

EI-726

EMMI TEGELER KREMER

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LEVINE: Today is January 23rd, 1996 and I'm here in Elmont at the Senior Center with Emmi Kremer, who came from Germany in 1926 when she was 9 years of age. Today, Ms. Kremer is 78 years of age. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I feel privileged to have this interview today, because Emmi Kremer has written a number of poems, some of which have been put to song, to music and hopefully we may get someone singing one of those on this tape later on. Well let's start at the beginning, if we may. Where were you born, and the date of your birth?

KREMER: I was born Bommern, Germany, March the sixteenth, 1917.

LEVINE: Bommen, is that what you're saying?

KREMER: B-O-M-M-E-R-N.

LEVINE: Bommern. Okay. And did you live in Bommern up until the time you were nine years old and left for America?

KREMER: Yes. 'Til I was nine. The day of our departure was the day of my birthday. That's why I remember that I was nine years old.

LEVINE: Okay. And who did you live with? Who, what did your family consist of when you were in Germany?

KREMER: I had lost my mother when I was four years old. And I lived with my grandparents.

LEVINE: Your maternal grandparents?

KREMER: Maternal, right.

LEVINE: Okay. So you lived with you... What were their names?

KREMER: (pauses) Ah, well, their, their, their married name was Tegeler.

LEVINE: Can you spell that?

KREMER: T-E-G-E-L-E-R. Ah, my grandfather's name was Jacob and my grandmother's name was Bertha.

LEVINE: And you lived with them from the time you were four?

KREMER: No. From the day I was born I lived with them.

LEVINE: Oh, you did.

KREMER: Yeah. It was a two-family house.

LEVINE: I see.

KREMER: And ah, we lived next door.

LEVINE: Okay. And what was your mother's name?

KREMER: Otilie O-T-T-I-L-I-E.

LEVINE: And your father?

KREMER: Henry.

LEVINE: And did you have sisters and brothers?

KREMER: Yes. There, we, there were four of us. There was Maita, there was Henry Jr. There was Eric and then Emmi.

LEVINE: You were the baby?

KREMER: Yes.

LEVINE: Okay. So, do you remember your mother at all?

KREMER: Very little, mm, hm.

LEVINE: How about your father? What did he do?

KREMER: My father was, er, he was a great speaker and he was into politics. Although he worked in the mines, but he still ah, loved the area of politics. And ah, when he ah, made speeches at times that were not approved by the political opposition parties, then eventually he had to leave Germany.

LEVINE: Oh.

KREMER: Mm, hm.

LEVINE: Was that the basis, that was the basis for the decision to leave?

KREMER: I think that was one of the, yeah. Because I remember a group coming to our house at night and he had already left. He had prepared himself already, knowing that he had to leave Germany. So ah, I don't know whether that was the beginning of Hitlerism or whatever. Political parties were involved. But I, I remember the group coming to the house and my great grandmother saying, oh, he's gone. He had a brother here in America, Andrew Kremer, and he had already prepared himself, had made contact and how he got the money together for, for traveling I don't know, but this is where he landed, was in America. That's how he came here.

LEVINE: Do you have any other memories of his political activities? I mean you were quite young, so you might not, but...

KREMER: I know he was, very active and very into it. That this seemed to be a very important part of it. And as I say, he was a great speaker. Cause I

remember later on in America, he gave a few speeches at the Veterans of Foreign Wars, that he got involved in over here and, and ah, he, everybody would sit and listen to him. You know?

LEVINE: And how about your grandparents? What was your grandfather doing in Germany?

KREMER: My grandfather ah, was a landowner. He was a farmer, and this is what we, we lived off the, we lived off the land.

LEVINE: What was he growing? Was he growing things, or he had cattle, livestock, or...?

KREMER: Yes. We had livestock and I remember helping him along, working with him, planting the potatoes. He would dig the hole and I would drop the potatoes in. So as a young child, I learned how to work. Which would help me later on in America.

LEVINE: And what about your grandmother? What are the things that you remember when you think about her back in Germany?

KREMER: She was a very sweet person, very reserved. My grandfather was very religious, and my grandparents both were very religious.

LEVINE: We're pausing for a second. Okay. We're resuming now. You were talking about your grandmother and ah, she was a very sweet woman. And both she and your grandfather were religious?

KREMER: Very religious. You couldn't say anything out of the way. You'd get your spankings, you know. My grandfather was also into writing. I guess later on I sort of inherited that from him. That's why I did the

writing that I've done. He could write the bible and memorize it from the front to the back and from the back to the front again. And he ah, had beautiful handwriting, which, when I was younger I really didn't appreciate. You know, it was only later on that I realized maybe that I had inherited some of the writing from him.

LEVINE: What was his manner like? What was his temperament? What kind of a person was he, do you remember?

KREMER: He appeared to be very stern, but he was really a very gentle person. And ah, I remember him making me a pair of shoes. During that period you couldn't go out and buy shoes and ah, the shoes were handed down from one, from my brothers down to me. And I remember him, for one of my birthdays, eh, out of an old pair of shoes, he made me a brand new pair of patent leather shoes. And I was very proud of those shoes. And to this day, I'm, I guess, patent leather seems to be a thing with me.

