

EI-391  
DOREEN PAYNE STENZEL  
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INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.  
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TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: IRV SILBERG

ENGLAND, 1929  
AGE 9

SHIP: "THE BERENGARIA"  
PORT: SOUTHAMPTON  
RESIDENCES:  
? ENGLAND: BIRMINGHAM  
? US: BALDWIN, LI, NY

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Tuesday, September 21, 1993. I am at the Ellis Island Recording Studio with Doreen Stenzel. Mrs. Stenzel came from England in 1929 when she was nine years old. Welcome.

STENZEL: Thank you.

SIGRIST: Let's begin, Mrs. Stenzel, by you giving me your birth date.

STENZEL: Okay. My birthday is July 24, 1920.

SIGRIST: And what was your maiden name?

STENZEL: My maiden name was Payne, P-A-Y-N-E.

SIGRIST: And where were you born?

STENZEL: I was born in Birmingham.

SIGRIST: And, um, can you tell me, were you born at home or in a hospital?

STENZEL: I was born in a private nursing home, a very small house on a street called Sarahole Road. I went back to England in 1967 and visited my cousins, and I said, "I must find out where I was born." Because I had my birth certificate. And he wasn't so sure we were going to find it, because he said during the war everything had been very--. But, um, when I got there, there was the sign at the corner of the street, and we walked up the street with the number, and I looked, and I found the house that I was born in. A very small house . . .

SIGRIST: Can you spell the name of the street for me, please?

STENZEL: Sarahole. S-A-R-A-H-O-L-E. Sarahole Road.

SIGRIST: And, I'm sorry, I interrupted you. You said it was a very small house.

STENZEL: Very small. It was all houses all together, because in England most of the houses are adjoined. There's not that many, there wasn't at that point in time that I know of. They were not separate. They were all joined together in one row.

SIGRIST: Did your mother or father ever relate to you a story about your birth or concerning your mother's pregnancy or her giving birth to you?

STENZEL: Um, yeah. My mother was in show business. She was a singer and a dancer, uh, before she married my father. And at the time that I was born, she said that my father was walking around in the garden in back of this little house, and she was playing the piano, and she was playing and singing, "When You Come to the End of a Perfect Day." Which I thought was really something. That's what she was playing, she said, when I was born. That was the song that she was playing and singing.

SIGRIST: Did you live right in Birmingham, or did you live outside of it?

STENZEL: No, we lived right in Birmingham, uh-huh. Right in Birmingham. I don't recall the name of the streets that I lived on, I don't think.

SIGRIST: You moved a number of times?

STENZEL: Just a couple of times, that I recall. Um, I remembered my grandmother's house was in Camp Hill where we used to go. And there's an interesting thing about that, when I went back I said to my cousin I wanted to see if I could find my grandmother's house. And he said, "Well, you won't remember it." I said, "Oh, yes, I will." I said, "I remember that there was a kitchen door and a dining room door coming out together like at an angle. And there was a big, long wall along the side of the house. And it was the garden wall there and," I said, "If I can see that, I'll know that's the house, because I will remember it." So when we got to the street, there was a row of twelve houses, and the first six were in perfect condition. The last six, which included my grandmother's house, had had a direct bomb hit. So he said, "Uh-oh, this doesn't look good." So I said, "Well, we'll see what we can find." And I had the number of the house, and as we walked down the street, we passed through the broken walls and, you know, the bricks lying around.

And we came to the very last, because I told my cousin, I said, "It's the last house." So when we got to the last house, I looked over the door, and there was a shriveled up sign broken down, and there was the number of the house. I said, "This is the house." We went around the side, and there was the garden wall. We followed the garden

wall halfway down until it broke where the bomb had hit. And as I turned around and looked back, the only thing remaining was that triangle there where the two doors were, and I saw the two doors, and I said, "That's it." So it was a great experience. I had seen my grandmother's home again.

SIGRIST: Was your grandmother important to your childhood?

STENZEL: Yes, very.

SIGRIST: What was her name?

STENZEL: Uh, Elizabeth Wilcox Payne.

SIGRIST: So that's your dad's mom.

STENZEL: My dad's mother.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me her personality?

STENZEL: Yes, she was, oh, she was only about five foot two. She was very little, a very tiny lady. But, uh, she was a very loving, loving person. Uh, it was exciting to go and see her. She, I always had in the kitchen a big old crock of what they call ginger beer, which we call ginger ale here. But in England they call it ginger beer. And it's, they, she made it herself. It wasn't alcoholic. It was just a ginger beer. They called it beer, but it wasn't. And it was just wonderful. It was ginger ale, but it was the most wonderful ginger that you ever could taste. And she always kept a big crock of it by the big, black stove, and she always knew that when I went there that was what I wanted. And the first thing she did was take a scoop of the ginger beer and give it to me, when I was there with her.

SIGRIST: Do you know how she made that?

STENZEL: No, I don't. I often wish I did. ( she laughs ) Because I would have loved to have had it now myself.

SIGRIST: Do you have any other stories about your grandmother that come to mind when you think about her?

STENZEL: Oh, my goodness, yes. She was on the boat coming over. She was jumping rope with us, because we had a jump rope going, and I remember seeing my grandmother jump rope. Uh . . .

SIGRIST: So she came to America with you ultimately.

STENZEL: She came with us. It was my mother, my grandmother and myself. My father, my grandfather had come previously about three years before. Uh . . .

SIGRIST: Had they come together, your . . .

STENZEL: Yes, they came together. We have a, that part of my family, my father's family, is a small family. My mother's family was very large. She was from one of ten or eleven. So with all the cousins I had over there, there was many, many. But my father and his aunt, they only two children in the family, so that, um, it was very small, a very small family.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

STENZEL: My father's name was Herbert Wilcox Payne.

SIGRIST: And tell me a little bit about his personality.

STENZEL: Oh, what a man. ( she laughs ) A fabulous man. My father was also on the stage. He was this act with his sister, a dance act with his sister. And he also, um, he used to run the lights and whatever it was and the sound and that for the Shakespeare Theater in Stratford-On-Avon, and he lived right across the street from Shakespeare's home, which I found also when I went back to England at that time and I went to Shakespeare's house, I found that, where he lived.

