To my recollection it's June 6th. That, I don't know how I know, but June 6th, 19, 1897.

SIGRIST: June 6, 1897.

EMBROS: June 6, yeah. I'm not sure because I don't know.

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SIGRIST: They didn't have birth certificates then, no. Where were you born in Poland?

EMBROS: Zagorzyn.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

EMBROS: Z-A, Z-A-G-O-R-Z-Y-N. Zagorzyn.

SIGRIST: And whereabouts in Poland is that?

EMBROS: It's in, uh, I don't know much about geography.

SIGRIST: Was it near a big city?

EMBROS: It was, yeah, near, like, Kraków, Nowy Sącz.

SIGRIST: Near Kraków.

EMBROS: Nowy Sącz.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the town itself? What did the town look like when you were a little girl?

EMBROS: I remember because my brother was, they were educated that first after the grammar school. You know, they have six years, six years grammar, and then after they go, they went, two of my brothers, they went to higher education. And first I know they were in Nowy Sącz, Nowy Sącz. That was

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a city near, closest to that.

SIGRIST: Nowy Sącz.

EMBROS: Nowy Sącz. You want to spell that?

SIGRIST: If you can, yes.

EMBROS: N-E-W-S-A, with a dot down, C-Z. Nowy Sącz.

SIGRIST: And that was the next nearest town.

EMBROS: Next. And then I know Kraków.

SIGRIST: Was near there also.

EMBROS: Yeah, the next one. It's further. But Nowy Sącz was closer.

SIGRIST: And that's where your brothers went to school.

EMBROS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Why does that stick out in your mind?

EMBROS: Because as a child I loved my brothers, and they were far away from home. And when they, my mother used to deliver, deliver like laundry, breads she make, their birthday, and they used to go there. What I remember, about every other week they took what they have, the leftover, and laundry, and clean one, and took that, and I always wanted to go there. I was stubborn,

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and I always wanted to go. And that's how I know about that city and . . .

SIGRIST: Did you live out in the country?

EMBROS: In the country, like farmland. There was a farm. Zagorzyn was village, and we have like a farm. Yeah, farm. It was beautiful.

SIGRIST: Was your father a farmer?

EMBROS: Yeah, land owner, a farmer. We have everything there. We have everything, orchards, which I have indeed, orchard and beautiful fields, everything.

SIGRIST: And your father owned his land?

EMBROS: He owned, yeah.

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

EMBROS: Ahh. It was, oh, in one place everything, the barn, the stables, and there were close around. And how can I tell you? I got any picture there.

SIGRIST: What was the house made out of?

EMBROS: What I remember, now it's different, but what I remember they have that lumber and it was, between that was moss or something thick, like you see some houses in here years ago, too.

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SIGRIST: So like lumber with moss?

EMBROS: Lumber, yeah, yeah, yeah. The house.

SIGRIST: How many rooms?

EMBROS: Rooms? There was one big room they call *Izba*. That's like for socializing, yeah. And then was another one they called [not understood] or something, what I remember. And a big kitchen, and there was another room I remember added to that, [not understood] yeah. And a kitchen, it was a big kitchen, and they have a, because what I remember, my brother was away already, what I remember. So . . .

SIGRIST: He was older than you.

EMBROS: Oh, yeah. They were older than, three brothers older. And the two was, they all were in this school, and the kids, I was the oldest of the, there was five of them, girls. One after another, five. The boys were first, three boys. Four boys, but one died.

SIGRIST: Can you name your brothers and sisters?

EMBROS: The oldest brother, the one that died, I don't know the name.

SIGRIST: Did he die as a child?

EMBROS: As a child, yes.

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SIGRIST: What did he die of? Do you know?

EMBROS: That I don't know.

SIGRIST: Your mother never talked about it.

EMBROS: No, I don't know. That I know because they were talking about that he died, but I don't know what he died of. But my oldest brother was Carl, Anthony, Frank, Anna, then me, Anna, and Władzia was, but I don't know in English, could be, I don't know. And Mary and Stacia and Rose.

SIGRIST: So you were the oldest girl?

EMBROS: I was the oldest, yeah, and they all were after me.

SIGRIST: Was this a big, noisy household with all these kids?

EMBROS: Well, I don't remember then that was a big noisy, no. Because I was the oldest, and the rest of them, they were small. And I don't know, for some reason, I don't remember too much noise. All I remember is if there was a noise, my father have, stay in the corner and put the hands up, standing ends up.

SIGRIST: As punishment.

EMBROS: As punishment. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

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EMBROS: Anthony.

SIGRIST: And what did he do for a living in Poland? You said he had a farm and owned land.

EMBROS: Yeah, you know.

SIGRIST: Was that the only thing?