LEVINE: Do you remember the celebration of any religious occasions in Germany? What was done?

KREMER: No. We were not, because of my father's involvement into certain areas of politics, we were cut off from the church. So therefore, we had our religious, religious teachings at home.

LEVINE: What church was it?

KREMER: The Catholic church, mm, hm.

LEVINE: Huh. And how about your father then? He wasn't practicing?

KREMER: No. He was Catholic. He was not practicing his Catholic religion because he had married my mother, into the Protestant religion. So therefore, later on in America we were raised in the Protestant religion.

LEVINE: Interesting. Do you remember any occasions in Germany that stand out in your mind? Maybe they were a particular holiday or maybe a certain activity that you engaged in, either with the family or...?

KREMER: Well, we lived in country. It was strictly all country where we lived. And there weren't even any stores around. As far as religious holidays or Christmas or anything like that, that was strictly family. It was strictly the involved, it was just the family took part and ah, relatives came to visit you once a year maybe, because your, your transportation and traveling wasn't as modern as it is now.

LEVINE: How did people get around?

KREMER: Ah, horse and carriage. And luckily if a younger person might have had a motorcycle, which was very rare. There were no radios. No electricity. We, we had kerosene lamps and the lights were very low. To this day, I enjoy low lights. Small lights are my thing.

LEVINE: Do you remember any dishes that your grandmother cooked that you particularly liked as a little girl?

KREMER: Well, we made our own bread. There was no such thing as buying anything in a store. And if you went into town, ah, which was maybe every couple of weeks or so, ah, ah, things were a delicacy. If you were to buy anything. No everything was strictly came off the land.

LEVINE: How about clothes?

KREMER: Clothes was all homemade and hand-me-downs. Ah, ah, shoes.
Whoever was next in line would get the pair of shoes if they fit.

LEVINE: And was Bommern a, community?

KREMER: A very small town.

LEVINE: Of families?

KREMER: A close-knit community, no. It was a very small town, and you had farms there and they were wide-spread. No. You didn't have much contact with neighbors. It was strictly family.

LEVINE: Did you go to school at all?

KREMER: Oh, yes. Oh, yeah. They had a school in town. You had to walk quite a distance into town to go to school. No. We went to school.

LEVINE: How did the school in Germany compare with the school....

KREMER: Later on in America?

LEVINE: ...went to later on in America?

KREMER: Well, the memories that I have... I went to school there, what, three years. And the memories that I have of a special school teacher. He was a very kind and gentle person. But at the same time, strict. If you didn't mind your manners, you would get the switch across your hands, you know. And ah, later on, in America, we didn't have any, the teachers didn't touch you, you know. Only on one occasion where I, I

talked too much in class. The teacher came with a book and hit me on the head with a book. But that was a very rare occasion. She was also my favorite teacher so I forgave her for it.

LEVINE: Let's see. Are there any other memories? Do you have memories in particular of your brothers or sister? I mean, do you, in Germany? What kinds of things? Did you go places with them or do things with them?

KREMER: No. We didn't go anyplace. There was no such thing as going anywheres. It was strictly the home.

LEVINE: Did you have a favorite of your brothers and sisters?

KREMER: No. We all loved each other. Although my one brother who was closest to my age, we could sort of relate to each other a little bit more so than the other two who were older than I.

LEVINE: And are there any other things that you remember when you think of Germany, when you think of your childhood up to nine years old? Do you have pictures in your mind of the house or the farm, or what you did?

KREMER: I have pictures in my autobiography of, going back to that period. Well, one memory I have is where an aunt, who later on became our guardian and brought us to America, how she came to visit us and she brought chocolate with her. Now, I had never tasted a piece of chocolate. And the chocolate was divided into so many pieces and the piece that I had, I remember, it dropped to the ground, into the sand and I picked up that piece of chocolate and wiped it off. It was like precious gold, you know. Although I had no idea what gold was like even then. That was one of my memories.

LEVINE: Were there other things that you remember that were very rare for you to have?

KREMER: Well, I remember after World War I; I was born during the war. An aunt of mine came to visit us. And she was um, very modern, and very, she came from the city. And she was very modern and very up to date, and she could speak French. And I remember after World War I, our town was ah, there was a, ah, what would you call it? Not a fence around it, but you, in order to get in and out of the town, you had to pass through a rail, a railing like, and there was a guard there, a French guard by the way, because France occupied the Ruhr land, which is the area where I was born. And France occupied that during the, after the war. During and after the war, which is part of history. And I remember my aunt, because she spoke French, we were able to travel back and forth. She was a young, very attractive German girl who spoke French and had no problem getting back and forth through that barricade. That's what it was, it was a barricade.

LEVINE: What else do you remember about that aunt?

KREMER: Well, recently, recently, we had contact, this past year only, we had contact again with each other after all those years. Not with my aunt, but with her daughter, my cousin. And we were able to compare notes and stories. Little bits and pieces of a period of that time. And she said yes, the area where we were born was a beautiful little town. It was almost isolated, you know, from civilization. We didn't have much contact with people on the outside. And with the French occupying it, it even isolated us even more. And ah, that's, and I remember once a year, during harvest time, ah, all your aunts and uncles would come. Fortunately we had a hayloft upstairs. And they would come to help

with the harvesting; once a year. And it was like a big family reunion. A big celebration. And ah, us as children, we had to sleep in a hayloft with the mice.

