

EI-610
EMILIE (MILCA) VAPENIK VALENTA
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INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.
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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED AND REVIEWED BY PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR, 5/1998

CZECHOSLOVAKIA, 1923
AGE 16
NO SHIP NAME RECORDED

SIGRIST: Good afternoon, this is Paul Sigrist for the National
Park Service. Today is May 1st, 1995. I'm in Latham
[NY], at the Lady of Hope Residence with Emilie
Valenta. Mrs. Valenta came from Czechoslovakia in
November of 1923. She was sixteen years old at that
time. Mrs. Valenta, can we begin by you giving me
your birth date.

VALENTA: Of course. My, I was born September 28th, 1907.

SIGRIST: And what is your maiden name?

VALENTA: My maiden name is Vapenik. Emilie, E-M-I-L-I-E,
Emilie. Vapenik, V-A-P-E-N-I-K, Vapenik.

SIGRIST: Vapenik.

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VALENTA: Vapenik, yes.

SIGRIST: And, did your mother or father ever tell you a story about when you were born?

VALENTA: No. You know, in Europe mother or, or father, they don't talk about such a things like I find out with my children here, yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when a brother or sister was born, when you were older?

VALENTA: Uh, I think I remember little bit my younger sister, when she was born. She was born home, naturally, and, but I remember my mom was in a bed and I heard a, a cry from her and I heard a baby was crying. And there she was, a little baby wrapped up in a little towel or whatever it was. It's such a long time ago. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: How, did, was there, was there a way that parents explained babies to, to their children?

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VALENTA: No, no, no.

SIGRIST: One day there wasn't a baby and the next day there was.

VALENTA: No, no. They were old-fashion(s) mother. They never teach anything like that.

SIGRIST: What, what was the name of the town that you were born in?

VALENTA: Well, town was Bojkovice, Krhov was little village, residents about ninety people.

SIGRIST: That's where your family lived?

VALENTA: The village, yes. And we had a school there, and a church we had to go to a city. It was Bojkovice, B-O-J-K-O-V-I-C-E, Bojkovice.

SIGRIST: Thanks. And the name of the, the village? Can you spell that, please?

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VALENTA: Village was Krhov, K-R-H-O-V, Krhov, yes.

SIGRIST: What, what do you remember yourself about living in that village? (Mrs. Valenta sighs) What did the village look like?

VALENTA: It was very nice. We had a, oh, I would say, looks like two story house. It was a higher, we had a, bottom was like a place for the goat or a cow. And that was built up so that you didn't hear anything upper level because it was a stone house. And, houses were nice. They had a garden(s) front of them, picket fence all around the house and, of course, it was not pavement road. It was all dirt road and stones. And was little brook through the village. As children we used to go bathe our feet there, special on Easter Friday we had to go and wash out feet in the water just like Christ did. (she laughs) And that's, and we had beautiful woods. We used to go through the woods Sunday and dance, national dances are in the village, or Maytime, you know. It was very, very nice, yes.

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SIGRIST: Can you describe for me what the house was built from?
What did they make the house out of?

VALENTA: Well, it was, as I said, it was a stone and a brick.
It was bottom stones, like they have a, a stones just,
blocks like they have here, you know, basement built.
And we had like a cellar there that was all cooling
system. We had milk there and stuff, potatoes and
vegetables. And we had a regular roof. Some on
the village, very small were like I would say, like
a camp(s), you know, they would have a straw roof.
But we have a slate roof, yeah. And it was very nice.
We didn't have a big, we had a big living room and
we had our beds there, it was four of us children. And
they used to call like "pokoj." That's like living
room, but was nice big table there and then nice beds,
nice cover and nice curtains and was high, you know.
Higher than just like first level.

SIGRIST: Can you spell "pokoj" for me?

VALENTA: Pokoj. It's P-O-K-O-J, pokoj.

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SIGRIST: And that means like a...

VALENTA: It's a "pokoj."

SIGRIST: ...living room.

VALENTA: Like a living room, yes, yes. And beauti--...

SIGRIST: What kind of floor did you have in the house?

VALENTA: We had good floor. We had no carpeting, of course. We had to scrub them. Every Friday we had to scrub the floors. That was...

SIGRIST: What were the floors made from?

VALENTA: Nice wood, wood floor. All wood floor. Nice wood, yes, because we all owned a lot of forest, our woods. And you sell it and they make all this nice, for woodwork and everything else, you know. So...

SIGRIST: Were there windows in the house?

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VALENTA: Oh, yes. We had beautiful windows, beautiful drapes,
yeah, all white, everything, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: How did you light the inside of the house?

VALENTA: Of course, lanterns and lamps, yes.

SIGRIST: And, and what, what kind of a lamp did you use?

VALENTA: Just like they use here. They call it "hurricane
lamps," you know. Kerosene, you know, kerosene lamps.
Not electric, there was nothing electric. I'll tell
you later on when I was so surprised after four years
when I went there. (she laughs) So...

SIGRIST: Did you have candles?

VALENTA: Oh, yes. We had candles, too, yes. We had candles,
also.

SIGRIST: Did you make the candles?

VALENTA: No, we didn't. We didn't make it. They used to,

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certain people on different places, they make candles.
But we never make candle in my...

SIGRIST: How did you heat the house?

VALENTA: (she laughs) It was a big oven and it was wood, all
wood. And that's supposed to heat up the kitchen and
the living room, "pokoj," and a little room another
two beds, like a bedroom. And we had this kind of a thing
(she gestures), like I bought for here...

SIGRIST: This is a beautiful armoire.

VALENTA: It reminds me of Europe. Armoires, yes. And we had
for clothing that (gesturing to the armoire), you know,
and a little chest (she gestures), just like I have
here, you know. So that was our thing, yes.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the stove that heated the building?

VALENTA: It was black stove, you know, that, I had one when I
came to America in a little apartment, too. (she
laughs) It was black top, I remember, and you put

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the wood, chunk of wood(s) there and that heats it up
on top. You could put your iron there, you know, the
solid iron, or your brick to warm, a regular brick
to wrap it up for your feet in the bed when it was really
cold or if you were sick. And, and that was only
heating we had, yes.

SIGRIST: Now, you said beneath the house was a place for
animals.

VALENTA: Yes.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me the animals that you had and
how you kept them.

VALENTA: Oh, well, we had a cow, as I said, before the war,
First War. And a goat. And we had chickens. They
were outside in another place, and there were pigs.
But we had only the goats and cow there. And...

SIGRIST: Did the cow have a name?

VALENTA: No, that I don't remember. (she laughs) I was too,

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too young to remember all that way back.

SIGRIST: So you had a cow and goats and chickens and, how did you use the animals?

VALENTA: Well, we had chickens. We would kill them and we would can them, you know, preserving for the winter, and the pigs also. So we have our own meat. Otherwise we, we wouldn't get any meat or we had to go to city. And you didn't have no transportation. You had to walk to a city that was about three quarter of a mile(s), almost mile. Oh, what I'm saying, three quarter of an hour, how long that's, that is I can't remember.

SIGRIST: Couple miles anyway.

VALENTA: Yes, couple miles. Because I remember when I had to walk to church my feet were hurting me but I made First Communion. (she laughs) So, but...

SIGRIST: Who would have killed the animals?

VALENTA: Usually ourself, fathers, you know. If my father

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wasn't there, so we had always somebody that they done that. My mother, my grandmother would kill a duck or chicken. She would just cut the neck off and that was that. (she laughs) I couldn't see it.

SIGRIST: You mentioned in the house you remembered there being a table and an armoire...

VALENTA: Yes.

SIGRIST: Is there any other piece of furniture that, that sticks out in your mind in the house?

VALENTA: Well, we had chairs, you know, we had chairs and we had mirror, too, and little things just like you had that was for that country, you know, little things, yes.

SIGRIST: What about the kitchen? How, how did you prepare, cook food in this house?

VALENTA: Well, we had also table there, or we had a big board and you been doing the bread in there, and you had big, big bowls that you mix up your pastry or your bread.

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We had regular pots, you know, they were most of them iron pots. And they cook fast or keep the heat fast on the stove, too, you know, longer.

SIGRIST: Was this the same stove that you used to heat the house with or did you have a separate stove to keep...

VALENTA: No, that was the only stove but we had, as I says, we had a big, what do they call it, that they bake bread...

SIGRIST: Oven?

VALENTA: A big, big oven that's not like an oven but it's like a, bakery shop they have these big things, I can remember really (she laughs)...

SIGRIST: It's a separate thing for bread.

VALENTA: A separate thing, yes, yes. And we, we would heat that up and that gives you heat now because houses were built up solid. They were warm. They, not like these houses. (she gestures to the wall where her electrical

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wall outlet has a plastic cover) Wind sometimes blows through that socket or whatever if I didn't have that. But keeps it warm and summertimes it's cool in the house. They were built well.

SIGRIST: Was, describe winters for me in this part of the world.

VALENTA: Ah, winters were sometimes hard, yes. The snow and...

SIGRIST: Do you have a story about a particular experience during, during a wintertime?

VALENTA: Well, children on a small village like that, my street was little bit, as I told you, it's a dirt, dirt road and it was little bit like on a hill, and as (a) children we had a sled, you know, that, a made-up home sled, so we sleigh on that. And by the school it was a, a blacksmith and there was little bit pond there so we had, water frozen we skate there. We had also skates made wood and skated. When I was little girl, six years old, and I broke my ankles and from then on I never want to, which I love to see skating, even here the professionals, and but I never want to

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put then on, when, when I, I raised my children I was
so scared they would break off their legs. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: How did they treat your ankle when you broke it? (Mrs.
Valenta sighs) How, what was the procedure?

VALENTA: Most, most of the time grandmothers treated. Bandaged
it and bathed it and all kinds of herbs and everything
else and it healed up.