EMBROS: Uh, he was, I don't remember. He was something. He had something to do in government, but I don't know. What's it saying? I remember them saying every once in a while he was away, saying what the saying is, I don't know.

SIGRIST: What was your father like as a person? What was his personality like?

EMBROS: He was nice. We all was a loving family, yeah, and he loved, you know. And he was very, and he loved me because he think, he thought I was a brave, I was a brave little girl.

SIGRIST: What, did you do something that showed how brave you were?

EMBROS: (she laughs) Well, I don't know if I can say, but I did things that I guess he liked about me. I don't know.

SIGRIST: When you think back to your childhood and you think about your father, is there a story that comes to mind, or something you remember about something you shared with your father that you remember, that sticks out in

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your mind, maybe a time he took you somewhere, or . . .

EMBROS: I remember we went to, when my brother was in the school there, I think in Nowy Sącz, we went to opera. And I think my father was there, he was holding me. That's what I remember. And in that opera that there was some show. It was, it was kind of scary, what I remember. It was like thunder and things. What can I tell you? I, that's all I remember.

SIGRIST: How old were you? Do you remember, how old were you when that, when you went to see the opera?

EMBROS: I must have been a child.

SIGRIST: A small girl.

EMBROS: Yeah, yeah. When I visited my brother.

SIGRIST: Now, what was your maiden name? What was your father's last name?

EMBROS: Gromala. G-R-O-M-A-L-A.

SIGRIST: And was your dad from this town?

EMBROS: My father? I don't know. I don't know where he was, if that was, I don't know if he was born in that town or someplace else. That I don't know.

SIGRIST: What was your mom's name?

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EMBROS: Mary.

SIGRIST: And her maiden name?

EMBROS: Uh, K-U-C, C-I-A. Kucia, Kucia.

SIGRIST: C-U . . .

EMBROS: Wait, wait. Ku . . . No, K.

SIGRIST: K.

EMBROS: K-U, K-U-C-I-A. Kucia.

SIGRIST: Kucia.

EMBROS: Kucia, yeah.

SIGRIST: And do you know if your mother was from this town?

EMBROS: No, not from that town. She married to my father. She was in a different village.

SIGRIST: Do you know how they met?

EMBROS: I don't know. No, I don't know.

SIGRIST: Do you know what year they got married?

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EMBROS: I don't know.

SIGRIST: Before you came along. (they laugh) Can you tell me what your mother's personality was like?

EMBROS: She was, she was a nice woman, very, very nice, yes, very. A hardworking woman.

SIGRIST: What did she look like, if you had to describe her in words?

EMBROS: (she sighs) Just like the rest of the people, hardworking people, yeah.

SIGRIST: Solid people.

EMBROS: I'm sorry I don't have her picture, yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me some of the things that your mother had to do around the house? What were some of the chores that she had to do?

EMBROS: Oh, she did, she did all the chores in the house, yeah. She always would, I remember she always had somebody to help her, and help her with the kids, with us kids.

SIGRIST: Was this a person who lived in the house with you, a servant of some sort?

EMBROS: Yeah, yeah. And they always have somebody, yeah. And my father always have somebody to take care of horses, and somebody to take care of the sheeps. We used to have the sheeps. And, oh, I used to go with my father.

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That's what I love about my father. We used to go with the sheep they have in the field. They have this place, like fence, and we used to go there in the morning, and he milk the sheep that have the babies. My mother used to make cheese with that. Somehow she, what I remember, the sheep milk and the cow's milk they mixed together, some kind of cheese. Bryndza, they called it. We used to go to, and my father used to, we used to sing. I know a few songs that we sing, yeah. Like religious, usually religious we sang, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you still remember any of those songs?

EMBROS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Could you sing a little bit of it in Polish for us?

EMBROS: You want?! (laughing)

SIGRIST: Yeah, sure. That would be great.

EMBROS: Oh, wait a minute. *Wszystkie nasze dzienne sprawy, Przyjm litoŝnie Boŝe prawy. A gdy będziam zasypiali, Niech Cię nawet sen nasz chwali!* There's more to it, but . . .

SIGRIST: What does that mean?

EMBROS: Uh, that's to God, that we go there and, you know, we going to do what we do, and we offer that to God, whatever we're going to do.

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SIGRIST: Huh. Well, thank you.

EMBROS: Yeah. You want another one?

SIGRIST: Yeah, sure, if you know another one.

EMBROS: *Boże w dobroci nigdy nie przebrany, żadnym językiem niewypowiedziany, Ty jesteś godzien, Ty jesteś godzien wszelakiej miłości, poszanowania poszanowania, chwały, uczciwości. O Boże dobry, Boże litościwy, przy...* I forgot a little bit, but I think you know. When you are a little bit nervous you forget.

SIGRIST: Is that a religious song also?