LEVINE: And then once the hay was harvested, was there, were there festivities?

KREMER: Yeah, my grandfather would bring out his violin. I guess this is where music was bred into me. Grandpa would bring out the violin and start playing music and we would have on our, our best clothing, Sunday clothing, and we would all sit around and sing hymns. Ya.

LEVINE: Was there any, besides the church and the school, was there any other place that people went ah, on a regular basis, or where people congregated, except for the home?

KREMER: There was a, a, a, there was a beer hall. And in fact, when I read something about Hitler's period during that time and he used to go into beer halls to make his little speeches, it sort of reminded me a little bit of when, of when I'd have the memory of my father going into town, going into that beer hall, they call it a biergarten, whatever. It was sort of like a little hotel, and it had a, had a biergarten on the outside and how he used to go into, into meetings, into ah, town. And ah, ah, I remember my mother getting angry, cause she felt that he should have been at home instead of politicking.

LEVINE: And you mentioned that your father worked in the mines?

KREMER: In the mines.

LEVINE: What were the mines?

KREMER: Coal mines.

LEVINE: Coal mines, mm, hm. So he might have been a politicking in regard to the miners' working conditions and that kind of thing, do you think?

KREMER: Possibly. I never, I, I guess I was too young to really absorb the area that he was into. All I know is that later on, when he came to America, he was, he was more American, became more American than some of the Americans here. And he ah, enjoyed this country. In fact, during World War II, he even volunteered his services to work on boats or in the Navy, but he was not young enough to really, to be accepted. But he volunteered his time.

LEVINE: Was he involved in World War I at all?

KREMER: Yes. He was wounded. He was wounded in ah, during World War I. And ah, he was shot. And ah, maybe later on that gave him one of the reasons to leave Germany.

LEVINE: Well now, what was the situation of your leaving? Why was it?

KREMER: Our leaving?

LEVINE: Yes.

KREMER: Well, as I say, he came to America first. And he wanted ah, ah, a better life for us. And ah, as I say, he came to America and he loved America. He right away applied for his citizenship papers and he wanted us children with him. He had met someone here, a woman, and he ah, according to my documents that I have, private documents, he ah, he was able to guarantee us a good life here. And he had gotten a job. In

fact he got a job in a sugar factory in Brooklyn. And ah, that sugar factory, I believe the man that owned the sugar factory had a daughter and the daughter is the one who ah, had the plaque made which is at the base of the Statue of Liberty. And my father worked in that sugar factory. And years later, the daughter would have a plaque mounted at Ellis Island. Strange coincidence.

LEVINE: So your father left. How long before you and your...?

KREMER: Three years. Three years went by. He had to establish himself. He went and applied for his citizenship papers. His first papers. And ah, then there was no problem in getting us here. We had no problem.

LEVINE: And was there any more of an aftermath to his leaving besides, you remembered some men came looking for him and your grandmother said he left.

KREMER: Yeah. I remember that vaguely.

LEVINE: And how about your grandparents? Was there ever a thought that they might also come to America?

KREMER: No. They, they were, I think they were then in their sixties already. And they had all this, they had quite a bit of land in that area there. And in fact, later on, I met a man in America, when I mentioned my family name, he goes, you come from that family?

LEVINE: So they were respected because they owned land.

KREMER: But they were not politically involved in anything, my grandparents.

LEVINE: So you were nine years old. So how old was the oldest? Who was the oldest child?

KREMER: My sister. Maida.

LEVINE: Maida. So how old was Maida when you children came over?

KREMER: Well, I remember her graduating from school in Germany when she was fourteen. I think she was about sixteen. Because there's three years between each, or was it two years between each of us. I think sixteen, thirt-, I was nine. Nine, eleven, I think thirteen and sixteen. Close enough.

LEVINE: Was she working after she finished, graduated?

KREMER: High school? No. We all worked on the land, yeah.

LEVINE: So do you remember what you brought with you? What you packed to come here?

KREMER: We traveled very light. We didn't have much clothing. And as I say, I think I had one pair of shoes and those were handed down to me from my brother. And in fact, I have that in one of my poems. And I remember my hat had a hole in it. And I have that in the poem that I wrote, The Little Immigrant. Her shoes too large, her coat like a sack, hole in her hat. It's there.

LEVINE: So do you remember saying goodbye to your grandparents?

KREMER: Oh, yes. Because later on, three years later, I would go to visit them again, but to me, I felt like a stranger. I had now adopted a new

country. I was determined to adopt, to adopt the American way of life. I was going to learn English real fast. So leaving Germany, yeah, I guess I was leaving behind all the animals that were my companions, and ah...

LEVINE: Do you remember your feelings at the time? Did you have any idea what to expect in America? Had your father written letters so that you had some idea as a little girl of what you were coming to?

KREMER: All I remember is my grandparents saying, there is gold in America. You're going to find gold on the streets. I remember that phrase.

LEVINE: So when you and your, when the four of you children left, how did you go from Bommern to Hamburg? Do you remember?

