

EI-059

MARTHA LEVASHESKY GARDNER

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RUSSIA, 1921

RESIDENCE: MALCH

AGE 10

RESIDENCE IN US: BAYONNE, NJ

PORT OF EMBARKATION: ANTWERP

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Tuesday, July 30, 1991, and we're here at the home in Brooklyn of Martha Gardner, who came from Russia in 1921 when she was ten and ended up being detained at Ellis Island for three weeks. Good afternoon, Mrs. Gardner.

GARDNER: Good afternoon, Paul.

SIGRIST: Let me start by having you give us your full name. Include your maiden name in that, and your date of birth, please.

GARDNER: Mushke. Mushke Levashesky.

SIGRIST: You're going to have to spell all of that for me,  
please.

GARDNER: L-E-V-A-S-H-E-S-K-Y.

SIGRIST: And Mushke? How do you spell that?

GARDNER: M-U-S-H-K-E. Mushke.

SIGRIST: I see. And what is your date of birth, please?

GARDNER: July 3, 1911.

SIGRIST: And where were you born?

GARDNER: I was born in a small town called Malch, M-A-L-C-H.  
It was, in Russia it was called, or in Jewish it was  
called Shtel, Shtel Malch. My mother and father had a  
dry good store, a business, there. And when the war  
came it was burned. It was set on fire by either the  
Russians or the Germans. I don't know who did that,  
but the whole town was on fire, and our business was  
getting burnt. And then I remember having to leave our  
house and run to a dugout where we were, like a cave  
where we were trying to escape the bombs, running over  
kind of, people who were dead from the bombs, you know.

And . . .

SIGRIST: Let's talk a little bit about the town, say, before this happened. What did the town look like?

GARDNER: I don't remember. You see, I was too small to remember anything except a traumatic incident like running to the dugout.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the house that you lived in?

GARDNER: Yes, I remember a house with little rooms and a hot oven on one of the floors, one of the rooms where if we were very cold in the winter we would go and sit there to warm up. And of course I also remember the sadness of I think my father dying. I don't remember my father too well, but I remember people crying. And then I remember where my brothers and sisters dying because there were four, they were college-age. And I remember people crying.

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

GARDNER: Ausher, Ausher. A-U-S-H-E-R.

SIGRIST: And was he from this town?

GARDNER: Yes, but he died, you see. He died when I was very little.

SIGRIST: And what did he die of?

GARDNER: Well, we don't know, because there was an epidemic. There was a war, and there was an epidemic, and there were no doctors or people to take care of you. And I was never told what he died from, except that he died and people were crying.

SIGRIST: Do you, how old were you when he died?

GARDNER: I think I must have been three or four.

SIGRIST: So you were very young.

GARDNER: Yes.

SIGRIST: Let's talk a little bit about your mother. What was her name?

GARDNER: My mother was Anna. A-N-N-A.

SIGRIST: And was she from that town also?

GARDNER: Yes, yes. They were both from that town.

SIGRIST: Did she have family that still lived in that town?

GARDNER: Yes. Oh, yes. She had I think a sister and a sister-in-law and, you know, other cousins.

SIGRIST: Did you have grandparents who were alive?

GARDNER: No, not that I remember. They were dead by the time. I don't remember any of my grandparents because they were all dead by the time I was three or four.

SIGRIST: Tell me about your brothers and sisters. Why don't you name them all, say, from the oldest.

GARDNER: Well, my oldest brother's name was Motel, M-O-T-E-L. And he died, I think, between eighteen and nineteen. I don't know what from. He was a college student. And my second brother was Borich, B-O-R-I-C-H, and he also died young, and I don't know what from. And there was my sister, who was already married, and she died in childbirth, giving birth to her second child. And another sister, I think, was sixteen, and I don't know what she died of. All I know is that my mother had eight children, and four died in Europe, and four came here in 1921. My father and four children died. Half of the family, exactly.

SIGRIST: Talk a little bit about what everyday life was like when you were a little girl with your mother and your other siblings.

