

EI-443

FRIEDA BECKER BERGMANN

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SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Saturday, February 26th, 1994. I'm at the Shore Drive Senior Citizens Complex with Frieda Bergmann. Mrs. Bergmann came from Germany in 1923 when she was eighteen years old. Also present in the room is Kevin Daley who is running the, the tape recorder, and you may hear wind whistling outside. We're right by the water. Anyway, thank you, Mrs. Bergmann for letting us come up. Can we begin by you giving me your birth date?

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BERGMANN: Yes. I was born in February the 8, 1905.

SIGRIST: 1905. And where were you born?

BERGMANN: In Bremen, Germany. The northern part of Germany.

SIGRIST: Right in the city of Bremen.

BERGMANN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about what Bremen was like as a city when you were a child?

BERGMANN: Well, it was very empty, more than what it is today, because I have made some trips back. But it was always interesting. The City Hall, the *Ratskeller*, and all the important buildings. I always loved to go there.

SIGRIST: When you were a little girl, was there one place in the city that was your favorite place to go?

BERGMANN: The beach. [Laughs] In the summertime. Well, and that was wartime when I grew up, you know. It was World War Number One. We had to be careful and satisfied. We couldn't do too much. Traveling, walk most of the time to the country with our knapsack on the back in order to get food, because the food was very scarce. Not like the Second World War. Hitler provided. But the Kaiser, and I, I didn't know much about the war, but...

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SIGRIST: What do you remember about World War One? How did it affect you and your family?

BERGMANN: Well, my father----- my father, he, he had to go the war. My, my uncles, everybody had to go. And they didn't all come back. My father. Yeah. He didn't come back. And I was only nine years old. And those day when you are nine years old, in that time it's more like five years old. You...

SIGRIST: You were more innocent.

BERGMANN: Yeah. Yeah. And we didn't learn that much. Like in school we had older ---older ---- girls, I used to watch them when I left school. I used to watch them when they had cooking classes, cooking classes which I would have loved, you know. I always to eat. Still like to eat today. But, and swimming lessons. Every, everything was done without it, because they had no food, they had no coals to burn, to heat everything else. So I, I didn't learn too much. But I made up, I made up---- in ---- in time.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me the house or the apartment that you lived in as a child?

BERGMANN: Yeah. Not so good. Not too good. My mother had four children. She raised them all. Get very little help from the city. Very little help. Yeah. I know, when I went to school, I was very skinny. The teacher always looked at me and said, "You're nothing but bones. Did you eat today?" Wasn't I lucky? Everyday after that she, sh---- shared her lunch with me. Wasn't that something? Mrs. Behrens. I will never forget her. She was an angel. And came Christmas I had to come to

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her house, and she had something there for me, a basket, and a doll all the time. Things that I, I never had. And then, of course, my mother had to go to school, and questions, you know, how she, well my mother said she did the best she can, could do, you know.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

BERGMANN: Anna.

SIGRIST: And what was her maiden name?

BERGMANN: Anna Wolf. W-O-L-F.

SIGRIST: That was her name before she was married?

BERGMANN: Yes.

SIGRIST: And can you tell me a little bit about your mother's background, her family background?

BERGMANN: Well, my mother was really born in Silesia. That's...

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

BERGMANN: Schlesien. [Sic] But in English it's called Silesia. S-C-H-L-I-E-S-E-N. That's now Polish. See? That's on the borderline. Silesia --- Breslau, the capital city. And her mother was born in Poland. Cracow. Yeah. She couldn't speak a word of German. She never learned. She didn't want to learn, I think. Maybe, those days they were different again, you know. So...

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SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little about, about her parents, and what they did for their living, that sort of thing?

BERGMANN: Yeah. Well, there's not too much to tell about it. They kept kind of secret in those days, the families. They didn't tell the children everything. When my, my parent, my mother had company, my mother was the smartest mother I could wish for. The best. But when there was company we had to go in our rooms. That's the way it was. Yeah. Not that it was anything sad about it. We didn't mind. We were used to it.

SIGRIST: You didn't know any different.

BERGMANN: No. That's right.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's personality like?

BERGMANN: Oh, my mother was nice, and loving, and busy, and working hard for us.

SIGRIST: Did she have a job outside of the home?

BERGMANN: Yes. She had to.

SIGRIST: What did she do?

BERGMANN: She worked in a factory like, where they made threads. It's called Jute *Spinnerei* (spinning mill), where you all know that big factory in Bremen.

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SIGRIST: Can you...

BERGMANN: Mostly women worked there, mostly women worked there.

SIGRIST: They're making thread, you said?

BERGMANN: Yeah. Spinnerei. *Die Spinn* [sic], and weave, and weave.

SIGRIST: Could you spell the name of the factory for us?