SIGRIST: Had he come from a theatrical family? What was his background?

STENZEL: Uh, no, no. He hadn't. Uh, he and my sis - my aunt just were that inclined themselves. My grandfather was not, and neither was my grandmother. My mother's side is something else again, because she and her sister, my aunt, were, um, dancers. They were in all the musicals, you know, the musicals and the theater in, in England. My aunt played Drury Lane Theater, and she was an opera si-- she sang opera. And I saw her do The Vagabond King, which I remember, in London, and heard her sing.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

STENZEL: Dora.

SIGRIST: And her maiden name?

STENZEL: Baxter.

SIGRIST: B-A-X-T-E-R.

STENZEL: Uh-huh. Dora Ethel Baxter.

SIGRIST: Um, you told me a little bit already, but can you be more specific about her personality and what her temperament was like?

STENZEL: Uh, well, being theatrical, I guess, she was always singing. Sunday mornings you'd always hear my mother singing all these hymns, and she sang a great deal. She was a very, um, outgoing person. She liked people, to be with people all the time. Um, she was a very, very good mother. My mother passed away in 1950 and, 19-- excuse me, 1947, when she was fifty years old. So she was young. But, uh . . .

SIGRIST: When you think back to your early childhood, is there a story, an anecdote about your mother, something maybe that you did together?

STENZEL: Yes. We, uh, we had gone to London, I recall, to visit with my aunt. And, uh, she said, "While we're here now," she said, "this is the first chance we're going to get." You know, because I, we were going back to America quite soon after that. And she said, "We're going to go to Buckingham Palace and see the changing of the guards." So I thought that was pretty wonderful. And I think, at that time, I was probably about, about seven, about seven or eight. And when we went there, uh, at that time the big gates, you know, that looked so huge to me, and they, everybody was standing around, and my mother questioned, "What is everybody standing around the gates for?" And they said, "Well, the queen is coming out." So, of course, we had to see it. And when I heard that the queen was coming, I got so excited.

And the gate opened, and this magnificent carriage came out with the prince, the then-Prince of Wales, who was the Duke of Windsor that married Wally Simpson, he and his mother, which was the mother before the queen mother now, the wife, I believe, of King George, if I remember. And as it came out, she was, I could see her sitting in the carriage window, and I remember getting so excited, I squealed like this. And as I did, she turned and put her head through the carriage window and put her hand out and waved to me like that. And I think there's not many kids that have had that happen to them.

SIGRIST: Now, you said your father went to America three years before you did?

STENZEL: Yeah, just about three years before.

SIGRIST: Do you remember him leaving?

STENZEL: I do.

SIGRIST: Can you describe that for me?

STENZEL: Well, I don't remember him leaving, actually, because I was asleep. He wouldn't wake me up. But I saw him the day before. We were at my grandmother's, and they had all gotten together for taking pictures, and I have a picture taken with my mother and father at that time. And I knew he was going to America. There's not much I can say about that except that I, we stayed there that night, and I re-- the only thing that bothered me, really, was I woke up and there was somebody in the house, I don't recall who it was, but my mother and father had gone, and my mother said that he came in and he kissed me goodbye and he left. And that, uh, bothered me for quite some time, that I didn't see him go.

SIGRIST: When you were young before you came to this country, what did you know about America? What did it mean to you?

STENZEL: I didn't know anything about America. Um, I hadn't learned geography, I guess, in school yet. Um, I don't recall much about it. I just recall hearing my aunts talk about being in America and that America was a wonderful place to go. Um, I had two great-aunts, which were my grandmother's sisters. They came to this country first. And they left, went back to England with such wonderful tales, and brought my father's sister back with them. So now those three were here and settled and staying here.

SIGRIST: Were they living in New York, or where were they living?

STENZEL: Uh, Newark. My aunt went to Brooklyn, and the two great-aunt -- my aunt, my father's sister, went to Brooklyn, and the other two went to Newark. And then it was my father's sister that came back to England again and convinced my grandfather and my father that they should come over. So they came back with my aunt, and it left my mother, my grandmother and myself alone in England.

SIGRIST: What did your father intend to do when he got to this country?

STENZEL: I don't think he knew, because he had, uh, I don't think he was going to be a dancer any more, that's for sure. And I don't think that he was, um, well, he would be, I can't think of how old he was when he got here, probably, my mother was thirty-three, so my father must have been the same, about thirty-three when they came over. And, uh, he had worked with the theater, he had worked with, um, he was in the navy. He had been in the British Navy. And I don't know what he really thought he was going to do. But when he came here, uh, he did get with a corporation called the Ghehegian [ph] Construction Company.

SIGRIST: Gahagan?

STENZEL: Gahagan. And that was Helen Gahagan's father. And Helen Gahagan was married to Douglas, Paul Douglas. And that was the Helen Gahagan, she was senator, I believe she was in the senate. And, um, he had a construction company. My dad went to work with him. And, uh, he did a lot of water surveying and land surveying, and this is where he was working most of the time, I think probably all the time, until we came over.

SIGRIST: What about your grandfather?

STENZEL: I don't have any recollection of what my grandfather did. I don't know. I can't recall what he did. He looked just like Franklin D. Roosevelt. ( she laughs ) One thing I do know is that my grandmother always used to say, "Did you see Franklin out there? Where's Franklin?" Because he did, he looked just like Franklin D. Roosevelt, the same, a big man, just like him.

SIGRIST: When your father was in England, was he supporting his family by dancing, or was he doing other . . .

STENZEL: No, no, no. He was working, uh, he was working, I know, with the theater, the Shakespeare theater. And also, he was also night telephonist for the government. So he did work for the government as a night telephone, telephonist. That was his position that I recall. In fact, that's what's on my birth certificate, that that's what he was at that time.

SIGRIST: Now, what about your mother? Was she working outside the home in England?

STENZEL: No, she didn't. My mother never worked at all. She quit dancing and being on the stage when I was born. and, uh, she never, she never did any work.

SIGRIST: Did she have other children in England?

STENZEL: No, I'm an only child.

SIGRIST: You're an only child.

STENZEL: The only child.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about what life was like after your father left, and if that created any kind of hardship?