SIGRIST: Can you talk to me a little bit about some of these
remedies that you remember that, that were used for
different, different illnesses?

VALENTA: Oh, there was so many. My grandma, she fell. She
broke her knee and you could of seen the open, the
bones and she cooked all kinds of herbs. Pick it up
in the field, you know, like hershmonic [ph]. That's
a, they're selling it for tea now in drugstore, that's
(chamomile?) tea. Or linden, linden tree that
blossomed at spring. I used to do that even here.
(she laughs) And she cooked all that, different things,
and she soaked her knee. And surprising, I never could

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believe it when you tell people here, they can't
believe it that it happened. The wound healed all
up and it grow all together. She bandaged it, putting
everyday. We didn't have bandages like we have now.
We ripped up the sheets and tied it up, you know.
And, and it healed up. And she, she lived, she was ninety
one years old when she died, yes.

SIGRIST: Was this your mother's mother or...?

VALENTA: My mother's mother.

SIGRIST: What sticks out in your mind about your grandmother
when you think back?

VALENTA: Oh she was a great grandmother. Special when my mom
had to go during the wars, I, my father was here in
America. When he left, 1913. And my mom had to go
to work in Budapest and we had so little to eat, my
grandmother's baking. Christmas came and we had
so little. We had walnuts and she baked a bread and
little bit pastry and children would come and sing
the Christmas carols. She would fix a little bowl and

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bring it in and we cried, "Grandma, don't give them everything. We're going to have nothing." And she says, "Oh, don't worry children. We're giving it to them and God will send us somebody who will give it to us. And surprising, but hour later we had for Christmas Eve only the soup and the walnuts and some dried prunes to eat. That's all we had, and the homemade bread, rye bread, as I would say here. And about an hour my mom came from Budapest with my older sister and brought us all kinds of good things. And my grandma says, "See, I told you that God will bless us because we gave and he's going to return it. And Mommy's here and she, he brought her up here safely and she brought us all these nice things. That's what I remember Grandmother, yes. She was very, very good to us.

SIGRIST: Do you remember your grandmother's name?

VALENTA: Katherine.

SIGRIST: Do you remember her maiden name?

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VALENTA: Ah, Jurasek. It's J-U-R-Jurasek-E-K. Ju Ra Sek, no,
just a second, it's J-U-R-A-S-E-K, Jurasek.

SIGRIST: Jurasek.

VALENTA: Yeah, Jurasek.

SIGRIST: Is there another story that you like to tell about your
grandmother from, (Mrs. Valenta sighs) from when you
were growing up with her? Maybe something, an
experience that you shared with her.

VALENTA: You know, mothers and grandmothers were very old-
fashioned in Europe. They, they didn't talk nothing
intimacy. Only they were kind to you. They made the
things for you or if you were little they sing you
little songs or cradle you. And, but they never,
they always, if we were sad they always says, "Well,
just don't cry. Everything's going to be better
tomorrow. We have a tomorrow." And that was it,
tomorrow, yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember a song or something that your

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grandmother taught you as a child? A song or a prayer, maybe.

VALENTA: Oh, prayers just like here, the Our Father, we say it in Czech. And if you tell me, I can remember to say it in Czech. I have Czech prayer book but I will have to read it. (they laugh) Ah, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Well, let's talk a little bit about your parents. We sort of got off the track.

VALENTA: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name.

VALENTA: My father's name was Joseph.

SIGRIST: And what was it in Czech?

VALENTA: Josef, Josef. It's J-O-S-E-K, no, F.

SIGRIST: F.

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VALENTA: Jo, Josef. You would say Josef.

SIGRIST: What do you know about his family background?

VALENTA: Not too much because I, his parents, I was very young.

I don't remember anything. He had three brothers and two sisters. That's all I remember. And two brothers were living, one was living next village and one was in our village and one was here in America. That was three brothers. And two sisters, they were, her name was Anna and Katherine, Katerjina [ph]. They were in different parts of Moravia. They were embroidery girls. They do a lot of embroidery, so they got jobs there in a store and they were doing this embroidery on the sleeves and aprons and things like that. And they used to come visit us often, yes. That's up...

SIGRIST: Were, were you in the Moravian section of Czechoslovakia? Is that where your town is?

VALENTA: That, yes. That was in Moravia, yes.

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SIGRIST: What can you tell me about, because I know embroidery is very important...

VALENTA: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: ... relative to that particular culture. What can you tell me about their work as embroiderers or maybe your own experience as a child with embroidery.

VALENTA: It was, yes. Embroidery is a very beautiful, special on a costume that'd be worn on a special occasions, you know. You had this pretty embroidery on the sleeves and in the front and the big, red skirts, flowers something like I have leaves on my blouse (she gestures). And pretty white aprons and a little red and blue and stripes made of a different material and embroidery leaves and flowers. Very, very festive and very beautiful, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: What about headwear? What did people wear on their head?

VALENTA: We used to wear, as they used to call it many years ago

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here, "babushka," kerchiefs, that's what we wore. And, of course, then we improve. When I was older, we have the hats, too. But most of the time, like my grandmother wore the shawls, you know, and the kerchiefs tied up, yes.

SIGRIST: What kind of shoes did you wear as a child?

VALENTA: We have regular shoes, too, only all big, just like we're wearing these walking shoes, you know, that was. And you had one pair of shoes to go into church. (she laughs) Yes.

SIGRIST: What kind of underwear did you wear at that time?

VALENTA: That was all long underwear, you know, cotton underwear, warm. And the dress-up underwear for winter, yes. All, everybody wore long underwear, whether it was a girl or a boy (she laughs) for winter, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: And where did you get the clothing?

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VALENTA: Well, we had to go to city to buy it, you know, in the clothing. In the village, we didn't have nothing. We only had regular (microphone disturbance), pardon me, regular big store with like little things to buy and anything big we had to walk to the city to buy it, yes. But you could have bought it not very much during that era until after that First War was over. Then we had more, more stuff.

SIGRIST: Things became more available.

VALENTA: Yes, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Well, let's get back to your dad, here. Tell me what your father's personality was like. What was he like as a person?

VALENTA: Ah, what do I remember of my father? He was very good father. He never punished us for anything, you know, beat us or anything like that. He was very, very good father, loving father I would say. Only my brother, he was the only boy in a, four girls, three girls, I can't even remember. (she laughs) Josephine, me, my

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sister Mary, yeah, three girls and one boy. Four children.

SIGRIST: What was the boy's name?

VALENTA: Ah, ah, Aloeis, Louis, Aloeis, A-L-O-E-I-S, Aloeis.

And he was little bit spoiled from all of us And my father, he plant a beautiful tree, apple tree, young tree, and my brother climb on it and he broke the branch. And that's the first time I saw my father took a belt and he give him whacking on his back (she laughs) and that's the first time I saw him ever hit anyone, anybody. It was, so I says, after that I used to tell him, too, when he grow up, I says, "Well, you were spanking, not us." (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Do you know how your parents met?

VALENTA: No, that I don't know. They were in a, my father was in a different village than was Bzova village, a little past us about fifteen, twenty minutes walking. Like we have here close village when I was in, I came from Schenectady and we had Scotia village, so...

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SIGRIST: What was the name of the village again?

VALENTA: Bzova. It is B-S, no, B-Z-O-V-A, Bzova. (she laughs)
I have...

SIGRIST: You didn't know this was going to be a spelling bee.

VALENTA: No. (they laugh) You know, it takes me, hard because
even when I write Czech letter I, I have time I have
to watch myself. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: It saves us time looking it up on the atlas later.

VALENTA: Yes.

SIGRIST: Is there a story that you associate with you and your
father? Some, something that you did together or
something when you were a kid?

VALENTA: No.

SIGRIST: Of course, he came over here. I realize that.

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VALENTA: Yeah, he was here when I came, when he came back I was already twelve years old. And he says, "I thought you'd be grown-up lady but you're so small." I says to Father, I says, "Well, why I'm so small is because we didn't have enough food. I didn't have any milk or nothing, so I didn't grow enough." And, of course, then he bought that cow. He didn't brought too, he brought money and the exchange was good that time, 1918, so he bought horses and a wagon so we had enough land to start it all over.

SIGRIST: Yeah, so your life changed a lot when he came back then.

VALENTA: Yes, oh yes. And...

SIGRIST: Why did he go to America in the first place?

VALENTA: Well, as I said, people were searching for better living and a lot of young girls like my age when I came here, they just want to see what the countries are because we all heard everything. America is

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everything in gold and beautiful. (she laughs) I sometimes didn't find it when I came in first. It wasn't so. (she laughs) So that's what, five men from village, they left but it was sad. The war, we were supposed to, my father says, "I'm going send you tickets for the boat," and to my mom, "and you're going to come in six months, I promise you." Well, it was all locked up and we were stranded and we didn't hear from my father at all.

SIGRIST: And that was because of the First World War?

VALENTA: Yes, and there was no mail 'til, soon as that war was over, we got first letter and a big box of clothes for us and material. And my mother was good sewer so she made us clothes and I was the best dressed girl in the school, in the village then.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the, the dress that you had? Can you describe it for me?

VALENTA: Well, it was a navy blue, pretty dress and it had a little white collar and cuffs on it and it was just

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beautiful. That was my first beautiful dress, yes,
yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember your father leaving in 1913?

VALENTA: A little bit. I was only seven years old. I only we
went to village, I mean a city, a train station and
then they went to Bremen or wherever, I can't remember.
We must have went from Germany, too, because that's
close to the sea. But I only remember that I cried
and Mom cried and, of course, my youngest sister was only
two years old baby and that's all I remember out of
that Father left. Of course, when he came back and
from pictures I remember he was older, you know, but
I was twelve years old growing up and he thought I'm
going to be very grown up girl. Of course, my father
was older than my mom. My mom was eighteen years old
when she got married and my father was about seven or
eight years older from my mother. And same thing
happens to me. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: Do you know what year your parents were married?