EMBROS: What?

SIGRIST: Is that a religious song?

EMBROS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What did that song mean?

EMBROS: Oh, the same thing, yeah, the same thing.

SIGRIST: Offering to God.

EMBROS: Offer to God, yeah, yeah. Offer to God.

SIGRIST: Were you a musical family?

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EMBROS: (she sighs) My brothers, they both, one play violin and the other one play clarinet, yeah. But otherwise not that. They, yeah, play.

SIGRIST: Whose side of the family did the music come from, your mother's or your father's?

EMBROS: I really don't know. I really don't know. I know my father sang a little bit, but, yeah. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Do you remember any grandparents or anything like that, other family members, when you were a kid?

EMBROS: I don't remember much about. I know my grandmother, my father's mother. She was old, yeah.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about your grandmother? What sticks out in your mind?

EMBROS: All I remember about my grandmother that I like her and she like me. I used to comb her hair, and she used to tell my father that, Antoś, when you're ready to retire, you have me, and take over." She would take care of you until, she will take good care of you, yeah.

SIGRIST: You said you remember combing your grandmother's hair. What kind of hair did she have? Was it . . .

EMBROS: Well, I don't know. I don't know. I guess, I suppose gray.

SIGRIST: Was it long?

EMBROS: It was, yeah. Long hair.

SIGRIST: Did she live with you?

EMBROS: Uh, she live with her other son, my father's brother, Peter. Yeah, she live with him in a, close, in neighbor, they have. Because, see, what they, how they do in, what I remember, they, when they are children and their land, they have to give some land to, when they leave home. So they have some land that really belonged to my father, but, you know, he was talking, he was using that land to, for, until, and have the mother leave with, instead of, like, payment, or something, to her. But the grandmother usually, they was here, and she stay with her, or she came to our house and stay for a while. And after grandmother die, you know, and that piece of land came back to them. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when your grandmother died?

EMBROS: I remember because they, that was in summer. Everybody was doing something in the field. They were getting something, I don't know what. And my grandmother usually take a nap. She was staying with us at that time. She usually take a nap in the afternoon. She was old. I remember she was about ninety years old when she die. And she usually take a nap, and I used to stay home with her to watch her. And when the grandmother

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didn't get up she was, or maybe I want something from her, I don't know. But I went to grandmother and tried to wake her up, and she didn't move. And so I ran to my father, to that father, because they were, you know, all, our land was all in one big place. I just ran out there and called or something for my father to come, and they found her dead. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the funeral or anything like that?

EMBROS: No. That I don't remember. I remember that my grandmother died while I was watching her, yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what year that was, or how old you were at the time?

EMBROS: No, I don't remember that, no.

SIGRIST: I see.

EMBROS: No, I don't remember.

SIGRIST: Let's talk about school for a little bit. (Mrs. Embros laughs) Did you go to school?

EMBROS: (she laughs) Yes, I did.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about school in Poland?

EMBROS: I remember that I was very stubborn. I liked to go to school. One winter was very bad weather, snow. And our land was, in back of our place they, in the

back was different village. We belonged to a different, main village. There was a brook, and there was a main road. Our land was in, we were off the road. We have our own, like, country road to the road. And there was a very bad winter, and I wasn't going to go to school. My mother says, "You're not going to school because it's bad." And I says, "I want to go to school!" I was crying. "I want to go to school!" And they didn't know. They didn't have, like here now, they announce, you know, that school is not going to be. They didn't know, but they have to figure out if there is school. So my father, my mother dressed me up good, and my father took me. I must have been first or second grade. I don't know. Took me to the road, and the road, by the road there was the houses, you know. They were known to us, like neighbors, people that we know who live there. So he went there and told his friends that, and he took me to the road. And the road was all right. I walked to school. And he says after the school I come there to that house, and he's going to come and pick me up. And I went to school, and there was no school, no school. And the teacher, they both were man and wife. They lived, I don't know if that was in the school or they had rooms there. But they were there, they invite me in. And they took me in, they keep me in their house and they give me something, too. I don't know. And when there was time, because my father, when there was a time after school, he was going to come and pick me up. So they keep me until that time to go home, and then my father come and pick me up. (she laughs) I was a stubborn child. That's why I'm here.

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SIGRIST: But you liked school.

EMBROS: Yeah, I liked school very much, yeah.

SIGRIST: Could your parents read and write?

EMBROS: Yes.

SIGRIST: They were educated people.

EMBROS: My father, yes. My mother could read, could read print, you know. I don't know if she, I know she could read, yeah.

SIGRIST: So by the time you left Poland you could read and write and the whole thing.

EMBROS: Yeah. My language, yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: That's a great story. Let me ask you about church. You were Catholic?

