

**EI-62**

**DORA HELLER RICH**

**BIRTH DATE: FEBRUARY 28, 1896**

**INTERVIEW DATE: AUGUST 9, 1991**

**RUNNING TIME: 42:51**

**INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.**

**RECORDING ENGINEER: BRIAN FEENEY**

**INTERVIEW LOCATION: BROOKLYN, NEW YORK**

**TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 7/1992**

**TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 2/1993**

**AUSTRIA, 1909**

**AGE 13**

**SHIP: NOT RECALLED**

**PORT: HAMBURG**

**RESIDENCES:**

- **AUSTRIA: BILCHE ZLOTE, BUKOVINA**
- **US: NYC**

**ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: ON THE TAPE RECORDING OF THIS INTERVIEW THERE IS A GOOD DEAL OF EXTRANEIOUS BACKGROUND STREET NOISE PICKED UP THROUGH A NEARBY OPEN WINDOW. NOISES INCLUDE WIND, CAR ALARMS, TRAFFIC, SIRENS, ETC.--Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of the Oral History Project, Ellis Island Immigration Museum, 7/3/1992.**

SIGRIST: Good morning. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Friday, August 9th, 1991. We're here in Brooklyn with Dora Rich, who came from Austria in 1909 when she was thirteen years old. Mrs. Rich, good

morning.

RICH: Good morning.

SIGRIST: Can you please give me your full name with your maiden name, please?

RICH: My name is Dora Heller, Heller Rich.

SIGRIST: Can you spell " Heller, " please?

RICH: Yeah. H-E-L-L-E-R.

SIGRIST: And what is the date of your birth?

RICH: 1896, February 28th, yeah.

SIGRIST: And where were you born?

RICH: In Austria, Austria-Hungary. Austria-Hungary Bucharina it was called then.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the town?

RICH: The name of the, it was a small village, Bilche Zlote.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that for me, please?

RICH: B-I-L-C-H-E Z-L-O-T-E.

SIGRIST: I see.

RICH: Zlote, yeah, " t."

SIGRIST: Can you describe this town for me?

RICH: It was a very nice little town, very more or less modern. It had a nice synagogue, had a nice church. And there were two thousand citizens living there and about, say about fifty Jewish people, Jewish families. And we lived a nice life. It wasn't no, no anti-Semitic, no nothing then. And it was pretty good.

SIGRIST: Was this an industrial town?

RICH: Industrial, no. Farming. Farming town. We had a countess. She owned the whole, all the fields and she employed all the Christian people, all the people, the non-Jews. The Jewish wouldn't work on the field. She employed them and they produced very nice wheat and barley and whatever they needed. And nice, nice fruit. We had fruit trees on our ground, beautiful fruit trees: apple trees, cherry, plums. We had our own cow and our own chickens--I used to feed the chickens myself--and ducks. And I used to take the little ducks out when they were first born and they would swim beautifully with the mother. And it was a nice little town. We were more or less sorry to leave it. But we had our own home.

SIGRIST: I was going to ask you, talk about your home. Can you describe it for me?

RICH: My home in Europe?

SIGRIST: The home that you lived in in this town.

RICH: It was a nice little home. We had two, two beautiful rooms and each room is

a built-in oven. It was supposed to be for two tenants but we were four children, we occupied ourselves. And it was a nice life. It was hard. My mother used to work very hard with all...

SIGRIST: Do you remember what the house was made out of?

RICH: Made of?

SIGRIST: Was it a wooden house, a stone house...?

RICH: I think it was a wooden. It wasn't stone. The rich people have the stone. It was a wooden home with a roof made of, covered with hay, a roof, yeah. A wooden roof, too.

SIGRIST: And you said you had animals. Was there a barn with the house?

RICH: The animals were behind a separate; it was called a "cabin." The animals, they had it for them. And the chickens, they were on the lawn, we used to and the cow had a real home for herself. (She laughs) The cow had a calf there and I watched that calf be born and was running right away, yeah. It was beautiful. It was a real beautiful life.

SIGRIST: Talk about your father. What was his name?

RICH: My father couldn't make a living. That's why we came here. He couldn't, do you know what a Talmud chuchum is?

SIGRIST: No.