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VALENTA: No, I don't remember, no.

SIGRIST: Who is the oldest in the family of the children?

VALENTA: From my family?

SIGRIST: Yes.

VALENTA: My sister, uh, Jose--...

SIGRIST: Josephine.

VALENTA: Josephine, yes.

SIGRIST: She's the oldest. How many, how many years older than
you is Josephine?

VALENTA: Uh, five years.

SIGRIST: Five years.

VALENTA: Five years because the child was between us boy and we
had a fire in the house and my mom tried to save(d) us

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and she hold the baby and when she jumped the boy was injured, so he died. So that's why was five years between us. But most of the siblings were like two years apart, or like that, yes.

SIGRIST: Was that the only child that you know of that died?

VALENTA: Yeah, that's the only child, yes.

SIGRIST: How old was he when that happened?

VALENTA: Well, must have been infant only, I, uh, about another year, or year old. That's how I know it was infant, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Was that before you were born, or do you remember the fire?

VALENTA: No, I do not remember because must have been just after, there was five years between me and my sister so it must have been, she might have been two years old or two and a half years old, three, you know, in the baby years.

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SIGRIST: I see. When your father came to America in 1913, where did he settle?

VALENTA: Schenectady, New York.

SIGRIST: And what did he do?

VALENTA: He was working in General Electric, General...

SIGRIST: Oh. Do you know what he was doing specifically?

VALENTA: Yes. He was doing as a press operator in, uh, pottery that they made. They made these sockets for electric, you know, these little things that you plug in and all kinds of different things. And that's what he was doing, yeah. He was an operator there on a pressing stuff, on the press, yeah. It's all from, uh, I say clay, I don't know. Must be. Then they glaze it, then they put it in an oven and they glaze it and bake it, you know.

SIGRIST: So he's, he's...

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VALENTA: Porcelain department.

SIGRIST: Porcelain.

VALENTA: The porcelain.

SIGRIST: Yeah, he's making these little porcelain fixtures...

VALENTA: Yes, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: ...for the electrical wiring.

VALENTA: Yeah, electrical, yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, that's interesting.

VALENTA: Yes, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Let's talk about your mom. What was your mother's
name?

VALENTA: My mother's name, name was Regena (pronouncing a hard

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"g"), Regena (pronouncing a soft "g"), Regena (using the hard "g"). R-E-G-E-N-A.

SIGRIST: And what was her maiden name?

VALENTA: Jurasek, J-U-R-A-S-E-K, Jurasek. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: I apologize. That's the second time I've made you spell that. (he laughs)

VALENTA: Yes. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: I realize we were talking about your grandmother. (they laugh) Tell me, tell me what your mother's personality was like.

VALENTA: Ah, well, my mother was very vivacious lady and she was young. As I said, she got married, she had children, she was young. And, but she was sick all during the wartime. She developed, because we didn't have enough food, she was very sick. We almost lost her and we couldn't get medication. Doctor gave medication, whatever he could give her. And only

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what save her, she didn't have any blood, to have a
wine or cognac to drink to build her blood up and that
he had to prescribe it. She was able to buy
it. And we didn't have much money, so I had good
godparents, I forgot their name really (she laughs),
and they were better, better little bit well off, so
they were helping us and that saved my mother, yes. So,
but otherwise she was just like any mother, yes. But
that I remember that, and this is why she died here
in America only fifty one years old, yes. She died very
young.

SIGRIST: Because she was so weakened by this...

VALENTA: Yes, body, her body never got strong really, yes.

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

SIGRIST: Since so much of your childhood was spent during the

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years of World War One...,

VALENTA: Yes.

SIGRIST: ...you know, as you were growing up, why don't we begin to talk about that and your recollections of life during that time period between 1914 and 1918. What sticks out in your mind about, about the period around World War One?

VALENTA: (she sighs) As I told, if I would talk in a previous, that it was a hard time. We had to go and pick out in a field even different kind of a roots to survive as kids, you know, or work in the field for people and they gave you, who had like better farming, you know, more horses and cows, so we helped them work because they took all the men to war. So women and children had to work. So before we went to school, I was telling that to people at the table yesterday, that how hard we had to work, you know. I remember before I went to school I was in the field six o'clock in the morning and work in the field and then we went to school. And, but we survive.

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SIGRIST: Was the town occupied by, by any particular military group?

VALENTA: No, they were just kind of like regiment, you know, and we knew when they come in. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: What, what sticks out in your mind about when, when the soldiers would come into town?

VALENTA: Well, I really don't remember, as I said I was too young, but I only remember when they came to the house, whatever they want to take, they took it. We couldn't (refuse?) because I think they would have killed us. So that was that. So we just gave up, let them take whatever they find. Only that what we hidden in our well, our butter and egg, so they couldn't find. They never went there because they wouldn't think about it, (she laughs) so we had that, yes.

SIGRIST: What about the livestock? Did they...

VALENTA: No, they, as I say, they would take, kill the chickens

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they would take or, or rabbit. We had rabbits, also.
They would take that but they wouldn't kill the cow
or anything like that, or horse, you know. But they
would, they would kill small pig and take it. They
use it for themselves and the chickens and things like
that. But they went through the mills and would
take the flours and, but, this is why we didn't put
any wheat through the mills. We rather grind it
on a little grinder at home. It was rough. It
was just like oatmeal here, (she laughs) making the
pancakes.

SIGRIST: Was food rationed at that time? Did you have to go get
food...

VALENTA: No, no, there was nothing to ration, nothing. They
probably didn't even know that such a thing exist. (she
laughs)

SIGRIST: You mentioned your mother was so, so debilitated from
not eating a lot and she got sick. What about the
children?

VALENTA: Well, children are different because I think you keep up more energy in, from other children you share things, you know, with the neighbor kids and like that. So it helps like that. My younger sister, she developed soft bones, too. She was very sick girl, child. We had to make a bag of sand and put her summertime on the sand and lay on the sun. And we thought she'd never walk, you know, the crickets [sic] they call it, crickets [sic], that's the soft bones. And she also died here very young, only fifty three years old, yes. So, I'm the strongest from all of them. (they laugh) I don't know why? But I tell you why, after my father came from America and had the cows, I was milking the cows. And I brought so little in the pail and my grandmother would say, "What happened to that cow? She doesn't give any milk. We have to search for it." And I never told her that I drank it, the hot milk, soon as I milk it. And that's why I was growing. I didn't need no rouge when I was in that age like children here, twelve years old, you know, they use make up. My cheeks were red and I was growing up. And this is why I have strong bones. I never broke any bones yet in my body, (she laughs)

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so...

SIGRIST: Tell me how you milk a cow. Describe for me the process of milking a cow.

VALENTA: Oh, don't you know how to milk a cow? You have a little stool and a pail between your knees and you just go one, two, three, four (she gestures), one, two, three, four. (she laughs) And I...

SIGRIST: You're making motions with your hand up and down.

VALENTA: Right, yes, like this. (she gestures) And it's foaming up until you fill up the pail. And then when we, we put it in our, our cellar that's under the house and you have all the cream. And milk turns sour just like yogurt here, then we made butter in a tank(s). You beat it up until you have a butter. And I used to go and take that cream and put it on a rye bread and made it. My grandma would come, you put a little board on that, uh, little pan, it's like crock here. And stone on top of it. And my grandmother's going to take the sour cream and she says, "I don't know what

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SIGRIST: Did you have a clock in the house?

VALENTA: I think it was one clock only in the house, yes. That was in the, the, as I said, that parlor where we sleep, you know, that living room, you know, yes.

SIGRIST: So you have a very early breakfast.

VALENTA: Yes.

SIGRIST: And then what's the next meal that you eat?

VALENTA: It was twelve o'clock. Grandmother or Mom would make a big bowl of soup and a rye bread and that was it for lunch.

SIGRIST: And how would she make soup? What was the process?

VALENTA: Well, you make barley soup, potato soup if we had sour cream, our own, so Grandma fix up the sour cream and thicken it up. It was good soup, homemade. It reminds me over here where I am now [i.e. Our Lady Of Hope Residence, Latham, New York], they have good soups

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just like we used to make. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: So that's the midday meal, twelve o'clock.

VALENTA: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: And what was the, the...

VALENTA: Suppertime we would have vegetable. We had meat very little, maybe once a week, only meat on Sunday because we couldn't afford to spend money for meat. Unless we had our own, if we killed a chicken. But you had to wait 'til they grow up a little bit, you know. So, or if they killed a goat or if a lamb sometimes. People have you buy it from them. People used to, in the village, like to share together, yes. So we had, but we had very little meat. But it was mostly potatoes and carrots and cabbage and things like that, you know. Cauliflower we planted and all this stuff. Cut up everything, that's how it was. And our coffee, again, and we had to dry fruit or fresh fruit, summertime on the tree we pick it up, cut it up and eat it. That's how it was.

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SIGRIST: What, what, and what time was that final meal?

VALENTA: Oh, that usually was 6:00, 6:30, yes.

SIGRIST: And then what time did you go to bed?

VALENTA: Oh, early. Well, summertime when it gets dark everybody because we wouldn't have a lantern going up. Soon as it got dark, everybody were in bed. (she laughs) Wintertime it was 7:00, 7:30. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: Because with the Kleenex in your hand because the microphone will pick that up.

VALENTA: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: It's rubbing the, the Kleenex.

VALENTA: I'm going to throw them. I don't need it.

SIGRIST: Tell me about school. How old are you when you start school?

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VALENTA: Ah, six, six years old.

SIGRIST: Now, when you were six it was just, the war was just
either beginning or...

VALENTA: Yes, yes, yeah, start of the war.

SIGRIST: Right. Tell me a little bit about your experiences of
going to school at that time.