BERGMANN: The Jute Spinnerei. J-U-T-E. Jute. Spinnerei. S-P-I-N-N-E-R-A-I.

SIGRIST: Thank you.

BERGMANN: Spinnerei.

SIGRIST: This was a big factory of some sort?

BERGMANN: Oh, yeah. They took care of the children, too, a little, on holidays.
Yeah. They did.

SIGRIST: Did she go to this job every day?

BERGMANN: Every day. Six days a week. I worked here six days a week, too.
[Laughs] Not that I mind, but I mean, that's the way it was here in the beginning.

SIGRIST: Was it unusual for, for women to work outside of the home at that time, or, or, people like you mother, this was a common thing?

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BERGMANN: Yeah. It was a common thing since the war started, that the men didn't come home. They had to. My mother got marr --- got married again, though. She was only twenty-fi --- or was she thirty then. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, actually, let's talk about your father before we get to...

BERGMANN: I don't know much about my father.

SIGRIST: What was his name?

BERGMANN: Robert.

SIGRIST: And what is your maiden name, his last name?

BERGMANN: My father's?

SIGRIST: Yes. What is your maiden name? What name, I assume you have your father's last name? That was your maiden name before you got married?

BERGMANN: Yeah. Becker. Becker. Becker.

SIGRIST: B-E-C-K-E-R?

BERGMANN: Right.

SIGRIST: I see. And, and what little do you know about your father's background?

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BERGMANN: Nothing. He wasn't that kind. He liked to take a drink. And my mother didn't get enough money. He worked on the railroad. Yeah.

SIGRIST: What, when you were a child, what do you remember about your father? Was there a story about your father that -----

BERGMANN: [interposed] No.

SIGRIST: or a time when he did something that you remember?

BERGMANN: No. Never did anything for us. We were too small I think. Yeah. Four children. And he liked his drinks when he was finished working. Went --- in the bar. My mother had to go to work then already.

SIGRIST: So your mother really is holding the household together?

BERGMANN: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Absolutely. That's why when I came over to this coun-, country; I made sure my mother had everything. She even told me, "Don't send anymore. You, you did enough." Yeah, a couple of times.

SIGRIST: She had worked so hard?

BERGMANN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah. You said you had, there were four children?

BERGMANN: Yes. Four.

SIGRIST: Can you, can you name your brothers and sisters for me?

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BERGMANN: Yes. My oldest sister, she passed away, Marie. Marie. And then I'm Frieda, and then comes my brother, Hermann, and then comes my sister, Emma. Emma. The four of us. My mother said we had one more boy, died on diphtheria. One more boy. And then she was only at that time twenty-five. A young mother. She was a teenager for two of her children, me and my older sister, Marie. She was a teenager.

SIGRIST: Was there somebody that you were closest to, one of your siblings?

BERGMANN: [not understood] Yeah, my oldest sister. Yeah, we used to sit there in the back and we, when the, nobody was home, my mother working, doing da---- dresses, something like that. We loved that, when the weather was nice.

SIGRIST: How much older is she?

BERGMANN: Only year and a half.

SIGRIST: I see.

BERGMANN: Yeah. Only year and a half, but she passed away.

SIGRIST: She, she passed away as an older person, or as a child?

BERGMANN: Yeah, older, seventy-four, yeah.

SIGRIST: Oh, when she was seventy-four.

BERGMANN: Yeah, she had four children.

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SIGRIST: Can you...

BERGMANN: That's, that's why I brought one over to help my sister. My sister lost a leg, accidental like, you know, when she was fourteen years. And over her knee, you know. [Not understood] she got married, and had...

SIGRIST: Do you remember that happening, when, when your sister lost her leg?

BERGMANN: I don't know what happened. She doesn't even remember. Kids sometimes don't, you know? She said, "All I did, I was jumping all the time." And then she had knee infection. Could have been from nothing. Because she had a boy, and he had knee infection. And he didn't really hurt himself, either. But in these times everything is all right. His leg was better, getting better.

SIGRIST: But hers didn't? She had to have hers removed?

BERGMANN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

BERGMANN: And it was wartime. We blame it on the wartime, too. The, all the doctors went to war, and, they were quick for taking off limbs. See? And my sister had to have, but she said she didn't miss anything all of life. She got married, the man she loved, and four children. She said, "I did everything else." But...

SIGRIST: Do you remember when you were a girl, after this had just happened, of helping your sister learn how to, to walk with an artificial limb...

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BERGMANN: No, well, on crutches first for the longest time, because it cost an awful lot of money to, to buy a artificial [sic] limb. I used to send her couple of times the money for that. Yeah, at least two, three times. Yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: So when you lived in Germany she walked on crutches? She was on crutches?

BERGMANN: I was eighteen--- she was twenty. No. Then she had, I think she finally got from the city, they took care of it, finally. Lot of, lot of interviewing, you know, before.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about what your sister's personality was like?

