

EI-058

REGINA ZELKOWITZ MASKOWITZ

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PORT: ROTTERDAM

AGE 11

RESIDENCES: KOCHANOVIC: BRADDOCK, PA

SIGRIST: Good morning. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. We're here at Ellis Island. Today is Friday, July 26, 1991. We're here with Regina Maskowitz who came from Hungary in 1921 when she was eleven years old. Good morning, Mrs. Maskowitz.

MASKOWITZ: Good morning.

SIGRIST: Let's start off by having you give me your full name, include your maiden name in that, and your date of birth.

MASKOWITZ: My name is Regina Zelkowitz, my maiden name. And I was born 1909, December the 2nd.

SIGRIST: Could you spell your maiden name for us, please?

MASKOWITZ: Z-E-L-K-O-W-I-T-Z.

SIGRIST: And where were you born?

MASKOWITZ: I was born in, the name of the town? They called it, in Czechoslovakian was Kochanovic.

SIGRIST: Could you spell that, please?

MASKOWITZ: K-O-C-H-A-N-O-V-I-C, I believe. Kochanovic, yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me what kind of town this was.

MASKOWITZ: It was a very, very small farm town. It was only about three streets. The city next to that town was named Humano.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

MASKOWITZ: H-U-M-A-N-O. Humano.

SIGRIST: And this was a larger city?

MASKOWITZ: A larger city, yeah. And everything was there. Because in our town, it was very small. There wasn't much. It was maybe one store, or something like that.

SIGRIST: You said there were three streets. Were they paved?

MASKOWITZ: Uh, no, no. When a car would come by, the first time you saw they left tracks in the mud, that's where we played. (she laughs) And we grew up there. My dad was working for business people that had farms, and he was like the foreman for that man, and took care of everything.

SIGRIST: What was his name, your father?

MASKOWITZ: My father's name was Louis Zelkowitz.

SIGRIST: And what did your father look like when you were a kid?

MASKOWITZ: He was short, not a very tall man. He was very nice. He had a good life until he went into the service. Then we had to struggle.

SIGRIST: And you were about five at that time?

MASKOWITZ: Yes, yeah.

SIGRIST: Before we talk about that, talk about your mother. What was her name?

MASKOWITZ: Dora Zelkowitz.

SIGRIST: What was her maiden name?

MASKOWITZ: Rosenberg.

SIGRIST: And was she from this town also?

MASKOWITZ: No, no. My dad wasn't from that town. He moved there. I was the first one born there in that town, and I had a sister that was born in another city.

SIGRIST: Talk about how they ended up in that town.

MASKOWITZ: The job. That's where he got the job, and that's why he moved there. And that was before I was around. And we were there until we left for America.

SIGRIST: Okay. Talk about the house that you lived in as a child.

MASKOWITZ: We had a nice house. There were two rooms and like a summer kitchen in the center. It was a front room, a nice large front room, and in the back, that's where we did everything. We lived there and cooked. It was a nice large room. We had beds there and a nice long table with benches, I remember. But no water in the house. The water was on the outside. We had a well on the outside.

SIGRIST: Did you have electricity in the house?

MASKOWITZ: No, no. Just lamps and candles.

SIGRIST: What was the house made out of?

MASKOWITZ: It was, I think it was plaster, and all that. Because I know they used to whitewash it. That I remember.

SIGRIST: And it was one story?

MASKOWITZ: One story, yeah. There was a couple of steps to go in through from the outside.

SIGRIST: How did you heat the house?

MASKOWITZ: With the wood.

SIGRIST: What kind of . . .

MASKOWITZ: It was a big oven. We used to bake in that, and then there was a stove for cooking, right all in one. It was all in that same room.

SIGRIST: This is in the back of the house?

MASKOWITZ: Yeah. And in the center was a summer kitchen where they also had a big stove there for cooking and stuff. And a front room. They already had wooden floors and we had also beds. It was like a guest house, a room for if we had company.

SIGRIST: I see. Now, was this house on the grounds of the farmer's property that your father worked for?

MASKOWITZ: No, no. It was separate. The family lived up the street a little bit.

SIGRIST: I see. Did you keep any kind of animals at all?

MASKOWITZ: Yes. We had our own cows and chickens and geese and ducks, all that. Everybody . . .

SIGRIST: So there was a barn or something?

MASKOWITZ: Oh, yeah. In back of the house there was a stable or barn, yeah. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: I see. Let's talk about your brothers and sisters. Name them all for me, please.

MASKOWITZ: I have five brothers, and we're four sisters. My older sister's name is Helen. You want her last name?

SIGRIST: No. Just the first names are fine.

MASKOWITZ: Helen, and then I was next, and I have a sister Anne, and the brothers are Kalman, the older, and Hymie, Sam, Milton, Harry, Minnie, she's the youngest.

SIGRIST: That was a house full.

MASKOWITZ: Yes. We were nine of us.

