

EI-617

FRIEDA MARK

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SIGRIST: Good afternoon this is Paul Sigrist for the National Parks Service. Today is Friday May 19, 1995. I am at the Ellis Island recording studio with Frieda Mark. Mrs. Mark came from Germany via Israel. She arrived in New York from Israel in May of 1952 and she was 32 when she arrived in New York. Mrs. Mark thank you, for coming in, can we begin by you giving me your birth date, please?

MARK: My birth date is June 6 1920

Sigrist: And where -- -you were born in Germany?

Mark: Yes.

Sigrist: Where in Germany were you born?

Mark: In a small town in Bavaria. The name of the town is Fürth, F-Ú-R-T-H.

Sigrist: Can you tell me a little bit about that town?

Mark: It's a very small town near Nürnberg, and I grew up in that town and went to school there. My parents and I had a brother and a younger sister, and it was just small place, and then the Nazis started to march.

Sigrist. In your early childhood, is there a building that sticks out in your mind from that town?

Mark: Yes, it has a very interesting style. A --- what's it called? the city hall. Has a large tower and is a very ---very beautiful building and I was in a private school ---we are ---- my parents were religious and I really was never in a public school. Was a private school --school--and I did not go very long to school and but what I learned was excellent, excellent education for the few years I was there.

Sigrist: I should say for the sake of the tape that the rustling you may be hearing is... your coat; you're wrapping your hands in your coat cause its chilly in here.

Mark: Oh. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: And the microphone will probably will pick that up, so any one listening to this tape should be aware of that. What was your father's name?

MARK: Max M-A-X and the family name was Zysplatt. Z like un zebra-Y-S-P-L-A-

T-T

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about your Father's family back round?

MARK: My parents crossed into Germany from Poland during World War I. I think at this time Poland was occupied by Germany, and times were very bad and they cross over to Germany and settled in this town Fürth near Nürnberg. And was hard times.

SIGRIST: Do you know how your parents met?

Mark: Yes! It's a long story [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Can you just give us a short version?

MARK: Well they met in Poland very --- two young people and it was before World War I and they met and after sometime they got married and decided to go to Germany.

SIGRIST: What did your father do for a living in Germany?

MARK: My father had a small business where he was selling toys, toys and pots and pans and combs and he was traveling around and he was selling it. Yes.

SIGRIST: What was your father's personality like?

MARK: My father was a wonderful man, very friendly and very helpful to the people. My mother was strict, very strict.

SIGRIST: Is there a story that you like to tell about your father from your early

childhood?

MARK: He traveled a lot around and was gone and sometimes my mother joined him and I went to ---- there was a family and they took care of me when they were out of town. And they were wonderful people.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

MARK: Esther

SIGRIST: And her maiden name?

MARK: Family

SIGRIST: Family was her maiden name?

MARK: Yes

SIGRIST: Can you just spell that for the sake of the tape?

MARK: It was F-A-M-I-L --- Familia F-A-M-I-L-A-M-I-A. I think that's correct.

SIGRIST: What do you know about your mother's family background?

MARK: There I have a good story. My mother's par -- par--- ... grandparents were very fr --- were very religious and in this time a boy and a girl were not allowed to see each other before the wedding. All their marriages were arranged, and my Grand mother must have been a very pretty girl and stubborn and she said she's not going to marry anybody unless she sees the man. She ask to see it, but that was against the religion. So they put her in ---- I think they had ... in between somebody who arranged

the marriage-----and she put her in a room in front of a big mirror and she was looking in the mirror and behind her came in the groom, and that's how they were allowed to see each other. Only through the mirror. At --- and then they got married. It must have been over a hundred years ago. And they had fourteen children together.

SIGRIST: My goodness and so your mother's parents would of been their children One of your mothers...

MARK: Well my mother had a lot of brothers and sisters and around --ninety or over ninety years ago. When they grew up, most of them immigrated to America. So when I came here I found here a big family, which I have never met before and didn't really know that they live here. But their name was Famil --- also Family and they ---- I think they spell it now the American way.

SIGRIST: And that is the Americanized version of the name family

MARK: Yes, --- family --- yes. There are several families' here by this name, but I never knew them. And now they already the children and grandchildren because my mother would of been way over hundred years old, and my father.

SIGRIST: You mention that your mother was the strict one in the family.

MARK: Yes she was very strict.

SIGRIST: Is there a story you can tell me about --- about an example of your mother's strictness while you were growing up?

MARK: Well I always had to help and had to help with the housework and the kitchen work. And doing the windows and by *betten* (beds) -----and dusting. And I hated it. But I had to do it and I did it, and I was mad because my brother never had to do anything because the boys don't have house work only the girls.

SIGRIST: You mentioned that you have brothers and sisters

MARK: one brother!

SIGRIST: What is his name?