VALENTA: Well, we had school in our village and I have picture
somewheres but I think it's an old album. I think my
daughter took it. (she laughs) I'm so mixed up. I'm
just searching for things where, where I have to, if
I bring anything and if she's going to have it and if
she's going to give it to me back. (she laughs) But,
no, it was a nice school. We were taught just like
all the children teach in here. We had to know how to
write properly.

SIGRIST: In what language were you taught?

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VALENTA: Only Czech, only Czech language.

SIGRIST: So you didn't have to learn German or...

VALENTA: No. Later, after that, Second World War, children did learn to speak. And like my husband, my late husband, he, he knew how to speak German, yes.

SIGRIST: That's, of course, quite a bit later.

VALENTA: That's later on, yes, so...

SIGRIST: Was the school a separate building?

VALENTA: Yes, all, all, end of the (microphone disturbance), pardon me, end of the village was the school and it was nice. They had a big, where we play in the garden like they have at, Little Field, they call it. We used to let priest come in once a week, taught us how to, religion. That was one hour and, just like, I, I went to school about, let me see, through fifth, fifth grade. That's all I have schooling. That's all I have schooling.

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SIGRIST: Is there a teacher that sticks out in your mind about going to school when you were in Czechoslovakia?

VALENTA: (she laughs heartily) I had a young teacher, I never forget. You had to be, they were very strict in, teachers in Europe those days. I don't know now.

I don't think they now like that because I have nephew, my brother's son, in Prague and he's different. (she laughs) I remember he was tall gentleman and if you whisper little bit, you had to go to his desk and he had like a ruler. And you put your hand in and he give you slapping on your, on your hand. (she laughs) The teacher, listen, not very hard but it's embarrassing in front of the class, yes. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: What religion were you?

VALENTA: Catholic.

SIGRIST: And how many Catholics lived in this village?

VALENTA: Almost everybody were Catholics, everybody, yes.

SIGRIST: Everybody was Catholic that you know of.

VALENTA: That I know, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: You said that the church, there wasn't a church,
though, right? You had to go...

VALENTA: Well, a city, yeah. A beautiful church in the city.
And when I went there first time in 1967, I went to
that church there. It was still there beautiful, yes.

SIGRIST: But there was no church in your village as such.

VALENTA: No, no.

SIGRIST: How did you practice your religion at home?

VALENTA: Well, we had to say a prayer with Grandma, if she was
with us, or Mother. We say a prayer every meal, just
like I enjoy it here, too. And, we read the book, you
know, like evening we had to say a prayer, kneel by the
bed and say your prayer. Prayer for parents, praying

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for your sisters if they're away or whatever, and just like all Catholics do, yes.

SIGRIST: Did any members of the clergy ever visit your house for any reason?

VALENTA: Only when you're dying, yes, yes. Only when you're dying, you call them, yes.

SIGRIST: Can you explain to me how you celebrated Christmas?

VALENTA: Oh, even if we had so little, we still celebrate Christmas. We would go and cut tree in the woods. And we made all the, the things, decoration ourselves, cut the papers and make a chain and walnuts, we wrapped it up in different color papers or prunes and string it up with a string through it and thread and hang it up. Or we bake cookies and we hang it up and we had candles, put it on the Christmas tree. We had to watch them. They had little things that you clipped it up and put the candles. And I remember first year when I was married my husband and I, we, we had candles like that, too, just to remind us that what we had when we

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were children (she laughs), yes.

SIGRIST: Is there special Czech food that is served only at Christmas time?

VALENTA: Oh, yes. Yule(s)time with, uh, prunes, cooked prunes. Everybody had dish of cooked prunes. And then you had a barley soup with a little carrots cut in, you know, and preparing all the garlic in it and onions and different things, spices. And it's good soup, you know, you make it thickening with a little butter. We never had margarine. We use butter. (she laugh) Or we had that fat like from pigs, lard, you know, and that was healthy. And then now we cannot eat it because it's a high cholesterol. (she laughs) So, then we had barley that's baked. You cook it with mushrooms. You cook your barley and cook your mushroom chopped, chop it up. Add(s) pepper and salt and garlic. You put it in a dish. You bake it. Or we had a carp, piece of fish, if we were able to get it. And that was, or we had a potato salad. That's the Czech potato salad, not mayonnaise. We didn't know what mayonnaise was. It was only vinegar, oil and a little

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bit butter, make it up. And that was we shared that honey waffles, like in a church You put a little honey on it piece. That was Christmas Eve. And I've been not, when my family was home, So even now, when I was in I still was able to from church, you know,

like a flour and paste and toss it our Christmas Eve, yes. And then and, it was just like little receiving Holy Communion. and you share with each little traditional, you know, to doing it all my life 'til when my children were home. apartment in Schenectady so sometimes get it from girls so...

SIGRIST: Do you exchange gifts of some sort?

VALENTA: Oh, oh yes, we did. But that was not gifts. That was only something you made home and things like that, you know. Just very little, little things, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Is there a, is there a Christmas song that you remember in Czech?

VALENTA: Ah, yes. It's just almost same thing as we sing here, uh....

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SIGRIST: Could you sing it for us on tape?

VALENTA: You mean Czech?! (she laughs heartily)

SIGRIST: In Czech, yes, yeah, in Czech.

VALENTA: I don't think I remember the words, dear. It's, uh, oh
gosh, my mind is blank. I'm thinking so many things.

(Mr. Sigrist laughs) It, it's almost same thing as
we have "Holy Night"...

SIGRIST: "Silent Night?"

VALENTA: "Silent Night," "Silent Night." Same thing, it,
because it did, came from Germany "Silent Night." So,
only it was Czech. I would have to, I should, if I
know that this going to go on I would have opened my,
find my, find my Czech prayer book. It must be in
there. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Well, that's okay.

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VALENTA: But, yes.

SIGRIST: What about Easter? Was Easter an important...

VALENTA: Oh, yes. Easter was important, too. That was...

SIGRIST: You mentioned washing your feet in the brook. Were there other ways that, that you celebrated Easter?

VALENTA: Oh, yes. You bake like a challah, you know, special bread and you do make a little, in a napkin, little thing you, eggs color, beautiful color, different colors. We used to do it with bags, you know, and the different colors in it. It was very interesting. And you bring it to neighbors or your favorite friend, you know. And it, boys used to, made a little, just like weeping willow, bend the tree and they made things and they go in neighborhood girls and they touch them with it and she had to give him a big kiss. (she laughs) It was funny. It was fun, you know, yes. That, that, like we had to go Friday, that we had to get up and you can't do anything 'til you go in the creek and wash your feet and come back and then you could have a

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I can breakfast, yes. There's lots of little things I, even remember but it's, it's different here. Here is everything gifts and a big dinner, you know, it's nothing that significant like we used to have, yes.

SIGRIST: Were there any other celebrations during the year that you, that stick out in your mind?

VALENTA: Well, like the first of May...

SIGRIST: Which would be today.

VALENTA: Yes, first of May we made like a pole and all the girls and boys dressed and we had streamers. We hold the streamers and we dance all around it, you know. And I don't remember the song either what we, what we sang because if you don't sing it all the time or talk about it, you forget about it. And I didn't have no neighbors here to keep up my Czech language. One died that was in my apartment and I said, "I'm going to forget my own language." (she laughs) But I'm trying to just remember what I can, yes. But, that was a festive, you know, the first of May, yes. And, of

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course, like fourth of July, we celebrate sixth of
July and that was different, too.

SIGRIST: What does that signify, what, what...

VALENTA: Ah, that signified that, uh, make the country strong.
That's a month that we should celebrate, it's summer,
and brings everything that we could have like good
food, good field grows up and everything, and we,
we could have it like harvesting almost. And then
we not afraid of anything. We will be strong, so we
used to sing (she sings in Czech). That's, we had a
gymnast, we were gymnast, Czech people. And they,
that's, uh, gymnast is a strong mind and healthy body
, and this is the song about it. That we, we could be
strong. We're not afraid, you know, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Well, I got you to sing something. (they laugh) So it
was a celebration of the strength of the country...

VALENTA: Exactly, exactly. I cannot explain but that you put it
just right, yes, yes.

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SIGRIST: And, how was it celebrated? You, you, you sang the song and what else would you do?

VALENTA: Well, as I said, we marched through that village. We had our costumes, you know, as I described before. You had little red skirts and nice apron and sunflowers in our hair, some, we had little wreaths like made and bonnets, you know. And it's a festive, you know. It's a parade, like any parades we have in here in America, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: How did you wear your hair when you were growing up?

VALENTA: Oh, sometimes straight or pigtails or braided all around your head, you know, or...

SIGRIST: It was long.

VALENTA: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: What color was your hair?

VALENTA: My hair was always chestnut brown. (she laughs) Now,

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it's gray. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: All right. Well, you said that your life changed when your father came home after the war. He came, what year did he return?

VALENTA: He returned in 1918.

SIGRIST: He came right in 1918.

VALENTA: Yes, right, right after the war, yes.

SIGRIST: Tell, you mentioned that he went out and bought some more livestock.

VALENTA: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: What were some of the other ways that your life changed when he came back into, into your life?

VALENTA: Well, my older sister was in her, nineteen years old, and she met Czech from center of Bohemia, you know, a gentleman in Hungary he was a soldier there. And she

was going to be married and my father was only year
and a half home from America. And she got, they got
married and she left to near Prague, about hour
from Prague in (unintelligible). And she was
lonesome that she was far away from family. So my
father decide he's going to sell the home and we're going
to move to center Bohemia. I was fifteen then,
almost fifteen, fourteen and a half, something like
that. And my younger sister was, oh gosh, I can't
even remember, uh, must have been five years younger.
She's five years younger so she must have been about
nine, ten, around there. And my brother was between
us. So we sold our home and we bought a home in Pocapli.
That was industrial place around, it was like
one hour by train to Prague. And it was very
lovely country. And my father got a job here and there,
you know. And my sister was married, and my brother
and sister, younger sister were going to school. And
I wasn't doing, supposed to be trained as a
dressmaker, next door, she, was a shop there. And all
of a sudden, my father was corresponding with these
people in Schenectady and he decided, they asked me,
these people, to come to America and my father

wouldn't let me go. "Sixteen years old. Girl all alone," he says. "No, I won't let you, sixteen years old, go all alone big country like that," because he knew the country. And he says to my mother, "You know what? I'm going to go for one year and we both going to save money and we going to come back." They call me "Milca" in Czech, you know, instead of Emilie. I'm christening Emilie and they...