GARDNER: Well, all I remember is that, you see, this was after part of the war and we were devastated. We didn't have anything to eat. And my mother, I guess that was after my father died. My mother would go out in the fields with the older children and try to plant potatoes or vegetables, whatever, to be able to eat. And my brother and I were left in the house because we were too young to help. But we didn't have enough to eat, and so I remember standing on a little ladder or a chair or someplace, to get up to a cupboard where there was food, bread and butter. And I would take a slice of bread. As a matter of fact, what happened then we, my mother baked little breads and she gave each one a bread, and we had to have that for the week. But I was very hungry, so I would take a little slice from some of the other breads, and I would stand up on this ladder, on this little bench and butter it. And I think for the rest of my life I felt like I owed my brothers and sisters everything because I robbed them

of the bread and the strength, and so I had to take care of them. I had to take care of them, whatever ailed them, or whatever I could do, to make up for what I did as a child. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: Do you remember your mother baking bread?

GARDNER: No, I don't remember that.

SIGRIST: You just remember it being there.

GARDNER: I remember that terrible thing that I did.

SIGRIST: Did you have your own plot of land?

GARDNER: At the time, when we had the business, we had a home, a big home and a business, and we were considered, you know, like one of the wealthy families.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the dry goods store?

GARDNER: No, I remember we came back and found it practically in ashes, six weeks.

SIGRIST: After it was burned. But you don't remember what it looked like before the burning?

GARDNER: Not clearly, not clearly.

SIGRIST: Was it in town? Was there a business district in this town?

GARDNER: Yes, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of the other stores that were there?

GARDNER: No, no, no.

SIGRIST: I want to ask a question about your religious life at that time. You were Jewish.

GARDNER: Yes.

SIGRIST: Was there a synagogue in town?

GARDNER: Yes, yes there was. And we would, all the children would go to the synagogue and learn and then they would also, some of the Hasidim would eat there and one, they would leave like little pieces of food, you know, little something, and we would all try to, you know, eat it, if we could get it.

SIGRIST: Was it a . . .

GARDNER: Benches. It was tables and benches where people would

learn.

SIGRIST: Were there a lot of Jewish people in this town?

GARDNER: Oh, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Was it all Jewish?

GARDNER: No, no, no. No, it wasn't. It was, I think, maybe half.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the inside of the synagogue at all?

GARDNER: No. This was, I remember the place where you would go to, to learn. But . . .

SIGRIST: Talk about that.

GARDNER: But, as I said, there were tables and benches and rabbis, or teachers who would teach. Oh, I think I was too young. I was really too young for any of that. And, but my sisters and brothers would go there because they were older, you know.

SIGRIST: And they would learn Hebrew?

GARDNER: Yes. Yes, they would learn Hebrew and, you know, go to the synagogue every Saturday. They were religious,

you know, really observed all the laws.

SIGRIST: What kinds of ways did you observe your religion in your house? Do you remember something that your mother might have done?

GARDNER: Oh, yes. On Friday night she would have everything ready for the Sabbath. All the food, because you had to cook for the next day, for Friday and Saturday, and everything had to be cleaned. Everything had to be, like, spic and span for the Sabbath.

SIGRIST: If food was very scarce for you . . .

GARDNER: Well, it wasn't always scarce, see. It was okay until we had to leave our house and it was burning. But before that we had enough to eat and, you know, everything was good. We had everything that we needed. Clothing and food and my father and mother were busy in the business, but we had each other, we took care of each other. But I don't, I don't remember too much of that, you see.

SIGRIST: Had your father died by the time the store was burned?

GARDNER: Uh . . . ( she pauses ) I, uh . . . No, I don't

think so. I think he died in the next house that we had. We had the next house after everything was burned. And everybody was dying. There were a lot of people dying of certain diseases. And whatever ailed them, they didn't have doctors to take care of them. And I think he died in the next house.

SIGRIST: I see. One thing I didn't ask, you spoke about your brothers and sisters who died and listed them by name, but you didn't talk, you didn't list the brothers and sisters who lived, who were alive. Would you do that for me?

GARDNER: Yes. Yes. There was my brother Abe. Abe, he was the oldest. And he, and then my sister Charlotte. And I came next, and there was a younger brother, Moishe, Morry. His name was Morry. When we came here in 1921 we were, we had two uncles here who sent for us. They had to verify that they would take care of us, because you couldn't come to this country unless someone vouched for you. So when we came, the four of us, my uncles sat us down and their families and they said, "These are your names, your American names." Now, my brother, my oldest brother was Abe, my sisters were

Zlote, and my, and I was Mushke, and my younger brother was Meishe. And they said Abe would be called, no, his name was not Abe. His name was Avromel. That's right.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

GARDNER: A-V-R-O-M-E-L. Avromel. And his name was Abe. And my sister's name from Zlote became Charlotte and from my, Mushke, my name was Martha. And my brother Moishe was Morris. And they said, "Don't use any other name. This is it. You're going to be in America. You're going to become Americanized. And this is it. So, of course, we remained. And when I came here, I couldn't talk English, of course, but I was so impressed with this country, and I was so eager to learn that I never opened my mouth until I really could speak the English language.