MARK: He passed away. His name was *Yitskh*--- Isaac

SIGRIST: Isaac?

MARK: hum.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me hum you do you have a incident that stands out in you mind about maybe an experience you shared with your brother as children?

MARK: No! He went his way and I was always mad at him.

SIGRIST: [Laughs] Was he older than you?

MARK: Yes! He was older and then I had a --- have a sister she's --- she lives in Israel now and she is eight-and-a-half years younger.

SIGRIST: I see. Was she born in Germany?

MARK: Yes, she was born in Germany in 1938

SIGRIST: And her name?

MARK: Zelma

SIGRIST: 1928?

MARK: 1928 she was born yes.

SIGRIST: What religion was the family?

MARK: Jewish.

SIGRIST: Can you talk to me a little bit about the Jewish community in your town?

MARK: It was a very, very religious town and very religious people, which believed in their religion, and as I told you we went to a private school, which was a Jewish school and was one of the few towns in Germany, which also had a Jewish orphanage, and children were there from all over Germany in that orphanage and I had friends there so I visited very often. That orphanage and it's still standing and its now a religious center, a Jewish center, and a synagogue

SIGRIST: How did you family practice their religion at home?

MARK: My father had all the prayers and on Friday we --- my mother was light--- having the Sabbath lights and we had always the service in --- my father went to synagogue and then my mother had the sup --for supper the food which she made. She made her own bread and her own noodles and we said the prayers and we were not allowed to touch the light or make a fire

so... it was always dark and I never liked it.

SIGRIST: Is there a prayer that you remember from your childhood learning?

MARK: Oh there are many, many prayers

SIGRIST: Is there one that you can say of us?

MARK: Oh you said the prayer for the bread and the prayer for the wine.

SIGRIST: And what language would you

MARK: It was in Hebrew

SIGRIST: Could you say the prayer for the bread in Hebrew for us?

MARK: [Chants] *Borukh ato Adonoy Eloheynu melekh hooylom hamoytsi lekhem min haarets.* (Blessed is the Lord our God, King of the Universe who brings us bread from the earth.)

SIGRIST: Thank you. You mentioned school

MARK: Yes

SIGRIST: How old were you when you started school?

MARK: I was bout six-and-a-half --- six --- six-and-a-half, yes.

SIGRIST: And you mentioned that, that you're your going to school was cut short

MARK: It was cut short because I have seven years of schooling and we had in

this school one world-famous, very famous student and that was Henry Kissinger. He went to the same school, and here in New York there is a lot of people, which are together, and they have a club from people which come from that school and get toge --- and we had a convention 'bout five years ago. Where I met people I haven't seen long, long time.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the school?

MARK: Jewish –*Jüdische die Altschule in Fürth* (Jewish –The Old School In Fürth)

SIGRIST: Oh my goodness can you spell all that? [Laughs]

MARK: Yes I can. And then when Hitler came and the Jewish children were expelled from pri ---- from the public schools, also from Nürnberg and from the surrounding cities, they came to that school. But we were already gone at that time. We were already in Israel.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about um, what you remember about the Nazis, beginning to take over?

MARK: I remember ----- it must have been '32, '33 that they were marching in the streets and boycotting Jewish stores. Personally I have never seen bad things. They were screaming and ever --- and they were -- had the signs "Do not buy from Jews." And boycott Jewish stores. And my father did not like this and we all left, 1934.

SIGRIST: When you were growing up in this town what do you remember about the relationship between the Jewish community and the non-Jewish community?

MARK: I had friends which lived in the same building were we lived. There was

one girl her name was Emma Reitsam. I still remember her full name and her father was a communist and I remember when the Nazis came in 1932, '33 and took him to concentration camp. And her mother was left alone with two children. And that's --- then I had girls in the street which did not go to my school but we were friends, and when the nazis came they broke off with me. They stop talking to me and pretended not to see me anymore.

SIGRIST: Did your father's business change in anyway when this happened?

MARK: No, he just closed it and left. My father left a year a head of us; in 1933 he left Germany.

SIGRIST: Whose decision was it to leave Germany?

MARK: My father. My mother didn't want it. My father wanted to leave because he said he remembers the times from Poland, and he does not want to stay in Germany, and he went ahead. Then it was Palestine. And I remember my mother was selling all the furniture, and giving away what we had and packed everything and left.

SIGRIST: How did you personally feel about leaving your home?

MARK: I was a young girl, thirteen -- fourteen years old. I cried. But I have one thing I remember: The brothers, which my mother had in America, I know they helped her, they sent her money. Because one day she took me in the --in the entrance, we had a linoleum on the floor, and she said, "Frieda, I'm going to show you something. Don't tell anybody but some -- you have to know." And she lifted this linoleum and underneath were dollar bills. I have no idea how much it was. And she said she got it from her brother, and we have to hide it 'til she leaves, and I'm not allowed to tell anybody.

