

EI-37

ELIZABETH BERINGER LONGFIELD

BIRTH DATE: MARCH 30, 1917

INTERVIEW DATE: 4/16/1991

RUNNING TIME: 1:00:19

INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

RECORDING ENGINEER: KEN GLASGOW

INTERVIEW LOCATION: ELLIS ISLAND RECORDING STUDIO

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 7/1993

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 8/1993

YUGOSLAVIA, 1920

AGE 4 (as recorded in the interview)

SHIP NAME NOT RECALLED

PORT: CHERBOURG

RESIDENCES: YUGOSLAVIA: KERENJA

US: CHICAGO, IL

SIGRIST: Good morning. This is Paul Sigrist with the National Park Service. We're here at Ellis Island with Elizabeth Longfield, who came from Yugoslavia in 1920. She was four-and-a-half, I believe. Today is Tuesday, April 16th. Good morning.

LONGFIELD: Good morning.

SIGRIST: Why don't we start off with giving your full name, and include your maiden name in that, and your date of birth.

LONGFIELD: Okay. I'm Elizabeth Beringer Longfield, and I was

born March the 30th, 1917.

SIGRIST: And could you spell your maiden name?

LONGFIELD: B-E-R-I-N-G-E-R.

SIGRIST: Where were you born?

LONGFIELD: In Kerenja, Yugoslavia. And I believe it was at that time spelled K-E-R-E-N-J-A. And that's, oh, about fifteen kilometers from Zombor.

SIGRIST: I see. Let's talk a little bit about the actual town. Is this a small village?

LONGFIELD: Very small, and very pretty. All the houses are the same height, one story, and the streets were all lined with great big trees that arched over. And I just remember that as a very pretty town, and these trees were mulberry trees, where we used to climb and eat the mulberries.

SIGRIST: Describe a typical house in this town. You said they were all one story.

LONGFIELD: Well, they were very small, very small. Ordinarily you entered into a kitchen, and then there were probably two other rooms besides, one on either side of the kitchen. And they had a big built-in stove which was used for baking and also

heating the entire house.

SIGRIST: Wood burning?

LONGFIELD: Yes, wood burning, and that was all the heat they had, and no running water.

SIGRIST: Is this your house, or are you just . . .

LONGFIELD: This is our house, but it's also, I do not know of any other house that was not built similar to that.

SIGRIST: Are these frame houses, stone houses?

LONGFIELD: No, they're, actually they're made of brick, I think, and then stuccoed over, and then white-washed, which makes them very pretty.

SIGRIST: Did you keep a garden?

LONGFIELD: Everybody had a garden, and everybody had chickens and their own pigs. And if they were halfway wealthy, they had a cow and a horse. Horse and wagon were probably the only mode of transportation, and all so the only way they were able to haul things.

SIGRIST: Did you have a horse?

LONGFIELD: Uh, at that time I don't know whether we owned a

horse. My father, yes, my father was overseer on a big farm, and there were horses and wagons, but I don't think we owned any. We were poor people.

SIGRIST: I see. Let's talk about your father. What was his name?

LONGFIELD: His name was John. We actually called him Johann. He was a very good looking man.

SIGRIST: Describe him.

LONGFIELD: He was, oh, about five eleven, ten or eleven, and broad. Very dark, very handsome. I thought he was the handsomest man I'd ever seen. (she laughs) Of course, every little girl thinks her father is just wonderful. And he was a very happy person, always singing and whistling.

SIGRIST: You said he was an overseer. Talk about some of the things that he did.

LONGFIELD: Well, of course, I only know him from after the war. He served in the Kaiser's army. And he oversaw this farm, took care of the farm animals and took care of the planting and the sowing and the harvesting.

SIGRIST: Whose farm was this?

LONGFIELD: I have no idea. It was just a wealthy man's farm.

SIGRIST: I see. Did you live on the property?

LONGFIELD: Yes, we lived on the farm, my mother and my father and I. My mother took care of the animals also, and so on and so forth. You know, the usual things, and helped out in the fields.

SIGRIST: What was her name?

LONGFIELD: Her name was Elizabeth.

SIGRIST: And her maiden name?

LONGFIELD: Quiring.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

LONGFIELD: Q-U-I-R-I-N-G.

SIGRIST: And was she Yugoslavian?

LONGFIELD: Yes, she was. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Did her family come from that same town?

LONGFIELD: They came from the same town. Both my father and mother were born there, and I think my father went to third or fourth grade, and my mother just to third grade. She was about

nine when her father was, I guess a kind of progressive man for his age, and he wanted her to learn languages, so at nine years of age they hired her out to another town as a babysitter where they spoke only Hungarian. And it was a terrible time for her because here she was nine years old, separated from her entire family, put in with another family and couldn't understand a word, and it was a very hard time for her. And while she was there her father died very, very suddenly.

SIGRIST: How did he die?

LONGFIELD: He died of pneumonia. And then my grandmother was left with five children. And, so she didn't know what to do with these children, so she put my mother back with this Hungarian family and hired out the other children to different places because here she was a woman alone, and my grandfather had worked, I think, in the courthouse. But all she knew was to work in the fields, but working in the fields she could not make enough to support all these children, so she hired them out for the year to these different families. And they were paid a very, very small amount of money, but they got a suit of clothes and a pair of shoes and maybe an overcoat and a shirt and so many pieces of soap per year. Can you believe that?

SIGRIST: Sort of a type of indentured servant.

LONGFIELD: Yes, that's right. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Interesting. Do you remember your grandmother at all?

LONGFIELD: Yes.

SIGRIST: What was she like?