BERGMANN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What was she like as a person?

BERGMANN: Happy-go-lucky. Happy-go-lucky. Yes. Jolly. Yeah. Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Now, in your, the, you lived in an apartment in Bremen or in a house?

BERGMANN: An apartment. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me the layout of the rooms in the apartment?

BERGMANN: Well, the apartment was like ---- we made our own heat, cold-water flats like here, too, when I came over here in 1923. Well, everything very plain. Two bedrooms, a kitchen and one living room.

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SIGRIST: What did the kitchen look like?

BERGMANN: Well, you, plain. Yeah. Took care of the painting yourself.

SIGRIST: Did you have a stove or a fireplace?

BERGMANN: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: What did you?

BERGMANN: Stove. A regular, good stove to cook. And to heat we had only in the living room, a good, living room oven. That, not the bedrooms. They were always cold. But you got used to it. We opened the windows even. Fresh air. Yeah.

SIGRIST: You had running water?

BERGMANN: Oh, yes. In the beginning, I remember we didn't have any gaslights. We had petroleum.

SIGRIST: Like little lamps of some sort.

BERGMANN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: But then they put gaslight into the apartment?

BERGMANN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember them doing that?

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BERGMANN: Well, just about, I came over here. It took a long time. My mother couldn't afford it --- see? Took a long time. Yeah. Oh.

SIGRIST: Let me ask you about your family's religious life. What religion were you?

BERGMANN: Well, I think, see, they don't tell you much. My grandmother used to took me to Catholic Church. And my mother was brought up Catholic, but when she got married, she was a convert. Yes. And I was Lutheran. We went to church every Sunday with my mother. Oh, yes. Every Sunday she looked forward, taking us each by the hand. It was nice. Yeah. So, see, in Poland, all are very religious. Very straight. So, and then my mother was Lutheran. Yeah. Then she got married again?

SIGRIST: What year did she get married again?

BERGMANN: My mother got marr----- right after World War One. Oh, it took a long time. The war was going on many years, because they was so poor. It took a long time. That's why people left their homes. We had, we had big, paper money. Millions. I was a millionaire. But I couldn't buy anything. You had to spend it right away. Otherwise the next, in a couple of days it was worse. I know I came in 1923, but in 1926 some of my other friends came over. They still came over with big pocket books, so they could put that big money in there. Hold it, you know.

SIGRIST: This was the terrible inflation...

BERGMANN: [interposed] Yeah.

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SIGRIST: that came after the war?

BERGMANN: Yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how much things cost before you came to this country, how many millions of marks things...

BERGMANN: No. I couldn't really. Money was spent right away, you know. And what did I do? I, I went to the Pastor, and I, I lived there when I was seventeen, or not quite seventeen, to learn housework, and cooking, and didn't get paid for that. So I learned it very thoroughly there. Mrs. Pastor (ph) was very nice and sweet. She taught me very good. From there I came over to this country.

SIGRIST: Did you learn the housework with the intention of getting that kind of a job when you came to?

BERGMANN: No. No. Nothing was serious in that age. I know when I came over here I was eighteen. Everybody asked me, "How old are you? Fifteen? Are you fifteen?" You know, green. Yeah. And then I had a ring on my finger. Now I don't have any rings on my finger, I have arthritis. [Laughs] They're swollen. And they said, "Oh, can I ask you?" I was livin' with that ---in the ten-cent store, they called me "Dearie." And I said, "What's that?" [Laughs] "Dearie" they called you those days. I never, that's Jewish, you know. I was, used these names in my life over here. But she said, "You got a ring on your finger. You're married." I said, "In Germany you're engaged with that ring. And with the same the ring you get married and put it on the right hand." That's the style of it. And the rings were very hard to get during

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inflation. But my late husband's brother ---- brother, he was ---
Jewelries ----. He was just learning it. And he, his rings, I still have
that ring yet.

SIGRIST: So you were engaged before you ever came to this country?

BERGMANN: Yeah. I was engaged two years.

SIGRIST: How did you meet your husband to be?

BERGMANN: Well, I met him in Bremerhaven. That's not far, just an hour away from
Bremen. When I worked for the Pastor's family. Yeah, that's when.

SIGRIST: Do you remember, do you remember meeting him, the first time that
you two met?

BERGMANN: Well, yes, I do. [Laughs] Well, I was very young, and I had a girl
friend. She was two years older. That two years older, those, they
meant an awful lot. She was so much smarter than I, and I did almost
whatever she said. So we went in, in the, in the restaurant. Yeah.
And that's where I met him.

SIGRIST: What was his name?

BERGMANN: A real old fashioned German name. Bergmann.

SIGRIST: Right.

BERGMANN: Yeah. Dietrich. [Laughs]

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SIGRIST: Dietrich.