SIGRIST: Okay. You talked, you said your father fought in World War I.

MASKOWITZ: Yes.

SIGRIST: Talk a little bit about him going to serve and what it was like at home.

MASKOWITZ: Well, he was fighting with the Hungarians against the Russians. And he was in it for five years, because he was captured as a prisoner by the Russians. And he was in Russia, for about three years we didn't hear from

him. And at one point we got a card from the army that he was killed. He wore a heavy coat, when they were running in the woods, when they were fighting, it was too heavy, so he dropped it. So another man picked it up, and his name, that man was killed, and they found the name Zelkowitz on it. So they thought it was our father, so they sent us. But my mother didn't know, the people wouldn't tell her, whoever got a hold of the card that was sent to us. And finally we got a card from Russia. He was able to send, he used to send cards every day, he told us, but only one came through, that he was alive. So everybody just celebrated. We were just so happy to hear. And after the war was over, he came home.

SIGRIST: Talk about what it was like being at home without him, because he was the major wage earner in the house.

MASKOWITZ: Right. It was very hard. It was very hard. Half the time we went hungry, and we went into the fields and picked the wheat that was left over for Mother to thresh her out, and go to the mill and grind it and make us some bread. And we had potatoes and stuff like that. And whatever we had we tried to get along. It wasn't easy. And she was supposed to get some relief from the government, but some man held back a lot from her until she found out, and then she got it.

SIGRIST: I see. Did she ever go to work at all?

MASKOWITZ: There was no work to go to work. In fact, she was left with five children, and the sixth was born a little later, so she couldn't go to work. There was nothing there for women to do. Just in the fields. And there wasn't much to do. And during the war a lot of times we had to pack and run away because the Russians were coming in.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about that. Do you remember people doing that?

MASKOWITZ: Yes. I was very little, but I remember that we packed up whatever we were able to pack, and we left to deeper Hungary than where we were, where they weren't fighting so much. My mother had an uncle there. So we went there to stay. We were there for about three weeks. Then we came back, we didn't find anything. The cow was gone, the chickens, everything was gone. The furniture they left was on the outside, and we were able to use it again. And we got back together and just went on with our life again.

SIGRIST: When you escaped to your uncle's, how did you get there? Did you go by foot or . . .

MASKOWITZ: By train.

SIGRIST: By train. Was there a train depot in this town?

MASKOWITZ: Yeah. Not too far away we had a train there, yes.

SIGRIST: Talk a little bit about being a little girl in times where things weren't quite so fearful. What did you do in this little town?

MASKOWITZ: Well, we went to school. We had the Hungarian school, a big school there. We went to school, and when we came home we did chores. As little as we were, we had to help along.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things do you remember doing, helping.

MASKOWITZ: In the house, whatever was needed to be done, fold clothes. And remember we had a beautiful river there right across the railroad, and we used to go there and go swimming and enjoying ourselves. That was all enjoyment there.

SIGRIST: Talk about school a little bit. Where was the school in relationship to your house?

MASKOWITZ: It wasn't too far. It was just about a block away. It was walking distance to go to the school. Because the whole town was very small, so we didn't have far to go to anything.

SIGRIST: Describe the building, the school building, for me.

MASKOWITZ: The building was a large brick building, I remember. And there were classes up to sixth, seventh grade. Because when I finished I was in the fifth grade, Hungarian. And when the Czech took over after the world, the war was over, we had to go to Czechoslovakian school. And probably I went for two years, which I didn't like much, so I didn't learn too much in the two years. And after that we came, we were leaving.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things, as a little girl in a small Hungarian town, what kinds of things were you taught in school?

MASKOWITZ: We taught everything. Reading, writing. We were taught our history, geography. Everything that any other school would have.

SIGRIST: Were you ever taught any English or any American history?

MASKOWITZ: No, no, no.

SIGRIST: Nothing like that. Let me ask you, because you mentioned your mother had an uncle. In this small town, were there any other family members, extended family, at all?

MASKOWITZ: No, no. It was quite a distance from there, wherever. My mother came from a different city before we went there. She used to take trips a lot of times to that small town.

SIGRIST: Did you have grandparents living, or anything like that?

MASKOWITZ: No. I don't remember any of my grandparents.

SIGRIST: Talk a little bit about your mother's uncle, and when you would go out. Where did he live? You said he lived far away.

MASKOWITZ: He lived, they called it Mako, in Hungary, deep Hungary. And he was in the lumber business there, I remember, because we had a little cottage right near the business. And we just stayed there, and they helped us out until we're ready to go back.

SIGRIST: Did he have children that you could play with?

MASKOWITZ: No.

SIGRIST: Nothing like that.

MASKOWITZ: They were mostly grown already.

SIGRIST: Let's talk a little bit about what religious life was like in this town. You were Jewish.

MASKOWITZ: Yes.

SIGRIST: Was there a synagogue?

MASKOWITZ: Yes. We have, they made a synagogue out of a house, a room, and that's where we used to go for services.