STENZEL: No, I, I really, um, found that -- my mother and I were very, very close. We went to, we went to my grandmother's, we visited with my grandmother. We would go to London to visit with my aunt. And, um . . .

SIGRIST: How are you supporting yourselves without your father?

STENZEL: I imagine my father was sending money to them to support them. I remember writing to him all the time, my mother had me write letters to him all the time. And I, I can remember some of the letters. I still have a couple of them, in fact. I said, you know, that I missed him, and I was looking forward to coming to America. And, oh, and he, one letter he had written to us, he said he was getting a car. And I wrote back and said, "Please get a red car." I wanted a red car. And when we got here, the car that he had was not red, didn't get a red car.

SIGRIST: Black probably. ( he laughs )

STENZEL: Black. Big open phaeton, you know, big, all wide open. He sent a picture of it home, him sitting there with this great, big phaeton, you know. Beautiful picture.

SIGRIST: Can you describe where you and your mother were living at that time after your father was gone?

STENZEL: Uh, yes. Let me see. My grandmother was on Camp Hill. I used to remem—I used to know the name of the street. Thompson? Something like Thompson. Something like that. But it was in an apartment. We had, like, three, three rooms. And I went to school, I went to a private school. My mother took me to a private school. And,

um, I remember going to school. I was going to school, I guess, for about a year. Because they don't start you in England very early like they do here. Now it's only four-and-a-half years old when you go to school. And then I guess it must have been seven, probably about seven or seven-and-a-half, something like that. Because I had been to school about a year-and-a-half when I came here.

SIGRIST: Before you came. Can you, can you be a little more specific about the apartment that you were living? Can you just kind of walk me through and tell me where the furniture is, that sort of thing?

STENZEL: I remember this big, long staircase going up. Oh, and I do remember, I must have been quite young at the time. I remember going, I went down the stairs on my bottom. I used to go down, I didn't walk down the stairs. I went down on my bottom. I went down to the apartment downstairs, and there was a fire. And I went crying back up to my mother to hurry, there was a fire. And there was a baby in a crib, and my mother ran in and got a baby out of a crib. Boy, that brought back, that was fast to get that memory back! ( she laughs ) And there was a long stairway, and it was one great, big room, and then, I think, a smaller room. The bed was right in front of a big, open fireplace.

SIGRIST: And is that how you heated the apartment?

STENZEL: With the fi-- oh, yes. Just a fireplace. There was no central heating.

SIGRIST: And what did you use in the fireplace?

STENZEL: I don't know. Probably, they probably used logs or wood or something. It couldn't have been more than that.

SIGRIST: Did you have electricity in the apartment?

STENZEL: No, gas light on the wall. You had to put money in the gas light.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the kitchen for me?

STENZEL: No. That I, I think that was probably like a part, just a little part of the big room, smaller. I don't recall that. I remember the, uh, I remember the bed being right alongside of the fireplace because that, I guess for warmth at night the fireplace was on.

SIGRIST: Did you and your mother have separate beds? Did you sleep with your mother?

STENZEL: No. We slept in the same one great big bed. It was a great, big featherbed. I remember all the feathers. A great, big featherbed. And my grandmother had a featherbed, too, and that's when I used to love to go and stay at my grandmother's. I loved that featherbed.

SIGRIST: Would you do that on occasion, stay for extended periods of time with your grandmother?

STENZEL: No. I think probably maybe just once in a while overnight. My mother may have gone out somewhere, gone to the theater or something like that, and I stayed with my grand-- she was going to be late getting home. She, once in a while, not very often. I was always with my mother the whole time.

SIGRIST: Did you have a favorite toy when you were a child?

STENZEL: A teddy bear.

SIGRIST: Do you know who gave it to you, or . . .

STENZEL: I think it was given to me when I had scarlet fever, and I came out of the scarlet fever, when I came out of the hospital from having scarlet fever I think it was my dad that gave it to me, the teddy bear. That was Teddy. And I had him with me, we brought him to this country with me. And then when I was nineteen here we had a fire in our home, and all of my things like that were destroyed, so that's when I lost Teddy.

SIGRIST: Oh. Do you have any recollections of having scarlet fever and that whole experience?

STENZEL: I tell you, it must be, one experience I do have. I remember, I'm surprised at this because I think my mother said I was only eighteen months old when I had scarlet fever, and I had to be taken to the hospital.

SIGRIST: Oh, you were quite young, then.

STENZEL: But I remember my father carrying me, and I remember being with my father, my mother, my grandmother and my grandfather. And it must have been that time when they took me from the fever hospital. That's the only time I remember, uh, going, walking with them and being with them and my father carrying me. And I remember, the funniest part about it, I look at it now and I think they headed for a pub. ( she laughs ) And the next, and I do remember them going in a pub. And in England then I guess everybody went in the pubs for a Chandygaff [ph] or whatever it was. But I guess on the way home they all stopped and, stopped in the pub.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when you were a child in England, any other medical emergencies or illnesses?

STENZEL: For myself? No.

SIGRIST: Yourself, or one of your family members, something that you would remember?

STENZEL: No, nothing from my mother, or my grandmother, or myself. Other, that's the only thing I remember was having that scarlet fever. But, uh, oh, I had my tonsils out. That was it. Oh, and my Auntie Gertie, who was the opera singer, came to us when I, when they brought

me, from my mother and my Auntie Gertie, they brought me home from the fever hospital. My Auntie Gertie taught me how to gargle. ( she laughs ) She could get that, she says, "Come on, now, get that sound out of you." ( she imitates gargling ). And she would let out this beautiful sound, and you'd hear all this gargling. And I could make the gargle, but I couldn't make the sound that she did with it. But she taught me how to gargle.

STENZEL: What was a typical meal when you were growing up?

STENZEL: Okay. We always had roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, which was one big thing.

SIGRIST: Would that be for a special occasion, or . . .

STENZEL: No, that was a, maybe Sunday dinner. Probably Sunday dinner. Roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, fish and chips. When we, when my mother and I would go to visit my grandmother, while my father was gone, we'd walk home at night, and we'd always go by the fish and chips shop and pick up a bag of fish and chips, and we would eat it coming home, eat the fish and the chips out of a paper bag. And one night when we were coming home, we had one of those wonderful fogs. And we got just halfway, and the fog came in, and my mother said, "All right. This is it. We're by a fence. We can't move any further." Because we couldn't see.