LONGFIELD: Well, I didn't, I remembered her as a little girl, and then I didn't see her until we went back again. And then when we came back to America I didn't see her until she was sixty-five. (she coughs) And then her children all chipped in and brought her over because they felt she was old and all alone.

SIGRIST: What year was that?

LONGFIELD: Oh, my goodness, I can't even think. I can't even think what that was. It must have been, well, it must have been around, uh . . .

SIGRIST: In the thirties, maybe?

LONGFIELD: Either the early thirties or '28 or '29, something like that.

SIGRIST: What did she look like?

LONGFIELD: She was a very slight person and, of course, by that time, sixty-five, and the life she had led, she was very old-looking to me.

SIGRIST: What was her temperament?

LONGFIELD: To me, she was always very nice, very nice. I can't remember her, you know, ever not being nice. But it was a lonesome life for her when she got here. Because she had actually lived almost all her life without her children, and when she came here her children were strangers to her, and she was strange to them, very set in her ways, European ways. I mean, she didn't even know how to peel potatoes over here. Over there they peel potatoes with a knife, you know, and it didn't matter because they had lots of potatoes, but over here her daughters kept telling, "Don't make the peeling so thick. We have to buy those. They're expensive, you know." (she laughs) That sort of thing.

SIGRIST: Do you think that she felt guilty about having to do that with her children?

LONGFIELD: (she sighs) Yes. I think, deep down in her heart, many times she wished she were back home.

SIGRIST: That she hadn't even come.

LONGFIELD: Yes, because she was so lonesome. She never learned how to speak English, and she never learned transportation. She couldn't go any place. So when she was with her children, this is where she was. And she had no friends here her age. So she was lonesome, and I felt very, very bad for her many times. And she lived to be ninety-four.

SIGRIST: Wow. What hardy stock.

LONGFIELD: I have three grandparents that lived to be ninety-four. And all I can think of is, "Oh, no." (she laughs)

SIGRIST: We may have you here again!

LONGFIELD: Oh, no. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Let's talk about how your parents met.

LONGFIELD: Well, you know, it was a small town, and Saturday night dances, local dances, and so on and so forth, and that's how they met.

SIGRIST: I see. Do you remember when they were married?

LONGFIELD: They were married in 1917.

SIGRIST: Let's talk a little bit about the religious climate. What were you, religiously?

LONGFIELD: Well, we're Catholic, and the entire village, as far as I know, everybody in the village was Catholic. I don't know of any other church in the whole town.

SIGRIST: There was one church.

LONGFIELD: One church, and everybody went to it.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the church?

LONGFIELD: Yes, I do, because when I came back the second time this is where I went to church.

SIGRIST: I see. What was it's name?

LONGFIELD: Oh, I don't know. I really don't know. Except that when we were back the second time a terrible thing happened. The church burned, and all the records were destroyed. And then when I was getting married here in America they insisted I have a birth certificate. Well, I couldn't get one. And, because of that. And eventually my grandfather in Europe went to Zombor, which was the county seat, I guess, or something . . .

SIGRIST: How do you spell that?

LONGFIELD: Z-O-M-B-O-R. And he got one, probably a photostatic copy, or had somebody copy it, and it arrived and it was written in Hungarian, and they couldn't read it here anyhow. And all

the trouble we have to go through to get, it is sort of silly.

SIGRIST: Do you remember as a small child, the first time you were there, do you remember holidays at all? Do you remember Christmas, or a Christmas celebration, or an Easter celebration?

LONGFIELD: No. I don't remember any when I was four, no.

SIGRIST: But later.

LONGFIELD: Later I do.

SIGRIST: I see. Well, we'll get to that when we get you there again. Well, let's talk a little bit about just sort of maybe everyday life. Now, it sounds like perhaps it was, perhaps not a hard life, but there was a lot of labor involved.

Your father worked, your mother worked. Who did the cooking in the house?

LONGFIELD: Oh, well, they did that after they came in from the fields.

SIGRIST: What was your diet like?

LONGFIELD: Uh, we had meat probably twice a week. The rest of the time it was, you know, noodles and potatoes and a variation of that.

SIGRIST: Was your mother a good cook?

LONGFIELD: Well, in her European way I think she was an excellent cook. Although my father always said he taught her because he was the oldest of nine and his mother had to go out in the fields too, and he had to stay and take care of these kids and have supper ready when they came home. So he was the better cook, where my mother was always a nursemaid in this wealthy family and there was somebody else who did the cooking. So she never learned how to cook until she got married. This was the story, and my father would laugh when he'd say this, and my mother would naturally get angry.

SIGRIST: Do you remember your father cooking?

LONGFIELD: He never, ever cooked. After I can start remembering, he never cooked. After he got married that was out. That was a woman's job, and she'd better, you know, do it.

SIGRIST: I see. Do you remember something that your mother made that was a favorite of yours, or something that she made particularly well?

LONGFIELD: Oh, yes. She would make chicken goulash, which I make to this day with her recipe.

SIGRIST: Yeah, how do you that?

LONGFIELD: Well, it's just sauteing onions, and when they're, you know, golden brown, you add lots and lots of paprika and then your chicken, your cut-up chicken you put on top of that, and maybe you cut up a green pepper or a tomato if you have it, and water, and then you steam it for a while, and it sort of thickens, and then you serve that either with noodles or dumplings.

SIGRIST: Dumplings, uh . . .

LONGFIELD: Not dumplings as most Americans know them, and they're completely different than the Bohemian dumplings. We laugh about our dumplings because nobody has heard about them. We make ours with farina and flour, and they're actually not fluffy and light. They're solid. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Well, of course, those would have been products that would have been readily available.

LONGFIELD: Well, those were the things we had, uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Isn't that interesting. Well, let's talk a little bit about, you were too young to go to school, probably.