SIGRIST: Talk about a service for me.

MASKOWITZ: Well, services was every Friday night, a regular service, what they have, and Saturday mornings. Saturday afternoons they have the services there, and all the high holidays.

SIGRIST: I see. Was this town primarily Jewish, or did it have a Gentile population?

MASKOWITZ: No. It was mostly, there were very few. Maybe seven or eight

Jewish families, a very small town. The most were all Slovak people.

SIGRIST: I see. Did you experience any anti-Semitism in this small town?

MASKOWITZ: No, not in that town. No. We were very, very close with all the people there. Everybody was happy. My dad was good to the men that he worked with, and they really appreciated everything.

SIGRIST: Describe maybe a Passover celebration for me when you were a kid.

MASKOWITZ: Well, you had the regular celebration there. We had to make our own, all the food that we had. We couldn't go in the store and just buy it. Everything was made homemade, the matzi and all that stuff. We had all the vegetables.

SIGRIST: Who came? Was it just you and your mother and . . .

MASKOWITZ: To America?

SIGRIST: No, who came to this Passover celebration?

MASKOWITZ: Oh, just the family.

SIGRIST: Because you had no immediate family.

MASKOWITZ: No other family. No, just the family.

SIGRIST: I see. Talk a little bit about your father coming back from Russia. Do you remember when he . . .

MASKOWITZ: Yes. He came back. We were all very happy. And one of my brothers was born while he was gone. He hasn't seen him, he was already about three years old. And he says, if my dad went over to my mother to touch her, he said, "Don't touch my mother." I says, "But I'm your father."

He says, "No. My father is in Russia. You're not my father. My father's in Russia." Because that's all he was told, that his father's in Russia.

SIGRIST: (he laughs) This was a very happy day.

MASKOWITZ: Oh, very happy, very happy.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me, pick it up from there. Pick your story up from there, and what made you all decide that you wanted to come to America, or who decided first?

MASKOWITZ: My mother had a brother in Braddock, Pennsylvania.

SIGRIST: Where in Pennsylvania?

MASKOWITZ: Braddock.

SIGRIST: Braddock.

MASKOWITZ: Yeah. And a sister in Buffalo, New York. So my uncle from Braddock wrote they should send two of the children to America and he's going to send them to school and raise us. My sister and I were the two older ones, but my dad sat down and wrote him a letter. He says, "If you want to see my children, you'll have to take all of us to America because I am not going to separate from my children again." I was away from them for five years. I will not separate again. In the next letter we received the tickets to come to America.

SIGRIST: Wow. And, of course, this is not that much longer after your father's return to you, is it?

MASKOWITZ: It was two years later.

SIGRIST: Two years later. So that's not so long. Wow. Well, that must have been exciting. What did you think of when you thought of America? What

did a little girl in Hungary think about America?

MASKOWITZ: I didn't know what to think about it. We were all excited that we were going on such a long trip. And so we got ready, and we took a long time. In one part where he didn't even have enough money to finish the trip, so a neighbor lent him the money.

SIGRIST: I see. Do you remember packing?

MASKOWITZ: Oh, yes, packing.

SIGRIST: What did you take?

MASKOWITZ: Well, we took a lot of stuff. We took all the bedding, and some of the dishes. Something that was valuable to us that we wanted to keep. So whatever we could we packed. You know, the clothes, with those baskets. We had those, like, suitcases. I'll never forget them. And other luggage. There was a lot of luggage that we had to ship through, that came through.

SIGRIST: Do you remember leaving this town, this small town? I mean, were you sad when you left the town, or were you excited?

MASKOWITZ: We were too excited just to go, yeah. Such a trip. So from there we went to Prague. We spent a week in Prague waiting for some more papers to come through. From Prague we went to Rotterdam.

SIGRIST: Was Prague the first time you've ever been in a big city?

MASKOWITZ: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: What was that like?

MASKOWITZ: (she laughs) In fact, my other sister, the youngest sister, she almost got killed by a streetcar. We didn't even know how to cross the streets. We never saw a streetcar before, till we got to Prague.

SIGRIST: Where did you stay when you were in Prague?

MASKOWITZ: In a hotel. We stayed for a week.

SIGRIST: I see. What a little army. (he laughs) This family. From Prague you went to Rotterdam.

MASKOWITZ: Yes. And they put us in a great, big, right near the water there, the ocean. It was a big, big room where everybody was there, and they gave us a little corner with all the children, so we had like a little room there for us.

SIGRIST: Was this like a large processing center or something?

MASKOWITZ: Yes. That's what it was. And we believe the reason we had to wait, we waited for three weeks for our ship. I guess because we had the tickets already, so they knew we can't go anywhere else, and they let the people with the cash go through first. And to make excuses they used to, we used to stand in line, and they had to check us out through our hair and everything, so they made excuses, "You have nits here," and "you have dandruff here," and "you can't go through." All kind of excuses about it. And we were three girls and my mother, so at one point my mother got so disgusted she went and cut our hair off. And my oldest sister says, "Mom, leave me some in front here and when I put a cap on they'll think I have my hair." She was thirteen years old. So she did. Then when we went through the line again he says, "You have dandruff here, you can't go through." So Mom took it and cut that off, too.