SIGRIST: How do you spell Milca?

VALENTA: Milca, M-I-L-C-A, Milca. It's a little curve on top, you know, over "C."

SIGRIST: Milca.

VALENTA: Milca, yeah. He says, "If Milca will want to stay in America," these people had two sons and they want me to come so he could marry their older, I could marry their older son. That was the parents' plan, you know, those days people matchmakers. Not nowadays. (she laughs) So, I came, as I show you the picture on my...

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SIGRIST: Well, but how did you feel about this? Did you want to go to America?

VALENTA: Yes, I did want to see it, yes. I did want to see America.

SIGRIST: What were you curious about?

VALENTA: Well, I thought, my father was speaking it was big and it was industrial and you could do more things, you know, and everything else. But I was a gym, uh, girl, to go into our gymnastic and I says to my father, "How am I going there?" He says, "Well, you got Czech clubs there and Slovak. You could go either one. They're both good," you know. So...

SIGRIST: Did you say that you had had some gymnast training in Czechoslovakia?

VALENTA: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit about that? I think that's very interesting.

VALENTA: Well, that's just like they have here, these children that you see them on television. They, they're marvelous. So, yes, we, but we didn't, been trained to do any competition. Just our physical fitness. That's why we would do it. And we have exhibition for ourselves only. But now they have a big festival, like my younger daughter and her husband were there last summer in Prague. They have big, all different nationalities were there. So...

SIGRIST: But you just pretty much did it, you know, people from different towns did it for themselves.

VALENTA: That's right, yes.

SIGRIST: Did, was this common for young ladies to get this training?

VALENTA: Oh yes, men, young boys, men and married women. there were classes. Little tots, you know, just like everything else. When you went to gym, you were five years old and do little things, you know. And so I,

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I really, we all love it, you know, that was our life, you know.

SIGRIST: The national sport, kind of, wasn't it like?

VALENTA: Yes, yes. So, my father decided he's going to come with me. So we both came to these people and my father got job right away in the G.E. [i.e.General Electric] because there was a lot of work here after the war, you know, then.

SIGRIST: Did your mother want you to go to America? How did your mother feel about it?

VALENTA: Well, she didn't feel bad because she knew she's going to come, too. If we don't return, that she's going to come maybe with my younger sister and my brother. But my brother was fourteen years old and he didn't want to go. My sister was married. She had two children. And my brother went for training in, in Prague in big hotel to be waiter and raise himself up. You got to go there and train for three years. You don't get any pay, just room and board or a little spending money, that's

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all. And then you get your papers that you trained and
you could go on your own, you know, when you grow up.
So he stayed there. But my mother did come. She...

SIGRIST: She actually did come.

VALENTA: She did come because, she came, I was engaged. (they
 laugh)

SIGRIST: I should have asked you this a little bit earlier. How
 did the family feel about leaving the village and
 moving to Prague?

VALENTA: Well, no, because it was better. It was a bigger place
 and a different way of living. Just like people go in,
 a lot of people here went to Canada or, or go into
 south searching for something, you know, different.
So that was same thing, same thing.

SIGRIST: So, so the family went willingly to, to Prague.

VALENTA: Exactly, yes, yes, yes, yes.

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SIGRIST: This is probably a good spot for me to just pause the tape and put another tape in (Mrs. Valenta laughs) and then we'll start the story about getting you to America. We're just going to hold on for a second here.

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist. We're now beginning tape two with Emilie Valenta, who came from Czechoslovakia in 1923 when she was sixteen. We, you had just begun to explain to us your father had been in contact with the people in Schenectady. They had an, an older son that they were hoping that you would marry when you came to this country. And you told me you wanted to come to this country. So tell me a little bit about the process of getting ready to come to this country.

VALENTA: Well, we were living in Pocapli in, uh, near Prague.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please.

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VALENTA: Yes. Pocapli, P-O-C-A-P-L-I, Pocapli.

SIGRIST: And that's just outside of Prague.

VALENTA: That's outside Prague. So my father, we went and take care of all the tickets and visum (visas?), and we're supposed to go from Bremen, Germany.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about getting the papers and the visas?

VALENTA: Ah, we had to go fill out the passport and all the other things, as you do in here, you know. But, as I say, I was only sixteen, and my father, he knew lot of in that place where we, it was a small city like Schenectady, too, so people are helping who were travelling and he knew a lot about it because he travelled before here. So he took care of it.

SIGRIST: In Czechoslovakia, did you have to undergo any medical exams?

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VALENTA: Oh, yes. We had to go through medical, too, yes. I had a vaccination, yes. We had to have it right. And, of course, that was already Republic, you know, 1918, so it was much easier than it would be any other way before. So, we didn't have no problem to go. You could go any place you wanted.

SIGRIST: That's right. It was its own country by then.

VALENTA: Yes, yes, right.

SIGRIST: It had become Czechoslovakia.

VALENTA: So when we got to Bremen...

SIGRIST: Well, now, wait now. (he laughs)

VALENTA: Oh.

SIGRIST: How long did it take you to get your papers?

VALENTA: Oh, oh, I think it took us about two months to get our papers. Everything filled out, everything was ready,

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too. Then they let you know that you're ready to go,
yes.

SIGRIST: What did you pack to take with you to America?

VALENTA: Not too much. (she laughs) I have little old-fashioned
suitcase that was not like we have now. I can't
describe it. It looks like a basket weave, you know,
old-fashioned...

SIGRIST: Wicker suitcase.

VALENTA: Wicker, that's what it is. I couldn't think of it.
Wicker suitcase. I had lovely suit on me and I had a
couple new dresses that I had made by dress,
dressmaker. They were already fashion. What I
brought, they were fashion and the fashion came
here following year, so I had a fashion dress. And
a...

SIGRIST: Can you describe the suit? You said you had a lovely
suit...

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VALENTA: I had lovely suit, gray suit, woolen suit because it was fall, and a hat to match. And I had nice shoes. And when I came to Schenectady to these people, they expected a little girl from a country with little babushka (she laughs), that kerchief on and old-fashioned shoes. And I came here dressed up like a young lady. (she laughs) You saw that picture on the passport.

SIGRIST: How long were the skirts at that time?

VALENTA: Oh, we had, (she gesture) about a half a leg, you know...

SIGRIST: Half up your calves.

VALENTA: Up on your calves, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: And what was the hat like? Can you describe the hat for me?

VALENTA: Well, it was gray. It matched, same material. We had beautiful millinery ladies. It was a big brim, you

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know, and I had longer hair. So it was really fashion, very nice, yes.

SIGRIST: Did you, did you mother and brothers and sisters travel to Bremen to say good-bye?

VALENTA: No, no, they...

SIGRIST: Can you describe saying good-bye to them?

VALENTA: Well, it was sad. It was sad but my father says to me, "Don't cry." He says, "If you don't come back within a year, if you're not going to go, Mama is going to come back." And that was that. That was, with the prayers that I will see her again, yes. And, of course, my older sister, she was married. I don't know when I'm going to see her. She was there. She had a husband and children. She had her own life, you know.

SIGRIST: Was there some kind of special dinner or something that the family did before you left?

VALENTA: No, no, no. Just, just like any other day.

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SIGRIST: Did someone give you something to take with you to
America as a remembrance of Czechoslovakia?

VALENTA: Well, I was given a little diary book. All my friends
wrote me something and my family, a little poem, and
many times I open it, even through the years, and I
cry over it in there. Leaves are all brown. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: And you still have it? (Mrs. Valenta nods "yes") Wow.
How did you get from, from Prague to Bremen?

VALENTA: With a train, train, yes.

SIGRIST: How long of a journey is that?

VALENTA: Oh dear, I wouldn't, I can't answer you that. (she
laughs)

SIGRIST: Was it overnight or...

VALENTA: Uh, yeah, I think so, yes, yes. It was overnight,
yeah. It was sleeping train, yes.

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SIGRIST: And it's just you and your father travelling, right?

VALENTA: That's all, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Nobody else from your town is going...

VALENTA: No, no, no. Just two of us, just two of us.

SIGRIST: What happened in Bremen?

VALENTA: Well, we met a lot of Slovak people, a lot of Polish people there. They went on the same ship. And a lot of Jewish people. We had to wait there. I don't know why that ship didn't come on time, so we spent the whole week there. So I bought myself a pair of earrings there (she laughs), yes. And they were looking for money, in Germany people, so, but finally we got on the ship and we had to, I had very hard time. I was sick all the seven days that, we had big storm and, oh, I told my father, "I never want to see America." And I didn't eat anything and the last day that we were almost going across to shore,

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VALENTA: I can't remember the ship. I used to remember. For so many years I says, "I never forget that ship." And now, as I said, it's seventy two years. It's hard to remember. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me where you slept in the ship?

VALENTA: Oh, we, we travel in the third class, the cheapest ticket. And I was on the, another girl, girls were separate, you know, from my father, was different. And, different place, room. And so, I had, I think was Slovak lady. It was, we had bunk beds. I had bottom, she was on the top because I was sick, you know, so she was afraid if I was on the top I might fall down. (she laughs) So...

SIGRIST: Or be sick on top of her.

VALENTA: Yes, or on top of her, yes. (they laugh) So, but it was not pleasant trip. I never forget it. When I was supposed to go on a ship, on a cruise twenty years ago with senior citizens, I was so scared, I says. Some doctor gave me pills so I won't get sick. (she laughs)

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And I never used them. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Did you have an opportunity to go up on deck while you were on the ship?