BERGMANN: Dietrich. A family of twelve. But they had a big restaurant. They always know, the restaurant, most of them. Bremerhaven is not as big, you know. And all his brothers, there was twelve of them ----- seven boys and five girls ---- all of them, they went to sea. And one came over here during the war. He couldn't come back, but he stayed here because he had a Uncle Bergmann over here, in Bay Ridge, 75th Street. Yeah. He was in restaurant business, and he got a job there. And that's what he did on the ship. Steward. Well, those days they didn't call it steward, I think. He was too young to be a steward. Mess steward. They were, they wait on the officers. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Now did your, your fiancé

BERGMANN: [interposed] Yeah.

SIGRIST: come to America first?

BERGMANN: No. No. He was going back and forth all the time. But his aunt came to Germany. And when she saw me, she said, "You're working for the Pastor's for nothing?" "Yes," I said. ----- "Your nephew, (like, my late husband) he gave me pocket money, so I manage." And my sister was an excellent dressmaker, so she made all the clothes for me. I got by. And, and nobody crave for anything more. So long you had something to eat, something good. [Laughs] Yeah.

SIGRIST: What did you know about America when you were growing up in Germany?

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BERGMANN: Oh, well, the aunt, I know where she had little gifts. And she liked me right away, and a lot of nice chocolate, chocolate from America. That was wonderful. And then, well, what did I know. All I know it's a beautiful country. And, and you know, I wanted to wander. I had that in me. I know I left my house once and went to Berlin, with, with a girl. I had a little money, because I worked in that factory, too, for a year or two.

SIGRIST: The same factory your mother worked in?

BERGMANN: Yeah. I worked there, too. But then my mother was married, and I couldn't get along with my stepfather. He checked me, he checked me all the time. When I wasn't home at ten o'clock, got a licking. [Laughs] Said, [Not understood] Yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, when your, how old were when your mother remarried?

BERGMANN: Well, maybe fourteen. Yeah, fourteen. Yeah.

SIGRIST: And, and why did she remarry?

BERGMANN: Well, young woman. My mother was young. She was thirty, or thirty-two. She was young. And the children growing up, you know. My sister and I, my brother. My brother went to sea. He liked the water. I just had another sister there. The last one, I brought her over to this country, too.

SIGRIST: So your mother, did she think that by remarrying she'd make things a little easier for everybody?

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BERGMANN: Well, ----- I guess so. Yeah. I guess so. And this sister over here, she passed away, too. Now I have nobody over here.

SIGRIST: So when you were a young woman, you had a bit of Wanderlust...

BERGMANN: Oh, yes. I loved ---- I wanted to go to Berlin. [Laughs] The name alone, you know. I guess every teenager, or, has some kind of dreams, you know. And it didn't work out. I had to come home. And when I came home, it didn't take long. I, I had, I went to Bremerhaven. And, see, that's how I met my husband. It's a good thing I went there. And that's, that's how I came over here, through him.

SIGRIST: Well, when did you decide that you wanted to go to America?

BERGMANN: They decided, and I, I was just happy. I didn't want to ask for, if you asked for something like that, you, they might not let you, you know. And I had to marry him, but I, I was in love with him. But, you know, some men don't think you are in love with them, when you go away, and then you come to America, and you make big money here, and all these things. So I had to sign a little piece of paper for him that I owe him five hundred dollars. [Laughs] What's five hundred dollars today? At that time, oh, I, I better be careful, there was a lot of fellows looking at me. [Laughs] Then, then right away I'm in trouble. But it worked out all right. We got married within a coup----, couple of months.

SIGRIST: A couple of months, once you got here?

BERGMANN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So that was the intention, that you would come over to America...

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BERGMANN: And marry...

SIGRIST: he would meet you here...

BERGMANN: Yeah. Yeah, he...

SIGRIST: and then you would get married.

BERGMANN: Yeah, he was seven years older than I am. So he said, "I got fooled before. I don't want you to fool me, and leave me. So better sign this."
And another thing, the hundred-fifty dollars for my trip, that was his aunt and uncle. I had to borrow from them. Otherwise he would have to pay it back, right? I could have been that kind of girl. But I wasn't.

SIGRIST: And that's what the passage cost you, a hundred and fifty dollars?

BERGMANN: [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Do you remember the whole process of getting your papers in order before you left?

BERGMANN: Well, I think my, my late husband did all that. And his aunt. Yeah. Because they were business people. They were Shriners. Yeah.

SIGRIST: And they probably knew exactly what had to be done?

BERGMANN: Yeah. I, I didn't know what to do about it. Just, I asked, is it time now that I'm, I'm coming over. It took, didn't took too long, but it took about six, eight months.

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SIGRIST: Before everything was in order for you to leave?