SIGRIST: You said that there were lots of people.

MASKOWITZ: A lot of people there, yes. Oh, those girls, some of them with hair up to their ankles, washing and combing and crying, they didn't want it cut. But they always had an excuse, you can't go through.

SIGRIST: So they inspected you pretty thoroughly in Rotterdam.

MASKOWITZ: Very thoroughly. Very thoroughly.

SIGRIST: Was it, did you see lots of different kinds of people?

MASKOWITZ: Yeah. They came from all over. Poland, Russia, from Hungary, from Slovak. All kind of people.

SIGRIST: What do you think your mother and father are thinking while they're detained here? You know, just trying to . . .

MASKOWITZ: Well, they were angry, very angry. That's why mother just got so angry already she got disgusted, so she just took our hair off.

SIGRIST: Did you have your luggage with you?

MASKOWITZ: Most of the luggage. Some of the luggage, and some was shipped through. They put it on the ship when we were there.

SIGRIST: I'm sorry. I interrupted you. You were about to say something.

MASKOWITZ: My older sister, she was crying when they cut her hair. So my dad says, "Don't cry. When we come to America they have some kind of a lotion that they put it on, and your hair will grow in no time." Just to make her feel good. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: So you were in Rotterdam for three weeks, you said.

MASKOWITZ: Three weeks, yes.

SIGRIST: Then tell me what happened.

MASKOWITZ: Then we got aboard the ship, finally.

SIGRIST: How did they find them? Why did they choose that boat to let you on?

MASKOWITZ: I don't know. That I don't know. But that's the one they put us on, and we got on. They gave us also like a cabin for the family with six bunks there. But we were seven children, and my dad didn't, had to go down lower. We were in the third class. He went down lower. But it was so bad down there, he was so sick, that he came up, and he said, "I'm not going down there."

SIGRIST: What was the name of the boat?

MASKOWITZ: Mongolia.

SIGRIST: The Mongolia.

MASKOWITZ: The Mongolia.

SIGRIST: And this, was this the first time you'd ever seen a big boat?

MASKOWITZ: Yeah, sure. They had no boats around our place. (she laughs)
Not in that small town.

SIGRIST: What was it like? Do you remember seeing that boat for the first time?

MASKOWITZ: The boat?

SIGRIST: The boat. Do you remember looking at this boat?

MASKOWITZ: We just saw it when we opened the doors, and for us to get in on it, and that's where we got in, and they took us into the cabin. And the people, a lot of people from Poland and from all over, they were very, very hungry. And when they started feeding them they ate everything. So . . .

SIGRIST: Were you fed in Rotterdam? Well, you must have been fed in

Rotterdam.

MASKOWITZ: Yeah. Herring, a lot of that kind of stuff. My mother got sick from it. She never wanted to touch it again.

SIGRIST: Because that's all they fed you in Rotterdam was the herring.

MASKOWITZ: Rotterdam, on the ship. Because we didn't eat everything. We were kosher.

SIGRIST: Did they make accommodations for kosher people?

MASKOWITZ: No, nothing, no. So we just ate like dairy stuff, whatever we could get. Eggs and something like that. That's all.

SIGRIST: Well, let's talk about the boat ride over. What was it like?

MASKOWITZ: Well, it was very rough. It was in December. It was rough, the sea was rough.

SIGRIST: Do you remember exactly the date that you left?

MASKOWITZ: No.

SIGRIST: It was late December.

MASKOWITZ: When we got to New York, 1927.

SIGRIST: '21.

MASKOWITZ: I mean, 1921, yeah. 1921, January the 27th we got to Braddock, as I remember. So three weeks we were, well, eleven days on the ship.

SIGRIST: Eleven days. Oh, I see. Okay.

MASKOWITZ: Yeah. We were eleven days on the ship. And then one week we waited in New York to get off of the ship because a lot of ships came in at

that point. So we had to wait for our next to get on.

SIGRIST: So continue telling me what it was like to be on the ocean liner.

MASKOWITZ: First of all, it was very bad. Everybody got sick. It was rough. Then a couple days out the ship sprung a hole and water was coming in. In fact, we were walking around with our life jackets in water. And they sent an S.O.S. out, and they told us there's another ship coming to help us. But before that ship got to us, they fixed it, the hole, and we kept on going. And in New York they already had in the paper that the Mongolia sunk, and all the people went down. When we got to New York, they couldn't believe it. They said we were found people, that that boat went down, that ship.