VALENTA: No, I, only before we landed I was on the deck.

SIGRIST: You were down in your cabin the whole time.

VALENTA: All the, through that time. People went on the deck because they had to. They, they were almost pulling me out of bed and I says, "No. I'm not going no place. Tie me up to the bed. If we're going to sink, I'm going to be in the bed." (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Do you know about what your father was doing on the ship during those seven days?

VALENTA: Well, he was worrying about me, so he couldn't do anything. He used to come and see me and console me that we're going to make it. And he says, "Just say your prayer and we make it." And we did make it.

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SIGRIST: And it took seven days, you said.

VALENTA: Yes, seven days.

SIGRIST: Tell me about when the ship came into New York Harbor,
what you remember about that experience.

VALENTA: Well, I saw that, a little boat, they put us on a
little boat and we went to Ellis Island. And there we
had a, we went through customs. We didn't have
anything to, declaring or anything like that, but we
had to go there through the physical. And they thought
that we'd be full of bugs or what, I don't know. They
put us in the (unintelligible) in there, and women with
women and little children and put kerosene in my hair.
I thought I'm going to lose all my hair. And I cried.
I says to my father, "I'm not going any further. I'm
going to wait for another ship. I don't know if you
have any money but I'm going back home." (she laughs)
But they put us in the shower and we wash up and back
in the little boats and then we were going to New York.
And from New York, took a train to Schenectady.

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SIGRIST: How long were you at Ellis Island?

VALENTA: Oh, I think it was about five days, yes.

SIGRIST: Oh, so you stayed overnight...

VALENTA: Yes, oh yes.

SIGRIST: Oh, well tell me, tell me about where you slept at
Ellis Island.

VALENTA: It was like a bunk beds, too, yes, yes. Bunk beds,
yes.

SIGRIST: And do you remember where they fed you at Ellis Island?

VALENTA: We were, it was a big hall. Everybody sit, same room,
ate it, you know, but I don't remember what I ate. I
don't remember, no.

SIGRIST: Did you spend your days with your father? Was he...

VALENTA: Oh yes, yes, yes, yes. I don't think we were there

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that long because if I remember I came here to
Schenectady November 7th and we arrive, must have
been, we arrive about around the 1st or 2nd to New York,
so...

SIGRIST: So, it could have been five days.

VALENTA: Yes, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: You, you mentioned that you had to take a shower...

VALENTA: Uh huh.

SIGRIST: ...at, at Ellis Island. Can you expl--, tell me how
you felt about having to do that.

VALENTA: Ah! How I felt, I, I cried because, you know, people
from Europe are little bit different, specially women.
My mother, she, we never saw her body or father or
anything like that. Today it's natural, you know,
not those days. And I felt terrible. The children
were watching you and I was a young girl and, but you
had to do it. You were like a guinea pig, (she laughs)

I call it.

SIGRIST: And you said that they put kerosene...

VALENTA: Yes. They thought maybe we had nits or what, I says,
 "My God, I never had nits in my life." (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Did they, how did they do it? Did they just, your hair
 was long, right?

VALENTA: Yes. They just put it on and we had to rub it ourself.
 They just put it on and we had to rub it ourself. I
 didn't want to do it. He says, "You got to do it."
 They were so strict with us.

SIGRIST: Did you see anything at Ellis Island that you had never
 seen before?

VALENTA: No, I don't. I only remember it was a huge building
 and you go in from one room to another and they were
 pushing you and doing this and doing that, you know.
 So that's what it was, yes.

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SIGRIST: And, and no one came to meet you at Ellis Island.

VALENTA: No.

SIGRIST: You and your father were on your own.

VALENTA: Yeah, on our own. Everybody, everybody were on their own, yes. No, nobody met us until we came to Schenectady, people, we were late. And they met, they went there. This young man, he had a car, the son, and they met us. But we didn't come. So when we arrived almost at midnight, my father know his way from State Street that was a train there, so we walked through the Broadway. And that was another thing that strike, strike me. It was, they were cleaning they told me, in the morning sweeping when they had all this food selling outside. It was such garbage all around. I says to my father, "Is this America? I thought it's going to be all in golden fences and everything so beautiful?" And it strike me terrible. It was awful feeling, 'til I got used to different way, you know. (she laughs) So now I love it.

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SIGRIST: Did your father speak any English?

VALENTA: A little bit, yeah, because he didn't learn because he mingle more among the Czech people, Czech club, you know, that we called the Sokol. That's the physical fitness name, you know, Sokol. It's like a falcon, you know, sokol is falcon.

SIGRIST: And how, how do you spell that?

VALENTA: Sokol. It's S-O-K-O-L.

SIGRIST: And that's the organization.

VALENTA: Organization. And we had our club house and we had a play and dances and dinners and things like, like Polish people, Italian, Irish, and so forth, German Turn Verien, you know.

SIGRIST: Did you attempt to learn any English before you came here?

VALENTA: No, there was no such a thing to learn. There was no

such a thing...

SIGRIST: I didn't know if maybe your father tried to teach you
or...

VALENTA: No. He knew just that, like "good morning" or "please"
or "thank you," you know, that I knew, you know, but
that's about all.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me how you went about learning English
once you got to the United States?

VALENTA: Well, I was here about three days and I, we took, this,
this family, these young boys, they had sister. She
was ten years old.

SIGRIST: This was the family that wanted to marry you off to
their...

VALENTA: That I came. Yeah, I was with them. And, both of us,
we stayed with them 'til my father got the little
apartment. I'll tell you, continue tell you what
happened. Three days later I had a job. I was

placed to a family to be like a nanny. They had four
children. Their name was, Le, La, Le FeVeer.
He was French gentleman, born in France but educated
in America.

SIGRIST: Could you spell Le FeVeer?

VALENTA: L-E, capital V, no, Fevre, F, capital F-E-capital V-E-
E-R. That was their name. Of course, they all gone,
you know. And he was comptroller, General Electric,
a big man. And she was a head nurse in Ellis Hospital
in Schenectady. And they had four children, two boys
and two girls. And they had, that little girl was
only two years old. And she had a big home in the
mid-city, good section. They had a lady who was
a housekeeper and cook and doing laundry. I was
assigned with the little child, you know, and
the boy came from school. Set the table and help like
clean up the table. Very nice people. But I was
working for seven dollars a week and room and board
and had Thursday afternoon off and Sunday off. And
I went to these people on Sunday. Well, I was there
five months and I met a lot of girls. She assigned me

to night
she assigned
the
speak. I went
twelve years old,
"walk." So I repeat
"Window." He says,
"Walk to window." And
learning how to speak.
months I was doing
So, I met these
so foolish to work in.
you application and get a
And, of course, most
(?) and I didn't even
you know, that you
I understood that Slovak.
This lady was very mad that
because she taught me how
taught me how to speak few
them. So, and I explained,
and perhaps I'm going
out of seven dollars."

school, this lady. Right following week
me to Knott's Terrace evening class. And
children, of course, taught me how to
to their room and this old boy was
oldest, and he says, "Emilie, say
"walk." "A window." "I says,
"Walk to window." So I says,
that's, little by little I was
So that five, five, three, five
pretty good, in the school, too.
girls. They says, "Oh, you're
Why don't ask your father get
GE [i.e. General Electric] job.
of them Polish, Slovak, Italians,
have to speak too much English,
speak. I understand Polish.
So, I, I got a job in G.E.
I'm leaving them, you know,
to go to school and children
things, and now I'm leaving
I says, "I want to earn money
home, back. And I cannot save
So, I went to work in G.E. and

my father and I got

It was old furniture we
but it was cozy. So I
knew how to cook our food
only (she laughs), I was
from my village were
twenty one years old,

I was sixteen. And he
to chum around in my
to school. So he was
Sunday afternoon. And he
man. His name was Joseph
living on the same street.
you going, Joe?" "Well,

And Joe says, "Where you
going to see the girl from
hello and how she is." I
three years. He was
training as toolmaker or
brother had a good job there
says, "Oh, yes." He says,
me," he asked Joe, Frank. So
That was Sunday afternoon.

three room little apartment.
bought, second hand furniture,
went to work and I cooked. I
from Europe. And I was here
here only two weeks and family
here. And this young man was
twenty, Frank Koselic [ph] and
wants to see me as a, I used
village with his sister going
planning to come and see my
met on the street this young
Valenta. His brother was

And Frank asked him, "Where
I'm going to see my brother."
going?" He says, "Well, I'm
my village. I want to say
forget he was here already
training as a, G.E. was on
something like that. His
so he got him in. So he
"Why don't you come with
they both came to see me.
I was here only one week.

And we talk. He introduce father if they could take me to silent movie. Of course, I of English but both boys went they could have understand, anything on the screen. So, I two boys on each, on each side it to me. It was a lot of So we were, we went on a They didn't have no cars. And theatre Frank had to get off And Joe was closer to where I "Well, why don't you take Emilie to Urbanex [ph], and I will say And I'm going to see you next week, Hall." It was play putted on and was in a play. He was a lovely nine years older than I am. (she grown up for my age. I was grown up years old girl, let's put it that in a play. So when he took me back says, "She's got to be home on time," came home on the time. It was a little

himself and they ask my movie Sunday afternoon, didn't understand a word to night school so they, understood if there was sat in the middle and and they were explaining laughter. (she laughs) trolley car downtown. coming home from, from first from trolley car. live, so Frank says, down to her father, good night here. Sunday, at the Sokol this Joseph Valenta man. He was older, laughs) But I was more than sixteen way. And he was home, my father you know, so we after six o'clock.

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We went to an afternoon matinee. for his play. And he says to my you two tickets for Emilie and you, see the play?" And my father says, would go regardless." So he gave him

So I went and see the play and, of dancing after the play, and my father

And he want me to go home because I morning, take a trolley car going back going to G.E. to work. No, I was with yet...