LONGFIELD: I guess I must have gone to kindergarten just before I came to America because they taught me how to count, I guess,

in Hungarian, and how to say, "How do you do?" Or something like that. Because I'd say it, but I wouldn't know what I was saying now, you know. (Hungarian), which is supposed to mean "how do you do" or something, but you couldn't prove it by me, and I wouldn't say anything else, you know.

SIGRIST: I won't ask you to spell it. (they laugh)

LONGFIELD: I wouldn't know how.

SIGRIST: Did you, again, you were quite young, but did you have any conceptions of America, what America was like?

LONGFIELD: Not an inkling. I had no knowledge of where I was going or what I was doing, nothing.

SIGRIST: Well, let's, your father came first.

LONGFIELD: Yes.

SIGRIST: Why don't you talk a little bit about that, why he came, when he came.

LONGFIELD: Well, after the war he had served in the Kaiser's army. He became overseer of this farm, but he realized this was the only thing he would ever be able to do. And I guess he and his friends were talking about America, and he and two of his buddies decided they would come, make a lot of money, and then

come back home, and they would each buy a big farm and they would be the big guys.

SIGRIST: There were just three of you, right? Ma, Dad and you?

LONGFIELD: Yes, uh-huh. And so this is what they did, and of course the big joke was that he came into this country illegally. (she laughs) Because you were supposed to have, I think, twenty dollars, and the three of them had twenty dollars together. And so they always stood in line, and they would show the twenty dollars and put it in their back pocket and the next guy took it and showed it and he'd put it in his back pocket (she laughs) and the third guy would have it. So I don't know if that's really being illegal or not, you know. But that's what they did.

SIGRIST: What year did he come?

LONGFIELD: Well, that would be, oh, let me see. I came about 1920, '21 in there, and he came nine months earlier, so it would be about 1919, I'd say.

SIGRIST: Do you remember him leaving?

LONGFIELD: No, I really don't.

SIGRIST: Do you remember him not being there?

LONGFIELD: Yes, I mean, I was just with my mother. I don't think that made quite that much of an impression on me.

SIGRIST: Life may not have been that much different, actually, if he were out working in the fields anyway. He wouldn't have been around. He came nine months. What did he do when he got here?

LONGFIELD: Well, this was really interesting because he was a very hardworking man. And he arrived, he said, on a Friday night at my aunt's house.

SIGRIST: Now where was this?

LONGFIELD: In Chicago, Illinois. And . . .

SIGRIST: And your aunt is his sister?

LONGFIELD: No, it's my mother's sister.

SIGRIST: Your mother's sister. So she, you already had family here.

LONGFIELD: Yes, uh-huh. And he arrived on a Friday night and my uncle told him that he could stay with him until he got a job, and it had better be soon. (she laughs) So Saturday was

all right, Sunday was okay, but Monday morning my father got up early and he walked to the corner and he stood there. He's going to go out looking for a job now in a strange country. He'd never seen a streetcar before, nothing like that. And he saw this group of men coming with very dirty clothes on. They looked like they were doing some building. So he watched them, and they got on the streetcar, so he got on the streetcar. And when they got off, he got off. And they walked a little ways, and he followed them. And they picked up some shovels and some wheelbarrows and started working, and he picked up the shovel and he started to shovel. And pretty soon some man came over and started screaming to him. Later on he learned it was an Italian, and he had taken this man's shovel. And so then he grabbed a wheelbarrow, and he was running up and filling it with cement and following these other men, and then somebody came and yelled at him and took the wheelbarrow away, but by noon he was hired. And he stayed with this company and became a foreman of this construction company. It was called Wetzels, W-E-T-Z-E-L, Construction Company, and he was never out of work a day in his life until he retired and moved to California, and retired when he was sixty.

SIGRIST: That's a wonderful story.

LONGFIELD: Isn't it? But that shows you if you really want to

work there are ways.

SIGRIST: Yeah, be persistent. Talk just briefly about your aunt who was here. When did she come?

LONGFIELD: Well, this was my mother's older sister. My mother had two older sisters, then herself, then a younger sister, then a brother, and then the youngest sister. There were five of them. And, uh . . .

SIGRIST: These were the children who had all been farmed out.

LONGFIELD: Yes, yes. But my two aunts who were already here in the United States, their husbands had come with the idea of making money and having them come over and then going back home. However, World War I came in between. So those two women were separated from their husbands for four or five years, about five, maybe six years, almost. And then after the war, when my father and mother wrote and said they would like to come to America, they were the ones who encouraged them to come, and so on.

SIGRIST: Who paid for the passage?

LONGFIELD: I think what happened was my father borrowed the money because I don't think they had a lot of money. But if you were coming to America people would pool their money to let you

come over there because you would send money back. They were sure of that. There was that honor in them that they would pay, and my father did pay.

SIGRIST: To get himself over.

LONGFIELD: Yes, uh-huh. And then he earned the money in nine months to have my mother and I come.

SIGRIST: While he was in Chicago with your aunt was he writing to your mother?

LONGFIELD: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Was he sending money?

LONGFIELD: Uh, probably. You know, I was too small, money didn't mean anything to me, so I'm not conscious of money, you know, except that he did pay for her passage over.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, was your mother excited about going to America?

LONGFIELD: Yes, she was excited because she had two sisters here and her husband was here. And at the same time she was a small hometown girl and she did hate to leave, too. It was kind of a mixed feeling.

SIGRIST: Well, let's talk a little bit about you and your mother and getting ready to go and that sort of thing. Do you remember anything at that time, for instance, the packing process? Do you remember anything like that?