SIGRIST: That's kind of like the story about your father and the coat, in a way. (he laughs)

MASKOWITZ: When we got to here, Ellis Island, so they had to open up all your luggage to see what was coming through. But it was so cold he couldn't open it up. It had rope on it, and all that, to untie it, he couldn't open it, so they let us go through without it. It was freezing.

SIGRIST: When you were on the boat you said you were sick.

MASKOWITZ: Yeah, very sick. For five days I laid up there, I didn't eat a thing.

SIGRIST: Was everyone in your family sick?

MASKOWITZ: Just, I was the worst. The little ones, they would throw up, and then they were all right. My brother came in, he was eating a piece of bread from the lunchroom. He came in, and he was eating a piece of bread. He says, "Oh, this piece of bread tastes awful." Next thing, he starts throwing up.

(she laughs)

SIGRIST: Did they have a separate dining room for you all on the boat?

MASKOWITZ: Yeah. They had.

SIGRIST: You probably didn't visit it very often.

(he laughs)

MASKOWITZ: Not very often, not me, no. But the children, the little ones, went up to there. And then they stood in line, and they would give us eggs, hard boiled eggs, or an apple. And one of the brothers, he would go up in line, and the children would get one, and the adults would get two. So he got angry. "Why should I only get one." So he took it, then he brought it into the room, and went back, stood on another line, and brought some more. (she laughs) He was only about four years old, five years old, at that time.

SIGRIST: Were the people on the boat nice to you, the staff?

MASKOWITZ: Yes, we had no problem. Only rats!

SIGRIST: On the boat.

MASKOWITZ: Ahh, yeah.

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

MASKOWITZ: I was on the upper bunk, and there were pipes above. And the rats were just running back and forth on those things. One day my dad took something on his hand and he hit one and got the tail, and that thing was squeaking so far. After that we got relief, because usually when they get hurt they don't come back to that same spot. After that we were relieved a little bit. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Oh, dear. (he laughs)

MASKOWITZ: It wasn't a nice boat. That was the problem.

SIGRIST: And you said your father wasn't staying in the cabin with you.

MASKOWITZ: No, but he came up. He couldn't stand it down there. He came up, and we found room for him.

SIGRIST: In your cabin, do you remember was there a sink or something, some kind of water?

MASKOWITZ: No, I think we had to go out and get washed. They had little rooms, I remember. They had bathrooms, not bathrooms, there was only sink and toilets there in the hall, on the outside.

SIGRIST: Do you remember at all being up on deck during the voyage?

MASKOWITZ: Not many times, because it was very cold.

SIGRIST: That's right. It was December.

MASKOWITZ: Yeah. It's very cold.

SIGRIST: So the trip lasted eleven days you were on the boat. Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

MASKOWITZ: Oh, when we got to New York and saw that Statue of Liberty everybody started screaming and crying and hollering, they were just so happy to see it, to be in America.

SIGRIST: Did they call you up on deck to see it? How did you . . .

MASKOWITZ: No, we knew that it was coming. At that point I was feeling much better, so I was able to get up there. This was just a thrill, a thrill to see it.

SIGRIST: And what about seeing the New York skyline for the first time?

MASKOWITZ: It was just wonderful. And being that we weren't able to get to Ellis Island right away to get off, so the relatives, whoever had relatives in New York, they found out that we were docked. They used to come with small boats right near them and bring all kind of stuff for them, and they used to pull up on ropes to give like food and stuff. Because they didn't feed us so well after we were there for a week. So the relatives used to send it up on a rope to the ship.

SIGRIST: And you said you were left on the boat for a week, you said.

MASKOWITZ: A whole week, yeah.

SIGRIST: Where was the boat? Had the boat docked at that point?

MASKOWITZ: It was docked. I don't know where. It wasn't too far from Ellis Island. Because I remember we got on another smaller boat and they took a little while until we came into Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: I see. We're going to pause.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: You were on the boat for a week waiting your turn to get to Ellis Island. You said you were put on a small ferry.

MASKOWITZ: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Tell me what happened then.

MASKOWITZ: Well, we got to Ellis Island. It took a long time in line to get through, and then with the luggage, whatever we carried, we had to open it and my dad couldn't because it was just too cold. And they let us go by.

And when we got in the building we had to stand in line for questions and to call everything down, whatever, the names, everybody separately. And then all of a sudden we get a call, Zelkowitz family to come on the side. So that's when we got scared that maybe something happened to somebody and we won't be able to go through. But my mother, it was a cousin was working here, and he got us through faster that way, we were able to come through. And then after we went through everything we had to wait for that evening to get on the train.

SIGRIST: One thing we haven't talked about, of course, is your mother's condition. As you said before, your mother was pregnant.

MASKOWITZ: She was pregnant and nursing a baby.

SIGRIST: Tell me if that, were you apprehensive about her being pregnant? Did you think it would cause any problems?

MASKOWITZ: We, not there, but it's only because she didn't get the food that she needed.

SIGRIST: What happened to her?