And he had tickets father, "If I give would you come to

"Of course. We free tickets.

course, I was want to go home.

had to go in the to work, work, these people

SIGRIST: Still, you're still doing domestic work.

VALENTA: I stayed with people. I had to go with these people, work. So I had to get up earlier and be there for breakfast. So Joe says to my father, he says, "Mr. Valenta," (correcting herself) "Mr. Vapenik, can I take Milca home? Can she stay for the dance?" And my father says, he says, "Well, can I trust you? You bring her home?" (she laughs) So he says, "Yes. We're going to be home before eleven o'clock. I promise. We're going to dance up 'til that time." So I did

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came home. Well, from one thing to another, I used to
meet Joe every Sunday when I came to, when I had off.
I went to church with these people, you know, that I
stay over weekends and Joe would take me to theatre
or we'd walk on the streets. So after I quit this job
and went G.E., we continue. He used to wait for
me going walking down to G.E. and coming back
home. And before I know, I have engagement ring, so
a year and a half I was married. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: So what year, what, what year was that?

VALENTA: I was married in 1925, August, let's see, oh geez, I
forget. I can't remember my own, my time. (she laughs)
1925, 1925 I was married.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about Joe's background. Did, he
came from Czechoslovakia?

VALENTA: My husband?

SIGRIST: Yes.

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VALENTA: Yes, yes, he came from Czechoslovakia. He was also, he was about two hours train from Prague, his village.

And he trained also in Prague and then he had to go to war, First War.

SIGRIST: During the First World War.

VALENTA: First War, eighteen years old boy. And he came back, and he was also wounded. He had a scar on his head right through here (she gestures), and...

SIGRIST: That's the left side of the skull you're pointing to.

VALENTA: Yes, yes. So, uh, he, same thing, landed in America because his brother was here and his brother wants him to come here. So I never knew his parents, only his brother here in America.

SIGRIST: What year did he come to America?

VALENTA: He came here, I was here '23, uh '22, he came here late '21.

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SIGRIST: I see. So he was a fairly new arrival also...

VALENTA: Yes, yes, yes, yes. And very...

SIGRIST: Go ahead.

VALENTA: Yeah, very friendly man and well-liked among our people, very, so, and...

SIGRIST: Did you, did you talk Czech with him or did you try to speak English with him?

VALENTA: Czech. Well, both, both.

SIGRIST: Did he speak English well?

VALENTA: He, he, I wouldn't say perfect because he had a hard accent. He spoke German and, you know, German people, when you speak German you have that hard accent, yeah. And, because he used to understand everything on that short wave radio during Second World War when it was news. But, no, we used to speak most of the time Czech. Only when we had somebody who came in, spoke

in English, yes.

SIGRIST: Would you say most, who, who, who constituted most of your friends? What, what nationality were most of your friends?

VALENTA: Well, nationality, we were mostly, as I say, we had our own club house and we had bowling club there and we mingle among ourselves. But we, I had Slovak friends, Polish friends, both and neighbors were Americans where we settle. So that's when I had to learn to speak English, you know. And the children were growing up. My two little, I had two little girls. I was...

SIGRIST: What were their names? What are their name?

VALENTA: My daughters? My daughter was born in, I was about twenty years old, after two years we were married. Her name is Mildred. And Eleanor was born eighteen months after. Her name was Eleanor. She was born, both were born in the house. I didn't want to go in hospital because right there, first baby carrying, I read in paper that baby was changed in hospital and they

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didn't know it. And a year after I said, "Nobody's going to take my baby in their hands. I want to see it in my own home." And they were marvelous children. But I lost my older sister [sic], it's going to be four years July. And my youngest daughter is marvelous. If that wasn't for her to help me here, she lives on Nantucket with her husband, I could never make it. I could never make it.

SIGRIST: You said you lost your oldest sister. Did you mean your oldest daughter?

VALENTA: My oldest, older daughter, yes, pardon me. Older daughter, yes.

SIGRIST: I just wanted to clarify that.

VALENTA: Older daughter Mildred, yes.

SIGRIST: Did you try to teach your children Czech?

VALENTA: Yeah, they were speaking Czech 'til almost five years old. And my husband's uncle said, "You better speak

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with these children English because they're going to start kindergarten." And my husband answers, "Uncle Lou," that's Alois too, "she's going to learn faster in that one year than she'd learn in thirty years."

(she laughs) And they did. They were, they were the best students. They got all the scholarships they had and all the prizes in the school and everything. They were marvelous students, both.

SIGRIST: Did anyone in those first few years in America, you know, before you were married and even after you were married, did anyone ever make fun of you because you were a foreigner?

VALENTA: Well, no, not our people, you know. That sometimes the children Czech, from Czech family that they are born here, you know, they will say, "Oh, you greenhorn."
(she laughs) That was only in a time of talking and have fun, you know. That's all, but nobody never, no.

SIGRIST: Is there a story that you have about you attempting to speak English and, and the wrong word coming out?

VALENTA: Well, yes. People correct you and I accepted because I do want to say it right. Even the children, they grow up, they, they have school. They always says, "Mom, you, you're pronouncing it wrong," you know. But I tell you, I didn't have any school, only the night school. When I had children, I couldn't go night school. Only I went night school to get my citizenship papers. That's all the school I had. And I learn on my own to read and write. I was a self-educator. And when I was with people, they couldn't believe it. He says, "so many people are here, like Italian people, they're here century and they cannot speak English. And I knew it in my apartment when I, before I came here. I had a little old lady neighbor. I didn't understand her. She was mumbling in part English, part Italian. I didn't know what she was telling me, yes.

SIGRIST: Tell me about, you mentioned when you, you left the job working with the kids, you said you went to G.E. but you didn't say what you did at G.E.

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VALENTA: Oh, I was doing same thing. They have these ladies doing same thing from this thing that they have to do for the fixture.

SIGRIST: Oh, the porcelain fixtures.

VALENTA: Yes, little tiny things, all kinds of things for planes and things like that. And you had to, you really had to make it good because if you're not, you didn't make anything. You were on the piece work. They crack if you didn't know had a feeling, make that press right, punch it, you know, make a form like. You put it in there, smooth it up and you press it. And it, really you learn it. You had to learn that technique and that feeling, you know, in the pressing, yes.

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE TWO

SIGRIST: Who were the other people that worked with you?

VALENTA: Most of them were Polish and Slovak and Italians.

SIGRIST: Immigrants.

VALENTA: Immigrants, emigrants, yes.

SIGRIST: And, uh...

VALENTA: And lot of them, they were born here and the children didn't go to school or high school and they were working in G-, those days you were fourteen years old, you, fifteen, you got a job in G.E., not now anymore. My father did want me to go to vocational school, and then when I was going with my dear Joe, I says, "I'm going to get married. What do I need to go into, I'm not going to do any job. I'm going to probably have a family, which I want. I don't need it." So, so I went to work. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: How much money did you get paid at General Electric?

VALENTA: Oh, we were making, that was good money, thirty dollars a week. And when we went sometimes Saturday, that was, got time and a half. So we were making good money.

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That was big money in those days.

SIGRIST: Did you get a set amount for the day and then anything more you produced beyond that you were paid extra for?

VALENTA: Oh, yes, as I said, if you work...

SIGRIST: Can you explain what piece work is, I guess is what I'm asking.

VALENTA: Well, you, oh, piece work is, that they, they work, they have a straight pay, right? Well, piece work, how much you make pieces. You had to work hard. You didn't have to, you couldn't go sitting and drinking coffee, you know, or have a longer lunch or anything. You had to go and work, earn that money because they give you the price how much you make, all the pieces. That's what it was, yes.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me how you and your fellow immigrant workers were treated by the bosses?

VALENTA: Very nice, very nice. I can, I had a Czech boss, I had

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a Slovak boss, very nice, yes, very nice.

SIGRIST: Did you have to join a union?

VALENTA: Not those days. I went second time to G.E. during the war we had...

SIGRIST: Second World War.

VALENTA: Second World War they didn't, they needed help and we build a home. My daughter went to college and we needed the money for more landscaping and everything else, so I says, "Why don't I take, go to work?" (microphone disturbance) I says, "I don't need children taking care of home." So I went to work, and I was also working on a good job then, on plain glass work, blowing the bulbs, you know, with white gloves and everything...

SIGRIST: Like light bulbs?

VALENTA: Light bulbs, yes.

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SIGRIST: Really?

VALENTA: That was very interesting, yes. So, I was working only twenty seven months there. We had to be in a union and have hospitalization but after D-Day came, they lay us off. My daughter came from college and she says, "Mom, when they call me back after a year, if you go to work I'm going to take an apartment with girls. We're going to be crazy people coming home and everybody's going to be in each other's hair doing cooking and cleaning and whatever," you know. So I says, "No, you're not going to go in no apartment. You stay home 'til you get married." (a woman enters the room)

VOICE OFF MIKE: Emilie?

SIGRIST: Oh, we're going to pause, just pause for a second...(break in tape) And we're resuming now. You mentioned earlier in the interview that your mother came to America to visit...

VALENTA: Yeah.

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SIGRIST: ...when you got engaged, I think...

VALENTA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...you said. I want you to tell me about that whole experience (Mrs. Valenta laughs) of your mother coming to America and what she thought of all of this.

VALENTA: Well, she loved the country because it was different.

SIGRIST: She came specifically to visit, though, she wasn't...

VALENTA: No, she, she not visit. She came because my father says he's going to stay. There was a lot of work here, you know, then and we sold everything there. You know, my mother sold everything there. So that meant, that meant that we're going to stay. And if I married, you know, that naturally they don't want to go and leave me here. So my older sister was left there, and their son. My father didn't, been very happy to have only one son and left him there. But he says, "We're going to go visit back home, you know. You could go there, visit." So, my mom came her in March and I had a

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wedding in August.