EMBROS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me about going to church, and if there was a church in town, that sort of thing?

EMBROS: Well, that was, the church was, the village was Zagorzyn and the church was, it wasn't that, I can't tell that town, city. Once, I didn't tell you. Before, you know, I after my village, Zagorzyn, there was a little town, Lunska, they called.

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SIGRIST: Lunska.

EMBROS: Lunska. L, in Polish they have, L, and something and A-U-C-K, uh, yeah. There was a church, yeah. But the school was in the village, in Zagorzyn, but the church was in there. And I go to the church.

SIGRIST: Were you a religious family?

EMBROS: Yes, but I don't think there was a hundred percent. My father wasn't that. But it was religion, yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how you celebrated Christmas?

EMBROS: We have a table. It was a very family at Christmas. A table and, covered with white, and there was a little hay on the middle, hay. And some holy picture or something was there, yeah. And we have a, and there was the, in the corner, in that house, in that room, they have wheat. Gee, I don't know in English. Bunch, tied together, wheat. And there was for us kids presents. They were religious pictures, holy pictures. We have to go and find it. (she laughs) And we have a Christmas tree. They didn't have, nobody had a Christmas tree, that I remember. But my brother, what I remember, I don't know how it was before, when my brothers went away. But when they used to come home for vacation we always had a Christmas tree dressed. The brothers brought those toys, that they weren't toys, they were all kinds of little animals. Fishes and apples, whatever color of the china, aluminum paper that they would decorate the trees. And after we ate all the candy that

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was, that was candy covered up, and hanging on the tree. And I don't think there was a lights. I don't remember lights, but we have that Christmas tree that I remember. But that was, the brothers, my brother Carl. He was, I loved him very much. Yeah, yeah!

SIGRIST: When you were growing up in Poland, what did you know about America?

EMBROS: I didn't know nothing about America. I didn't know nothing. Just how I find myself coming here, that's a good question, and I don't even remember everything. But, see, that was, war was hanging. Do you have a lot of time to listen to that?

SIGRIST: Yes, go right ahead.

EMBROS: I remember that all the people was talking about war because that was, Poland was on the Austria, and Franz Joseph was emperor, was big picture, portrait, on the wall.

SIGRIST: In your house?

EMBROS: In my house.

SIGRIST: Oh, you had a picture of Franz Joseph in your house.

EMBROS: Yeah, on the wall. And I remember one summer when my brother came home for vacation they were already, but we jumped from, I jumped from what you asked me. He took the picture from the wall and he step on it.

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And my mother was crying that he will be arrested, but I don't know. That's all I know. See, that war was already brewing, I think. People were talking about them. And the students, they were, I guess, started some kind of, but I don't know. And what I was talking about.

SIGRIST: About why you wanted to come to this country.

EMBROS: Oh. And the people were, the boys, I remember they, they were running, tried to run away because the war was coming. And all the boys, sixteen years or so, they wanted to go away. And they were opened, open way if you have money, and if you have, a lot of them, I think, they had family here. So they send some documents to bring them here, like, like, oh, gee, I keep forgetting.

SIGRIST: Like a passport?

EMBROS: Passport, yeah, money and ticket, whatever the Schipskarte, they call it. A lot of family from America, they used to help them, yeah. So a lot of them were Communists, and the boys were running away. So in that, they were, two boys were turned back from, when we arrived, now, we, away from what we . . .

SIGRIST: Well, wait. Now, did you have any family in this country?

EMBROS: No. Oh, my father, that's how my father's cousin, some cousin in Meriden . . .

[END OF SIDE ONE]

[BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO]

EMBROS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: From Maryland.

EMBROS: Meriden, Meriden.

SIGRIST: Oh, Meriden, Connecticut.

EMBROS: Yes, Meriden. So my father wanted my brother, the third brother, he was home. But he didn't want him, what I remember, he was afraid that when the war going to come he was going to, he was about sixteen, I don't know, seventeen years old, he was going to go. And he might be killed, and he's not going to have nobody and take over their land then, because all those girls were. So he wanted to send him away, send him to America to that cousin in Meriden, some cousin, the same name was my father, Gromala. His second cousin, third cousin, I don't know. And when I heard that, that he's going, and two of my girls, not friends, but two girls from the same village that I, they were going the same time there. They have one, she have in Hartford, she have a sister that's married and has a family. And when I heard that, I want to go, too. And my father have this cousin in the village that he was taking over business people. He was, I don't know, he was like, I can't tell that, mayor or something, that he was taking care of that

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business, people business, if anybody go someplace to fill out the papers, and so I remember I went with my father to him, to make papers for me. And he was looking at me, and he says, he said, "Why are you going, child? Why are you going?" I remember that. "But I want to go!" So he says, he fill out the papers. I don't know what he fill. He's supposed to fix my age or something, yeah. So I, what I can tell you.