So also she hasn't seen her brothers in twenty years or more, I don't know. They still were thinking about her.

SIGRIST: And that was how she sort of kept things running while your father was away. She had money...

MARK: I think she got also help from the Jewish community in that town. It was very little because on the weekend there was hardly any money left, and we talked if we can have this for Saturday or not, if we have enough money or not.

SIGRIST: Interesting.

MARK: Yes.

SIGRIST: So your father was gone a year before the rest of the family-

MARK: A year before. And then the family followed to Israel.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me how you got to Israel from Germany?

MARK: With a--- my brother, and my mother and my sister, we stayed with a Jewish family about a week, when my mother sold all her belongings. And then certain things were packed. I still have still have certain pieces from Germany.

SIGRIST: What do you remember specifically taking with you to Israel?

MARK: My mother took her -- she had beautiful silver candlesticks she took. And some plates she took. And her pots and pans and all her feather beds -- she wouldn't leave this out, the feather beds. It was all packed and sent

along, including an old sewing machine which we still have in Israel, a German sewing machine. I would like to bring it over here, but it's so expensive.

SIGRIST: I should say for the sake of the tape that of course when you're actually going to Palestine, it wasn't called Israel-

MARK: It was Palestine, yes.

SIGRIST: -that really even though we're saying Israel, we really mean Palestine.

MARK: It was Palestine until '47.

SIGRIST: So you left the town, you sent on the belongings ahead-

MARK: My mother did, yes. Somebody packed it and sent it.

SIGRIST: What do you remember of the actual journey to get to Palestine.

MARK: We were on a ship.

SIGRIST: Where did you go to get the ship?

MARK: We --- from Germany, we went by train to Italy. And I remember when we were, as long we were in Germany, I was afraid to talk. But the moment we crossed the border, it was like a load was taken off my head because I knew that now the Nazis cannot get you. And we stayed in Italy a few days, I forgot, in a big place where we, people gave us a room. And then we were -- had a ship, called the Pilsnas.

SIGRIST: I should right this down, the Pilsnas.

MARK: Pilsnas. P-I-L, pils, P-I-L-S-N-A-S.

SIGRIST: Pilsnas.

MARK: Ye, that was the name of the ship. And took over a week.

SIGRIST: Does anything stick out in your mind about the ship?

MARK: I had a lot of fun on the ship. There was music and people were dancing, and we were watching. And it was kosher food, I remember. And our family had a room there, my brother ---- we had four beds.

SIGRIST: What is your mother's attitude about going to Palestine?

MARK: My mother did not want to go to Palestine. She wanted to go Poland because in Poland she had a lot of family. And then what is she going to do in the desert? And my father said no, he's not going to Poland. We would have all have disappeared, of course, in the holocaust.

SIGRIST: Tell me about seeing your father after a year.

MARK: It was strange. We arrived in Jaffa. And to get off the ship, they put us in little boats. And the boats was wiggling. I got very ill. I started to throw up. And then when we landed finally in Jaffa they took me out of that little boat. It was really a shock because it is such a, the camels and the donkeys, and it was very dirty and all Arabic. And you come from another, from another area, but Tel Aviv of course is more modern. We had a hard time finding there an apartment. My parents couldn't find an apartment.

SIGRIST: Did your father come to Jaffa to meet you?

MARK: Yeah, yeah yeah.

SIGRIST: So when you arrived, he didn't have a place for you to stay at first?

MARK: No, he didn't.

SIGRIST: Where was he staying?

MARK: He was looking for a place for us, and somebody promised him an apartment. But then we landed in a very cheap hotel in town. And it had bed bugs. [Laughs] Never forget that! The first time in my life. But it was such a difference from Jaffa, what we saw and what we knew, yes.

SIGRIST: Two completely different worlds.

MARK: Completely different words. And Tel Aviv, the camels were walking still in the street, and donkeys, and the marketplace...I mean, it's unbelievable. Everything was covered with flies then. Today it's beautiful, but that was -- how many years ago?

SIGRIST: Sixty years ago.

MARK: Sixty years!

SIGRIST: Almost. This is 1934. Correct?

MARK: Right. No, this is fifty...yeah, sixty years.

SIGRIST: It's '34 you arrived.

MARK: Yes. Sixty years.

SIGRIST: Your mother probably really wanted to be in Poland once she got to Palestine.

MARK: No, she worked very hard. Was very hard work, because finally --- finally we found a place with two small rooms. And we were five people. And there was no kitchen. She just had a little table where she prepared the food. And also at this time, they did not have any stoves or anything. Everything was done on a Primus. You know what a Primus is?

SIGRIST: Mm Mmm.

MARK: You put in petroleum and you light it. I think you use it here for campfire.

SIGRIST: Like a Bunsen burner. I think they call it.

MARK: Something like this, yes. And there was-

SIGRIST: And it's called a Primus? P-R-I...