SIGRIST: March of 1925 she comes and you got married in August.

VALENTA: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Do you remember going to meet, where did your mother come in that you had to go meet her?

VALENTA: In Schenectady train, in Schenectady.

SIGRIST: So she got through the, through New York and on the train by herself.

VALENTA: Right, yeah. But she didn't, she didn't, I don't think my mom, she must have went through Ellis Island, too, because it was...

SIGRIST: Maybe, maybe not. Depends.

VALENTA: Maybe not. I can't remember that, yes. So, but she was happy that I was going to, you know, to be married. And she like Joe very much because he was very friendly

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man and very nice. He had his parents in Europe. They just die when I start going with him, both of them.

So, that, he was happy that he's going to have his own home. He was boarding with family, you know. So, and he was in an age, too. He was twenty five years old, twenty six almost, nine years older than I. So, my father didn't want me to get married. My mother says, "You're too young." So I says to my mom, "How old you were, Mom, when you got married?" She was eighteen. I couldn't get the marriage license. She had to go with me. (she laughs) I says, she says, "I'm not going to go with you." I says, "Okay. I'm going to be, next month I'm going to be eighteen so I could go by myself." So then she went. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Tell me some of the, some of her impressions of America.

VALENTA: Well, she liked it because it was more to, to luxury, let's put it that way. More things that what you want, you could have it, which we couldn't have at home, you know, in Europe. So...

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SIGRIST: Well, I'm just curious. What were some of the things, the luxuries, that she really like having in America?

VALENTA: Well, my mother loved to, good clothes, and she likes good jewelry and (she laughs), which I never was like that, you know. And, but, our home, you know, we didn't have the carpeting and different things that, that we possess. Because even now my daughter, when she went back, she says, "Mom, no matter how beautiful everything, they have one room and they're crumbled up, you know. They, they haven't got much," she says. "They're educated but still there's, compared to us it's nothing, you know. And, but she was there twice so, and she wants to go back and again to see my family, yes.

SIGRIST: How long was your mother here in America?

VALENTA: Well, my mother died in 1932, believe it or not, not too...

SIGRIST: So she came and stayed...

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VALENTA: Yes.

SIGRIST: ...all that time. Did she attempt to learn English?

VALENTA: Ah, very, no, very little because she thought she was old, you know. When you're fifty those days, people thought they're old. I'm going to be eighty eight years old and I don't feel that I'm old. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: It's different now, isn't it. (they laugh)

VALENTA: So, anyway, my mother only knew more or less, I would say, Polish, talking with Polish people and Slovak people. They communicate through their clubs, you know, together. And that's the way that whole section where we lived was, you know, built up all people, European people. Store was, store was in Polish or Czech. You could have, you need English. When I used to go to American store, my husband bought me a dictionary so I would write it in English when I went shopping, like used to be A+P Market, public market. So I write it on a piece of paper and I buy in a different store what I want, you know. So

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that's how I learned, from dictionary. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: Tell me about the process of becoming a citizen and what you had to go through to do that.

VALENTA: Well, all the things that we have to know about, about United States, uh, law...

SIGRIST: You went to a class?

VALENTA: Class, the law, you know. They tell you what to learn. They give you book. I think I had it for many years, that book, and I don't know what happened, moving three times, you know. But I made out good, so I guess I was speaking pretty good in English then, you know, already. So, and we had to go fingerprints, also, too, only I didn't like that. I says, "I'm not, I'm, I didn't stole anything. I wasn't in a jail." But that was the procedure. (she laughs) You had to go fingerprints.

SIGRIST: What year did you become a citizen?

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VALENTA: Just before, before the war, I think 193--, let me see, my father, my mom died in 1932, my father left for Europe because he had a son there and he wants to stay with his son, you know, father and his son. (she laughs) So, I got citizen paper that year, so that must have been 193-, late 1933, '33 I got my citizen...

SIGRIST: How did you feel when your father wanted to go back to Europe to live?

VALENTA: Ah, I was sad because I says to him, I says, "Are you sure you're going to live with your son?," because my sister was out of Prague. He went direct to Prague. And I says, "You have Mom's grave here." My mom is buried here. I says, "Why don't you stay here? You have two girls here. My sister was going to be married. She was engaged. Oh, she was, he was here when she got married. She just got married and he left after she was married, yes, married. So he says, "I know. But I'm going to have all the pictures and I'm going to see you every day. I put the on the table and I'll talk to you." And he says, "I have also

grandchildren there," you know, my sister's children. So he went back and my brother was married and he was working still in a hotel. He was a chef there. Then he open his business, but it didn't work out very well business. So he went back managing again in a hotel. And my father didn't live with him because, well, they were young couple. They want to have a baby and they didn't have a child, so after ten years my brother got a baby boy. That's the one that I correspond now. And my father took his own apartment in a, nearby him. And he died, he was, I over-lived him, too, he died was eighty three years old in March. I don't know what year. I got all the papers home, saving it, but I don't remember.

SIGRIST: Did you communicate with your father by letter?

VALENTA: Oh, yeah, oh yeah.

SIGRIST: I mean, you had been through so much with him just coming to this country. When the Second World War blew up, it was the same procedure. We didn't knew what's happening to them, and the first thing we had a chance

we sent a package. And my father was devastated because in Prague were all the soldiers, you know, they, I saw it when I went there first time after forty years, '67. The building that he was living, there were holes from the way they were shooting there. And they had all the wreaths outside on those holes, you know. And my father says, "We were lucky we didn't been killed," you know. So, but I did worry about him and I says to him, "You," I want to bring him here before the war started. He didn't want to come. My husband want him very badly to come and live we us. We take care of him. But he says, "No, I'm going, I'm going to be buried in the soil where I was born." That was his idea, see? And, see, I was different. When I went there, my sister, I lost my husband and I never want to go back because I promise him I won't go without her. But when I saw my grandson, fifteen years old, during Thanksgiving, I came from Bethesda, Maryland, and I says, "What is Mom doing?" See, Kevin, fifteen years old, that's how my brother was when I left him first time. It's time to going back. And my husband and I, we planned to go that year before that. He was sick man already, to Europe, and I had all the papers

that he had owned, which way is better: on a ship or flight. And all the information, so I says, "Well, I found the letters. I'm going to write tomorrow. I called my daughter. She says, "Mother, that's the best news I heard from you since Daddy died." So I says, "I'm going home. I'm going to visit my sister and my brother while I still have good health."

Well, I called my husband's, uh, nei--, uh, cousin, first cousin. They were there a year before my husband died. They came home three days before he died. And we supposed to that time go and visit them, but my husband was afraid. He says, "Honey, if I die there I know you wouldn't leave me there. You will want me to bring back because you have children here, your children and grand--, and I will have grandchildren. You, and Mom is buried here. You will have to bring me to America." And he says, "I'm not going." So we didn't go. That's why I have these letters. So when I call his cousin, her name is Anna, she was Valenta, too. So she says, "Wait. My husband and I, we planning going back because we left our car there." They bought a car, left it with nephew. "And we have good passport, so we going to go, all three

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of us." Well, I was very happy. So she took care of
everything. She took care of, I even took driving
license from AAA, but I never drove. I rent a car but
my nephew was driving because, oh, the driving over there
is, is crazy, you know. (she laughs)

SIGRIST: When you've gone back, have you ever gone back to see
the house that you lived in?

VALENTA: Yes, I did.

SIGRIST: The first time you did that, was that in 1967?

VALENTA: First, after forty, after forty...

SIGRIST: 1967?

VALENTA: '67, yes.

SIGRIST: How did you feel when you saw that house?

VALENTA: Ah, I couldn't believe that it's was the same house.
They have a doorbell on the door outside, which we

never have. I look. I says, "Is it the same house?
I'm sure it is." It's a little bit on a hill. Nobody
answer. People were on the field. I was there in
June. Well, I finally got there towards evening.
They have electricity in the house, washing machine,
everything like I have here. All modernized, the
whole house. I couldn't believe it. Village was paved.
It was no more dirt road. It was all paved up. The
creek was there and the school was there. And the field,
we had all the two rows of plums right, little bit
outskirts of village, that was all houses. The
village was bigger. It was all houses built. So it was
a big change.

SIGRIST: When you saw it, did you feel emotionally attached to
it, or did you feel kind of distant from it all.

VALENTA: No, I wasn't emotionally, because it's, it was not my
home anymore. My sister was with me traveling from
center of Bohemia there. By train we travel. She
says, "See, wouldn't you like to come back where
you were born, you creep." I says, "No." I says,
"There's nothing here for me anymore. You're going to

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see her again." Because I always says, "It's tomorrow. It's not only today I'm sad. I'm going to have a better day tomorrow and Mom, Mom's going to be here maybe tomorrow or next day." So, you, you always have to have a hope for better than for worst. And today's children, they're asking too much all at once. And some of them, this is what happens, it's destruction, really. And I, I'm very happy and thanks God that the way I brought up my two daughters and they brought their children and they do same thing to my great grandchildren. I have twelve great grandchildren, God bless them. I don't know what's going to happen to them. I'm not going to be here. But I hope they will be just as strong no matter what's going to happen to our beautiful country America, that they will make it.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Valenta, thank you very much for...

VALENTA: Your welcome.

SIGRIST: ...letting me sit here and...

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VALENTA: I think it was, it brought me back different, different way. This was my third page that I've been turning over in my life, going to this place [i.e. Our Lady Of Hope Residence] and I'm happy here, too, yes.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist, signing off with Emilie Valenta on May 1st, 1995 at the Lady Of Hope residence in Latham, New York, which Mrs. Valenta has just moved into about a week or so ago...

VALENTA: Right.

SIGRIST: And this is Paul Sigrist signing off. Thank you.

VALENTA: Your welcome.