RICH: You wouldn't know. He was studying the Talmud, always with the Talmud

learning and learning and we couldn't get along. It was impossible. And here my sister and I were growing up to be, and my mother was worried she'll never have the money for us to get married. You needed money. And she began talking, breaking it in that he should come to the United States. That's where he'll work and he'll make a living.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

RICH: Marcus Heller, Mordacai Heller.

SIGRIST: And was he from that town?

RICH: No, they were, he was from a different town. He came, he married my mother from that town and that's where he remained until he got, he came here in 1906, my father. He came before us and he more or less, he began selling things for a weekly payment, you know, he used to be a custom peddler. A custom peddler they were called. So he was no businessman. They used to take away the stuff and they never paid him (she laughs) and he wasn't doing good here. But my mother managed to get here. She sold the house and sold all the animals.

SIGRIST: Before we get to that, what did your father look like?

RICH: (pointing to a picture) There he is.

SIGRIST: Well, describe him for me in your words.

RICH: Uh, he was a nice-looking person with a beard and blue eyes, beautiful blue eyes. A nice, nice-looking person.

SIGRIST: And you said he was from a different town...

RICH: He was from a city. We were from a village and he was from a different, also not too big, not too many people there but he was in a different environment. There they only studied the Talmud. The boys only studied the Torah, from five years old you had to go a Hebrew and study. And he, he remained studying all his life.

SIGRIST: So he was a true scholar.

RICH: A scholar, that's what I forgot, he was.

SIGRIST: Now, how did he meet your mother?

RICH: How he met my? It was through, uh, what do you call the shadchen.

MRS. RICH'S

DAUGHTER: Arranged.

MRS. RICH'S

SON-IN-LAW: Matchmaker.

RICH: Matchmaker, through a matchmaker. It was all done through a matchmaker. All the meeting of the shadchen.

SIGRIST: And what was your mother's name?

RICH: Clara, Rifka

SIGRIST: Could you spell her last name for me, please?

RICH: Clara. Was C-L-A-R-A.

SIGRIST: And her last name? Her maiden name?

RICH: Her maiden was Schecter. It was really Falberg, but then, the real name is Falberg and that's what, my grandfather was a shochet, what do you call a shochet?

SIGRIST: With the chickens.

RICH: Yeah, he used to kill...

MRS. RICH'S

DAUGHTER &:

SON-IN-LAW Slaughter, yeah. Slaughters chickens.

RICH: Slaughter, yeah. So a slaughter in German was called Schecter, Schecter. So they were called Schecter most of the time. So this is their name.

SIGRIST: So your father met your mother and they moved to this town.

RICH: Yeah, they would come to my mother's town.

SIGRIST: Now she had family in this town.

RICH: Yeah, she had two sisters and a father and mother.

SIGRIST: Talk about your grandparents.

RICH: My grandparents? Here they are in the picture. To me they were my parents. I was with them more than with my parents. They were the most wonderful two people. They used to love me and I loved them and, uh...

SIGRIST: Did they live near you in this town?

RICH: Yeah, not far. But my grandmother was a sick woman so I used to go; when I was six years old I went to take care of my grandfather. So he used to call me " my little housekeeper," " my little *balabuste*, my little *balabuste*." I used to help him a lot, you know, six years, you know, you were trained to do things and work. And my grandfather had books from the Talmud on the table and I would clean up and take all the books and put them up on the shelf. He would come in from synagogue and say, " Where are the books? " So I tell him, " You have to clean up." He says, " This is gold and silver on the table. It's gold. You don't take gold off the table. You leave it on the table." (She laughs) That was my grandfather. And my grandmother was also a very fine person. It was, we had a beautiful family.

SIGRIST: You said your grandmother was not well. What was wrong with her?

RICH: She had, she gave trouble with the gall bladder, some kind of, she used to go on a vacation every summer to get to herself a little. There was a certain spot that they used to go to. So I had an uncle in America. He used to send ten dollars a month. So she would save that ten dollars and go away for two weeks in the summer to health, to get some health. She wasn't a well woman. And most of the time she was in my mother's house sick, too. When she was sick she would take it to my mother's house. And they lived a nice life.

SIGRIST: Let's talk a little bit about, for instance, your religious life. You said you were

Jewish. You said there was a synagogue in town.

RICH        Yeah.

SIGRIST: You said there were only fifty Jewish families, though.

RICH:        Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did those Jewish families all live in one part of town or were they scattered?