SIGRIST: Did your parents want you to go?

EMBROS: No! My mother don't want. I says my father thought I was brave, so he didn't mind so much. But my mother was crying. She was crying, very. On the day we were leaving she cried, she cried, but I didn't cry. But when I saw her cry I start tears coming in my eyes, but I wiped them right away. And my father gave her some money because they were friends, cousins, to get themselves something, some kind of refreshment. And my mother threw the money in the mud there. She didn't want, she cried. She didn't want me to go. And . . .

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you took with you? What did you pack?

EMBROS: That I don't remember nothing. I don't remember what, she gave me, she gave me some kind of (she laughs) cloth or dress, and I didn't want to take it. I didn't want to take it. I said, "I don't need that when I get there, but she says, "Take it, take it." And you know what I thought she gave me that for? Because I didn't have my period, and I didn't know anything about period.

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I didn't know it. So what I think that she thought on my way, maybe, I'm going to get sick, and then I won't have nothing. So that's what I think that it was for. And I don't remember it, they just, that cousin I was coming, to Meriden, they gave me . . .

SIGRIST: Where did you leave from? When you left your town in Poland, where did you go to?

EMBROS: My father took us on a horse and buggy, all of us, from the village, to . . .

SIGRIST: You and the two girls.

EMBROS: Two girls.

SIGRIST: And your other brother.

EMBROS: And my brother.

SIGRIST: Which, and his name is . . .

EMBROS: Frank.

SIGRIST: Frank. So it's you and Frank and the two girls.

EMBROS: And two girls, yeah. Two girls. He took us to there. Now, this one to train, train. Was about three hours, maybe, ride in horse and buggy, yes.

SIGRIST: And your mother stayed.

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EMBROS: Stayed home.

SIGRIST: She stayed home.

EMBROS: She didn't come. She didn't come.

SIGRIST: So Dad went with you and then where did the train go to?

EMBROS: The train go, I think straight, straight to, uh, Rotterdam or Bremen. I don't know. But my brother was there in, studying, I don't know. He was in Antwerp. What is that? You know that.

SIGRIST: Antwerp?

EMBROS: Antwerp, yeah.

SIGRIST: In Belgium?

EMBROS: Oh, that is in Belgium?

SIGRIST: Antwerp is in Belgium.

EMBROS: Which is that closest, uh, train, not train, but boat, that I took the boat? I don't know. We took the boat. I don't know. Because we, our brother met us there. Rotterdam or Bremen.

SIGRIST: Well, boats left from all of those places.

EMBROS: Oh, yeah. But I don't know which one was it. but that's close to Belgium,

those ports?

SIGRIST: Antwerp is in Belgium, yeah.

EMBROS: Yeah. And that . . .

SIGRIST: Rotterdam.

EMBROS: Rotterdam. Close maybe?

SIGRIST: Somewhere, yeah. (they laugh)

EMBROS: But brother met us there, and took me and my brother to where he live, because the boat wasn't going to leave the same day. Supposed to leave the next day. You know, they have to go through the papers and everything, and was going to go the next day. So my brother took us where he lived there in Antwerp, yeah. And he took us on a ride, on a trolley cars over that city there, and he took us to lunch at noon. And there was a big, big hall, like dance hall, and a bar. And he took us there for lunch. And he ordered some beer, I think, for himself. And he told the bartender in French language, I think. I don't know if he studied French there, I think, in French what he wants. And he sent me to take it and tell me something in French to tell the bartender. And I went on the middle of the hall, and I forgot, and I ran back to him. (she laughs) He laughed, yeah. That was, yeah. These things I remember.

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SIGRIST: So you stayed overnight there.

EMBROS: Yeah, we stayed overnight, yeah.

SIGRIST: And then what happened?

EMBROS: The next day we went, our brother took that, he took over the papers and boat. And I have money.

SIGRIST: Carl? Is this your brother Carl who was living there? Frank is traveling with you.

EMBROS: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: But is this your brother Carl who's living there?

EMBROS: Carl, yeah.

SIGRIST: Carl.

EMBROS: Yeah. He lived, he was studying there, in Antwerp.

SIGRIST: I see. So he's your host while you were there.

EMBROS: Oh, he took us and he took care of the papers and the boat. And we have a cabin, not on the floor, not on the floor. On the second floor there. There was four bunks, beds. So the three of us slept in there, but the fourth one, I don't know who occupied the fourth one. Nobody I know.

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SIGRIST: Well, it was just the women, right? Were you separated?

EMBROS: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: So Frank is somewhere else.

EMBROS: Somewhere, yes. I don't know where he was, but he was on that.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, is this the first time you've ever seen a big boat?