MARK: P-R-I-E...P-R-I-M-U-S. Primus, yeah. And you had to pump it, and then the flame goes all the way up. And then we had little ones, where you, it's like...where you can make it higher or lower, what's it called? A little -----

SIGRIST: Like a knob that would turn?

MARK: burner. Yes. Yes.

SIGRIST: Did you go to school once you got to...?

MARK: No.

SIGRIST: You didn't. What happened to you once you got to Palestine?

MARK: School was very expensive and I didn't know the language. And I guess my parents needed the money. And I had to go to work, yes.

SIGRIST: What language did you speak in Germany?

MARK: German.

SIGRIST: Did you speak Yiddish at all?

MARK: Yes. My parents spoke Yiddish at home.

SIGRIST: But you spoke German.

MARK: German and I had English in school.

SIGRIST: Oh, that's interesting. So you had some English.

MARK: I knew English. I had three years of English in school. It was a very good, good school. Excellent.

SIGRIST: And then in Palestine, what are they speaking? Arabic, I suppose, or...?

MARK: Well, the Arabs section in Jaffa was Arabic, and in Tel Aviv, the language was Hebrew. Hebrew and any other language you want. People spoke Polish and Russian and Hungarian and Czechoslovakian and German and newspapers in every language, yes.

SIGRIST: Then am I to believe then that there a large community of Europeans who had come down-

MARK: Yes. Yes, that was all before World War I. Yes.

SIGRIST: World War II.

MARK: World War II, I'm sorry.

SIGRIST: We're just on the eve of World War II.

MARK: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: You said you had to go to work. What was the first job that they got for you, or that you got for yourself?

MARK: There was not far where we lived – we lived in a basement – not far where we lived, there was under construction a store for Israel. It was a big store for Tel Aviv. It would say like a --- 5 and 10, like a Newberry store. And my father knew somebody who works there and took me there, and they took me in for, to help, whatever is necessary. I helped in the office and I helped in the store, and I had to sweep the store and unpacked the merchandise and be behind the counter and sell.

SIGRIST: What were your feelings about not continuing on with your education? At that time, how did you think about it?

MARK: I thought it's wonderful, I don't have to go to school...

SIGRIST: Making money, I suppose.

MARK: Well I didn't keep a dime from my money. But if I made, I gave it home to the parents.

SIGRIST: Is your brother following a similar path? Is he getting a job and contributing money?

MARK: He also worked, but it's blurry, I don't remember exactly. My father in Poland, when he was a young man, he learned the trade to make leather bags, like of ---

SIGRIST: Like a briefcase?

MARK: Like brie ----he made briefcases. So he went to Jaffa and he bought leather and he came back, and he still had the tools from Poland – we still have them in the family – and he was standing in the kitchen on the table and started to make briefcases. And my brother helped him. And then he went out and tried to sell them. You see, at -- in school the children always carried a briefcase on their back with all the ---- they did not hold it in their arms. Was always in the briefcase. So he made them and went around and sold these briefcases.

SIGRIST: And did that supply enough of an income to keep the family running?

MARK: Well we were, there was never much there. I understand he had a hard time collecting the money after weeks, what he sold, unless they sol ---but everybody was in the same boat. They were --- I didn't know anybody who had more. And whatever I earned, I think it covered the rent.

SIGRIST: What was the family's experience once World War II broke out? How did they feel about being where they were and what was going on?

MARK: We did not know what happened in Germany. We did not know about it. Just, the mail stopped coming from Poland to my mother. The mail stopped coming, but we did not know what happened. And a lot of people came from our town and came to us because we were already the old-timers there. We lived already there a few years. So they had a lot of people came from the same town, and people my parents knew, and so they had friends. And came --- they came for Saturday and had a cup of - ---- glass of tea and they continued their friendship. "Oh you came too? Wonderful, nice you are here."

SIGRIST: But for the most part you were oblivious to what was going on.

MARK: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: What about, was there any fighting in that part of the world during the Second World War?

MARK: Yes.

SIGRIST: There was.

MARK: Well, Israel --- then it was Palestine. First of all, all the armies came. We had the Australian army, we had the Canadian army, we had the English army. From everywhere. The South African came. And they were in the deserts; they had big camps and brought a big prosperity to the country. But we were bombed by the Italian.

SIGRIST: And that you remember experiencing.

MARK: Oh yes, I remember the bombs, of course. In World War II, yeah. We were bombed a lot.

SIGRIST: Well I think we're going to pause just for a second right now. Peter's going to flip the tapes over and we'll get you to America.

(END SIDE A) (BEGIN SIDE B)

SIGRIST: All right, we're now beginning tape ---side two with Frieda Mark, and we have you in Palestine, and we were just discussing some of the bombing that took place during the Second World War.

MARK: Yes.