So she said, "Hold to the fence." And she went first, and I was in back of her holding onto the fence in back of her as we crept along the fence. And all of a sudden this big flashlight hit us in the face, and it was a bobby, and he asked, you know, "You're lost." My mother said, "Well, I know where I'm going, but I just, I've lost my bearing now because of the fog." And she told him, and he guided us with his light around the bend, and it wasn't that far. But he guided us with that light. I can remember the fog. I never saw anything like it in my life before, so dense that I couldn't even see my mother, just hold on to her. But that's, and the English bobby came by. I remember lamplighters. I remember seeing them light . . .

SIGRIST: What was it, gas? Gas lamps?

STENZEL: Gas lights. And they'd come around at night, and they'd put the ladder up, and they'd light the gas light.

SIGRIST: Birmingham is an industrial city?

STENZEL: Yes, it is. It is an industrial city. Uh-huh. Yes, it is.

SIGRIST: Now, your father is in America with your grandfather.

STENZEL: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: And you're writing back and forth.

STENZEL: Right.

SIGRIST: Do you remember your mother saying to you, "Well, it's all set. We're going to be going to America."?

STENZEL: Oh, yes. I was always encouraged that, uh, you know, when I would say, it seems like it's such a long time, or my mother said, "It's taking a long time. When he gets the money together and he sends fare for us to come over we will go. But he promised us it would only, it would not be any more than two or three years at the most." It was about two-and-a-half years when he was able to bring us over.

SIGRIST: Do you have any recollection of the whole process of getting papers in England?

STENZEL: No.

SIGRIST: You probably were excluded from that.

STENZEL: No. No, I don't recall anything like that.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how you felt about leaving?

STENZEL: Uh, I think, uh, I think I was really excited to leave. I had been in school a little while. I had a few friends in school. But, you know, at nine years old you can very easily say, well, you know. ( she laughs ) And I -- I don't recall ever being, I was so anxious to see my father that I thought, I guess nothing mattered more than, I didn't care where he was, I wanted to go see my father.

SIGRIST: Do you remember if anyone gave you a dinner or a party or some kind of a sendoff?

STENZEL: No.

SIGRIST: Nothing like that?

STENZEL: No, nothing that I recall.

SIGRIST: It's you, your mom, your grandmother.

STENZEL: Uh-huh. Is that it?

SIGRIST: The three of you.

STENZEL: The three of us.

SIGRIST: When, when did you leave? In July?

STENZEL: In July.

SIGRIST: July of 1929, and where did you go? From Birmingham to where?

STENZEL: Birmingham over to Paris, to France, rather. Not Paris. La Havre? La Havre. To pick up people there from, we left from, um, Southampton, to there, and then to New York.

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

STENZEL: The only thing, I don't know, my mother, I guess, did all the packing. We had one great, I was telling my daughter when we came in, I said, "See that big trunk over there? That's what we had. One big trunk." And, um, I guess the usual things, the clothing. And that, I know one thing my mother brought was my little cup with cats on it when I was a baby that I drank out of. She brought that. And I still have two silver egg cups that I used to play with when I was a baby, she told me. And I would tap them together and they'd ring and make sounds. I still have them in my closet now. I still have those two little egg cups, and I still have the little cup. It got broken and mended, but I still have it.

SIGRIST: And sadly the teddy bear was incinerated.

STENZEL: The teddy bear [not understood] with me, but he was lost in the fire that we had.

SIGRIST: Did you get new clothes before you came to America?

STENZEL: Not that I recall. Just whatever we had, that was it to come.

SIGRIST: So you went to La Havre.

STENZEL: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: And did you have to wait a period of time in La Havre?

STENZEL: Uh, I think it was just to, just take on passengers. They were all ready to go.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the boat?

STENZEL: Berengaria.

SIGRIST: And, um, tell me what you thought when you saw the boat.

STENZEL: Big. Big. It was a three, three, uh, stack, smokestacks on the boat. Um, I remember the boat, when we got on that. And it was -- that was, it's exciting, I know it was, because I remember, I remember, you know, that part. I remember we start. My mother told me where we were. And she said, "Next time we stop, we'll be in America."

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

STENZEL: In a bunk. I slept in a bunk. Yeah, I guess there was two be-- I guess there was bunk beds or something in the cabin.

SIGRIST: Was it the three of you in the cabin?

STENZEL: I think we were all in the one cabin. I think we were. Yes, I think we were all in the one cabin, because I remember them being together. I remember being together with us.

SIGRIST: Tell me what else do you remember about being on the boat. Do you remember the dining facilities, for instance?

STENZEL: Yes. I remember eating, and I remember one morning it was very, very, very windy and stormy, and they had the sides raised up along the table, and the plates were sliding across the table and hitting the side and going back again. But the best of all, I remember I could have ice cream on cantaloupe in the morning, and I thought that was something out of this world, because ice cream was a real treat. When we would go out my mother would say, when we come back we're gonna stop in the tea shop and you can have some ice cream. And I used to get a penny to go over, when I visited my grandmother's, to get a penny to go across the street and get a piece of candy. When I think of what the kids today have, and I had a penny to get a piece of candy when I went to visit my grandmother.

SIGRIST: What else was there to do on the boat/

STENZEL: Uh, we played some games. They had some games that they played, and they had jump rope. And I remember my grandmother jumping rope. That I do remember. And they did have some games. Um, we sat in different places, I remember while they talked, my mother and my grandmother talked, and I guess I just had books to look at and things like that. Uh, I wasn't bored. I don't remember, I wasn't frightened.

SIGRIST: Do you remember there being safety drills on the boat?

STENZEL: Yes. I remember one of those, when you had to put the big, uh, life preserver on. Yeah, we did have a safety drill, I remember that. Because we thought it was my grandmother, she was so tiny, she put it on and we laughed at her because it came down to her knees. ( she laughs ) This big thing, I remember that. It came right down to her knees, and she was so tiny.

SIGRIST: Had your grandmother or your mother ever been on a large ship before?

STENZEL: No.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how, how they reacted, or did they ever tell you?