MASKOWITZ: She, when we got off the ship onto the ferry, she passed out from hunger. But they brought her to, and she was okay after that. They gave her something, and she felt better. When we got off the ship she was all right.

SIGRIST: Were there lots of people at Ellis Island?

MASKOWITZ: Yes. Yes, it was real crowded. You had to wait a long time in line to get through.

SIGRIST: Just kind of give me, again, through the eyes of a little girl, the impressions of the place. What stuck out in your mind?

MASKOWITZ: Well, I don't remember too much. All I know that when we, after we were finished with everything a couple of my mother's aunts came to meet us with some cousins. So they thought they're going to treat us, the little kids, children, that didn't have ice cream ever and all that stuff. So they bought pound cake and ice cream for us and sat us down on a bench. Remember those big benches they had? And we looked at it, we couldn't put it to our mouths because we were sick on the ship, we wanted something hot because it was cold, and here they give us ice cream. We couldn't eat it. Meanwhile, they left, and left us there, and we just left the ice cream and the cake, everything melting on the bench. We didn't know what to do with it. (Mr. Sigrist laughs.) And we had to wait for a few hours for our train, and we got on the train right from Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: Let me just ask you one more question. Do you remember what kind of examinations they gave you when you were here?

MASKOWITZ: They didn't go through exam. Just oral, just questions they asked us. Names and births and all that stuff, where we came from, that's all. One of the brothers, they ask him his name, so he told them in Jewish. Well, he was angry, he was angry at the ship because they didn't treat him right. So he says when he gets off he's going to burn that ship down. (they laugh) So that's about how it was.

SIGRIST: So where did you go when you left Ellis?

MASKOWITZ: We went to the station. They had a station here, right near Ellis Island. We didn't have to go to New York. And we got aboard the train here. That's another funny story. When the train was there, they showed us what train we're going to get on. And we went, and my dad started putting the children up. He didn't know that there were steps. It was just a platform, you know how they have the train at that time. So he started

putting the children on, the small ones. But then when it came to the bigger and my mother, he wondered how we were going to get on. Meanwhile the conductor comes along and opens up and brings the steps out. So he was so relieved to see that. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: He wasn't going to have to lift your mother up.

MASKOWITZ: No, no, no. It was funny. And then, so from here we went, we rode all night, most of the night. When my uncle bought the tickets in East Pittsburgh but we were supposed to go to Braddock. East Pittsburgh is only five minutes by train to Braddock. But that train wasn't going to stop in Braddock, just in East Pittsburgh. And being that he bought the tickets in East Pittsburgh that's where we were going to get off. So when we, the conductor told him that we had to get off, she yelled, "No, you're going to Braddock." (German) And he couldn't change her mind. And there my uncles were waiting with a car in East Pittsburgh. That train stopped special for us to get off in Braddock. (she laughs) And when we got off there was nobody there to meet us because they were in East Pittsburgh. And it was cold, snow, and nobody there. There was one man on the station. He was waiting for a family on the next train. So he came over and wanted to know what we're looking for. So my dad told him. He says, "I'll take you down."

It wasn't too far my uncle had a store in Braddock, a tailor shop. So he took us there, but he was in East Pittsburgh waiting, the store was closed. And this man couldn't take us any further because he had to go back to the station. So he told us which way to go and how we're going to find him, and we're walking and walking. We knew just where to turn to the street, and as we're walking the children are coming home from school for lunch hour, and they saw and start yelling "greenhorns" and throwing snowballs at us. My dad got so angry. But then my mother's sister was looking for us through the window, and she saw a family walking, she come running down and she recognized Mother. Then we went up to the house.

SIGRIST: Well, I imagine you looked rather distinctive. (they laugh)
This large group. Probably you looked very immigranty.

MASKOWITZ: My dad was carrying the luggage, we were holding on to the little ones, my mother was carrying the baby. So it was a nice family walking.

SIGRIST: You've mentioned a couple of times, you know, you said your mother talked to the conductor, your father talked to this man on the platform. Did they have any knowledge of English at this point?

MASKOWITZ: No, not a word, none of us. All was, well, this man at the station was German. He just happened, and if you speaking Jewish then you can understand German, and he understood what we were talking, so we were able to converse with him.

SIGRIST: I see. So it was finally the aunt who saw you. And this is your mother's . . .

MASKOWITZ: Family.

SIGRIST: Right. So did you live with them?

MASKOWITZ: No. We stayed over just a couple of nights, and they had an apartment ready for us. And we got there Thursday, and Saturday night they took them into the apartment.

SIGRIST: What did the apartment look like?

MASKOWITZ: It was a four room house, apartment house, near the steel mills. Dirty, filthy, a big black box. We weren't used to that. We wanted clean. My mother started crying. She wants to go back to Europe. But we made, we had to live there for a little while, then we moved to a better place.

SIGRIST: Did, how long did you live there?

MASKOWITZ: We lived there just a few months, and then they moved to a little better place. And my dad got a job right away. Thank God he started working right away.