SIGRIST: I guess what I'd like to do – and you suggested to me that there's a great deal of story between what we're talking about now and your actual arrival in America. What I sort of would like you to do is sort of give us a thumbnail sketch of what life was like in Israel in the forties, before coming to America.

MARK: At this time I was a young girl. And there was a complete blackout in the country. You could not have any light showing out, and everything was dark in the streets. The cars were not all --- when they drove around there no lights. Everything was with black. And Israel has -- the roof is flat. So when, there was more light on the roof, so we had young people, we had parties on the roof for Saturday night, I guess, or Friday evening. And that's how I met my husband. On such a party on the roof 54 years ago.

SIGRIST: What was his name?

MARK: His name is Henry.

SIGRIST: And can you tell me why he was in Palestine at that time?

MARK: Oh he lived ---- in 1933, he left Vienna. He left his whole family because he went to build up the country. So he came to Palestine and became a bricklayer and worked in construction till World War II started. But I didn't know him then.

SIGRIST: You met him after the war?

MARK: No, no, no, no.

SIGRIST: Or during war?

MARK: No, I met during the war, but he was not a bricklayer anymore.

SIGRIST: I see, I see. And his name was Henry and Mark, M-A-R-K. Tell me, when did you get married? What year?

MARK: In 1942.

SIGRIST: In '42, so you married during the war.

MARK: Yes.

SIGRIST: Tell me how life was different now that you were married. How was it different than it had been with your family?

MARK: Well we married and then we, nobody could afford an apartment. So we just had one roof, one room. And most young people, they had one room, and they shared the kitchen and the bathroom with other couples. And my husband was, there was no more construction, and he worked for the English army in the camps, it was called the Naafi. That was like, they

made food and concessions.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the...?

MARK: Naafi was the company. N-A-A-F-I.

SIGRIST: Thank you.

MARK: I think. And he worked for the Naafi. And I worked still in that same store where I started when I was fourteen.

SIGRIST: And did you have children during this time?

MARK: My daughter was born in --- we got married in --'42, and my daughter was born '45, yes.

SIGRIST: That's your oldest child?

MARK: My oldest child.

SIGRIST: What is her name?

MARK: Rina.

SIGRIST: Rita.

MARK: Rina. R-I-N-A.

SIGRIST: Thank you.

MARK: Charnarina, after her grandmother. Anyway, at this time, my husband

changed jobs, and by accident he fell into a store where they had a drapery. They sold drapery material and made drapes. And by accident he fell into such a place. And he liked it and he said to me, "I think I will stick with drapes and see what we can do about it."

SIGRIST: What was the impetus to decide to come to America during this time?

MARK: His family was in America, my husband's family. We had the War of Independence and we had very hard times. You could not go out and buy an egg. Everything was rationed. And long lines. And his family came from Vienna to Los Angeles. And they sent us the papers and he said, "We are young, we'll try Los Angeles."

SIGRIST: What did you know about America in your life at this time? How did you perceive the country of the United States before you got here?

MARK: I have never been here. We had a big American army stationed then in Palestine. And the soldiers were there, very friendly, and we had all the American music, and we saw the American movies – Fred Astaire, Ginger Rogers, dancing into the sunset, Janette McDonald, Nelson Eddy, and we loved it. And we had all American movies and all American music.

SIGRIST: So your perceptions of America are very much colored by what you're seeing on the silver screen.

MARK: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Was your husband in communication frequently with his family that was in-

MARK: He was always with his family, yes. I mean, they wrote us letters and we wrote them letters.

SIGRIST: How did you feel about, how did you emotionally feel about leaving this second life that you had built up for yourself?

MARK: I was glad to get away from Israel at that time because life was very, very hard. You had all the money in your pocket, but you could not buy anything with it. And I had two small children, and it was hard to buy food for them.

SIGRIST: Let's see, Rina was born in '45, now what's the name of the second child?

MARK: Judy.

SIGRIST: Judy. And what year was she born?

MARK: '50.

SIGRIST: She was born in '50.

MARK: Yean, 1950.

SIGRIST: The War of Independence is 194---...

MARK: 1947, yes.

SIGRIST: '47. And Israel becomes a...

MARK: Became a state and we were bombed by the Arabs day and night. Lots of bombings and running to the shelters. And we had an opportunity to leave and we were young. And business was hard because we had ---- my husband was in draperies, the bombs are falling, people don't buy that

many drapes. So I said, "We'll come to America and we'll try our best.",

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the process of getting the necessary papers to go...

MARK: My husband did all ----we had to go Haifa. In Haifa they had a consulate, and my husband's family guaranteed for us and signed all the papers. They were already here a few years.

SIGRIST: And they were in Los Angeles, right?

MARK: All in Los Angeles, yes.

SIGRIST: Tell me, just like I asked you when you were leaving Germany to go to Palestine, what did you take with you when you were getting ready to leave Israel?