RICH:        No, no. We had two divisions, one on this side of the bridge and one the other side. They lived on both sides. There was a nice community with them. They lived nicely and they, most of them did a little business here and they have all kinds of stores. And they used to have stores in the house, in the building. In their own house they made a little store. The people used to go and buy things from them.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things did they sell?

RICH:        Like food and all, all kinds that were necessary for the household. I remember I bought lump sugar from one. Yeah, they used to count the sugar, how many was on the pound. And a lot of things you bought, all necessary for the housekeeping.

MRS. RICH'S

DAUGHTER:        How about the candlesticks?

RICH:        And the candles we used to buy from them, too.

MRS. RICH'S

DAUGHTER: Candlesticks. What they took them from...

RICH: Oh, the candlestick.

MRS. RICH'S

DAUGHTER: Tell them.

RICH: This she got from her parents. I have a pair of candlesticks here. They're four hundred years old. You get one when we...

SIGRIST: We can do this all later, please.

MRS. RICH'S

DAUGHTER: I meant the boys didn't go to school. They weren't German. And if they didn't go to school they would take the candlesticks from...

RICH: They take, they take a pledge. Not the boys, the girls, too. We have a compulsory schooling. We didn't have it in Russia. In Germany mostly we have compulsory schooling and the second language in Austria was German. We used to learn the German language a lot. In fact, when I told them if I read German books, do you know anything about German?

SIGRIST: Very little. So all girls were educated in this town.

RICH: Mostly. We had private teachers, either we went to public school. When I came to this country I got into the day school right away.

SIGRIST: Talk about going to school in this town in Austria. What was it like?

RICH: The school was a good school. We were taught everything nicely. We

had a nice teacher.

SIGRIST: Was it a big building in town somewhere?

RICH: It was a special building for a school, not big. We had two classes, two classrooms. The boys and girls used to have the same room. We had a nice teacher.

SIGRIST: Was it a male or female teacher?

RICH: We had a female teacher but there were boys in the school, too. Well, not Jewish boys. Jewish boys went to the Jewish school. We had a regular school for Jewish children, so they went there. But the girls went to this school and they were given credit for that school because they would teach them everything there. So they started school when they were four, five years old and it was pretty good.

SIGRIST : Did you like school?

RICH: I loved school. Even here I wanted to go but I had to get out. By fifteen I had to take my working papers and go to work. They put up a big struggle. All the immigrants right here in the Lower East Side, most of them had a horrible struggle.

SIGRIST: You said your father came in 1906.

RICH 06, yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember him leaving?

RICH: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Describe it for us.

RICH: I remember he's standing over us and he thought I was sleeping. He was crying bitter tears. The next morning it would leave, so that I was sleeping in a certain place with the boys on one end. I saw how broken up he was. He didn't want to leave. My mother made him leave because we were growing up and we had to get married. That's why she made him leave. Oh, I thought I had something there.

SIGRIST: Did you have relatives in America already?

RICH: Yeah, sure.

SIGRIST: And were they sending him money to pay for his passage?

RICH: My oldest sister was here already and my mother's brother, the one brother, was here.

SIGRIST: When did your oldest sister come?

RICH: Just a year before.

SIGRIST: And how old was she when she came?

RICH: She came when she was fourteen.

SIGRIST: Why did she come?

RICH: She wanted to. She wanted to get away from there. One of the families went to the United States from the town, so she wanted to go with them, alone with them. And she went and she was terribly sorry. And I remember my grandfather, he, my mother was broken up why she went. She was terribly set on going. So my grandfather said, " Where did you send the child?" She was still young. And she was bitter and she couldn't stop crying for days why she sent her away. And she wasn't happy here, either, until we got here.

SIGRIST: What did your sister do when she got here? Did she get a job?

RICH: She went to my uncle's house. They took her as a maid, yeah. She didn't get a job. She had to go to school. That's what she had to do but they didn't send her to school. They used her for the housework. But she was very unhappy.

SIGRIST: Was she writing letters to you?

RICH: Yeah, we heard from them. I don't think she wrote to us. Only one year she was here without us.

SIGRIST: I see. And then your father came.

RICH: Yeah. You see, my grandfather didn't want us to go to America while he's living. He thought the Americans are not observant. They're, you know, they're not kosher. Even the stones in the sidewalks are not kosher. (She laughs) That's what he said. And he wouldn't want us to go. And after he died we first went. He died the year that my sister went. She should have stayed already until he died but...