KREMER: Well, I remember that we had to go to Koln, K-O-L-N, which is a major city in Germany. We had to go there for our passports first, just a few months before that. And that was the first time I have ever been in a city you know, or anything like it. I was strictly a farm girl. As I say, the only ones that I knew were the animals on the farm. And my brothers and sisters. So, ah, yes, it was quite a, in later years, I would remember it more than at the time. To me I was just following orders. My aunt, who became our guardian, who brought us to America, I just did it, as I was told.

LEVINE: Now, how was it? Your aunt came to visit?

KREMER: My father's brother. His wife, ah, she came over to Germany and she became our guardian. And she was the one that brought us to America.

LEVINE: So had she been with you for a while before you actually traveled?

KREMER: I had never met her before. No.

LEVINE: So it was the four children traveling with this aunt.

KREMER: With my aunt, and she had brought her son with her. His name was Henry also. She had brought him along as a traveling companion. They were four, there were six of us.

LEVINE: What was your aunt's name?

KREMER: In German it was Tante Frieda, Aunt Frieda.

LEVINE: And her last name was Kremer?

KREMER: Kremer. Yeah. She was married to my father's brother, who's name was Andrew.

LEVINE: And he's the one who was here.

KREMER: He's the one who was here already. He, he was the one that was a hard-hatter. And ah, at that time, he was a hard hatter, and he worked on the New York skyline. He worked, yeah, when I look over at that, well, I'll start with him. He worked on the Woolworth Building, Chrysler Building, Empire State Building and later on, Rockefeller Center, which was built later. Okay. He worked on all those buildings as a hard hatter, and um, I remember him telling us different stories how some of the American Indians who worked on those buildings were so agile and they were able to climb around where he couldn't. And how some people got hurt, you know. And he was one of my uncles here in this

country, and as I say, when I look over at that skyline, I can look over at that skyline with pride, knowing that one of my ancestors had, had taken part in building thst, creating that skyline.

LEVINE: So when you left your little town, did you take a train then?

KREMER: Yes. We took a train. We took a train to Hamburg.

LEVINE: And did you have to stay in Hamburg much before the ship left?

KREMER: No, no. We went right over towards the port of embarkation, where the ship was docked. It was a ship not a boat. Although later on it felt like a little boat when, when we ran into a storm.

LEVINE: What do you remember about that voyage?

KREMER: Well, I remember the day, it was the day of my birthday, March the sixteenth. And ah, I remember just before, they had gangplanks then. And I remember before climbing on to the gangplank, I said to my aunt, you know, today is my birthday. She said, oh, I have nothing for you. And I said, well, there's a man over there selling oranges. I had heard the word orange, I had never seen one. I had never tasted one. Because the part of Germany where we came from, there was nothing shipped in, into that area. So she went and bought me an orange. So with the orange in my hand, I call it a bit of sunshine, with the orange in my hand, we climbed onto the gangplank. And that was the day that we, that same day I think we sailed. And ah, we were on the ocean, like ah, it was supposed to take two weeks and it took like three weeks. We hit a storm.

LEVINE: Do you remember the accommodations?

KREMER: Oh, I remember. That's something that I was old enough to remember.

It stayed with me. I remember we traveled third class, steerage, which is all the way at the bottom of the boat. And I remember we climbed down two flights of stairs, and ah, I remember when we got down there, I could hear this rumbling noise, it was the motor, from the, from the engine, from the ship, you know. And that stayed with us all through the voyage, except at one time. And I remember that we had a small group of musicians on board that traveled around from class to class. And they would come a certain night and entertain us. We traveled third class which was steerage. The huddled masses, later on. the word became famous. And I remember we were halfway across the Atlantic Ocean and we hit a storm, and ah, the storm was, as I say, the ship that we were on, The Thuringia, was a smaller vessel. It was not one of those big ocean liners. And I remember when we hit that storm, all, they had tables and they had guard rails around the tables, and ah, ah, the stewards forgot to put up the guard rails and all the dishes went sliding onto the floor. And people started falling onto the floors from, ah, the ship's rocking back and forth. Well, I don't remember really how long, how many days the storm lasted, but I know after the storm, the engines stopped and as noisy as the engines were, when finally, when the engines started again it was such a relief. We thought we were going to be stranded in the middle of the ocean. And it was quite an experience. I remember one thing, of course, people getting seasick and then they would give us orange juice to drink or they would give us pickled herrings to suck on to cure the seasickness. And I remember going to the bathroom and you could hear the rumble of the water, you know, below, and I used to, as soon as I went to the bathroom, I couldn't leave, run fast enough out of the bathroom cause I used to think the water was going to come up through the toilet. And I had seen the fish jumping in the ocean and I thought the fish were gonna, were

going to come jump up through that (laughing) through that toilet and I would run like a little scare, like a little scarecrow I would run out of that bathroom.