LONGFIELD: I don't remember the packing process itself, but I remember that we had no suitcases and my mother tied whatever she had in a bedsheet and carried that as a bundle. And I wanted a bundle too, so they took a tablecloth and put, oh, probably some of my little clothes in, and that was my "bindel," as they called it. And I remember going to the train station and my father's mother, also my grandmother of course, she was crying, and she had this rope, and she gave my mother the rope, and she wanted to tie the rope around my waist and around her wrist so that I wouldn't get lost.

SIGRIST: Your grandmother wanted to tie you and your mother together.

LONGFIELD: Yes, so that I wouldn't get lost. She was afraid we would get separated and lost.

SIGRIST: That's very touching. Was there a train station in this town?

LONGFIELD: Not a real, real station. Just a little stop, you

know. And people would just stand by the side of the road and the train would stop and then you'd go in, but not a station, per se.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, or maybe your mother talked about this later, just what you took? And what did you do with what you left behind?

LONGFIELD: Oh, evidently we did not have too terribly much because we did not own our own home at that time, and probably just a few pots and pans and things like that that were distributed around. And so it was just clothing and maybe a pillow or two because featherbeds and things like that. Those were treasures, and I think she took some of that along.

SIGRIST: Where did the train go to?

LONGFIELD: I'm a little bit confused because I know once we left from Bremerhaven, and once we left from Cherbourg. But I don't know which was which, which was the first. I have a feeling that the first one was Bremerhaven, and I don't know why I have this feeling, but that's the way I feel.

SIGRIST: Do you remember before you got on the boat, do you remember waiting for the boat?

LONGFIELD: Yes. This was rather funny, and this makes me think

it might have been Cherbourg, because I think Cherbourg has high tides, doesn't it? Do you know?

SIGRIST: Could be.

LONGFIELD: But my mother had a friend, not a real friend, but another woman was coming to America at the same time who had a boy who was just a little older than I. So they kind of stuck together, you know, became friends because of the trip, I think.

And wherever it was we had to lay over until the boat came and so they discovered this wonderful place where they had good chicken soup. And so every day we went for chicken soup. And then one day, I don't know how, they discovered they had not been eating chicken soup, but turtle soup. And, oh, my goodness, they couldn't go back there again for anything. (she laughs) They wouldn't go back for anything.

SIGRIST: How long did you wait for the boat? Do you remember?

LONGFIELD: It seemed to me like it was about a week.

SIGRIST: An extended period of time.

LONGFIELD: Yes. And I know that we would, this little boy and I would be playing out in the sand. And then all of a sudden one day this man came and he was yelling at us and telling us,

"Get up, get up, get up." And there was a big high wall, and we went up these stairs and got up, and we couldn't figure out why this man was chasing us. And a little later, oh, maybe an hour or two hours later, we went past there and the water was right to the top of this wall. And evidently the tide was coming in and he didn't want us playing, but of course we knew nothing about tide because this little village I come from is inland.

SIGRIST: Did you stay in a hotel?

LONGFIELD: I don't know. We just had one room. But where it was, whether it was a pension or a hotel or what I don't know, or whether somebody made arrangements for us to stay in someone's home, I have no idea.

SIGRIST: Now, this boy who was with you as sort of the unofficial, your mother was just sort of unofficial supervisor, whatever he was, her ward, uh . . .

LONGFIELD: Well, his mother was with, too.

SIGRIST: Oh, I see.

LONGFIELD: So his mother and he were coming with my mother and I.

SIGRIST: I see. But you guys played together.

LONGFIELD: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: The same age. All right. Well, do you remember the name of the boat that you'd gone on?

LONGFIELD: No. I have no idea, but it was a terrible boat. It was just real, real old, and my mother and this woman were very, very sick. They were in their bunk half the time. And all we could do, this little boy and I, was play in this little gangway, running back and forth and up and down these metal stairs, you know. And every once in a while, why, the door would open and a man in a white coat would come down, and he'd give us an apple or something. And I really think it was because it was so stormy, and I do know that my mother tried going into the dining room to talk, to eat. And in the dining room they had stacks of watermelon piled up with a board in front of them, and they had boards around the tables so that the things wouldn't fall off. And one day it was so bad that the board holding the watermelon slipped and fell and the watermelon rolled all over, and some of them broke, and we had watermelon. We thought that was the greatest thing in the world. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Can you describe the accommodations at all? Where did you sleep?

LONGFIELD: On board ship? Oh, it was in bunks, and it seemed like there were a lot of people in there. And I don't know, I seem to remember a porthole, but we were not allowed to open it. And one day they came and they boarded it up even. And I think we were going through some vicious storms, because everybody was real, real sick.

SIGRIST: Did this woman and her boy stay in the same cabin with you?

LONGFIELD: Yes, uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Were they from the same town?

LONGFIELD: Yes.

SIGRIST: I see. Let's see, what else can I ask you about the boat. Do you remember, you said that as a child with this little boy, you were playing up on a gangplank or something. Was this up on deck?

LONGFIELD: No, no. We were not allowed up on deck, and this is why I think it must have been so stormy, because those metal steps seemed to me to be wet and slippery.

SIGRIST: So you were not allowed on deck at all.

LONGFIELD: It doesn't seem like it, no. We did not, actually,

as far as I know, I don't remember going on deck until early one morning. There was such excitement. Everybody was running around, it seemed, and grabbing things. And it was still almost dark, and so we ran up, and everybody was crying and they were saying, "There she is. There she is." And I didn't know what it was, and it was drizzly and rainy and cold, and all of a sudden it was the Statue of Liberty. And this was when we came into New York, the harbor.

SIGRIST: What did that mean to a four-year-old?

LONGFIELD: I didn't know. I was just looking around like everybody else. I think I was more overcome with what the people were doing, crying and praying and some were laughing and hugging each other. I don't know. But I had no idea what it was.