STENZEL: No, but I think just from being with them and seeing them happy, seeing them, you know, my mother was saying how we're going on a walk on the side of the boat, and my aunt and my grandmother would be with us. And my grandmother said, "We have to walk all the way around, because you've got to exercise." We walked around and around and around the boat.

SIGRIST: Do you know how long it took, the ship?

STENZEL: Seven days. I recall that it was seven days to get here.

SIGRIST: Um, and did you get sick?

STENZEL: Yes. I was the only one. Nobody else got sick.

SIGRIST: It's all that ice cream you were eating.

STENZEL: It had to be the ice cream on the cantaloupe in the morning. I couldn't believe that -- that for breakfast. My grandmother said to me, "You know what you can have for breakfast?" And I said, "No." She said, "Do you want ice cream on cantaloupe?" I said, "Yes." ( she laughs ) And I had that for breakfast. But I did get sick. I did get sick on the boat.

SIGRIST: Did you end up refined, uh, confined to your cabin?

STENZEL: No, no. I just had little bouts of, uh, of being sick. I remember that. And my mother wasn't sick, and my grandmother. I couldn't understand it. And I used to say to my grandmother, "Why don't you get sick? Why don't you get sick, too?" ( she laughs ) But they didn't get sick. Only me.

SIGRIST: We're gonna pause for a second and Kevin, excuse me, Peter is going to flip all the tapes over and then we'll continue, get you to America.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: Okay. We're returning with Doreen Stenzel, who came from England in 1929 when she was nine. The boat took seven days.

STENZEL: Yes.

SIGRIST: Tell me about coming into New York.

STENZEL: Um, well, of course, when they, I guess when they told everybody that we would be nearing the New York Harbor, everybody was up on the deck. And, um, we stood there, and as we came in I watched, I could see the Statue of Liberty. Um, I didn't know anything else about what was there, but, just, I saw that. And we were told where to go and wait, you know, before getting off the boat. And then we were told that, uh, we would be taken to Ellis Island. And my father had to come to Ellis Island to get us. And we got off the boat, we came into the building at Ellis Island, and we were all, we were waiting together.

But while I was on the boat, I remember looking over and seeing a pilot boat come in. The boat was already docked. The Berengaria was already docked at Ellis Island. But then I think it might not have been as close to the -- to it, because a boat had to come out. But whether that boat came out, this is something I just can't get quite,

whether that pilot boat actually came out to the boat, or whether the boat was there and I saw the pilot boat come to where they were getting off if I, you know, before we got off the boat. And my father was on the pilot boat. But I didn't know that. I didn't see him then. I just know that that pilot boat came, and they said this way, I remember my mother saying, "These are the people that are coming to get us. So Daddy will be on that boat somewhere."

And then we got off and we were brought into the, into the building, and we were waiting on one side, and they were just naming off different people. I can remember them hearing them calling different names of people that were coming in. And finally, um, I don't know where the archway is, but I know I saw my father coming through a great, big, huge archway. And I saw him coming, and I broke away from Mother and ran and grabbed him. ( she laughs ) But, um, that's when the first remembrance I have of seeing him back, you know, when we, uh, when we landed. But we had to wait there quite a while, I guess, until all the luggage was off and all that.

SIGRIST: Did you have to undergo any kind of physical exams or questioning or anything like that?

STENZEL: I didn't. No. No. I might -- if any, if they did anything, I wasn't included in it. You know, if I was, I was not included in any questioning or anything, like. I guess my mother and my father took care of that. But I wasn't examined at all, or have to be examined.

SIGRIST: Do you . . .

STENZEL: I guess because he was picking us up. He was there for us, and I was being claimed.

SIGRIST: Did he look any different to you?

STENZEL: No. No, no. He still had that same curly hair and still looked the same.

SIGRIST: Did he bring you a present?

STENZEL: I don't think so. I don't remember that. I don't think he did.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me how your parents greeted each other?

STENZEL: Oh, my goodness. I guess that was something, after three years, my mother and my father together again. A lot of crying, a lot of tears. Uh, and my grandmother, too. A very emotional meeting, I know that. But a happy, happy kind of, very, very happy.

SIGRIST: And then what happened? Your father came and he claimed you.

STENZEL: Yeah. And they had already rented the couple of houses in Baldwin.

SIGRIST: How did you get off the island?

STENZEL: Now, that's a very funny thing, because I was saying that to my daughter on the way in. I said, "As strongly as I remember, seeing him come through that big archway, and running to him and seeing him, I don't remember where we went after that." Isn't that strange? I don't have a recollection. Now, after that, I do recall the house. I remember where we were. My grandfather lived in one house across the street, and we lived in a little bungalow near each other, and you used to just go back across - across the street to see my grandmother again. But I do not remember any more that day, which I think is very strange. I remember so strongly seeing him, and seeing that archway, and it looked so huge to me. And, and I remember the greeting, but I don't remember anything else of that day.

SIGRIST: Your memory doesn't click back in until you're in, is Baldwin on Long Island?

STENZEL: Baldwin is on Long Island in Nassau County, and I went to school there.

SIGRIST: Tell me what happened the first night, or don't you remember?

STENZEL: Uh-huh. I don't remember that at all. I'm sure that when my grandma, when my grandfather, of course, met my grandmother, and I'm sure they all had quite a get-together, you know. Um, but I have no recollection of the rest of the day. And it amazes me that I cannot recall, that, seeing him was so vivid. That archway looked so big. And I ran to him. And I remember that very strongly. I remember seeing my mother and my father hugging, and my grandmother. And I remember being so terribly excited and wanting, you know. But I don't remember anything else of the rest of the day. And it's so strange.

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

STENZEL: No. It probably was just a little cotton dress or something, because it was July and it was warm. So it was probably that. I know I had a Buster Brown haircut. I remember that, a Buster Brown haircut, with the bangs. But I don't recall anything else like that.

SIGRIST: Well, let's get you to Baldwin, then.

STENZEL: Okay.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the house that you lived in, the first house if there were (?).