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KREMER: ...and of course when the engines started again, and I, I, I was on deck, and ah, just before the storm started I had been sitting on deck and a big wave washed over me. Luckily I was strapped, I was a child, you know, and they had strapped me into the chair. Otherwise, that wave would have thrown me right off the boat, off the ship rather, yeah. And then of course when the engines started again, I, we were allowed – oh! During the storm they closed all the hatches, and you were locked in down there. All the hatches were closed. And I remember after the storm was over, and the engines started again, ah, I went up on deck and I was watching the propeller, the ship's propeller make a pass through the ocean, you know, as we were going on our way to America. Those are my memories of that crossing.

LEVINE: Do you remember when the boat came into the New York Harbor?

KREMER: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I remember that. I remember we were standing on deck and ah, I think it was Pier ninety-something, I think where we landed. I don't remember the exact number. But I know Pier 90 was a

very famous pier at that time where ships used to land in Manhattan. And I remember a man standing there waving, and ah, my sister said to me, that's our father. But our father in the meantime had had a bad accident in the sugar factory. Okay, so, it changed his complete looks. You, you, you, that you would hardly recognize him, you know. He had had such a bad accident, that, but, she recognized him, and waving, and ah... Of course he came on the ship. Now in the meantime, I had, I don't know about my brothers and sisters, but I had contacted lice on the ship, and ah, ah, then when our father came to pick us up, we were detained. That we were told we had to go to Ellis Island to be examined again. So ah, um, a smaller ah, tender, a boat came and ah, ah, took us off the ship and drove us over to ah, Ellis Island. And that was my experience in Ellis Island where I had to go through a de-lousing process where they placed me, I, it seemed to me that my memory, like into a shower. And they sprayed all these sulphur fumes over me. I don't remember whether I had to take my clothes on, left my clothes on, or whether I took, had to take my clothes off. All I remember is these, these sulphur fumes smelled to me like match fumes. You know, matches are made out of sulphur. And that's what it smelled like to me. And they sprayed those all over me. I was coughing and choking and I was thinking about the buttercups in Germany, where I had, I said, gee, there are no buttercups here. Only those fumes spraying me and I was coughing. But I survived. I got through it. And then a short while later, we landed there in the morning, the ship docked in the morning and then by, towards evening we were cleared. We were released. And the fact that our father had already applied for his citizenship papers, we were able to leave. You know, they didn't detain us or keep us overnight.

LEVINE: What was it like for you to see your father at that time, when he came and picked you up?

KREMER: Well, he was always so busy politicking in Germany and then he was in the war. He was in World War I. He was gone for a couple of years, he was like a stranger. And even later, in later years, he, he, was ah, like as stranger to us.

LEVINE: How about the Statue of Liberty? Do you remember seeing it?

KREMER: Oh, that I remember! Oh, I remember that where, where the ah, ah, ah, where the captain from the ship ah, ah, we had no loudspeaker, they had those horns, like ah, like megaphones. What do they call them?

LEVINE: Megaphones.

KREMER: He had something like that. And he called everybody and he said, everybody come up. Come up on board and see the... Evidently he must have seen it before, you know, he says, come and see the Statue of Liberty. And ah, I asked, I remember seeing the Statue of Liberty and I also remember those tall buildings, coming from a farm, where you only had like, a small farm, you know, and then there's those tall buildings. Really made an impression on me. Plus the Statue of Liberty. And of course later on I would, ah, our father would take us over to see the Statue of Liberty and then ah, when we went to see the Statue of Liberty, I remembered and I said, gee, this is what I saw when we first came to America. I felt, I remember touching it. I says, I says, gee. I'm actually touching the Statue.

LEVINE: Do you have any other impressions of Ellis Island?

KREMER: They gave us something to eat and something to drink and everybody was very nice to us. Yes. Yeah, no. I have no, no, only the sulphur

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fumes. But outside of that, no. I have, sitting there, I was sitting there on the bench. And waiting to be called. I have that in my poem, in my song. No. Outside of that I have no other bad memories.

LEVINE: Well then, once your father picked you up, where did he take you?

KREMER: 133 Coffey Street.

LEVINE: Where is that?

KREMER: Ah, Red Hook/Erie Basin, Brooklyn, New York. That's where I grew up in Brooklyn.

LEVINE: Did you stay living on Coffey Street?

KREMER: No. My father had, as I say, he was a widower. And he had met another woman. And ah, ah, she had agreed to take care of us. And plus my aunt. Ah, ah, so we had relatives. My aunt and uncle living... It was an apartment house. I think it was a three-story apartment house, as I remember, a three-story apartment house. My aunt and uncle lived on one floor and my father had rented another floor for us to ah, for us to have a home when we came to this country. Because he had signed a piece of paper ah, with the government saying that he would create a home for us before he would bring us to America. Which he did. He had an apartment waiting for us. And of course, then when ah, he had that bad accident in the sugar factory, and his case was coming up now in the meantime, he already had had the accident before we came to America, the sugar factory made a settlement of \$3,000, which was, at that time, 1920's, a lot of money. And with that money he was able to ah, provide a good living for us. Ah, ah, he opened up a bakery and restaurant business and ah, the bakery and

restaurant business ah, was very successful. It was right near the, near the Brooklyn docks and we had all the longshoremen coming in as customers. We had a very thriving business. Because three years later, ah, my father had made enough money that we traveled all through Germany and we hired two chauffeurs. We had two chauffeurs three years later, drive us all through Germany.