SIGRIST: Was your mother better by then?

LONGFIELD: Yes, uh-huh. Just the fact that she was getting off the boat, I think, made her feel better. (break in tape)

SIGRIST: Okay. So you were just telling us about the Statue of Liberty, where everyone got all excited.

LONGFIELD: Right, uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Then what happened? What happened after you saw the Statue of Liberty?

LONGFIELD: Well, it, I don't know. It, I don't know if the big boat came and our boat came and we got off at Ellis Island, or if we had to go on another boat. I really can't tell because it was always gangplanks, and everybody was around me. You know, I'm just a little kid looking at all these legs going by. But I know we got into this big, big room and all these people were milling around, and then we had to sit on benches. And we sat there for hours and hours, and some lady came, and she had this dark blue outfit on and she gave me my first orange. And she was showing me, "Eat it." And I tried to eat it like an apple, you know, biting through the thing, and then she showed me you peel that. And we just waited there a long, long time, and then eventually we got into some rooms where they were putting us in some place. I think we had to take a shower. And my mother was a very modest person. I don't think anybody had ever seen her naked before. (she laughs) And they put me in with her. Well, she just shoved me right out again.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LONGFIELD: And then this woman came along and put me in with

this other lady and she shoved me out, so I just stood there crying. And so then they put me back in with my mother again. And then we went through the examinations, and I got the vaccinations.

SIGRIST: What were the examinations like?

LONGFIELD: Well, they were, it seemed to me that they were thumping me on my chest and I was behind my mother and I just watched, and if she didn't cry or do anything then it was all right. I let them do the same to me. And then I got the vaccinations, and I think they examined our eyes, too, and our hair.

SIGRIST: Was that your first vaccination?

LONGFIELD: Yes.

SIGRIST: What was your reaction to that?

LONGFIELD: I didn't quite know what to do with it. I wondered why he was doing that. I did get a very bad reaction from it. My arm swelled up, you know, and all that, and I still have the three scars. I don't know why I got three vaccinations. I have three scars. So I must have been a cute kid, they decided to give me an extra one. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: And the eye exams, you said, what did they do?

LONGFIELD: I don't know. I thought that they just pulled my eyelids way, way up, you know, and that's all I remember about that. So . . .

SIGRIST: Was Ellis very crowded?

LONGFIELD: Very, very crowded. There were just people all over the place. And it seemed like we were here a couple of days.

SIGRIST: Did you stay overnight here?

LONGFIELD: Yes. But I don't remember much about sleeping. But I remember breakfast, and they served us eggs, sunny-side-up eggs, and white bread. Where we came from, you know, the bread was coarser. We thought, my gosh, this is just like cake. My mother kept saying, "This is so fine, it's like cake." And I had these sunny-side-up eggs and everything, so that was great. And then I seem to remember that for a couple of days at noontime and also at night we got cabbage soup. Now, I don't know if that's right or not, but my mother was saying it was cabbage soup they fed us, so I'm taking her word for it.

SIGRIST: Where did you eat?

LONGFIELD: It was in a great big place, and there were long,

long tables. So that impressed me, just the amount of people around there, and the milling around that went on.

SIGRIST: What did it sound like?

LONGFIELD: Very, very confusing because the only people we could talk to were this other woman and her boy. And I know that there was a young Italian girl, and I was so impressed with her because she came and she had this huge wicker hamper and they opened it up. And it looked to me like it was filled with salamis and cheeses and things. And something must have been wrong with it because they dumped it. And she was screaming and crying and very hysterical, and it scared the daylights out of me. Now, what could have been wrong with that, I don't know. But my mother was saying, "Why are they throwing that good food away?" You know. So, I don't know.

SIGRIST: Isn't that interesting. You said they checked your hair. What did they do?

LONGFIELD: Oh, they . . .

SIGRIST: What were they looking for?

LONGFIELD: Probably lice, and I wouldn't be a bit surprised, they did not find any on me and they did not find any on my mother, but evidently on some people they must have or they

wouldn't have been, you know, searching for it. But that's what they were looking for, at least my mother said so. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Do you remember what your mother was wearing, or what you were wearing?

LONGFIELD: Well, she was still wearing her European clothes, you know.

SIGRIST: What did that look like?

LONGFIELD: Oh, lots and lots of skirts, three or four skirts. And I was wearing the skirts, too. And then a blouse and a shawl. We had no jackets or coats. It was a shawl.

SIGRIST: What season did you come? What month?

LONGFIELD: Well, it was in November, I think.

SIGRIST: Of course, you came from a cold climate, too.

LONGFIELD: Well, yes. It, actually, I don't know if it gets to zero weather there or not. It gets cold and it has the rain, but where we come from I don't think it gets to really zero weather. But it gets cold and damp, you know, where you don't like to be out. And that's what it was when we came, I remember that morning when we got up on top of the boat. It was cold and

misty and the wind was blowing, and you felt like you were going to freeze.

SIGRIST: What about the people that you were traveling with, the woman and her son? Did they have any problems when they were here?

LONGFIELD: Well, the problems came when we arrived in Chicago.
(she laughs)

SIGRIST: Okay, well, we're heading in that direction now. So let me just, do you know why you stayed overnight?

LONGFIELD: No, I have no idea why we stayed overnight, because we were going to go on the train to Chicago. And this is what they did. One morning they put us on the train to Chicago. So I don't know whether it was a weekend or . . .

SIGRIST: Was your father supposed to come and meet you?

LONGFIELD: No, no. We were supposed to meet him in Chicago at my aunt's house.

SIGRIST: When you were here was there any entertainment offered to you? Did they show a movie or anything like that?

LONGFIELD: No. Uh-uh. No. We just wandered around, and my father had said he signed his name someplace and my mother was

going around looking for his name.