STENZEL: A little cottage. It was a very small bungalow, and it was near a great, big farm because in those days Baldwin itself is a pretty big town. Now, it's all built up. But in those days it was a lot of farmland around, and I used to have to cut through a farm when I went to the school. But it, um, it was a lovely little house. It was just a small house, a one-bedroom, and it had, uh, two bedrooms, rather, excuse

me. I had a bedroom and my mother and father had a bedroom. We had a kitchen and a living room. And they had a coffee grinder on the wall. My mother used to grind coffee every morning, and I could still remember smelling that coffee. I didn't drink coffee at the time, but the house was filled with that coffee aroma in the morning, which my mother had to learn to make, because we were all tea drinkers. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: Did they keep a garden?

STENZEL: Yeah, my mother had a garden.

SIGRIST: Did she have one in Birmingham?

STENZEL: No. No, we didn't have gardens in Birmingham. Um, my grandmother had a garden. I still carry a scar on my arm from falling through the glass top. My grandmother had a very big garden alongside of that wall. But there was a glass covering over it, like a, I don't know, a greenhouse effect or something for them. And I remember at one time I was in the garden and I fell, and my arm went through it, and I still have the scar going up my arm here from when I fell.

SIGRIST: Was that in Birmingham?

STENZEL: No, this was . . .

SIGRIST: This was here, in Baldwin.

STENZEL: No, this was in Birmingham. This was in Birmingham.

SIGRIST: Well, see, you do remember another medical emergency. ( he laughs )

STENZEL: That was. Yes, I have a scar on my arm from when I fell through the glass. And, um . . .

SIGRIST: You said your grandparents lived across the street in Baldwin.

STENZEL: Yes, they did.

SIGRIST: And . . .

STENZEL: And their house was the same as mine.

SIGRIST: And do you remember what your grandfather was doing for a living?

STENZEL: No. I still don't recall what he was doing, what he did. I really don't. I do know that shortly after that the Gahagan Company owned this property in East Rockaway, and they made it, it was a beach, beachfront property. And my grandfather worked there as building that beach up, and he managed the beach for many years, in fact, for quite a few years after that. It became a very big beach. They did the fencing. My father used to paint the signs for him and everything. While my

father was working for the Ga-- and that's how I think they both got together with that, was because of the Gahagan Construction Company, which owned it, and I think probably that's how my grandfather started working at the beach. Then I recall my grandfather working at the beach.

SIGRIST: Did your mother go to work once you got to America?

STENZEL: No.

SIGRIST: What about your grandmother?

STENZEL: No. They never worked.

SIGRIST: Neither?

STENZEL: No. They never went to work at all.

SIGRIST: Uh, why, how did they end up in Baldwin?

STENZEL: That's something I don't know. It's very strange, because I often wondered why we didn't all go to Newark, because my two great-aunts lived in Newark, and then my other aunt was in Brooklyn. And yet I, possibly because my father, wait a minute, Valley Stream comes into my mind somewhere there. My father worked out of Valley Stream. Possibly that's why.

SIGRIST: Which is near by Baldwin.

STENZEL: Yes, it is. And then, too, the Gahagan Construction Company, that was all waterfront. So it's, you know, they did the water surveying, land surveying. And that was probably why we were in Baldwin, which was near the water.

SIGRIST: Were there other English people in Baldwin?

STENZEL: Not that I recall.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of your father's friends, or your mother and father's friends, and who they were, and what their backgrounds were?

STENZEL: Yeah. I remember one particular family. Their names were Killine [ph]. And I don't know what he did, but she was a schoolteacher, and we used to go visit, we used to visit them a lot.

SIGRIST: What nationality?

STENZEL: He must have been Irish. The Killine sounds Irish to me. Uh, I don't recall her, her name. I remember, Vincent. His name is Vincent Killine. And that was my father's friend. And I guess they had worked together. But she was a schoolteacher, and we used to visit them. And I always went with them, and then I would go to sleep on the bed or the couch or something until they finish playing their cards, which they played at night, and then go home. I started school in Baldwin.

SIGRIST: In September?

STENZEL: End of September. Yeah, I went to school for the first time. A horrible experience.

SIGRIST: Oh, well, tell us about it.

STENZEL: Because I had such a very, very strong British accent, and I was, it was not cockney, from London. That's -- I was ver(r)y, ver(r)y British. If I was any more British I wouldn't be able to speak at all, one of those kind of things, you know. Very, very British. And the kids used to make fun of me. And they'd run after me, and say, "How's your toma(h)toes? Where's your bana(h)nas?" You know. And I would come home from school crying every day, because I couldn't understand why I spoke so differently to them that they would make some, what was the matter with the way I spoke that they made fun of me and laughed at me.

And they did it, many, many times. So that I used to, I would speak to my mother, and I would go to say, "Well, I ca(h)n't do it," and I would say, "I ca(a)n't." And my mother would go, "Oh, no!" ( she laughs ) You know. It was cute. She just hated the thought of me swinging from the lovely British accent and the British ways out of speaking to, um, to picking up slang, you know, the American slang which, uh, a couple of the children, there was a couple of girls that lived near there that I played with, and I used to listen to them and tried to listen carefully to hear what they were saying so that I could say it. And the teacher, of course, would always have me stand up in front of the room and read because she liked to hear me sing.

And the kids would sit there looking at me like, "Hmm, get you when you get outside," you know. And then I'd get out, and then they'd run after me and yell about the bana(h)nas and the toma(h)tos. ( she laughs ) So it, it was a difficult time for me then, losing that, that, uh, English way of speaking, you know. Because my grandmother, my mother and my father still maintained it. I mean, even - even -- and Jackie can probably remember, even with my father that, uh, even though he was Americanized, he still had so many English expressions and ways, you know, about him that, uh, he never really lost it completely. But they were older, you know. I guess I was just young enough to be, uh, to be affected strongly by it.

SIGRIST: Well, trying to alter your speech is one way of Americanizing.

STENZEL: Yes.

SIGRIST: Were there other ways that you tried to Americanize?

STENZEL: Well, going to the school. Um, going to a public school. I'd been in a private school in England. I think probably just growing up with American children and learning the history and that of the country, and going in school, to that.

SIGRIST: Were you ever embarrassed by having immigrant parents?