SIGRIST: Well, good. We'll talk about that when we get to America. Let's get you to America. Who decided that you should come to America? You said you had an uncle here already.

GARDNER: Yes, two.

SIGRIST: You had two uncles. Talk a little bit about those

uncles. When did they come, and what were they doing here?

GARDNER: Oh, they came, they came much earlier, years, years before, and they took over their families, you know, their wives. And then they had children, and they were established. They were considered well-off to be able to help us. They were in-laws. My two uncles were in-laws because they were the sisters of my mother, these two.

SIGRIST: Married to the sisters.

GARDNER: Right. So we were, we were just, we felt just wonderful about them. The fact that they were not blood-related, they were married to these women and they were so helpful. They collected money. They made us, gave us a home, built in Bayonne, New Jersey.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what they were doing, what business they were in when . . .

GARDNER: My uncle in Jersey, I.J. Rosenbloom, he was a commissioner of license, of car license. And my uncle Koch was, had a business called The Town Shop. It's still in existence a hundred years.

SIGRIST: And what did it, what kind of business?

GARDNER: Ladies wear.

SIGRIST: I see. So they accumulated the money, because this is quite a chunk of money we're talking about.

GARDNER: Yes.

SIGRIST: We're talking about a woman and four children?

GARDNER: Yes.

SIGRIST: Four kids, that's, you know, a lot of money.

GARDNER: Well, they collected from both families, you see. Their children were grown, and they were asked each one to contribute. And the family in Jersey provided the home. And the family in New York would come every week and bring us clothes and money.

SIGRIST: Once you got here.

GARDNER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What did you know of America before you came here? As a little girl in this small town in Russia, what did

you know?

GARDNER: What we heard was that it's a golden medina, a golden land. And that the opportunities and the greatness and everything was just so, like a Shangri-La.

SIGRIST: How did your mother feel about leaving her home town?

GARDNER: Oh, she was glad. She was glad. She wanted, she had lost all these people, and she wanted to save herself for us, for the four of us.

SIGRIST: Do you remember your mother telling you, "We're finally going to America?" Do you remember her telling the children at all?

GARDNER: No. I don't remember. I, what I happened to be is that I blocked out so much of the misery. Everything was so miserable.

SIGRIST: Do you have any happy, any happy remembrances of being a little girl in Russia? Nothing.

GARDNER: Nothing, nothing. It was all horrible. And when I came here, I said this is a new life, a new language. I don't want to think about it. It was too horrible. I want to be able to just do everything for myself and

for this country and for my family.

SIGRIST: Do you remember packing?

GARDNER: No.

SIGRIST: Do you know at all what you took, or maybe . . .

GARDNER: Yes. Oh, yes. We each had to carry a little package, you know. Whatever, the clothes, you know, the clothes that we needed to wear on the journey. Because we knew it was going to take a long time. It took three weeks. Well, it wasn't supposed to. It was supposed to take less time, but we had to be quarantined in Ellis Island because . . .

SIGRIST: Right. We'll get to that. Where did you leave from? What port did you leave from?

GARDNER: From, I think it was Belgium. Oh, I forgot.

SIGRIST: Antwerp?

GARDNER: Yeah. Antwerp, that's it.

SIGRIST: How did you get from this small town in Russia to Belgium?

GARDNER: By train. We had to go by train.

SIGRIST: And were you travelling alone, or were there other people from this town who were going with you?

GARDNER: There were other people going but I don't, it's not clear. It's not clear to me. All I remember is having this bundle and trying to stay close to my mother and the family.

SIGRIST: Your brothers and sisters, are they older than you or younger than you?

GARDNER: Two are older.

SIGRIST: Two are older, and then the brother.

GARDNER: I was the third.

SIGRIST: Do you remember being in Belgium at all? Do you remember how long you had to stay before your boat came, for instance?