SIGRIST: What did you know about America? As a young lady in Austria, what did you know about America?

RICH: We didn't. We know people who came to town from America and they came to see their parents. One, Laza's, Laza's aunt came with a baby. She had a baby and she came to her parents. So from her we learned something that it's that and it's this.

SIGRIST: What did she tell you?

RICH: She told us that it's a struggle. Her husband was a worker working on cigars, rolling cigars, and he wasn't doing too good. And she came back here, to Harlem she came and that's who my sister went with, with that lady with the baby. And, uh...

SIGRIST: Talk about that one, the time after your father left and your mother is by herself, talk a little bit about that. What was that like without your father around?

RICH: My mother made a good living for herself.

SIGRIST: How did she do that?

RICH: She, they used to deal in eggs. They used to buy eggs and store them and sell them. This was a good business. You used to go, five o'clock in the morning she would go out and get the people that used to save the eggs for her and buy them. And then she'd, when my father was home they used to put window, windowpanes into the windows when they were broken and the picture, picture frames on the pictures. You know, the people in town, they bought a lot of these religious pictures so they needed framing. So she used

to do that and she did pretty good.

SIGRIST: Why didn't your mother do that while your father was still there?

RICH: She did.

SIGRIST: Oh, she did.

RICH But it's not enough. My father helped her with that, too, but it wasn't enough to keep a family going.

SIGRIST: Now, did you have to help her or did you work at all during that time?

RICH: No, not then. All I help was my grandparents in the house. That was my work. But my older sister did help. She did help them with that.

SIGRIST: In fact, I didn't even ask you about brothers and sisters. You have an older sister in America at this point.

RICH: She's gone. I've out-lived everybody.

SIGRIST: But you're home with your mother and who else is...?

RICH: My two brothers, younger brothers, yeah.

SIGRIST: And what were their names?

RICH My older brother was Morris and the other one was Harry. And they came with my mother. They came together.

SIGRIST: Did they help out at all or were they too young?

RICH: They were too young. They went to school. They helped out when they got to be eighteen, nineteen. They got into some kind of business with machines and my father got in with them. That was the only time they began making a living. They established a little factory. They bought it off of someone, in a basement.

SIGRIST: But that was here, right? In America?

RICH: Yeah, here. And I, after school I got a, they used to have factories in basements. Somebody called me in. They knew I knew how to work on a machine. They gave me a quarter an hour after school. I went there in the basement to work for two hours, three hours, a quarter an hour.

SIGRIST: Let's talk about your mother's decision to come to America.

RICH: My mother who?

SIGRIST: Who decided that you would come to America?

RICH: My mother did. It was her idea.

SIGRIST: Yes. Your father, you said he...

RICH: My father was not too happy to come here and my uncle, my uncle used to correspond with them, so he advised us to come here. The children are growing up. They'll be better here than there. So that's why she came and she had a miserable time of it.

SIGRIST: Do you remember leaving the town?

RICH: Me? Sure. I was thirteen years old.

SIGRIST: What did you take with you?

RICH: (She chuckles) I'll say I took with me my mother's, mother's, a china bowl. It was an antique and my mother was afraid to pack it, so I carried it in my hands all the way for so many miles. We slept in Hamburg, slept over night in Hamburg and I still had it with me. And when we came to Ellis Island they begin pulling on my eye, you know, the doctors that were examining I thought would take my eye out. And all of a sudden a door opens up and a black man walks in. I got so scared I dropped it. Oh, my mother almost died. I dropped it and it broke to pieces. I almost killed myself. I got frightened. Maybe you know what, I never saw a black man and this is what happened in Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: How did you get from Austria to Hamburg?

RICH: By train.

SIGRIST: Was that a long train ride?

RICH: Oh, sure. It was a long train. About two days we went by train. In Hamburg we went on the boat already, in Hamburg.

SIGRIST: Was that the first time you'd ever been on a train?

RICH: Yeah, the first time.

SIGRIST: What was it like?

RICH: My mother, they were on the train before, but not the children were never on a train.

SIGRIST: Was that an exciting experience? Was it a...?

RICH: It was. The whole thing was exciting for us, for the children. And then the boat was very exciting.

SIGRIST How long were you in Hamburg before you got on the boat?