STENZEL: No, never. Because I never, because I felt I was, too, you know, we were English. Uh, of course, my mother and my father kept their speaking like that. So whenever, as I grew older, in my teen years and that, when the, uh, when I would bring people home they always said, "Gee, your mother sounds so Scotch." Well, my mother did have a lot, because she was born in Sunderland, which is right on the borders of Scotland. So my mother did have a little bit of Scotch in her, uh, in her tone, as English and Scotch, she had a lot of Scotch accents.

SIGRIST: I want to talk a little bit about your mother. Your father had already been here for a while.

STENZEL: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Tell me how your mother adjusted to this country. What she liked, and what she didn't like.

STENZEL: I think it was very difficult for her. My mother was thirty-three when she came to this country with me and my grandmother to meet my father, left her entire family behind, and never saw them again. Um . . .

SIGRIST: Do you think she was more apprehensive about leaving England?

STENZEL: I don't remember. See, my mother would not have let me see it if she was.

SIGRIST: And didn't talk about it later?

STENZEL: No. No, no. I think once we got here she, um, she adjusted. But somewhere I think that my mother always wished that she could go back to England. I really do. I feel that my mother wanted to go back. Um, she was all right here. My father had a job where he was away. The surveying took him away for days at a time and she'd be alone. She didn't, um, I don't think she made friends that easily. I think it was harder for her. Not my dad. My dad was, he fell right in to being an American. In fact, he never wanted to go home. He never, ever wanted to leave. He became an American, and he was an American through and through. He got his citizenship papers.

And I became a citizen under my father's papers. He became a citizen in January of 1931, and that was the last year that any children born into, born of, of anybody coming over where he became an American citizen, where they automatically became a citizen. After that they took, I was an automatic citizen at that point. That law, after that, made it that you had to be, you could be covered until you were eighteen, but then you had to get your own papers. And for me all, if I ever want, I have my father's papers and the number and everything which covers me, but if I would want a copy of the papers to have my own, I would have a certificate, a derivative certificate of citizenship which I could get under my father's papers, because I was covered. So when I was, in 1931 when I was eleven years old and I was an American citizen. My mother never did.

SIGRIST: And that was a conscious choice. She . . .

STENZEL: She never wanted to give up her British subject. She never gave it up. So, uh, of course, when the war came out and everything we had the little cards, you know, the alien registration, we had to go up and register as an alien, which she, she couldn't understand, "Why can't you be registered as an Alien, too? You're English." I said, "No, I'm not."

SIGRIST: Did your mother almost take a little bit of pride in being registered as an alien?

STENZEL: Well, I don't know it would be pride. She just did what she had to do. She had to do it, you know. But, um, as long as it did not take away her British subject. As long as she was sure that registering as an alien or whatever she had to register for and the cards she had to carry, that she knew then, she was kind of secure with that. That maintained her that she was still British.

SIGRIST: Yeah. It says a lot about her opinion of America.

STENZEL: Well, she liked America. I'm sure of that. Um, there were certain parts that she didn't like.

SIGRIST: Do you know, specifically, some of the things she didn't like?

STENZEL: She didn't like Newark. She didn't like New Jersey at all. She went to visit over there with my aunts a couple of times, and she did not like Newark. She did not like any part of that. She said she never wanted to live there. But, uh, she, um, she liked the Island. She was happy on the Island. Then we got a house, and I went through school, graduated.

SIGRIST: Do you remember your father studying for his citizenship?

STENZEL: No, I don't. I know that it took seven years, I think, then, at that time. Now I think you can get your papers much quicker. But the minute he got off the boat he went, choo, right over, to get my citizenship. Applied . . .

SIGRIST: He was determined . . .

STENZEL: He was determined. I can remember, uh, during the, um, the Second World War, when there were so many conscientious objectors to the war, and the other ones were denying about the war and didn't want to go, didn't want to go. And my father had a very strong feeling about that. He said, "This is your country where you live, that supplies your-- all your needs. This is your country. You fight for it." See, he fought for his country in England when he was in the British Royal Navy. And, uh, I think, he joined the Navy and fought in the First World War in the Navy because he was British and because he was fighting for the British.

And I think he felt the same way here. This is his country. This was his country now, and he was, they defended the presidents, every one of them. Every time, uh, one of them, uh, would make a speech or something, he said, "See, he's doing the best he can. Give him a chance." You know, very strong for the president. Every one of them. He never really, he never said anything against anyone that was a president. If they were the president, regardless, that was your president, and you honored him. And I think that comes from British training, of honoring the government, the queen and the king, you honor them. You know, now, nowadays they refer to the queen sometimes as Liz or something. In those days you would have never, never . . .

SIGRIST: It was a whole different . . .

STENZEL: . . . have done that. The respect had to be there. And to call your, your president, you know, JFK, or something, you never did anything. And my father objected to that. He felt they should get the full honor that they deserved for being the president.

SIGRIST: One thing we haven't really talked about, but it's sort of an interesting aspect to all this, the adjustment of your grandparents in this country, because they're much older.

STENZEL: Right.

SIGRIST: And, uh, talk a little bit about how they adjusted to America.

STENZEL: Well, my grandfather seemed to have adjusted fine to it. He, he had no problem, uh, working in that. And my grandmother was, was happy with it. And I think probably because her sisters were here, uh, she didn't have any trouble adjusting to it. Uh, what they did do, let's see, we came over in 1929, and in 1933 they went back to England for a visit.

STENZEL: Your grandparents did.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. They did. They went back. And, uh, my grandmother said, my grandfather, both my grandfather, they said they wish they had never gone. Because when they went back, people that they knew were gone, things had changed, uh, I can always, my grandmother said, "You can never go back. You can never go back. Once you leave, you can never go back." She said, "I would just as soon never have gone back and seen the changes." She saw some of the people she knew, some had gone. But she said, "Even in those few years it was so different," she said. She said, "You can never go back." But they wanted to, and they went back.

SIGRIST: And it was only intended to be a visit, though.

STENZEL: Just a visit. They only went for a visit for, what, five or six weeks, or whatever it was, and I got cards from them, you know. And somewhere I probably still have those cards. But, uh, they had a happy trip, and went back, but there was no family for them to see, you know. There was no family because, uh, they were the family.

SIGRIST: How old were they when they came to this country?

STENZEL: All right, well, I'm trying to think now. In 1936, my grandmother died in 1936, and she was sixty-three.