MARK: Just suitcases with clothes, yes.

SIGRIST: Were your parents still living at that time?

MARK: Oh yes.

SIGRIST: How did they feel about you going to America?

MARK: They were hoping that we should come and have a better life because it was very, very hard at this time in Israel. Thanks God it has changed, meantime.

SIGRIST: Do you remember saying goodbye to your parents for the last time?

MARK: Of course. They all came and took us to the airport, and we hugged and we kissed and the children. And we knew that we are going to back to visit them if possible. I promise them I'll come every year.

SIGRIST: So you were never leaving with the intention of never seeing them again, you always...

MARK: No. At this time, I said if possible, we will come and visit. And ten years later we took the children -- we visited, yes.

SIGRIST: Where was the airport again?

MARK: Mit the--in Israel, the airport?

SIGRIST: Yes. Where did you...?

MARK: In *Lud* (Lod).

SIGRIST: And what sticks out in your mind about the air passage?

MARK: The air passage with two little children was very hard.

SIGRIST: Yeah? What do you remember about that?

MARK: That they all had earaches. And it took a long time, because it was a ---- it was not a straight flight. It went --- first we went to Belgium, and we had to stay over there for about two days, in Belgium. And what sticks out in my mind is we were in --- we went to a big department store in Belgium, and one floor is like a giant food market. And I walked in with my husband and the children and the cheeses, and the salamis, and everything was hanging, full, full of ----- and I looked at it, and I had to start crying so hard,

I still cry now, I had to leave. I couldn't look at all that food. This is what I remember about it.

SIGRIST: Because you had come from such deprivation.

MARK: Where you couldn't get an egg. One egg was a big luxury. You saved it for your children, yes.

SIGRIST: Where did the plane go from Belgium?

MARK: From Belgium to New York. What I remember about New York is Judy was two years old and we had a lot of suitcases, and something with the papers, I don't know, I don't remember. I left it --- I didn't know it then, but I was at the beginning of another pregnancy. It was just the beginning. And I felt already a little. So I said, "Rina, stay with the suitcases." And we look around, and Judy disappeared in that airport with hundreds and thousands of people walking. And I call my husband, "Henry, where's Judy?" He doesn't know where she is, he was busy. And nobody knew where Judy was. So I said, "Rina, you stay with the luggage and I run in, look for Judy." And people were coming and going. All of a sudden, there was a tall man, and he had Judy on his shoulders. He was standing in the middle between these thousands of people, and held her on his shoulders so we could see her. So I was running up, and I had my child. This is my impression from New York.

SIGRIST: Oh, that's a -- well, what happened when you got to the airport, and I know that ultimately you ended up here at Ellis Island, exactly what happened and how did you get out here?

MARK: The reason was we arrived, I forgot if it was a Thursday or a Friday, and it was in the beginning of May. And we had to bring papers, which we had,

that we will never – that we have ----that we have a good --- we know what to do ---that we know what we want to do ----- that we have people who signed for us that we will never be on welfare ---- that we are in good health. And they looked at all these x-rays and everything, and somehow, I don't know how, my husband's chest x-ray was with black spots. I don't know. So they said, "We are very sorry but he needs a new chest x-ray. We have to see that he is in good health." So we came to Ellis Island. They took us with a little boat, I remember, with the girls, with the luggage --- with ---. I was a nervous wreck.

SIGRIST: Did you know what Ellis Island was?

MARK: No. No. Never heard of it. So we came here, and because it was before a weekend, they gave us a room, a very nice room, for the four of us. And then came was Friday, Saturday, Sunday, where everything was closed. Monday he got a chest x-ray, and Tuesday, they sent us home – out. And a cousin of my husband came and picked us up.

SIGRIST: With great relief, I'm sure on your part.

MARK: I don't know, I never knew this young man. He lived in New York, and I guess my husband con --- called him or whatever, he had his name and address. And he came and get us off when we arrived with the boat, I forgot, and got us a small hotel somewhere in the city.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you remember about being here those four days.

MARK: These four days, for me it was wonderful because we had a very nice room, the children were playing with other children, the meals were excellent.

SIGRIST: Where did they feed you?

MARK: In the kosher kitchen.

SIGRIST: And does anything stick out in your mind about...?

MARK: I was not used to get a whole hot dog, or if I want two I can have two hot dogs. It was --- my daughter at this time has never seen an apple because we come from a place where everything was in very short supply. And she played around and my little girl --- all I remember is I did a lot of washing because we stayed in Belgium a few days, so I had a lot of laundry. And they had all the facilities here.

SIGRIST: And they allowed you to do that?

MARK: Oh they had special facilities; there were a lot people on this island. There were, just when we asked around, there was one couple, I forgot from where, and they told us they're here already a year and a half. They for --- they lost their papers. So we got a little scared. We were not prepared to sit here a year and a half. And another woman said she was from Canada, young woman. She said she's in Ellis Island because as a child she was a member in the Communist Party. All kinds of stories we heard here.