RICH: Overnight. We slept over night there.

SIGRIST: Did they do any kinds of examinations on you when you were in Hamburg?

RICH: No, no, nothing. We just slept over and we boarded the boat. Nothing else. The only thing I remember about the boat: my mother was told we need rubbers here for the shoes. A pair of brand new rubbers I had standing by my bed on the boat. The day we had to land we get off the boat. They stole my rubbers. (She laughs) I was so sorry they took them. It was a valuable thing for me. Brand new. So that's my story about the boat.

SIGRIST: Let's talk a little bit about what the boat looked like. Where did you sleep on the boat?

RICH: We went steerage, you know.

SIGRIST: So what was that like?

RICH: It was bare, you know. We had a bed to sleep and the food was horrible.

SIGRIST: What did they feed you?

RICH: They fed you meat and things but we didn't eat the meat. It wasn't kosher. We're not allowed. And my mother brought a lot of stuff, prepared food that we ate, you know. Laza's mother gave along a big cake and cookies and whatnot. So we had, we ate that. It was only six days. My sister went a month on the boat. She almost died on that boat. It was the first time that a boat made it in six days. So this is my story.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the boat?

RICH: Hamburg-American Line. That was the name of it.

SIGRIST: And do you remember playing on the boat or going upstairs at all?

RICH: Yeah, they had, I think we were sick most of the time, seasick. Sitting there in agony. They had things going on but not for us. On the second class, the first class they used to look down at us and throw us down things. What they didn't want, the things to eat, they'd throw it down to us. It was not a good trip. I had a...

SIGRIST: So all of you were sick?

RICH: Not all of us. I don't think my mother was sick. I was sick. My brothers, they weren't too well, anyhow. It wasn't too good a trip. I had better trips going to Israel in 1940. (She laughs)

SIGRIST: You said the trip took six days, which is very fast.

RICH: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

RICH: Yes, I was going to tell you about that.

SIGRIST: Well, tell us.

RICH: We all ran out to see a statue. Nobody knew about that but what goes up. So one man says, "What is that? What?" Another man says, "Don't you know? That's Columbus." (She laughs) "That's Columbus," he says. So we thought it was Columbus. Who knows? (She laughs)

SIGRIST: What did you think when you saw New York from the boat?

RICH: Well, when we, they took us around. You see, most of the people slept on the, until the people took them from the boat, from Ellis Island, I mean. But we, my mother had forty dollars, so they let her go with three children and we came across, we were put on the boat and came across the water. So many street signs, East Broadway. There were people waiting for us, see. My father wouldn't come because it was Saturday. He wouldn't come and take us off the boat on Sabbath. He had to ride and then make us ride. He had a place for us here. They first come, Sunday morning they came for us: my father, my uncle and Sadie. So we slept at East Broadway at the HIAS. Did you hear of the...

SIGRIST: The HIAS, sure.

RICH: The HIAS, sure. Yeah, they took us in. Believe me, they did a wonderful

thing. My mother sent them, we belong. To this day we send them money.

SIGRIST: Before we get too far along here, let me ask you what you do remember of Ellis Island. You were talking about you remembered them examining your eyes.

RICH: Yeah.

SIGRIST: How did they do that?

RICH he doctor came up with an instrument and he pulled this eye up, both eyes and he looked in. But he was it ripping open. (She laughs) He was too rough on me. And they found people there with glaucoma. They didn't let them into the country. There was a lot of noise and screaming and crying but I remember I was hurt by him. But my eyes are all right. They didn't find nothing wrong with us.

SIGRIST: Did they have to examine you for anything else?

RICH: No, nothing else.

SIGRIST: How long were you at Ellis? Do you remember?

RICH: How long what?

SIGRIST: How long were you there?

RICH: By the examiner? Half hour, not more.

SIGRIST: Very quick.

RICH: They had a lot of people lined up. Not only me.

SIGRIST: So the place was very crowded when you were there.

RICH: Very crowded. Line up, with people old and young and children.

SIGRIST: What do you think your mother is thinking during all of this?

RICH: My mother?

SIGRIST: Yeah. What do you think she's thinking about?

RICH: Oh, she was miserable. That's all I can tell you. She left a comfortable, beautiful home with chickens and ducks and cows. (She laughs) You know, my mother sold the cow to a neighbor so anytime, before we left, anytime we'd pass, any of us, she'd go, she's calling, yeah, " Moo," she'd go after, " Moo." She'd call after us. We were so attached to the animals.