LEVINE: Well, when you first arrived, did you remember? I mean, coming from a farm as you did, what other things struck you as new and different those first few days and weeks?

KREMER: Oh, you could get all the candy you wanted! (laughs) Never had any candy in Germany. The only candy we had was ah, the, my grandmother made sugar out of sugar beets. She would dry the beets and grind them up and made something sweet. You didn't have those things. And coffee. I remember my grandmother making coffee out of rye beans. Out of rye and ah, another kind of a wheat that she, she ah, burnt them on the stove like, and she made like a chicory out of it. And that's how we had our coffee. And of course we had cows. I didn't drink coffee. We had fresh milk from the cows. We had farm animals.

But I do have one more memory – talking about my grandfather. I remember after World War I, how there, how there was very little food left in Germany because the enemy will always surr-, whoever is fighting the wars, one enemy will always surround the other one, and starve the people out. And I remember the government, the German government coming to my grandfather for food, and he had given as much as he could. He says, I have four children to feed here, you know? And I remember him taking little piglets, and ah, the government was going to come and take that little pig from us. And I remember him digging a hole in the ground and putting that little pig into the hole and

covering it with branches and leaves. And tying a string around the pig's snout so the pig wouldn't make no noise. So we, we would have meat to eat. And this was shortly after World War I when food was very scarce.

And talking about one thing leads to something else and brings back certain memories.

LEVINE: So you started school right away after you came?

KREMER: Oh, yes. The next day. I, I didn't have no vacation time or anything like that. No. The next day, I ah, I started, I was registered into the school. And ah, let's see. PS 30. I, I, yeah. PS 30 in Brooklyn, New York, I started school. Of course, the first few weeks in school are rough. Because I didn't speak no English. No speak-a the English. And ah, ah, the students in school, they were young. What, what did they know? They didn't know anything about immigrants. They would tease me. And as I came out of the class and I'm on my way home, ah, we lived not too far from the school. In fact, our bakery restaurant business was ah, two blocks away from the school. So after school I would walk over, I had to report to the bakery first, to my parents, and then the kids would follow me and call me Heinie, Heinie, Heinie. And I says, what is Heinie? I didn't know what Heinie was, you know. So um, the first day in school, the teacher spoke to the class and she says, I can't relate to this young lady here, you know. Does anyone speak German? And there was one girl and she hesitantly raised her hand saying, yes, she spoke German. But this was not too long after World War I and nobody wanted to be associated with the word Heinie, you know? So ah, America had been at war with Germany, you know. And, but she raised her hand reluctantly and, and it was through her that I learned my first words in English. That we were able to ah, make contact with the

teacher. It was through her. To this day, we remain friends. And ah, no, those, I remember those memories. Afterwards, nobody's going to call me Heinie. I'm going to learn English (chuckles) as fast – and within a year's time, I learned how to speak English. Yeah. I learned the American way. And I was very proud to be in school. Especially on certain days when they had ah, Assembly days. And we had to salute the flag. And I remember ah, ah, they would always choose two boy scouts to be honorary boy scouts and they would ah, at Assembly time, they would bring out the America flag and one young boy would hold it and the other one would spread the flag out. And then we had to ah, ah, learn the pledge of allegiance. And I remember if anybody, anybody in, in the assembly or in any of the classes, didn't have a necktie on, the teacher would get um, ah, crepe paper and make ties out of them and put them on the students, to make sure they had a tie on when they went into assembly. And I, this is how I remember the connection between... They had to have respect for that American flag. And I remember that. And I wrote a poem about that too. I don't know if you've seen it, called...

LEVINE: What's the name of that one?

KREMER: Star Spangled Banner. I, with the memory of that, I stood in front of the Elmont public, Elmont, town where I live, Elmont Public Library and it reminded me of when I was young. And I ah, had to learn to the Pledge of Allegiance. And I wonder if anybody's in such a hurry nowadays, whether they ever look up at that flag. I said, I'm gonna go and ask people. And every time somebody came out of that library, I would stop them. And I thought, I hope they don't get annoyed with me. Why am I stopping them, you know. But everybody was so cooperative, I had not problem. I said, what do you think of the flag? And I got different responses. There was only one woman. I didn't like her answer. And

she, she, she could hardly talk the English. She says, America flag, oof! I said, what do you mean by that? She no got the time, no got the time. So I said to her, well, what are you doing in America if you don't have time, you know? And ah, but...

LEVINE: Were you, well you probably came by your patriotism in part through your father who was very proud to be here and to be...

KREMER: Oh, yes. Oh, yeah. I remember ah, ah, he joined a Veterans of Foreign Wars and he wanted to be the carrier of the American flag. Now, because he had had such a big accident in the sugar factory, he had a silver plate in his head, and he could not physically ah, do too much heavy carrying, you know. And one time when he caught, carried that American flag in a parade in Bay Ridge, Brooklyn, where later on he lived, and where he worked, he collapsed. From the heat, and ah, ah, I don't know whether it was Memorial Day or Fourth of July parade, some, it was one of those parades and he collapsed from carrying that American flag. But he never, he never ah, ah, pushed another language at us. He said, you learn. You're here in America. I remember him saying that. You're here in America and you speak English. You learn the American way.