EMBROS: The first time.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you thought when you saw this thing?

EMBROS: (she laughs) Huge things, huge things. And then, and then when I started getting to be lonesome, I miss home, that time.

SIGRIST: Was when you were on the boat.

EMBROS: On the boat, and that's when I start crying. (she laughs) And I wanted to go back, but it was too late. Oh, and my, my brother didn't want me to go. He didn't want, he wrote a letter home that, when my father wrote to him that we're going to go and he's supposed to meet us there, and he wrote, I think, that not to go, not to let me go. Oh, and my other brother was in Vienna, studying there. And he came home to stop me from going, but I, but I had my mind that I'm going to do.

SIGRIST: You were determined, like you wanted to go to school. You wanted to come

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to America.

EMBROS: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the name of the boat? No, you don't.

EMBROS: No, I don't remember that.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what, were there things to do on the boat? What did you do during the boat trip?

EMBROS: We walked on the deck and we walked down where the people lay on the floor and were sick. Oh, my God. And that's when I saw everything, and I cried so much. And when we, in Ellis Island I don't remember how . . .

SIGRIST: Wait, wait. We're not yet, let's not get to Ellis yet. Let's get you across the Atlantic first. How long did the trip take?

EMBROS: What I, I think it was eight days or something. I think about eight days.

SIGRIST: Did you get sick at all?

EMBROS: No, I didn't get sick. No, no. I didn't get sick.

SIGRIST: Do you remember there being a dining room on the boat?

EMBROS: That I don't remember, no. I should remember, but I think I was, my mind was blank. I was thinking about home, back home, and I didn't care about

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things, what's going around me.

SIGRIST: Did you, when you were on the boat and you were lonesome and you were unhappy, did you regret making the decision to come to America?

EMBROS: Yes, I did. Yeah, I did. Yeah. Because I had a good home. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you remember about Ellis Island. The boat pulls into New York Harbor.

EMBROS: Well, I remember I don't know how we, how we got off the boat. I know they were separating people. Those people that they were on down, I think they were taking baths, and the clothes was steamed up, disinfecting. But us, when we were up, they didn't do nothing, that stuff. Just the eyes, they examined, looked you in the eyes if you, how, your health, or whatever. And my eyes were red, and I thought maybe they're going to send me back, but they didn't. They knew that they were from crying. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you were wearing when you got off the boat for the first time?

EMBROS: (she laughs) I think it was Navy blue with white dots. Navy blue, I had made something, yeah.

SIGRIST: What did the clothing look like at that time? Was it long, or . . .

EMBROS: Uh, there was two pieces, I remember. Yeah. That was two pieces.

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Normal, two pieces. My mother had made that for me.

SIGRIST: Were you wearing a hat?

EMBROS: No, no. No hat, no hat.

SIGRIST: Do you remember anything else about being processed at all at Ellis Island? Do you remember any kind of, them asking questions, or anything like that?

EMBROS: I don't know. I don't remember, no. That's, the eyes. They were looking in my eyes. That I remember, and other things, no, I don't remember.

SIGRIST: Now, did your father's cousin come from Meriden to meet you at Ellis Island?

EMBROS: No, no. They, we were transferred somehow. That I don't know, from Ellis Island. I don't know, to New York. And I guess in New York they separate people where they want to go, and we have, the four of us, my brother, me and the two friends. We were going to Meriden, and the other two, they were going to Hartford.

SIGRIST: The two girls.

EMBROS: The two girls were going. They had families there. Why, we have that cousin in Meriden. We have this, just something to put on the paper, the piece of paper, names and everything.

SIGRIST: Like a name tag.

EMBROS: Yeah, a name tag, yeah, and things. And that they were notified that people, we come to pick up. And I remember they take us, and we sit on the depot there, yeah. And they pick us on Meriden, on, and I didn't like that place. Again, I didn't like that place. I cry.

SIGRIST: You mean Meriden in general, or where you were living?

EMBROS: Where, yeah. Where they took, not Meriden, but the place. I forgot the street. See how you forget. I knew well, but I forgot. I didn't like that place there. There was a big steep in the back of the house. They called it coal yard. They used to bring coal in there, and all the people, you know, they'd serve the coal for whoever wants. And I, and I cried because they was no nice grass like in back home to run around, and everything was, to me, I guess I just didn't like it.

SIGRIST: What were some of the things that you saw in America that you had never seen before? Or is there something that you had never seen before that was really strange to you?

EMBROS: (she sighs) That, the, not the cities, because I saw in Poland, in Kraków, I saw that, cities and so. That wasn't strange. I really . . .

SIGRIST: Maybe nothing. Maybe there was nothing that you had. Were your father's

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cousins good to you? Did they treat you well, or did they treat you poorly?