BERGMANN: Yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you have to undergo any kind of examinations?

BERGMANN: Examinations. Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: in Germany?

BERGMANN: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: What, what, what kinds of examinations...

BERGMANN: And here, here, too, on the ship. They were ----- those days; every passenger ship had a doctor. Even if you were on a, plea ---- pleasure cruise, we got, I made four trips back home as long as my mother was alive. So, well...

SIGRIST: So you were examined in Germany, then, before you actually left?

BERGMANN: Yeah. You couldn't come over here if you have T.B. There was a lot of T.B. going on then.

SIGRIST: Did you have friends that died of tuberculosis when you were growing up, or.

BERGMANN: Not that I know of. No.

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SIGRIST: But it was a problem at that time?

BERGMANN: Yes. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did your mother want you to leave?

BERGMANN: Well, my mother figured it's, that while I was sensible, she's knows her own daughter. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you took with you?

BERGMANN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What did you pack when you left?

BERGMANN: Well, just a little suitcase. One little suitcase. It was like in a [not understood]. It was light. And I had a nice coat. My husband bought me a nice winter coat, and a nice dress. And then my sister made all the house dresses for me.

END OF SIDE ONE BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

BERGMANN: ...for me.

SIGRIST: Could you describe one of the dresses that you remember?

BERGMANN: Yeah, I had a picture, but I have a niece in Germany right now, and she wants, likes all the old picture. She, her room is like that, you

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know, old fashioned, for memories. So I sent a good many. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you describe in words what, what the dresses looked like at that time?

BERGMANN: Like, like a house dress. Yeah. My sister made it. Yeah. I don't think my husband bought me a dress. Maybe one good dress. But I traveled with that. And I had a picture of that; they took a picture of me on the ship. I remember. And I sent that home, too, to Bremen. Yeah.

SIGRIST: What, what ship did you take?

BERGMANN: Oh, yeah. I remember the name. S.S. Yorck.

SIGRIST: Yorck. And where did you get The Yorck? Where did have to travel to, to...

BERGMANN: Bremerhaven. Bremerhaven.

SIGRIST: Did your mother go with you to Bremerhaven to say good-bye, or when did you say good-bye to your mother?

BERGMANN: No. Nobody came on the ship except my husb----- my late husband was working on the ship. I didn't travel alone.

SIGRIST: Oh, so he was working on the ship that you took.

BERGMANN: Yeah. Yeah, he was like a mess steward.

SIGRIST: Now, were, did you stay in the same cabin, or did he...

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BERGMANN: No, there's...

SIGRIST: Oh, you weren't married at this point.

BERGMANN: No.

SIGRIST: Right.

BERGMANN: No, we all had little cabins. Yeah. There were other ships, where the people all slept in one big room, I heard. The Polish people, they didn't have enough money. But I had enough passes. And you had to have extra money; otherwise you couldn't come in this country. Some twenty-five dollars, I think. It was twenty-five dollars.

SIGRIST: That's a lot of money then.

BERGMANN: Oh, yes. And I...

SIGRIST: What do you remember about being on the ship?

BERGMANN: Well, I had fun like a teenager. I was eighteen years. We were jumping around, which we never did before. We were timid. And I got plenty to eat on the ship. We were eating on long tables. And I got good food there. But then my late husband had a friend in the, in the office. He was a printer. A printer. And there I came after dinner, and I had soup plates full of ice creams. And I finished that. And sometimes even a little pigeon, like, you know. *Delicatessen*. Because they liked me, you know. When you're young, you know, they take care of you a little more. So I was treated so wonderful on the ship. I

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never will forget that. And they took a picture of me. Yeah, and I had the picture for such a long time.

SIGRIST: Well, and you were there with your fiancé, so that made it even nicer for you.

BERGMANN: Yeah. We were engaged. Yeah. And, and then when I came to this country, he had to make one more trip in order to come here himself. They kept, and he didn't want to let me stay with his aunt and uncle. I was safe. And he had a brother here, too. But they weren't in, in New York, or Brooklyn at that time. They lived in Englewood. And that, of course, was very far for, for us at that time. Englewood.

SIGRIST: In New Jersey?

BERGMANN: Yeah. Yeah, when I think of that. He, and he, he had just a baby. He had a little baby. He was just married. And he traveled to New York to his uncle place, and he was a waiter there. And then finally the crash came. He lost all his money. So he had to come to New York and got a job. You don't get a job in Englewood those days. And then I got very close with him. We all, my husband and I. Then I had a nice home.

SIGRIST: But it took a while?

BERGMANN: Yeah. Gradually. Yeah.

SIGRIST: How long did the ship the voyage take? How long did it?

BERGMANN: Oh, yeah. I think fourteen days.

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SIGRIST: And what time of the year is this?

BERGMANN: Yeah, it was around September. September the 1st, I came.