LEVINE: Was his new wife, his second wife German?

KREMER: Well, the first wife, they were all German women in his life, except the last one. Who was Mae West's first cousin, which I'll get to later on. The first one was his lady friend. She was already married, and she would not get a divorce from her first husband. And their friendship lasted about seven years. And he always felt that ah, ah, he wanted to do the right thing and marry her, but ah, she, no. No, she didn't want to get married. So their friendship didn't last much longer after that. He

then met a, a, German woman. As I say, he was still a widower. He met a German woman on the ah, steamship Bremmen, ah, which was a luxury liner, like the Queen Elizabeth at that time. And he had friends on board the Bremmen, and he met her there. And, and this woman was also a widow. And he married her, and he had another child from her. Hildegarde. And we correspond to this day, her and I. And my father was also very handsome, tall, good-looking man. And he had no problem attracting ah, women friends. So ah, he divorced her. That marriage didn't last, last very long. And ah, he then married ah, ah, Anna, and ah, that marriage lasted. Then, they stayed together all those years and she was ah, Mae West's first cousin. I think her mother, I don't know if you've ever heard of Mae West. Her mother and Mae West's mother were sisters. Okay? And ah, as I remember she had all the mannerisms...

LEVINE: Of Mae West?

KREMER: All the, all the.... Whenever Mae West was in town and she was on Broadway, she would ah, contact her family, cousins, and she would send them free tickets and they would go to visit her. And ah, I didn't go. I never met her. And ah, I was too busy with being young, I guess.

LEVINE: How was it that your father was on the Bremmen?

KREMER: He was in business in Brooklyn, you know. And he had ah, he didn't work on the Bremmen.

LEVINE: No.

KREMER: No, he had, he had quite a personality. He was ah, he had, he could attract people like flies, you know. And the fact that he was successful

in business, I guess helped. The money was there, you know. And he had all kinds of friends. When there, when certain areas when there's money, you also attract all different types of people, you know. And I guess some of the friends he made through business, ah, ah, were ah, on the Bremmen. And the ah, ah, the woman who he met on the Bremmen and he married, she had a ah, um, a friend on the Bremmen who came from the same town where she came from in Germany and he was head printer on the Bremmen. He had control of the newspaper that, that you have on these luxury liners. They have news-, ship's newspapers. Conrad Walter. I remember his name. He had charge of the newspaper on the Bremmen. And so whenever the Bremmen was in port here in New York, they would go to visit him and he would stay with us for several weeks 'til the Bremmen was ready to leave again. And I remember on one of the last trips, that when we saw him, was when he came to stay with us and we heard about the rumblings in Europe going on now with Hitlerism on its way, you know. And I remember my father asking him, well, Conrad, how are things in Germany? And he said, oh, not so good. I can't talk about it. He said, well, what's going on in Germany, you know? He said, I can't talk about it. So Hitler had already created fear in the German people even though war had not been declared. He had already created such fear that even though this man was on American soil, he still was afraid. He already was afraid. This is how much power he was already getting in Germany. Nobody was aware of it at the time. But I can still see that, no, I can't talk about it.

LEVINE: Well, going back a little bit. Talk about the trip that the family made back to Germany after you had been here three years.

KREMER: I was, yeah, I was here three years, and ah, (pauses) was it my stepmother wanted to go back and see her family? And ah, in the

meantime, my grandparents had been writing back and forth how they missed us and all that and my father came to me one day and he said, would you like to go back and see your grandmother? I said, oh, I'd love to. Although when I was four years old and I had lost my mother, my, through my father's doing, my father has a German schoolteacher friend in Germany who had no children. And after, after I lost my mother, they ah, the ah, teacher wanted to adopt me, and it had a very traumatic effect on me, to be taken off that, off that farm, where I had all my animals. They were really my companions, my playmates, and to be placed someplace into a city. The German schoolteacher lived in a city. And to be placed there. So when I went back to see my grandparents again the second time, I didn't feel very close to them because ah, I felt that they had given me away. But it wasn't their doing really. My father was the one that gave the permission. He thought I could be placed into a home and be adopted. I was young, and I was sort of maybe a little wild. You know, my grandparents were getting older and they couldn't control me as much as they would like to. And I guess they thought it would be better off if I was placed ah, in another home. And ah, I never got over that.

LEVINE: This was when you were about four?

KREMER: Four years old. I tried to trace the records. I checked them out not too long ago. I must have been about three or four years old.

LEVINE: Did you stay with the schoolteacher for a while?

KREMER: I, I only have a brother living, okay? I ah, contacted my brother recently and I said to him, how long did I...? Cause I don't remember too much how long did I stay there? Was it six months, was it a year? I know I was not happy there with them. And ah, he, I haven't received no

answer from him. Maybe he, certain memories he doesn't want to go back to either. Cause I think he was placed into a home, some kind of a home too at that time. And it was, I guess not easy for grandparents to take care of four children.

LEVINE: But then at some point, you all came back and stayed with your grandparents while you were still in Germany, or not?

KREMER: You mean before we came to America? Ah, yes. My, my, ah, grandmother wanted me back and I was brought back, and my brother came back again too. And, yes. We were all, we were all together when we finally came to America. No, we were together as a family.