SIGRIST: Did the cow have a name? Did you name the cow?

RICH: No, no she was just, but I must tell you one thing. My mother sent me out once to feed the cow on the field because they need a lot of food to graze, to put her there to feed her. So, I come home from school, very little, come up to the cow and there's a little ridge there. And the cow went into a ditch to graze, to feed. And I fall asleep on the ridge. All of a sudden I hear such a yelling. A man is doing some fieldwork on the other side and the cow got out of the ridge. She walked on his area. She was eating his stuff and he was yelling his head off. I wake up and I run over to her and I take a hold of the cord of the cow and she don't want to go. And he's yelling terrible so I begin

slapping her. (She laughs) My hand were as big as this, (she gestures to show how small her hands were) so how can I hurt her. I begin slapping her and I begin pulling her and finally I got her out of there. And as I walk back with to my house I look at her and I was so sorry I slapped her. I see tears coming down over, tears coming down from her eyes and I thought she was crying because of me. I began kissing her and hugging her. I couldn't stop kissing her all the time that I thought I hurt. Oh, I could tell you things that...

SIGRIST: So you think that your mother was quite upset, actually, about all this.

RICH: She was upset. She was very unhappy. And here, in this country, my father couldn't make a living either.

SIGRIST: Now you said at Ellis, no one came to meet you at Ellis. You went to the HIAS in New York.

RICH: HIAS, yeah. That's where they picked us up.

SIGRIST: All right. And did someone come to the HIAS to get you?

RICH: Yeah, my uncle, my father and my sister.

SIGRIST: What was it like seeing your father?

RICH: It was nice to see him. What can, we loved our father. We were very attached to him. He was a child like we were, you know, he never knew how to run or make business or deal in all kinds of deals. He was an ordinary, nice human being. And my sister was happy to see us, no question. And then my father had a little three-room apartment on the Lower East Side and we got, and we began.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the apartment for me?

RICH: It was a room facing the street and two bedrooms facing the alley. Yeah, two of them facing the alley. And no hot water, no electricity, no nothing. Well, the electricity was beginning to come in. You see, nobody had it yet but it was coming in a short while. And it was a hard life. No bathtub. We had showers in the street, you know, that was run by the city. Showers, city showers.

SIGRIST: Describe one of those to me, please.

RICH: They had a little building built and there were about ten showers built so that people from the street used to, from the homes used to go to take a shower. I used to go myself. Once a week we took a shower there. We had no bath in the house. My children don't even know that. They don't remember. I never told them.

SIGRIST: Was there a bathroom in the building?

RICH: here was no bathroom...

SIGRIST: A toilet in the hall, perhaps or...?

RICH: No, not where we were. There were washtubs, you know. In that tub I used to bathe the children in the tub, but no bathroom. Later, much later when I moved from there to Second Street to where my sister lived we finally got a bathtub.

SIGRIST: What floor in the building was this apartment in?

RICH: What?

SIGRIST: What floor were you on?

RICH: I was on the second floor, yeah. There weren't too many, there was four floors altogether in the building.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about what those first couple of days in America were like. What did you do?

RICH: Do you think I could remember seventy years ago what I did? I had to register for school right away and I wanted to be an American right this minute. (She laughs) I wanted to forget and I shouldn't have. I knew so many languages and so many other cultures. I didn't want to know of nothing. I wanted to be American. And believe me, we loved America. It was our new home and we appreciated. You know the anti-Semitism was growing in Europe when we were there yet. Don't think it wasn't, although we had a wonderful, tolerant king. My own friend that I went to school with, she says, " Don't forget. When this king dies we're going to kill all of you." That what she tells, my friend from school. It was kind of morbid. It was kind of frightening. So we come to a free country, free for everybody. You're free to do whatever you want.

SIGRIST: Was it a Jewish neighborhood that you moved into?

RICH: Yeah, all, we're here. Yeah, all Jewish were immigrant, most immigrants. They all struggle, most of them. Some made a little living more or less but some of them--you know, we had no help from nobody.

SIGRIST: Talk about what your mother and father are doing at this Point.