SIGRIST: Do any of the staff members stick out in your mind?

MARK: They were extremely friendly and helpful. There was one very nice lady. When we came they asked us what food we would like. And my husband said, "Oh, it's all right." And she gave us a note and said, "Go to the kosher kitchen. That's the best food." So they came a lady over from New York by boat every morning, and she cooked special...I think the

kosher kitchen were maybe 10, 11 people, not more. On the other half side of this island, there was a camp for sailors, which missed their boats. All young guys. They played ball all day. And when they came to eat it was a like a stampede when they came running. But there were a few Jewish boys and they were with us in the kosher kitchen. The food was excellent. And the people here was, they were some of most helpful and friendliest people.

SIGRIST: Did you see any types of food that you had never seen before?

MARK: No, the kosher food is Jewish food.

SIGRIST: The same everywhere.

MARK: Yeah, yeah. The same

SIGRIST: Were you allowed outside of the building?

MARK: No. Yeah, we walked around outside, and I always looked at the Statue of Liberty. And I'm ashamed to say I didn't know what it is.

SIGRIST: After your little incident with Judy in the airport, ---

MARK: Yes.

SIGRIST: how were you able to keep track of the children?

MARK: There were not many children here. I think about four or five children altogether. And I kept a good eye on her, she shouldn't fall in the water. No she was only two years old at that time.

SIGRIST: Do you remember if they offered any kind of supervision for the children, like a school class or something that they could go to if they wanted to?

MARK: I really do not remember. But there was one little girl here. The Ge -- the parents came from Germany. And Rina, the oldest girl, both of them, we speak German at home, so she played with that child in German. And they had a wonderful time. Then came on Sat --- I forgot which day it was -- there came some ladies from organization and they brought gifts for the children, beautiful dolls. There were only five children and they brought gifts for twenty. I don't know what happened. I think each child got one doll. And we were very, very happy about it, yes.

SIGRIST: What about any kind of entertainment did they supply here at Ellis Island? Could you go to the movies if you wanted to?

MARK: I really don't, I don't remember ever seeing here a movie, no.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing any nationalities of people that you had never seen before?

MARK: There were not many people. There was that lady from Canada, and some were from Europe. And we were sitting with these people we could talk to.

SIGRIST: Where was your room? Do you remember?

MARK: No.

SIGRIST: You don't.

MARK: We had to go up somewhere and the long -- all I remember that the rooms

were not locked. There were no keys. And everything was just wonderful. Nobody ever disturbed. You could only lock it when you are in the room from the inside. But not from the outside. I think that's I remember.

SIGRIST: Were -- obviously your husband had to have his X-ray retaken-

MARK: Well we had to wait for Monday for the x-ray, yes.

SIGRIST: What about you and the girls? Did you have to undergo any kind of physical exams?

MARK: No. No. Our papers were fine, yes.

SIGRIST: So the cousin comes out to get you, and do you remember what the process was before you could leave Ellis Island, did you have to find something, or...?

MARK: My husband, my husband had to do all that, yes. I was always busy with the girls and with the laundry, because I didn't have a dryer I was worried the wash wouldn't dry till we leave.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you were wearing when you arrived at Ellis Island?

MARK: Dresses.

SIGRIST: But could you describe it specifically for me?

MARK: Dresses which people wore fifty years ago.

SIGRIST: All right. So the cousin took you to a hotel...

MARK: To a hotel. Yes. Somewhere around that big --- what's that square called here?

SIGRIST: There are several.

MARK: Well, Broadway, is there a Broadway here?

SIGRIST: There is a Broadway, yes.

MARK: I think somewhere on Broadway. Half of the building was a hotel and the other half was a senior citizen's home. And all I remember, we had a room on the fifth floor, and it was so dark because when you looked out there was nothing but high rises. But it was cheap, and it was convenient. And my hus -- they took us to -- what's that big movie where the people were, the dances? Not Carnegie Hall, that other big one.

SIGRIST: Goodness, I don't know.

MARK: That big theatre. Very large.

SIGRIST: You went to a theatre.

MARK: Yes. A movie hall.

SIGRIST: Was that the next night, or the same night, or...?

MARK: No, I don't remember. I think his wife took care of my children. She was baby-sitting so we can go out and see New York in the evening.

SIGRIST: Of course, you'd been in other large cities, but did you have any specific

impressions of New York?

MARK: The lights, the lights. Yes. And the people in the street. Because don't forget I come from a place where everything was dark. Blackouts. And they did not have the running lights like here. Nobody could afford that. Of course, meantime everything has changed.

SIGRIST: How long did you stay in New York before you went to the west coast?

MARK: In New York, we stayed about, I think a week.