EMBROS: Well, I'll tell you, they have their own families, and like I was neglected. I didn't, they struggled themselves.

SIGRIST: What was, what was your father's cousin doing for a living?

EMBROS: I don't know what he was, a factory. I guess he worked in a factory somewhere. So when we came they, my brother, they found a job for him right away. I don't know, not next day, but maybe they found. So he was working someplace, got a job somewhere in a factory. Well, I, for some time I was home, staying. I still miss my home, and I got under the bed. I was crying. I got under the bed so they wouldn't see me. But after they have to do something with me. They, you know, those years you can get a job fourteen years, fifteen years old, some kind of job. So they got me a job in a pen factory, writing pens, in Meriden. And they put me in a, there was a boarding house there close to the factory, and they put me on a boarding. I was boarding, and they got me the job there.

SIGRIST: What did you have to do in this job? Can you describe what your . . .

EMBROS: On a foot press punch the pen, on a, the, uh, you know how they curve? They were, little pieces of, uh, well, not steel, but, you know, they make from. Yeah, I punched them in the shape, like, shape.

SIGRIST: Was this a boring job?

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EMBROS: Yeah. Well, yeah. It was boring, yeah. (she laughs) I liked the boss very much. He was nice, a very nice man, Mr. Pom.

SIGRIST: Were there other Polish people?

EMBROS: Yeah, there were a lot. Most of it. But they have families there, and they were familiar with it. But I was a stranger there, yeah. And . . .

SIGRIST: Did your brother live in the boarding house with you?

EMBROS: No, he lived different, someplace. He lived different.

SIGRIST: So you were really kind of by yourself, weren't you?

EMBROS: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, someplace else he lived, someplace. Because we met, we have to. After he came to Hartford, after a while, yeah. I was, and I, I didn't like it there in that boarding house. I don't know if that was, we slept three of us in a bed. I was sleeping in the middle. And I don't know if the room was a room or was it whole big hallway. What I remember, that house was somehow converted to families. Families supposed to be, family house. But they still have that toilets, not one, but in a row there. And there were a lot of people there boarding in the boarding house, and they go to the bathroom, and I didn't see, but they complain somebody that they (she laughs) before they go to the bathroom, they were drunk, they drink a lot. And I didn't like it, and I cried a lot, and I didn't like. But they were, and

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I connect my friends in Hartford.

SIGRIST: The two girls who had come over.

EMBROS: Yeah. I got the address, to take me to Hartford.

SIGRIST: So how long were you in Meriden?

EMBROS: (she laughs) I don't know.

SIGRIST: Was it like a year or . . .

EMBROS: Maybe, I don't know. A few months. I don't, this I didn't keep. I should, but I didn't.

SIGRIST: When did you start learning English? How did you learn English?

EMBROS: It came gradually somehow, yeah. Some, I don't know, yeah. I did the housework. I didn't, when I moved to Hartford, I didn't go to factory.

SIGRIST: You did domestic work.

EMBROS: Domestic work. That's how you learn, maybe.

SIGRIST: Tell me the first job you got in Hartford.

EMBROS: Another, I got a job in Hartford in boarding house again. But I, but that was different. They were real boarding house that people, mostly they were Irish. Mrs. Mills, she was Irish. She was very religious. She was a very nice

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woman. Very good to me, just like mother. And I supposed, I got a job there, I supposed to, like, help her, peel potatoes and do a little cleaning there. And there was the three of us, we worked there. I was like mother's helper. Peel potatoes, we have to clean the milk bottles and not dishes. I don't remember washing dishes. I remember cleaning the milk bottles and, you know, there was a lot of milk bottles. And I was, I was very conservative. I don't know why. Even now, I am. All the bottles, you know when you spill milk quick you always, there's some left in there. When I washed the bottles I spilled the milk into one bottle, and before I washed all of them there was almost a full quart of milk. And Mrs. Mills says, "You will make good wife for some poor man."

SIGRIST: Did Mrs. Mills try to teach you any English?

EMBROS: Yeah, yes, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you ever remember trying to speak English and making a terrible mistake, saying a word incorrectly and using a wrong word that sticks out in your mind?

EMBROS: No.

SIGRIST: No.

EMBROS: Well, that was my first job, yeah. But that job was hard for me, again. Mrs. Mills, I'm supposed to, I get up four o'clock to help that cook to cut the

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potatoes because those men, they were all good eaters at breakfast. They eat ham, potatoes. So we have to prepare all that, so I was, that. And after all that at night that was supposed to be my job to clean the floor. And Mrs. Mills thought it was too hard for me, too hard work for me. Yeah, so.

SIGRIST: Were you writing back to your mother and father? Were you writing them letters?

EMBROS: Not, during the war not much. Yeah, I did. Yeah, I did. I think I remember two letters go through before they, before everything collapsed.