SIGRIST: Here at Ellis Island.

LONGFIELD: Yes. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: That's interesting.

LONGFIELD: Only about ten thousand or fifty thousand other people doing the same thing.

SIGRIST: All right. So you said you stayed for a couple of days and then they put you on a train.

LONGFIELD: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Do you remember that experience?

LONGFIELD: Yes. That was something else again. For one thing, I guess we went through New York, and my mother and this woman kept saying, "Oh, this is so dirty. If we had known it was so dirty we would never have left our town." It was just unbelievable, and then there were buildings that were so high. And as we were going along, my mother kept saying, "I don't know how they keep their clothes hanging in the sky." She had never seen a pulley before, and the clothes were on pulleys. And this just amazed her no end. "How do they keep their clothes hanging in the sky?" Because as you're going by you don't see the

little rope. So that was part of it, and then it seems that we slept, and we arrived in Chicago at night.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the train ride at all? Do you remember, for instance, did you bring food with you, or did you buy food?

LONGFIELD: I think we bought food, because by this time we didn't have any food that we, you know, even if we had taken food, which I think we did take some little sausage and bread, you know, along on the train when we left our home town, but by this time it would have been eaten up. So I think we bought something.

SIGRIST: All right. Describe to me seeing your father for the first time after this nine month period.

LONGFIELD: I would like to, can I go back a little bit about my first ride?

SIGRIST: Sure.

LONGFIELD: We had, my mother and her friend had made arrangements that they would take a cab together. My father evidently wrote to them that they should take a cab.

SIGRIST: This is once they're in Chicago.

LONGFIELD: In Chicago. We got out of there and that was a thing, and they were all going to come to my aunt's house and then this woman's husband was going to pick her up at my aunt's. We got to the station. Again it was raining, and these two men ran up to us. And one grabbed my mother and her bundle and started shoving her into this cab, and another man had this other woman and he was shoving her into a different cab. And they were screaming at each other, "No, no, no. Don't. We want to come together." They thought they were being kidnapped. You know, you hear all these awful stories. But their cab took off, our cab took off, and we had an accident.

SIGRIST: What happened?

LONGFIELD: One ran into the other.

SIGRIST: The two cabs ran into each other?

LONGFIELD: (she laughs) I flew over the front seat, and my mother flew around in the cab, and we were crying and everything else, and this man opened the door and he was talking to us. We didn't know what he was saying, but he wouldn't let us out. He just kept us in there. And I guess he saw there were no broken bones and no blood, so he just shut the door and kept driving. And we each had our names, name tags on, and so he finally found my aunt's house and he made us sit in the cab while he went

upstairs and knocked on the door, and my aunt and uncle were already asleep, but they said yes, and then they came down, and we all got out of the cab and into my aunt's house.

SIGRIST: Did the woman and her son also end up with you at your aunt's?

LONGFIELD: No, no. He took them.

SIGRIST: Were these just aggressive cabbies? Is that it?

LONGFIELD: Evidently. They had people who didn't know where they were going or what they were doing. And as soon as you got off and you had a name tag on they grabbed you and they had a fare, you know.

SIGRIST: Sure, easy victims.

LONGFIELD: So, but then my uncle and my father had rented a little flat not too far from my aunt's, and he ran over and got my father and he came over and we were reunited.

SIGRIST: Just describe that scene a little bit for me. Where were you in your aunt's house when you saw your father?

LONGFIELD: I was in the kitchen. It was a very small flat. A living room, a kitchen and a bedroom. Two bedrooms, two very tiny bedrooms. But my mother and father, of course, embraced

and cried, and my aunt was crying and I was very happy to see my father because he was always very good to me.

SIGRIST: Did he bring a little gift or something for you?

LONGFIELD: No, because he was woke up out of a sound sleep, so he just ran over, you know, and got us and took us back home.

SIGRIST: One thing I meant to ask you a little earlier on in the interview, what was your mother feeling through, I mean, we know she was sick on the boat, but through the full process of Ellis, and then this extended trip to Chicago and all that happened, what was your mother feeling during all of this?

LONGFIELD: Oh, I think she was very, very anxious to get here. She was very exhausted and tired from being sick and just such an anxious feeling to get where she was going and get this over with, get off the boat, especially.

SIGRIST: Yeah. So it was a very happy reunion at your aunt's?

LONGFIELD: Yes, very much so.

SIGRIST: Did your father take you to his flat that night, or did you sleep at your aunt's?

LONGFIELD: Oh, yes. No, no, we, it wasn't but about two or

three blocks from my aunt's house, and we thought we had walked into heaven when we walked in. It was so nice and warm, and there was the front room with a dresser in it and two chairs and a little table and the kitchen had a kitchen table and chairs, and it was nice and warm. And we just felt like, "Oh, we finally did it. We're here."

SIGRIST: Was this the upstairs of a house or the downstairs of a house?

LONGFIELD: It was on the ground floor. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the address?

LONGFIELD: I think it was on Willow Street. I don't know the address. It was on Willow Street in Chicago.

SIGRIST: And, of course, by this time your father had established himself with this contracting company.

LONGFIELD: Yes.

SIGRIST: All right. Let's talk a little bit, how long were you here before you all went back?

LONGFIELD: Well, let me see. It must have been three, three-and-a-half years. So I was about seven-and-a-half, eight years when we went back, and in the meantime my sister was born.

SIGRIST: Refresh my memory a little bit just about what the intention had been to come and then to go back.

LONGFIELD: Well, my father was going to come and work and bring us over, and if we worked for, you know, four or five years and made a lot of money we could go back and buy a house and a farm, you know, a farm and animals and all that and go back and really live the life of a gentleman farmer, you might say.