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

BERGMANN: I don't remember that. Maybe there was, but I don't think I remember that. No. I m --- I made couple of cruises. But here. Not with my late husband. He passed away twenty-five years ago. That, with his friends, which were, our, our friends. And when his wife passed away, we made couple of cruises. We always had the drills. Always.

SIGRIST: But not in 1923, you don't remember.

BERGMANN: No. I don't remember. But they, the crew had it. I remember that. My late husband talked about that. Oh, yes. They had all that.

SIGRIST: Did they have organized activities for you to do on the boat, on the ship?

BERGMANN: I don't think so. No. No. No. We had big --- along, some deck chairs. That's all. Fourteen days was a long trip, but not for us.

SIGRIST: It was fun for you?

BERGMANN: Yeah. We got plenty to eat, different kind of food.

SIGRIST: Do you remember arriving in New York Harbor?

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BERGMANN: Yes. It didn't look that good to me. I'm sorry to say I tell the truth. It didn't look that good to me. And I, and I saw a lot of wash hanging on lines those days. We never see that in Germany at those time. We had a special room on top. They call that the, the "*Boden.*" (*wäsche boden* – drying room). There you, you wash your clothes in your own kitchen, then you brought it upstairs, but, and hung it up certain days. But it never got any air. But in this country, they want to bleach everything. So that was the style here. Want to look nice, but it didn't look nice when, when you come for the first time. No, I didn't like that at all. It made me sad even. Yeah. Somehow. Yeah. Of course, I couldn't speak much English at all those times.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when the boat...

BERGMANN: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Did you know what that was?

BERGMANN: Yeah. Oh, they explained that to you right away. Oh, yes. On every trip I made thereafter. Because I was, I ma---- went home 1927, made another trip. Because I don't know, my husband somehow, he never liked it too much in the country. He liked it on ships. So for, for him it didn't matter. But to settle down, he said, you don't have any insurance here, see. You didn't. For health. When you get older, he said they worry about health then. Not today. Yeah. He said, and when you get sick, no. You got to pay every cent when you get in the hospital. So he talked me into it. He was on ship, I saw him there in Germany, I saw him here. So, I made a trip, and I stayed ten months. But it was, I die to come back. [Laughs] You have no idea. I was afraid that he, I wasn't a citizen at that time. I was only four years in

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this country. You had to be five years in this country. Not like today. You become a citizen right away if you pass things, you know. So, no.

SIGRIST: Getting back to New York...

BERGMANN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: when you first arrived in 1923...

BERGMANN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: tell me after the boat arrived in the harbor...

BERGMANN: It was...

SIGRIST: how did you get to Ellis Island? Tell me about that experience.

BERGMANN: Before, yeah, first the doctor's station, and then you got to Ellis Island. A lot of people. And they locked the door on you. [Laughs] I didn't like that. I start crying. Then you realize--- you know----- then you realize that you're away from home. But that happens; in the beginning things don't work out that way. Not right away. So, and then my aunt and uncle came.

SIGRIST: How long were at Ellis Island?

BERGMANN: Oh, a good day. Full, not night. They, they had a business, like delicatessen, the Germans, you know. Delicatessen, they probably wanted to go together, you know, man and wife, because they know

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we weren't married yet. And sometimes, they marry you on the ship even, those days. And, well, they were Shriners. And I think that helped a little. They said already, "You're not related. Not more than Adam and Eve is related." I remember these words. [Laughs] That was so funny to me. So, well, I don't know. I look tall, and I weigh hundred and twenty pounds. And they look for girls to work in the house -- they were short of them. Taking care of kids. Children and housework. Even for cooking, but of course, I couldn't cook. I didn't learn any cooking on the other side. There was nothing to cook with. We ate hand and mouth.

SIGRIST: When you were at Ellis Island, do you remember having to go through any medical exams?

BERGMANN: Well, no...

SIGRIST: What happened at Ellis Island?

BERGMANN: Yeah. I don't think so. Well, well finally he said, "All right. Go." So that night, you know, when they came, he le ---, I didn't think he would, you know, and I felt so bad. Some days, they let, they let you stay up all night, and then they let you go. But thank God, I think they did that. Yeah. Those, those...

SIGRIST: Did you eat while you were there?

BERGMANN: I don't think so. No. I don't remember. Maybe a sandwich.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what it looked like in the inside?

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BERGMANN: A big room. A big room. And we all sitting there. Yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: So tell me where, where...

BERGMANN: [interposed] And then it was, I was happy. They were very nice to me. She even said, "Don't call me Mrs. Stadtländer. Call me Mother, or Aunt." Wasn't that ni --- she had friends when they came in, you know. She had one daughter and one son. It was a nice family. Yes.

SIGRIST: This was your husband's aunt?