GARDNER: No, that's not clear. That's not clear. I remember Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the boat?

GARDNER: Yes.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the boat?

GARDNER: ( she pauses ) Oh, I don't remember. I had it, I used to know it.

SIGRIST: You wrote it on your form. That's why I asked. Krunland.

GARDNER: Oh, yeah. That's right.

SIGRIST: That's what you wrote on the form.

GARDNER: See, that's my memory, short memory. ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: Do you remember being on the boat at all?

GARDNER: Yes. Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Talk about what it was like on the boat.

GARDNER: We were down in the steerage.

SIGRIST: What was that like?

GARDNER: It was horrible. It was just very bad, and we, once in a while we'd sneak upstairs and try to get some food, because over there on the next deck there was

food and people would sometimes hand us, you know, some things, and we'd bring it down, down in the steerage place. And some of us were sick, you know. I think my mother was sick too, at times, and she couldn't eat. So we'd bring her, you know, a little something from upstairs. And, uh . . .

SIGRIST: You said steerage was horrible. Why? What was bad about it?

GARDNER: Well, I mean, you had to be crowded in, and the food was so bad, and it was just a long, hideous journey. It was just very, very hard, and very trying.

SIGRIST: Do you know how long the boat ride was?

GARDNER: Oh, it was a big, big boat.

SIGRIST: Yeah, but how long was the trip before you got to Ellis Island?

GARDNER: I think it was about almost two weeks.

SIGRIST: Two weeks. Do you remember being up on deck at all? Were you ever up on deck?

GARDNER: Yes. We'd sneak up.

SIGRIST: Is this the first time you'd ever seen a big boat?

GARDNER: Yes.

SIGRIST: So what was it like being a little girl seeing a big boat for the first time?

GARDNER: Well, it was okay, but we were all scared. We were scared about so many things, you know. The anticipation of going to a new place and not knowing. We looked forward to it. We were excited. But we also were scared. It was very scary for young kids, you know, to be going.

SIGRIST: What do you think your mother is thinking about?

GARDNER: Well, all she thought about was to get here and keep us safe and well. Because she was so devastated from the country and what happened that I think she just looked forward to coming to America. First of all, there were two of our family were here, and she thought the opportunities would be good.

SIGRIST: She kind of thought that it would just solve all her problems.

GARDNER: Yes. Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when you arrived in New York Harbor?

GARDNER: Oh, that was the highlight of my life.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Well, explain that to me.

GARDNER: It was just, we were on, we, at that time we were on deck, on the top deck, I think, when we were, when we were, or maybe on the lower deck. We were on one of the decks where we could see coming in to the Statue of Liberty. And it was the most marvelous sight. Everybody was cheering and clapping and laughing and, "At last we have arrived." And we were just very, very cheerful.

SIGRIST: Was your mother feeling better by then?

GARDNER: Yes, yes. She was, she got over her seasickness, and really felt whole and the anticipation of getting here was, had just become real.

SIGRIST: Get us to Ellis Island. What, how did you, did the boat dock? What happened next after you saw the Statue of Liberty?

GARDNER: Well, then we got to Ellis Island and we were, of course, showered, de-loused or whatever. ( she laughs ) You know.

SIGRIST: Tell me, what did they do?

GARDNER: They had to clean us up. I think they used kerosene in our hair and washed us, scrubbed us clean and gave us clothes and food and it was great. But the, it didn't last long because we had to go to a hospital. We had to go to a, we were, there was a death of, what do you call that sickness? I forgot the name of the sickness that someone died from. Typhoid. And we were quarantined, and we had to go to the hospital. And then . . .

SIGRIST: Who died? Was this on the boat?

GARDNER: Yes. Some, some tourist. Some member died and so we all had to be held back, quarantined for a certain time. And then I was detained longer because I had glandular trouble and I think I developed some condition where it was pussey and they didn't know, you know, they didn't know what it was, and they had to check me out. And I think it took time until everybody

was cleared. And lucky for us there were other people who were even detained longer, but my uncle in Jersey he, I think he had pull because we, when he came to take us, you know, we were cleared. There was a lot of people that were not cleared, so we felt very fortunate even though it was so long until we were able to get off the boat. But we did get off in the custody, in his custody. And then we were taken to Bayonne, New Jersey, and we were given this little place to live and food and clothing. And it was just, you know, an enlightenment.