SIGRIST: And to stay there.

LONGFIELD: Oh, definitely.

SIGRIST: All right. Let's narrow in on those three years now before you go back. What did your mother do? How did she adapt to America?

LONGFIELD: She had a very, very difficult time because, again, she was in a country where she could not speak the language.

SIGRIST: Did she try to learn?

LONGFIELD: Well, you almost had to. And she had always been outdoors. She was either a nursemaid for children or else she worked in a the fields, and she loved the outdoors. And when she got there, between my father and friends they got her a job in a factory sitting at a machine. She was frightened of the

machine, she hated being indoors, and she sat and cried all day.

She just could not take being confined. And so after several weeks she quit. My father told her to quit, and they got day work for her, and what you would do is get these bundles of work where you'd sew the clocks on women's stockings. You know, they have these fancy things, and she would do that, and she would sew sweaters. The sweaters were sewed, they would bring the pieces and she would put them together, and this is what she did then. She would sit by the window for hours just sewing.

SIGRIST: And she was paid by piece?

LONGFIELD: Yes, by the piece. Uh-huh. But I don't know how much.

SIGRIST: Did the neighborhood where your father moved to, was this a neighborhood of other Yugoslavians, or what was the nature of the neighborhood?

LONGFIELD: It was a neighborhood that was mostly immigrants, but strangely enough where we lived they were either mostly Germans or Italians, and this made for very bad feelings. Because, you see, the Germans had fought the Italians in World War I, and my mother put me in this kindergarten, and I would come out and these Italian kids would gang up on me. And it was pretty bad.

SIGRIST: What would they do? Would they just call you names?

LONGFIELD: They beat me. No, no, no, no, they beat me. They beat me. And I would come home (she laughs) at lunchtime crying and I would come home after school crying, and my mother would cry with me in sympathy.

SIGRIST: Did your father ever experience this kind of bigotry as an adult?

LONGFIELD: If he did he could take care of it and handle it, but I guess we couldn't because we'd never been exposed to anything. We had never been out of this little town, you know. A little town that had no streetcars, no cars, no nothing. Just horse and wagon. So we could not do it, but my father, having been in the war, he had been in cities and further away, you know, so he had seen things. He was a worldly man in our eyes.

SIGRIST: I see. Talk a little bit now just in detail about the flat itself. For instance, describe your bedroom. Did you have your own bedroom?

LONGFIELD: Yes, I was fortunate, I did have my own very, very tiny. All it had in it was a bed and a chair. That was all. And my folks just about the same. They were very tiny rooms,

and they were coal-heated, where the coal shed was in the back.

And it was not an indoor plumbing. You had to go outside and go to the bathroom.

SIGRIST: Did you have a garden outside?

LONGFIELD: No, because we were renters. We did not have a garden. And in this particular place, we lived there in the winter. I don't remember a garden at all. Later we moved to another place, and we lived on the second floor there, but again no vegetable garden, or anything like that.

SIGRIST: Life is very, very different for you.

LONGFIELD: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Dramatically different.

LONGFIELD: Because my mother loved gardening, and later on in life she had a garden, but not there, not when we came into Chicago the city itself.

SIGRIST: Was there electricity in the house, or was it gas light?

LONGFIELD: No. They had gas vents on the wall, and this could have been very serious too, because my mother didn't know how to control this, and once the house did fill up with gas because

she hadn't turned it off all the way, or else had turned it down so low that it went out. I don't know. But it had filled with gas, and my father came home. And then another time my sister was very small and was creeping on the floor, and my father was gone on a Sunday afternoon playing cards with, you know, the men friends. And my mother and I and my sister were home, and my sister was creeping on the floor, and she pulled herself up by the stove, and I think my mother must have dozed off and I dozed off. We were all in the same room. And she turned the vents on. And when my father came home we were almost unconscious. He pulled us out on the porch and threw open all the windows and things like that.

SIGRIST: Wow.

LONGFIELD: So that was a little dangerous.

SIGRIST: Yeah, I should say. Talk about your sister being born. When was she born? What was her birthday?

LONGFIELD: Her birthday is September 29th.

SIGRIST: What year?

LONGFIELD: Hmm, gee. Now you're throwing me. Must have been about '23 or '24, in 1923 or '24.

SIGRIST: So this is, what, two years after you'd gotten here, three years after you'd gotten here. So, what was it like for your mother being pregnant and being in this very strange environment?

LONGFIELD: I think this is one time in my mother's life that she was very, very excited and very, very happy to be having a child. Because between myself and this sister I'm talking about she had lost two children. So she was very excited about this, and my sister turned out to be a beautiful, beautiful healthy baby. And everybody, you know, just oohed and aahed over her.

SIGRIST: Do you remember your mother being pregnant?

LONGFIELD: No, not really. You know . . .

SIGRIST: You were in school by this point, right?

LONGFIELD: Yeah. But she was just my mother and I accepted her, you know. She got fat or whatever. And sex and this was never, never discussed. This, you never talked like that in the house.

SIGRIST: I see. Do you remember your sister being born? Was she born in the house?

LONGFIELD: Yes, she was born in the house, but my father took

me and brought me over to my aunt's. As I said, we had moved to another flat, but again within two or three blocks of my aunt, and my two aunts lived in the same house. And I stayed there, and then my aunts brought me over and I had a baby sister. So that was it.

SIGRIST: Surprise.

LONGFIELD: I loved her from the day she was born.

SIGRIST: What's her name?

LONGFIELD: Helen.

SIGRIST: Well, let's leave Helen for a minute. How did you learn English?

LONGFIELD: That was a hard process. (she laughs) My folks put me in St. Michael's Church in Chicago.

SIGRIST: Was this a Catholic school?