BERGMANN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Correct? So you went and stayed with them?

BERGMANN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Where did...

BERGMANN: [interposed] They brought me all over. Paid the money for me. And they suggested I should come to America.

SIGRIST: That's right.

BERGMANN: And the minute I heard that I, right away I was for it. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Where did they live in New York?

BERGMANN: I think 48th Street.

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SIGRIST: Can you describe their apartment for me?

BERGMANN: Yeah. Yeah. Old fashioned those days, you know. Sixth Avenue. They went --- they made trips to Germany, but they were good to their family. Their family came from the country like. Not like my late husband. He was from the city. His parents had a very big restaurant, and the whole family had to work in that restaurant. There were twelve children. You know, they had to cook, they had to peel the vegetables, and they had waiters to wait on them. Men waiters. It was a nice place. They called it Mama Bergmann. Yeah. From, stewards from the ship came.

SIGRIST: What did you do your first night in America? The first night you were here what, what happened?

BERGMANN: Well, not too much. I was tired and excited, and what I went through. I went to bed early. Yeah. Yeah. I went to bed early. And then the next day, daughter took me to the ten-cent store. Did I love that ten-cent ---- it was summer ---- September. It was hot. It was a real wonderful summer. Yeah. And a lot of other places. We walked. I liked that. She was nice. She was only two years older than I am. Year and a half or two years, Margaret. I remember her.

SIGRIST: Was, were there things in New York that you saw that you had never seen before, that were new to you other than the clothes lines?

BERGMANN: Well, I didn't come home much. I didn't want to stay long there. I stayed there one week, and I was, I had a job.

SIGRIST: How did you get the job?

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BERGMANN: From the agents. She took me to an agency in New York. I had the job. But I didn't stay there more than two weeks. The lady was very nice. She was very observant. She said you can't even cook potatoes. Potatoes. [Laughs] Because the water, the water boiled away. And I had to wash the windows, I, and I for ----- forgot to make the flame lower. Because I was not used to gas or things like that, you know. But she was very nice. She said, "You stay here a little while. But get a job, nurse girl, where you take care of children." Or a mother's helper she even said, where you learn something even, for --- - and you get paid for. [Laughs] Yeah. I got forty-five dollars right away. Not long, I got fifty dollars in two months.

SIGRIST: Did you like this kind of work?

BERGMANN: Yeah, I did. I wasn't used to anything else. Not those days, no. Everything was simplicity. And believe me, when I think of it right now, it's the best. When the pastor, my pastor here on the corner, Callahan, when he ----- no, in the Salvation Army I learned it. I go to the Salvation Army since my, my companion passed away only eight months ago. So I go there twice a week. And, no, once a week we go in church. The other week we stay our homes, only for ladies. They call that the Home League. Only for ladies. And it was so beautiful there. The ladies, can feel their warmness. Lady like. And smiling. They come and squeeze your hand. A couple ladies, they go around. I fell in love with that place right away. So, when we went in church, they, they had different Norwegian pastors, and other pastors. And when they talk about simplicity. Oh, the captain talked about, most of the time, about simplicity. He, he went in the church, too, and the Mrs. Captain, too. Yeah. One happy family there. We call each other by

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the first names. Well, my little church here on the corner is almost the same, too. He's a young pastor, only twenty-nine.

SIGRIST: Tell me how you learned English when you got to America.

BERGMANN: Well, I tried to go to evening school. But I never got through with my work. I had to rush and rush, and then I needed my sleep, too, you know, those days, in my age. So I finally had to give it up. But then I listened to the radio.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what the first English word that you knew?

BERGMANN: No. But I remember when my niece came over here, when I brought her over. I remember the first word. I sent her money to educate her in English. And when she took a subway ride with me, I said to her, "Isn't that nice?" She said in German, "*Was* [what]?" I said, "Nice." I said, "Nice," again. And, you know, like that, you know. "Nice." She didn't know what nice, and that's why I gave her money for. [Laughs] Now she speaks wonderful English, because she has three children. I had no children, so I didn't learn as much. I, I learned from T.V., from...

SIGRIST: From the radio.

BERGMANN: Radio. From my work, because when I didn't do housework anymore - ---- when I came back from Germany, I didn't do no more housework - ---- I worked in the restaurant, or tea room they called it, here right in Bayridge. A very nice Irish lady. And she only want girls, she want to train them herself. But we had to do a little kitchen, you know, make like tartar sauce, and this kind of dressing, and grapefruits, clean them

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out. But we didn't know. We were happy we are waitresses. Service, you know.

SIGRIST: Tell me --- tell me...

BERGMANN: So that's, and we couldn't, that's where I learned more English. I had to.

SIGRIST: Because you had to, because you were working?

BERGMANN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me how soon you were here before you got married.