RICH: Yeah, well they, the help came from the neighbors. We used to collect money, go buy our grocery order and leave it by the door. Those were the neighbors helping their people, their own people in the building. My mother and father, they struggled. What can I tell you? They weren't too happy.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: How did they make a living?

RICH: They didn't. My mother took in boarders, you know, and she cooked and she washed dirty clothes from them, and my father, he stopped selling that stuff. Nobody gave him the money from when he, I think they, they made some little stand or a stand, kind of, some kind of a stand. I don't remember what. Piece goods, trimmings was in there. He didn't make a living there, either. He lost money there. He didn't until later years when my brothers got big and they got into a little factory. They manufactured hankerchieves. That was in (she thinks out loud) '20..., I came '24, about 1920, '21, around then.

SIGRIST: Can you sort of just describe this neighborhood for me on the Lower East Side, I think you said. Was it a congested neighborhood?

RICH: It was mostly tenement buildings, mostly owned by Jewish people. The tenements were all with Jewish and most of them got into the building by most of those people. You know, those immigrants built up all Seventh Avenue, the manufacturing, where they manufacture all the clothing. They built up all those buildings. They went into that and they did pretty good in there. And the shops were owned by Jewish, most of the shops. And children there, children used to go to work. Now they weren't even sixteen

yet, other words. And I got the working papers. But they were still children.

SIGRIST: And how long did you go to school before you went to work?

RICH: Two years. From thirteen to fifteen. And then...

SIGRIST : Tell me a little bit about going to school.

RICH: When I first got into class I could read but not English. I could read Polish and German. And the German is more or less the same lettering as the English, so my teacher said, " I want to hear what, how you can read in German." She give me the English reader and I begin reading and I read every word in German. I didn't, I remember only one word: in " July " I said " Julie ", " lulie." And " June " and " Junie." And the kids were laughing, they were hysterical. (She laughs) How I pronounced the words. That's how she found out what I knew in reading. And I got to it; I got to it pretty soon. My parents were surprised. There was another girl and she also went to school. And my father showed her how I could read. So he took me in there. He says, " You read and let her read. Let's see who knows better." So I knew better and in no time, maybe a month, I read good. And it was an interesting time, what can I tell you?

SIGRIST: You learned English very quickly. How about your mother and father?

RICH: They were struggling most of their lives. I mean, it wasn't a life until they got to that factory that...

SIGRIST: Did they ever learn English?

RICH: English, no. They never went to school. What they learned they learned

from us. We used to talk English to them, more or less, but they never went to school.

SIGRIST: Your older sister who had come here before you, did she know English?

RICH: No, she didn't go to school. My aunt wouldn't send her. She needed a girl for the homework. She did, what she also learned by herself, used to read a lot and more or less we got to it. Yeah, but it was a struggle for everybody and...

SIGRIST: Did you find the atmosphere in this neighborhood just as accepting? You said it was a large Jewish population, so there was no anti-Semitic behavior in America in this neighborhood when you first got here.

RICH: No, there wasn't, no. But you used to hear of out of New York, you used to hear they beat up a man with a beard, they beat him up. You used to hear of it. It wasn't altogether immune. It existed.

SIGRIST: Did you come across any kind of food, for instance, that you had never seen before?

RICH: eah, banana.

SIGRIST: What was that like?

RICH: (she laughs) They tell, they give you a banana and I says, " I need a knife. I have to cut it." " You don't cut it." They show me how to open the banana. They fool around with me. That was a new thing for me. Although there was nothing new. We had beautiful fruit here.

SIGRIST: Well, and you lived in a fairly sophisticated town; it sounds like, in Austria.

RICH: We had delicious plums and cherries and apples. We had three apple trees right behind our building, our house. Beautiful apples.

SIGRIST: You said your mother took in boarders.

RICH: Yeah, here.

SIGRIST: And so we're talking about the three room apartment.

RICH: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So how many people are living in this three-room apartment?

RICH: We, that was already, we moved from there. We moved to a four-room apartment.

SIGRIST: How long did you stay in the three room?

RICH: Not very long, dear. It was too inconvenient. We moved from Ridge Street to Suffolk Street. It was right around the corner.

SIGRIST: To what street?

RICH: Suffolk.

SIGRIST: Oh, Suffolk Street.