LONGFIELD: Yes, it's a Catholic school run by the nuns, and they were very, very strict. And unfortunately I did not learn too much, because though they were a German-speaking order, they realized if they spoke German to us we would not learn English. So they did not speak German to us. And so I sat in this classroom all day long while this woman stood up there speaking.

And I didn't know what she was talking about. And then she would call on me, and I didn't know what to say. Though she'd stand me in the corner, with my face in the corner. Well, how I was supposed to learn anything I'll never know. And it was a very sad experience. And also they were allowed corporal punishment, you know, where they would thump you a couple of times. And my father decided that was enough of that. So he took me out of school, the Catholic school, and he put me in a public school. And I thought at the time that I was being punished, because all the kids could go out at recess time and play, and the teacher made me sit in my desk. What I did not realize was that this wonderful woman, whoever she is, was giving up her recess time to sit there and teach me how to read during her recess time. But I thought I was being punished, and I felt very bad about it. And of course, you know, I had this German accent and everything, and I looked very, very German. My mother did not know how to dress me. So my hair was still, like, European, and my clothes were I guess what they would call very "Dutchy." And so the kids made fun of me, and it was a very sad time and a hard time for me. And, like I said, these Italian kids would gang up on me and beat me up. And I made up my mind I was going to learn how to speak English so no one would ever know that I was not an American.

SIGRIST: You did.

LONGFIELD: Yes, I have no accent. I know, people are always surprised that I don't.

SIGRIST: Well, you were young, too.

LONGFIELD: Yes, definitely.

SIGRIST: This is probably a good time to just describe about going back, very quickly, in our last five minutes, about going back to Yugoslavia, and then just sort of in a nutshell what happened.

LONGFIELD: Well, we, I guess my folks felt that they had enough money, so we were going to go back.

SIGRIST: What year is this?

LONGFIELD: (she sighs) Well, it must have been about '26 or '27. And this is what we then did. And we went back on this marvelous ship. It was called . . .

SIGRIST: 1926 or '27. For a minute there I thought you were twenty-six. I'm having all these things in my mind. (they laugh) No, this can't be. Okay, so you went back on a nice ship.

LONGFIELD: Yes. It was called the Christopher Columbus, and I think it was an Italian ship. I'm not sure. But now I heard a rumor that during World War II, when World War II started, that it was here in New York. And rather than have it confiscated or tied up they scuttled it. I'm not sure about this. No, I'm wrong about that. But this is what I heard. This could be a rumor. So, but that trip was very, very nice. And we got back to Zombor, and it just, nobody ever knew the exact dates when these things would happen. So when we arrived there, they were going to take the train. And they had bought the ticket here to go into our little town, and the man wanted more money. And my aunt was coming with my mother back with my cousin. And . . .

SIGRIST: Your father stayed in America.

LONGFIELD: Yes. And my mother and my aunt refused to pay the additional money. So would you believe they locked them up in barracks? And my mother and my aunt would say, "Scream." And my cousin and I would scream and scream and scream, and just in order to make them let us out, and they wouldn't. So finally my aunt bribed the one guard to let them out, so they let them out, and I think they stayed in, they must have stayed in some room or something. But they ran into my grandmother's brother, and so they said, well, rather than have these kids stay here, let them go home with the uncle. So this is what he did. He took

us home, and he opened the gate to my grandmother's house. This is my mother's mother, and we just walked in. And my grandmother was washing clothes at a wash tub in the yard, and she turned around and she looked at us two children, and then all of a sudden she screamed, "Oh, my God, it's my children." And she ran over to us. And then by next morning my aunt and my mother came.

SIGRIST: Did returning to Yugoslavia have the outcome that your father had intended it?

LONGFIELD: Well, yes and no. My mother bought a house and she bought some land. She bought some animals and things and, you know, started working. And he was here sending money back, and then we got the letter after we were out there a while that he was so sick that if my mother didn't come back she would never see him alive again.

SIGRIST: Your father.

LONGFIELD: Yes. So that's what we did. She auctioned off the house and the household goods. The land she could not auction off. There was no buyer at the time. And it was a hurry-up trip back.

SIGRIST: How long were you there?

LONGFIELD: Oh, it must have been about a year, around a year.

SIGRIST: Of course, you were well on your way to Americanizing by the time you . . .

LONGFIELD: Yes. But, see, I had had the same problem when I got back then. In school I could not read German and I could not write German. So, again, I was sort of like an oddball.
(she laughs)

SIGRIST: Well, in our final few minutes I just want to ask you a question. Were your parents glad that they stayed in America?

LONGFIELD: Well, at first yes, but then later on they were acclimated and I think when my mother went back she saw the light going on. I do not want to get up at daybreak and walk into, work in the field all day. I do not want to have outside toilets. I do not want to, and by this time electric light. By this time I do not want to have the kerosene lamp any more. I think the bloom was going off of it as far as my mother was concerned. So she I think we glad to come back to America the second time.

SIGRIST: America looked better and better.

LONGFIELD: Yes, uh-huh.

SIGRIST: And I guess my final question for you is are you glad you came?

LONGFIELD: Oh, definitely, definitely. Yes. It couldn't have been better.

SIGRIST: Good. From a little girl who didn't know what they Statue of Liberty was. (they laugh) Well, anyway, Mrs. Longfield, I want to thank you very much for coming, actually, all this way from California to be with us, and for sharing your memories with us. Thank you.

LONGFIELD: Well, I'm doing it more for my parents, I think, than for myself. I think it's more of a history for them.

SIGRIST: And what an interesting story. Certainly one of our most interesting stories. Anyway, this is Paul Sigrist signing off for the National Park Service with Mrs. Elizabeth Longfield.