SIGRIST: Doing what?

MASKOWITZ: He was working in a steel mill. At that point that's all he could do now was work in a steel mill in Trappe, Pennsylvania. He worked there for a while. And then we bought dairy cows, and he made a little money, and we were selling the milk and dairy. Before we went to school we had to deliver the milk, all the children, cold, and putting milk bottles, then it was the glass bottles. We did that till we got a little better. But this is a funny story. When we got on the train, Mother found a milk bottle.

SIGRIST: When you got on the train initially?

MASKOWITZ: Yeah. To go to Braddock. So she says, "Ooh, that bottle come in handy to put some stuff in." Milk, or whatever we had, liquid. Because we didn't have that in Europe, those kind of bottles. So she says to my younger sister Anne, "Hold that bottle, and make sure you don't break it." We carried that bottle. When we got to my aunt's place in Braddock, and we got up, it was on the third floor, we walked up there, and she takes that bottle and puts it right in the middle of the dining room table. A little while later my aunt comes along, she started yelling, "Who put a milk bottle on my dining room table?" So my mother says, "Ooh, that's mine, that's mine. It'll come in handy for something." She takes her outside on the back porch, she says, "Look, you can have all the bottles you want." (she laughs) They used to deliver milk in those days, so you could have all the bottles. They never forgot that story, isn't that horrible?

SIGRIST: That leaves me to ask you, talk about your parents adjusting to America. Of course, it's one thing for a child to adjust, it's easier.

MASKOWITZ: Yeah, we went to school right away.

SIGRIST: But what about your parents, because this is all sort of new and different for them.

MASKOWITZ: Right. It was very hard for my mother, very hard.

SIGRIST: Talk a little bit about that.

MASKOWITZ: She was no used to all that kind of, to get started, and especially in such a place. Braddock was very, very dirty. It was all steel mills. And it was hard to keep clean. And, like I said, there was no toilet in the house. They had an outhouse with rats running around again. Until my father started working and made a little money, then we moved to, like I said, to another place. And she did other things to make money that she was able to do at home.

SIGRIST: What kind of things?

MASKOWITZ: We bought geese, and we used to feed them special feeding to get them nice and fat, because years ago that's what they used for fat, that or beef fat. And goose fat was the best, healthiest fat at that time. And she used to do that and sell it to people that couldn't do it. And that's where she made a few dollars that way. And we went to work. We helped. As little as we were, we babysat or cleaned for somebody else, and to make a few dollars.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever learn English, or did she try to learn English?

MASKOWITZ: She did. She learned more than Father. She did it faster than Father. Yes, she did. But at that point a lot of people came to America from all over, so they all spoke Slovak, Hungarian, Polish, and that language

we all knew. But she picked it up after a while, yeah.

SIGRIST: What was the neighborhood like that you lived in? You said this was very dirty, and the steel mill area.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Well, it wasn't that bad, but I mean the soot and all that, you have to keep cleaning all the time.

SIGRIST: What sorts of other people lived in this neighborhood?

MASKOWITZ: It was all that came from Europe, most of them.

SIGRIST: All eastern Europeans?

MASKOWITZ: Eastern, yeah. They all came, a lot of them came. And they all went to work in the steel mills.

SIGRIST: Was this primarily a Jewish neighborhood then?

MASKOWITZ: No. No, it was a mixed with all kinds, all kinds of people.

SIGRIST: What was your religious life like then? Was there enough Jewish . . .

MASKOWITZ: Oh, yeah. A real good Jewish . . .

SIGRIST: So was there a synagogue there?

MASKOWITZ: Synagogues, yeah. In Braddock we had two synagogues and they had Hebrew school. And we went to public school right away.

SIGRIST: Talk about that. Talk about your, when you first start going to school. What was that like for you?

MASKOWITZ: It wasn't easy. First of all, we couldn't say a word in English, so my mother's cousin had a girl working for her that was Slovak, and she was able to speak for us, so she took us to school and registered us in school.

And through her she was always there to talk for us, because she lived right across from the school. If they needed her, they used to call her in. But we picked it up very fast. You know, when you're small you pick it up very fast. And I went up to the fifth grade, but I had to quit to go to work.

SIGRIST: I see. What was your first job?

MASKOWITZ: My first job was at National Biscuit Company in Pittsburgh.

SIGRIST: National Biscuit.

MASKOWITZ: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Doing what?

MASKOWITZ: Frosting cookies and packing and all that. I worked there only for a short time. Then I worked in different baker's shops.

SIGRIST: And you were quite young.

MASKOWITZ: Yes. I worked in the meter works, I worked in, all hard work. In a foundry, whatever, during the Depression.

SIGRIST: Was this the same sort of job that maybe your brothers and sisters were doing? Were they doing the same kinds of things?

MASKOWITZ: Some of the brothers, yeah. Until, when one brother worked with us, a couple of them worked at Westinghouse in East Pittsburgh, so they worked in Westinghouse. And my dad opened up a little store later on.