RICH: Yeah, Ridge to Suffolk. And there we had an extra bedroom and besides

my, the boarder that my, one slept with us in the living room. He slept on the couch and we slept on the double bed, on a, you know, you put out the bed every night. So my sister and I, we slept in the same room with the boarder. He slept on the couch and we slept on this. And then she had one bedroom, so she gave it to a man with a son. He slept in the other. One bedroom they had for themselves.

SIGRIST: So you had a house full of people. Were they immigrants, also, the boarders?

RICH: Yeah, they were all immigrants, yeah. One boarder was a single man. The other brought his son over. He just had brought him over and he sent him to school. He was trying to make something of him. It was an interesting way of living.

SIGRIST: Did she cook for all these people? Was...?

RICH: No, for some she cooked, for some of them. For the single boarder. But not for the man with the son. They used, they had all kinds of restaurants, very cheap restaurants.

SIGRIST: Did your mother miss Austria?

RICH: She used to sew but she had no machine. She didn't sew here. Knitting, she did a little knitting.

SIGRIST: Did she miss Austria? Did she miss her hometown?

RICH: Oh, she did. Of course she did. We all missed it.

SIGRIST: Did she ever want to go back?

RICH: No, she never said about going back but we missed our conveniences, our home with our wonderful way of living there. We had a river that we used to go bathing in and boating. It was a beautiful town.

SIGRIST: Just tell me a little bit about your first job.

RICH: My first job was somewhere on Bleeker Street. I used to walk, you know, from Ridge to Bleeker I used to walk with a sandwich in my pocket, some kind of a sandwich, I don't remember. I used to work there, three dollars a week with a half hour for lunch.

SIGRIST: And what were you doing?

RICH: It was a blouse, we used to make blouses when blouses were very in style then, although they're in style now, too. And we, they took the blouses away from the machine. We used to trim the threads and sew on buttons. And so I trim and sew something else. I finish; we were called "finishers." So we worked, I got three dollars a week, so I didn't work and couldn't work on Saturdays, so they took off a half a dollar. For two and a half dollars a week we worked and my mother did something with that. She was glad to get it, yeah, 'cause they were very, were very poor.

SIGRIST: How did you get that job?

RICH: I don't know, I really don't know how. Someone, another girl, I think recommended it. A friend of mine took me out there.

SIGRIST: And were you working with a lot of immigrants?

RICH: Yeah, sure. Immigrants, mostly immigrants. The Americans went to high school, they didn't go to factories. No more, they looked for something better. They were beginning to see the light a little, the Americans. Then after the war I got into a factory. I was a machine worker already and I was getting fifteen dollars a week, which was a lot of money.

SIGRIST: Did your brothers fight during World War One? Were they old enough by then?

RICH: No, no, no. They were too old for that already.

SIGRIST: Too old.

RICH: Yeah. My younger brother Harry was almost drafted but he wasn't. No, my other brother couldn't fight, anyway. He lost a leg here in this country. He couldn't go. And it was a big struggle.

SIGRIST: I see. Well, I just have a couple questions in conclusion here. One is, were your parents happy they came or do they wish they had stayed in Austria?

RICH: No, they were happier here. No, they, it was much later years when they heard what was going on. It was beginning, not with Hitler; it was beginning there yet in our neighborhood, in our country. It was brewing like that for years. Don't think it was Hitler's work. He finished it up but...

SIGRIST: So even though things were a struggle here...

RICH: Yeah, yeah, they were, they began to love this country. They had, they married off children and grandchildren. They had, they liked it very much.

SIGRIST: My final question to you is, are you glad they came?

RICH: I am. I love this country. Right away I loved it and to this day it's my country and there's no other country that's as good as here. And God should bless it from its beginning, to get to go from weak a little. But I hope it will come back to a good standard and we'll all be happy here. I'm saying again, God bless America. It's still the best country in the world, even now, even the way it is. But the people, they're not good. I don't know what brings around but a lot of horrible things are happening right here in this city, never mind the country.

SIGRIST: Especially in this city.

RICH: It's all over the country, not only here.

SIGRIST: Well, Mrs. Rich, I want to thank you very much...

RICH: You're welcome.

SIGRIST: For letting us troop out to your house and...

RICH: It was wonderful to talk to you and wonderful to know all of you. It's been my pleasure, believe me. And nothing like the United States. I love it to this day.

MRS. RICH'S

SON-IN-LAW: How do I get a copy of that tape?

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

EI-62/RICH

END