SIGRIST: Let's talk about Ellis Island. Was your whole family allowed to stay together, or can you talk about what your accommodations were like, where you slept?

GARDNER: It wasn't too good. It was like cubby, like cages, I think. It was like cages we were in.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: But you were allowed to be with your mother?

GARDNER: Yes. Well, no. I was taken away by myself until I was cleared.

SIGRIST: Where did they take you?

GARDNER: Well, in a hospital. And I don't remember how good it was. I just was, I think I must have been so fearful of what happened, what happens to you, you know. I couldn't see anything good at the time. Nothing was, I was just scared, and nothing was, everything was frightening.

SIGRIST: Did your uncles ever come to visit you while you were detained?

GARDNER: No. I don't think they could do that, because there was quarantine. Nobody could get on the boat until then, by the time we were all cleared.

SIGRIST: Did you, were you allowed to go outside at all? You may not be, because you were in the hospital boat. Were your, did your mother and the kids, were you allowed outside. I mean, what did you, how did they spend your days?

GARDNER: I don't know. I don't, I don't know because I was just very scared and I don't remember. But they said it wasn't too good.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how long you were there?

GARDNER: About five days.

SIGRIST: In the hospital.

GARDNER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: That's how long you were on Ellis Island?

GARDNER: No, no. On Ellis Island altogether we were weeks.  
About three weeks altogether.

SIGRIST: I see.

GARDNER: It was a horrible experience.

SIGRIST: Well, talk about your uncles. They came and they took  
you off the island and they brought you to Bayonne.  
Describe the house that they had prepared for you.

GARDNER: Well, this was like in the attic. See, they made an  
apartment out of the attic. And, you know, of course  
it was like a railroad thing all, you know, all one  
floor and not too much partition. But we each had a  
place to sleep and a kitchen and food and, as I said,  
clothing. They brought us clothing.

SIGRIST: Did you sleep with one of your brothers and sisters, or did you have your own bed?

GARDNER: Yes, we had our own bed. It was, see, big. It was a large place, but it wasn't separated with separate rooms so much as, but we each had our own bed. They made provision for that.

SIGRIST: Did you have electricity in this?

GARDNER: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Is this the first, was this an exciting thing for you?

GARDNER: Yes, it was. It was just great. We were just overwhelmed with everything. To be here and to have a home and food, mostly food, and clothing.

SIGRIST: When the . . .

GARDNER: And to go to school.

SIGRIST: The first night that you got to Bayonne, did one of your aunts put a big dinner on for you?

GARDNER: Yes. Oh, yes, they had . . .

SIGRIST: Do you remember that?

GARDNER: Yes. They had the family. They had some of the family, you know, all come and meet us. And that's when they told us about, you know, what our name was going to be like and everything. They gave us, made up rules for us.

SIGRIST: Was the food unusual to you?

GARDNER: Yes, it was good. It was very good to have enough food and cooked food and vegetables and everything. It was just wonderful.

SIGRIST: You started mentioning school. Tell me how you learned English.

GARDNER: Well, I didn't talk until, I didn't say anything until I was able to talk, spell and talk. I was very quiet, and I listened and observed and I was so ambitious to learn everything. Nothing was going to stop me from having this life. And . . .

SIGRIST: What grade did you start in school?

GARDNER: I think the fourth, fourth grade.

SIGRIST: Was school scary for you being, you know, a little girl

from Russia?

GARDNER: No, no, no. School was not scary. It was wonderful. I wanted to learn. I wanted to learn the language and the, know everything about the people here and the customs and the whole bit. I just didn't want to think about anything I left behind or care about it.

SIGRIST: Talk about your mother in America. What was America like for your mother?

GARDNER: Well, it wasn't easy. It wasn't easy. Because she was an independent person, and she appreciated being helped out. But she wanted to do something so that eventually she would stop the aid and of course my oldest brother Abe, he went to work, so he was the sole supporter.

SIGRIST: What job did he get?

GARDNER: A waiter. He was a waiter. But unfortunately it didn't last long, because he went to have a tonsillectomy and he died. So my mother had to do it. She had to, she wanted to do everything possible to be self-sufficient and get off the, you know, she appreciated the helping, but she said, "How long can

people do it?" She wanted to do it on her own, and she would, she went into the egg business where she would buy a crate of eggs and divide it into dozens, a dozen boxes, and deliver it to people who ordered it.