SIGRIST: But this is quite a bit later on.

MASKOWITZ: Later on, yeah. They had a little store.

SIGRIST: So basically all the kids went to work as soon as they could.

MASKOWITZ: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And so your mother is raising geese on the side and . . .

MASKOWITZ: Yeah, and selling that. Whatever we could do. And the children helped along. I went to work, my other sister went to work. We had to help out.

SIGRIST: And you say bit by bit everything got better.

MASKOWITZ: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: What was it like having electricity? Say, was this something that . . .

MASKOWITZ: When we came to Braddock they didn't have electricity. They had those gas . . .

SIGRIST: They had gas lighting.

MASKOWITZ: Gas lights, yeah, for a while there. And then later on we got electricity. So we didn't get electricity right away. It wasn't easy. And we didn't have a bathroom in the house. We made our first bathroom when my dad later on bought a house, and he put in a bathroom.

SIGRIST: And that must have been, actually . . .

MASKOWITZ: And that was in the basement, but we worked it out.

SIGRIST: So, basically, your family sort of worked all together and very hard to just kind of improve your situation.

MASKOWITZ: Yes, yes. And then the brothers got older and they all went to work. And then they opened up, they called it a beer garden, a tavern, in Braddock. And they opened that up and just before the war broke out, and they were all taken, and all five brothers went in, in the Second World War. And when that happened my dad took a heart attack because he knew what they

were going in for, because he was in. But thank God they all came back.

SIGRIST: Your father, you said he had a heart attack.

MASKOWITZ: Yeah, but he got better.

SIGRIST: But he was okay after that.

MASKOWITZ: After that, yeah.

SIGRIST: I see.

MASKOWITZ: And the boys came back, and they were able to continue the business. Meanwhile, my parents and with other help they kept the business going for them. For when they came back, they should have something to come back to.

SIGRIST: It seems like so often your family has teetered on the edge of tragedy and, you know, you're very blessed, it doesn't happen. Isn't that interesting.

MASKOWITZ: Always, yeah. That's right.

SIGRIST: Well, I guess, in just our remaining minutes here I want to ask you just a couple of questions. One is were your parents happy that they made the decision to come here?

MASKOWITZ: Oh, yes. Later on, Mother was, like I said, she was unhappy, so she wanted to go back. My dad says, "We'll make money." After he bought the cattle, he said, "We'll make the money. I'll send you back with the younger children. I'll stay her with the older ones. We'll make money, and then we'll come back to you." But by then, by that time she got used to it and everything was okay.

SIGRIST: So they really liked coming here.

MASKOWITZ: Oh, we were happy that we were here.

SIGRIST: I want to ask you to tell me what it was like, because you said you visited Hungary in 1981.

MASKOWITZ: '81, yeah.

SIGRIST: Just tell me a little bit about that, and what it was like to go back to your little town.

MASKOWITZ: When we got in my son-in-law, we drove in to town, and as I says when you get to the city, Humano, from there it's not far. Well, it was closer then than it was when we were living there because they put buildings towards the city a lot. And when we got in, driving on that street, that's where we were living. And we passed by so fast, and I says, "George, don't get any further, because this is where my dad worked." We passed that house.

I recognized it right away. But everything looked big. You know, when you're little everything looks big. When I got there, everything is little, the house, and this. The yard where my dad was working, there was a big family there, and I think it looked so small. I said, "How could that be?" But the man wouldn't let us in. He was afraid. As soon as he saw we were coming to the gate, he ran in and locked himself in, because it was a Communist country. They didn't want to talk to strangers. So then we started walking down the street, and I says, "This must be it." So I didn't recognize right away the house because they had made a fence. We didn't have a fence. We had, I remember, a tree in front, a strawberry tree, and that was gone. So the women came out in the yard, and they saw us looking around, and they started talking to me. So I told them who was our neighbor. I remember the name. And they says, "Oh, yeah, and this was the house." We were standing right in front of the house. Because it was so small, I was looking for big windows, and all that. So that's where we found out. The

women took us into the yard. And at this point already she had a pump outside, not a well. And the houses looked beautiful. She built on to the back for her son, another house in back there. And we just stayed there for a little while.

SIGRIST: What that emotional?

MASKOWITZ: Very, very. I just looked around. I couldn't believe my eyes that I was there.

SIGRIST: That's a great story. It's something that will stay with you forever. Mrs. Maskowitz, I want to thank you for coming, actually a long way, to do this interview. It's been a pleasure having you here and telling us a very interesting story. I appreciate it.

MASKOWITZ: Thank you. I'd like to say you're welcome, and it was a pleasure to do it. I'm glad I could help.

SIGRIST: Well, anyway, this is Paul Sigrist . . .

MASKOWITZ: I hope it's okay.

SIGRIST: Oh, it's great. It's, like I said, a very interesting story.

MASKOWITZ: It's the best I could.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off for the National Park Service.