BERGMANN: Well, I got married. I was still eighteen. 1924 in January. Yeah, I was still eighteen. Yeah.

SIGRIST: And where did you marry Mr. Bergmann? In New York?

BERGMANN: The pastor came from New York. That church is still here, that's, the mother church. On Henry Street. Downtown there. And he came to the house and married us in the house.

SIGRIST: Do you remember?

BERGMANN: In his brother's house. In his brother's house.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you wore for you wedding?

BERGMANN: My sister-in-law's things. Her dress. Everything fit except the shoes

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because she was only five feet one. [Laughs] So I had to wear dark shoes. Yeah. And then we invited the pastor for dinner. That's the way it was in 1924.

SIGRIST: Did you miss Germany? Did you miss the country when you first got here?

BERGMANN: Oh, yes. I went in the park. Somebody said there's a lot of girls. They speak German; they take care of children and like that. Go in the park. Somebody, and there's a lot of Jewish people and they speak German. Go there. Somebody will speak German there. And nobody did. I should have given it another try, but I didn't. So when I was sitting there an hour or so I felt very homesick. I start crying then. [Not understood] Nobody speaks German here. They, they told me, they would, would, but I felt bad. But you get over that. You remember, especially in my age now, you know. I'm eighty-nine. In my age you remember the olden things better than the new, because sometimes I forget things. I do. When I go in the kitchen, I have to come back in the bedroom. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Was your mother writing to you? Were you writing back and forth?

BERGMANN: Oh, yes. That, oh, yeah, we all wrote. Yes.

SIGRIST: How...

BERGMANN: And I did, I sent stuff, or when I, when I worked in the, as a mother's helper, the lady got me acquainted with other families. It was Jewish people, and I met such a nice girl friend there. We were friends until she passed away five years ago. Yes. And that lady taught us

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English, too, once a week. We all had to come from the different houses together, and had English lessons. Every little bit helped then, you know. And then we had coffee and cake. They were good to the help. They want to keep, keep us. So, and that girl, we were over fifty-five years friends until she passed away.

SIGRIST: Did you want to bring your mother to America?

BERGMANN: Oh, no. My mother had chi ---- two more children. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Oh, by her second husband.

BERGMANN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So she, she had no interest in coming to America?

BERGMANN: No. And, and she was so simple. When you look at a picture, you know, you can tell she wants everything simple. [Laughs] Nothing, yeah.

SIGRIST: When you went back for the first time, which was in 1927...

BERGMANN: '7, yeah.

SIGRIST: How did you feel when you hit German soil? I mean did, did you feel emotionally attached to the country, or did you feel just kind of like a visitor and it was all sort of remote?

BERGMANN: Well, I felt like, more like a visitor, I think. But I want to give it a try for my husband's sake. And then he was laid off. He was not working.

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So wherever he was I was satisfied, right? That's how the time flew.
And it was ten months I stayed...

SIGRIST: That's a long time...

BERGMANN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: to leave. And you said you wanted to come back to America...

BERGMANN: Oh, and how, yes. I was afraid. I wasn't a citizen then. And he worked, and he got a job on another ship. And I had to travel alone. But that didn't matter. Then I could speak English and German, and I met young people there. But somehow when I, the ship, I think that was The München, S.S. München, when we docked, and, and had an interview, all kinds of questions. They said, "Where's your husband? Is he living with you? Did he left you?" All these, they want to fish something. You know? But then later, and, I answered correctly. But later I found, they said they had to answer these question, or you could be a burden to the United States government, and, while you were another citizen. Everything...

SIGRIST: When you came back in 1927...

BERGMANN: '8.

SIGRIST: in '28...

BERGMANN: Then.

SIGRIST: you didn't have to go through Ellis Island when you came back...

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BERGMANN: Oh, no. Right away I went to get my paper, and was in such a hurry. I don't think it was quite five years, even, but I applied for it. And then he said to me, "You shouldn't have made that trip. You should be here five years steady." Do you remem --- know about the rules? Yeah? Yeah. Five, five years. Well, I said my mother wasn't so well. That's right. She had arthritis while she was young. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

BERGMANN: So I got away with it. He was a nice, Jewish judge. But my sister, when she pa-, came over here, she didn't pass it. No. [Laughs] They were strict, see, all depends.

SIGRIST: Well, Mrs. Bergmann, I...

BERGMANN: [interposed] I study it then, you know.

SIGRIST: I want to thank you very much...

BERGMANN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: our time is all up. Thank you...

BERGMANN: Yeah. How long is it? [Laughs]

SIGRIST: I want to thank you very much. You've been wonderful, really.

BERGMANN: Thank you. Yeah.

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SIGRIST: Yeah. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Frieda Bergmann...

BERGMANN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: on February 26th, 1994 here in Brooklyn. Thank you.

BERGMANN: Yeah.