SIGRIST: Because the war started in 1914 over there.

EMBROS: Yeah. And now what do you want?

SIGRIST: I want to ask you a question. How long did it take you before you started liking America, before you started liking being here?

EMBROS: Well, I started liking one day, I didn't have a choice. When I didn't have another choice that was own, I have nothing to go home for, because my parents die, my brothers die.

SIGRIST: When did your parents die? During the war?

EMBROS: During the war. Everything during the war. My brothers die in one day, the oldest brother that was there. And my father, that I don't even know did he die before they die or after. Everybody, it's just like hurricane collapse. My

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brothers die in one day, a well-educated boys. My father spent money.

That's why I might be in this country, because what I remember, my mother used to say to my father, "Antoś, you spent all the money on the boys, and the girls are one, two, three, four, five. They, you know, you have to give them dowry, marry them." If you, my father was well-off, with nice (?). They wouldn't want us to get married to anybody, to somebody. So you have to give dowry, yeah. So he says, "You're spending money on the boys, educating." They were well-educated. I don't know.

SIGRIST: Did they die because of the war? Were they fighting, or . . .

EMBROS: That I don't know.

SIGRIST: You just don't know.

EMBROS: I just don't know. That was the influenza there, too. So . . .

SIGRIST: Did you find this all out after the war was over?

EMBROS: After, after the war was over.

SIGRIST: So it's just you and Frank are here in America.

EMBROS: Yeah, yeah, after, yeah. And, uh . . .

SIGRIST: Well, that must have been devastating to find out.

EMBROS: It was, it was, yeah. Even my daughter remembers when I cry a lot, and she

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says, "Why are you crying, Mom?" (she is moved) And I says, "I'm crying because my brothers and parents." And she says, "Don't you love us?" I says, "Yeah." But I survived.

SIGRIST: Were you and Frank close?

EMBROS: Not very close. He didn't . . .

SIGRIST: His life sort of went like this.

EMBROS: He didn't make good. He was a very good, he was a good, hard-working boy. When he came to Hartford he had five hundred dollars saved. And he, where he board, they were gamblers. And he didn't know, they were professional gamblers. I guess they played for money. And he lost all his five hundred dollars in the game. And he says, "There wasn't one man fellow, I knew him, and he got most of his money from it." And he said he wants to marry me. He's going to give the money back if I marry him. And I says, "No, no." I says, "No, forget it. You're going to get, save your money. I'm not marrying nobody." I was not thinking of getting married. And he, from that he started gaining play and gaining money. He didn't make good, he didn't make good. But he was a good man. I'm sorry for him. He got into bad, yeah.

SIGRIST: Bad company.

EMBROS: Bad company, yeah.

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SIGRIST: Are you glad that you came to this country?

EMBROS: Now I am.

SIGRIST: Now you are.

EMBROS: Now I am. Yeah. I feel sorry for my, because I still got big family, nephews, nieces. Yeah, yeah. I sent packages.

SIGRIST: So you still have family over in Poland?

EMBROS: Oh, yeah. I got this family.

SIGRIST: But it took a long time before you were happy that you came.

EMBROS: Oh, yeah. I got my family here, my daughter. I had one son that died young, yeah. Very good man, good man, die young, you know.

SIGRIST: So you just have the two kids, a daughter, and you had a son.

EMBROS: I had a son, yeah, my son, yeah.

SIGRIST: And what was your husband's name?

EMBROS: Ben, Benny.

SIGRIST: Ben Embros.

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EMBROS: Benjamin Branislaw. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Do you remember what year you got married?

EMBROS: 1919.

SIGRIST: 1919. And you have two children. Mrs. Embros, we have just a couple of minutes left, and I was wondering if you would say the Lord's Prayer for us in Polish.

EMBROS: The Lord's Prayer?

SIGRIST: In Polish? Can you do that?

EMBROS: In Polish?

SIGRIST: Yeah. Would you do that on tape?

EMBROS: Or another prayer.

SIGRIST: Or some prayer in Polish for us for the interview.

EMBROS: *Ojczy nasz, któryś jest w niebiesiech, święć się Imię Twoje, przyjdź królestwo Twoje, bądź wola Twoja, jako w niebie tak i na ziemi, chleba naszego powszedniego daj nam dzisiaj, i odpuść nam nasze winy, jako i my odpuszczamy naszym winowajcom, i nie wwoź nas na pokuszenie, ale nas zbaw ode złego. Amen.*

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SIGRIST: Thank you. I want to thank you very much for letting me come out and asking questions about coming to America. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Anna Embros on June 29th, 1993 in Terryville, Connecticut.
Mrs. Embros, thank you.

EMBROS: You're very welcome.

END OF INTERVIEW