SIGRIST: That was ambitious.

GARDNER: Very.

SIGRIST: How did she get involved in that? How did she even . . .

GARDNER: I guess she found out through, you know. When you want something you do it. She was always a businesswoman. So she wanted to be in her own business.

SIGRIST: Did she learn English?

GARDNER: Yes, a little bit, considering her age. And, you know, she was able to talk English.

SIGRIST: How old was she when she came to this country?

GARDNER: Well, she must have been fifty-five.

SIGRIST: Fifty-five by the time she got here.

GARDNER: Right.

SIGRIST: So she had you and your younger brother quite late in life then.

GARDNER: Yes, she did. She had my brother the same time as my big sister gave birth, because they made a joke of it. They said, "Where does your mother sleep, at the head or the foot?" ( she laughs ) You know, it was really, it was gossip going around the town, in the town that my mother gave birth to a child the same as her daughter.

SIGRIST: So anyway, in Bayonne your mother has this egg business. Now, did you kids help out with this business at all?

GARDNER: Yes, yes. We did. We would help her and, you know, on the day she had to make the delivery. And, you know, bring it to this one and that one and, you know.

SIGRIST: Did you all live with your mother still?

GARDNER: Yes. Yes, we all lived together for a long time, until we were married.

SIGRIST: How soon after you got to America did your brother Abe

die?

GARDNER: We came in 1921 and he died in 1923.

SIGRIST: So soon thereafter. How did he die from a tonsillectomy?

GARDNER: Well, we don't know. We never performed an autopsy. But he was told he could come, it was in Brooklyn, at the time it was called The Israel Zion Hospital. It was new. And then later it was changed to Maimonedes. Now it's called Maimonedes Hospital.

SIGRIST: Maimonedes.

GARDNER: Yes. And we don't know. We don't know, because it's so seldom when you hear of anyone dying of, he was told he had bad tonsils, he was told he comes in in the morning, he could go home at night, and he would not have these colds which kept him from working, you know. And it was so tragic, so tragic.

SIGRIST: Now, my question for you is that with this yet another tragedy in your mother's life, did she blame America for that?

GARDNER: No, no. She had, she had the most wonderful way of

getting over, she believed in God. She believed that whatever happened, it's God's will. So she didn't blame anyone. She couldn't blame God, and she couldn't blame anyone else. She said that was destiny. That was the way it had to be, or so she was never bitter. She never got bitter. But she held on to us more tightly because, and we were, and I was scared to death because I figured in my own mind that it seemed that the oldest always goes, you know. And I was so scared that my sister would be next and so I always said I give up my life to save her, or at least do everything to save her because I didn't think my mother could stand another death. And so it was constant with me. It was, my sister was always constant, the fear of if anything happened to her. And if she was ill, she became ill here when she came here. She developed something, kidney trouble, but they were able to help her. But she was always sheltered by my mother, because she lived with my mother even when she was married and had kids. And instead of being jealous of her because she was favored by my mother and pampered and lived with her and helped to bring up her children, I felt that that was wonderful that she had to be saved and I wanted to do everything to help her so that she

wouldn't die.

SIGRIST: Ultimately was your mother happy she came to America?

GARDNER: Yes, yes. She was very happy. She was grateful that she was here and that she had us, the remaining children. And that's all she wanted was for us to be okay.

SIGRIST: Did she ever want to go back to Russia?

GARDNER: Never, never. Nobody ever. I don't know of anyone who ever wanted to go back to that place. My God. How much more do you need? ( she laughs )

SIGRIST: I guess my final question for you is are you happy that your mother made that decision and brought you all over here?

GARDNER: Oh, I'm the, I was the happiest child in the whole world to come here. It was America, it was freedom, it was opportunity, it was everything. God Bless America, and anyone who ever talked about, against America, I just would cross them off. I couldn't understand how anyone could talk about this wonderful land with the opportunity and the freedom, after coming from Europe.

No way.

SIGRIST: Well, Mrs. Gardner, I want to thank you very much for allowing us all to come out to your house and for giving us your time and telling us your story.

GARDNER: Thank you.

SIGRIST: Thank you very much. This is Paul Sigrist signing off for the National Park Service.