SIGRIST: I see. So they, they came in their late fifties.

STENZEL: Their late fifties would be what, that's, yeah, my grandmother would be in her fifties when we came over.

SIGRIST: Tell me, tell me a little bit about, um, your later life. We'll just kind of zip you . . .

STENZEL: Okay. All right. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: In our few remaining minutes, tell me when you got out of school and that sort of thing.

STENZEL: I graduated from East Rockaway High School in 1939. And, um, oh, I had various, uh, things, jobs that I did, you know, banks and things like that. My main, I really wanted to be an actress, you know. I guess it came from my aunt and my mother and my father. I guess it was in me. And I did, uh, I did a lot of theater in school. I was in all the plays and that, which spurred me on. But then I, I got married and, uh . . .

SIGRIST: What year did you get married?

STENZEL: I got married in 1944.

SIGRIST: And what was your husband's name?

STENZEL: Charles Stenzel.

SIGRIST: And that's S-T-E-N-Z-E-L.

STENZEL: Z-E-L. That's when my name went from Payne to Stenzel.  
( she laughs )

SIGRIST: Can you tell me, quickly, how you met your husband-to-be?

STENZEL: Yeah. Very cute. I met my husband on a New Year's Eve. Uh, my mother and I were in the apartment. My father, my mother and father and I had an apartment in this one building and, um, he, uh, he was away that, he wasn't home yet. He hadn't come home, he was coming home the following day from work. And there was a couple across the hall that were having a little get-together, come on over. And I was working in New York. And, um, I was working for Longchamps at the time. I was a cashier at Longchamps. And I came home, and I got home, I guess, about ten minutes to twelve. And my mother said, "Come on over. We're all over here with Sophie and Art, which turned out to be my brother-in-law and sister-in-law later. And, uh, my husband was standing in the doorway. He had his coat on. And they said, "This is my brother, Charles." And I said hello to him. And, um, he said, "Well, he's just

going down to the corner to have a couple of beers and going home." And as I walked in he took off his coat ( she laughs ) and he stayed. And he didn't leave to go. And, uh, that's the night I met him, and we started going together, and got married a year later.

SIGRIST: And, uh, name your children, please.

STENZEL: I have one daughter, Jackie, right out here. I have a stepson, Charles, who lives in, um, San Diego. He was eight years old when I married my husband, so, uh, he spent a lot of his younger years living with his grandmother, then he lived with me, then he was in the service, the Korean War, and he was married, uh, and then, and then they got divorced, and then he re-married, now he's out in San Diego.

SIGRIST: I see. And Jackie lives on Long Island?

STENZEL: Jackie and I, Jackie and I live together. We have a big high rise ranch house, and I have my own apartment in the back. And then in the winters I go to Florida.

SIGRIST: And, um, tell me a little bit about, you have, actually, told me about going to England in 1967.

STENZEL: Yes, I did.

SIGRIST: Tell me why you wanted to go.

STENZEL: Uh, that was right after my dad died. My father died in September, and this was a couple of weeks later. And I had a very, I have a very, very good English friend who goes home constantly every year, and she was going to England. She said, "You know, it would do you good. Why don't you come on home with me for a couple of weeks?" So I quick got a passport and the whole thing. And I went home with her. And it was right after my father died, so it was great because I went back to Stratford-on-Avon and I saw the apartment where he lived across from the street, and I saw the, um, Shakespeare Theater where he worked. Um, I did find the house that I was born in. So it was quite a nostalgic thing to do.

SIGRIST: Your grandmother's kitchen door.

STENZEL: My grandmother's kitchen door, which I saw.

SIGRIST: Would you say it was an emotional visit?

STENZEL: Yes, it was, because I saw, I saw my Auntie Gertie, who was the opera singer. And, uh, I have . . .

SIGRIST: Oh, she was still living.

STENZEL: She was still alive at that time. She passed away shortly after that. But I saw her, and my Uncle Bradie, who is still living. He's ninety-two years old, an absolutely wonderful English gentleman, whom I saw again. I went back to England again in 1985. And, uh, I went

with a group of friends. We went to London really just to do theater. But I went down to see him again, and he's still there.

SIGRIST: When you went in '67, did you feel part of what you were seeing, or did it seem very removed to you?

STENZEL: No, I didn't feel part of it. I'm very Americanized. I guess I, um, I loved it. I loved seeing it. I loved the remembrance of it, the memory of it. And I loved seeing, uh, the places where I had been. But, um, but, no, I, it was wonderful, wonderful to see it, wonderful to be back there, wonderful to see my aunt. And it felt good to see Stratford, and just to be places where my dad had been. When I went back the second time, it was really just a theater thing, to do theater, since that is what I had gotten into. I did get into doing theater and television commercials and that, and spent about twenty-five years doing that, and during the time that Jackie was growing up. And, um . . .

SIGRIST: Are you glad that your parents opted to come to this country?

STENZEL: Yes, I am. I am. England is a beautiful, beautiful country. Uh, I love, I love a lot about England when I've been there. Um, traditions in England are great, you know. Especially, the Christmas cake at Christmas time, the fruit cake with the hard white icing. I always remembered that. That is so different, you know. I remember the, the traditions. I still remember family things that my, that my mother did. But, um, to want to go back again to live? No. No, like my dad, I think this is my home. But being, being in England and going back again was especially great, I think, and I think you should go back. Like my grandmother said, "You can't go back," but I think you can. I think you can go back, and I think you, you can renew a lot, and it sort of reminds you, and I think it reminds you of what you have today. There are so many places in England they don't even have central heating yet, you know. There's a lot, there's a lot of advances, a lot of things that they're lacking yet.

SIGRIST: Makes you appreciate what you, what you have.

STENZEL: It makes you appreciate what you've got.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Stenzel, I want to thank you very much for coming out to Ellis Island.

STENZEL: Oh, it's been a pleasure.

SIGRIST: It's been a delightful interview and I want to thank you very much.

STENZEL: I hope so, I hope so. I've enjoyed it tremendously.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Doreen Stenzel, on Tuesday, September 21, 1993, at the Ellis Island Recording Studio at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum. Thank you.

EI-391/STENZEL