SIGRIST: Now were you using your English that you knew, to communicate?

MARK: Yes.

SIGRIST: Did you experience in your time in New York any troubles trying to communicate?

MARK: The only trouble with ----we used the subway and we tried to find out where we are, and where we are going. And nobody knew which way to go. They said, "Sorry, we don't know either." Everybody just knew his own line and we got lost somewhere in the subway, till somebody put us back.

SIGRIST: How did you feel about New York in that one-week you were here?

MARK: Very excited. Very, very excited, yes.

SIGRIST: I suppose it looked a little bit like maybe the movies you had seen...

MARK: No, what's that big theatre? They always had dance girls, a whole row of

them.

SIGRIST: Oh, Radio City Music Hall.

MARK: Right!

SIGRIST: Of course, the Rockettes.

MARK: That's the one.

SIGRIST: That's where you went.

MARK: That's where he took us, the cousin, to show us New York, yes.

SIGRIST: Did you see anything in New York that you had never seen before?

MARK: Many, many things, yes.

SIGRIST: Anything stick out in your mind specifically?

MARK: The high buildings. The subway. Everything is moving, everything is going, everything is running. People are more quiet in other countries. But here it was very exciting.

SIGRIST: So you were in New York for a week. And then what happened?

MARK: From New York, my husband had a brother in Minneapolis, in Minnesota. So we had a ticket to go to Minnesota and from Minnesota to Los Angeles. So we stayed three or four days, St. Paul, with his brother.

SIGRIST: And what sticks out in your mind about that whole journey across the

country?

MARK: We flew.

SIGRIST: You flew? Oh.

MARK: Yes it was always with a plane. We had tickets to fly, yes.

SIGRIST: I'm just curious. In 1952, how long did it take to fly to St. Paul?

MARK: It took to fly a day at least. Because the plane went up and down all the time. It stopped at every little city.

SIGRIST: Oh, that must have been awful actually.

MARK: It was horrible because up and down, all the time, yes.

SIGRIST: Oh, the kids probably had their ear problems too, going up and down all the time.

MARK: Big ear problems, right. And I didn't know about it before we left. Yes. But then we stayed at his brothers. And that was the opposite of New York. Very quiet. I didn't like it there.

SIGRIST: We have five minutes left. I'd like you to explain a little bit to me what it was like to meet your husband's family?

MARK: My husband hasn't seen his families from 1933 til '52. So he came with his children and his brothers and sisters came with their children. So all of a sudden my girls find a big family that they never knew they had. So we flew from St. Paul to Los Angeles and also we were picked up at the

airport. And stayed at his sister's house and brother-in-law. They had two children in our children's age. They still have them. And we...in the meantime, my husband started to look around, what to do here for a business. And I was expecting already. I knew then already that I'm expecting. And my son was born in Feb -- in February.

SIGRIST: Of '53?

MARK: '53, yes.

SIGRIST: And what is his name?

MARK: Steven

SIGRIST: Steven. Tell me a little bit, just quickly: how long did you stay on the west coast?

MARK: We still live there.

SIGRIST: So you stayed there a long time.

MARK: Oh ye, since '53 we live in...no since '52 we live in Los Angeles.

SIGRIST: I see.

MARK: Yes.

SIGRIST: Tell me quickly about what it was like to go back to Israel the first time.

MARK: To visit.

SIGRIST: To visit. When you went back to see your parents.

MARK: Well, I went to see my parents. And before that, I made a little money. I sent them packages. Food packages. And then to go back you take just presents and presents, and for my mother a dress, and for everybody. And I stayed in my sister's house.

SIGRIST: How long had it been from '52 to when, what year did you come?

MARK: Eight, nine years.

SIGRIST: Long time.

MARK: Oh yes.

SIGRIST: So were they still experiencing a lot of the same kinds of hardship that you had experienced, or had things gotten a little better?

MARK: It got a little better, but still it was a hard time, because they had wars. They still have wars. The wars in Israel, and the Arabs attack them again. And thanks God all this has changed now. It's a wonderful country, and everybody should visit Israel and Los Angeles.

SIGRIST: Do you think of yourself as being German, Israeli, or American?

MARK: It's a strange thing. I tell you the truth. When I go...I was many times in Germany, and I go to Germany, and I'm there a few days, I feel like I have never left. And I speak the language. Then I go to Israel, after a few days I feel I never left, I feel like an Israeli. Then I come back to America, to Los Angeles, and I feel like I belong here. So it's very strange. I think about it sometimes.

SIGRIST: You have a lot of homes.

MARK: Yes! I feel everywhere at home.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Mark, I want to thank you very much for taking time out from your visit here to let us interview you. This has been a very interesting story.

MARK: I don't know.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist, signing off with Frieda Mark, on Friday, May 19, 1995 at the Ellis Island Immigration Museum. Thank you very much.