LEVINE: So it sounds as though financially, anyway, the family was better off once you were here in America. Enough to be able to afford the trip back and the chauffeur in Germany.

KREMER: Oh, we were quite successful. Oh, ya. The business that we had, it was like a goldmine. And ah, my father was a very charismatic man. Ah, he was very good in business and in fact he sold the business and the people that he sold it to couldn't make out as good as he did, and he went and bought the place back again. So, no. We were financially very secure. I had my silk dresses and I had my trips and whatever I wanted. Yeah. (sighs) Unfortunately, later on, the women that he married, they wound up with all the money.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, now, after you, so you were still in grade school, or high school I guess, maybe, when you took the trip to Germany.

KREMER: No. I was in grade school. I was...

LEVINE: About twelve, or thirteen?

KREMER: Ah, (pauses) I was about eleven I think. Let's see. I was in this country three years. Eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve. I was twelve years old.

LEVINE: And how long did you stay in Germany that time?

KREMER: About six months. Yeah.

LEVINE: And how did it seem to you, having been here?

KREMER: Oh, the relatives, they, they treated us like we were millionaires. Coming from America. You know, the rich relatives from America.

LEVINE: Did you ever have second thoughts about wanting to be in Germany rather than coming back here?

KREMER: Ah, no. No. I, in fact, I met someone from my hometown, near my hometown, not too long ago, and um, I said to him, well, what would it be like for me to go back and live there? And he, no. Even when we went back on that trip that time. I felt strange. I felt I didn't belong any more. Because um, ah, when I went to visit one of my relatives, I was very bored. I wasn't going to school, I wasn't doing anything. So they had me sit into a German classroom to participate and to see what it was like to be back in a German classroom again. No. I didn't belong anymore. No. I had learned the American way of life, and I, in fact when I went to see my grandparents, I said to my grandfather, I, and I sat on that same sofa that I had sat on as a child, and I started crying. I said, I want to go home. America was now my home. And my grandfather said, but this is your home here too. I says, no. No more. I guess maybe he was hurt, whatever, but I had gotten used to the

American way of life and that was it for me. I have some very pleasant memories of growing up in Brooklyn.

LEVINE: Are there any in particular that you want to mention?

KREMER: Oh, yes, I, not too far from where we lived, there was a library. And I lived in that library. I lived in that library. I was always reading and in fact, so much so that ah, I was scolded, and I was told not to read at night before going to bed. And I had a searchlight and I would hide it under my blanket and get a book from the library so I could read it.

LEVINE: And was the experience you had in Germany similar for your brothers and sisters? I mean, did they also feel out of place there when they went back?

KREMER: No. They never went back. I was the only one.

LEVINE: You were the only one!

KREMER: I was the chosen one to make the trip back.

LEVINE: Do you know why you?

KREMER: Well, my sister had gotten married in the meantime. And ah, she married a musician, and in fact, he was working as a piano player at that time in a very famous, notorious nightclub called the Texas [Diner] nightclub, and he was the piano player there. And ah, my, my brother, Henry, he, he later on went into the CC camps, which was something that Roosevelt had started. CCNY camps for the young people here in America, where if they weren't working or they were sent all over the country to build the roads that we have here in America. CCNYU, I

think it was called. CC camps. Civilian Conservation Corp. CCC camp. My brother was in there, yea. And my younger brother ah, where did he work? He had gotten a job some place. Or he worked in the bakery. We all had to work. We all had to help in, in the lunchroom and bakery.

LEVINE: What did you do?

KREMER: Well, on my lunch hour, our, our business was right, one block away from the school. And ah, at lunchtime, when I went to the restaurant for lunch, I didn't, I didn't eat. I had to work, I had to help. Especially, we were busy. It was a very busy place. I had to help wait on the tables.

LEVINE: Had you grown closer to your father by this time? By the time you took the trip with him?

KREMER: I thought I had, but later years, no. I never went to visit him very much. And ah, he handed all his property and his money over to the women that he had married. You know, so I ah... No, I never really felt that close.

LEVINE: So ah...

END TAPE ONE, SIDE B

BEGIN TAPE TWO, SIDE A

LEVINE: This is the beginning of Tape Two. I'm speaking with Emmi Kremer, here in Elmont, New York. And we're going to start now talking about how Emmi Kremer came to write the poems that she's written. Would you want to speak to that Emmi?

KREMER: Well, (clears throat) um, it has been many years since that little girl sat on that bench in that great hall at Ellis Island waiting for her dream to come true. And how did I start, um, writing... Oh, as I say, when I was younger, living in Brooklyn, I practically lived in the library. And I always wanted to write. So when I had retired for a year in Florida, down there, the heat overcame me. I couldn't write. So I decided to come back to New York and start writing children's stories. And ah, also we had ah, the celebration of the Statue of Liberty in 1986, and um, oh, I remembered coming from Europe and when I saw that Statue in the New York skyline, and I remember when I lived in Brooklyn, I used to sit – we were not too far from the Brooklyn docks – Todd's shipyard and Robinson's shipyard. And ah, I used to look over at the Statue of Liberty and I said, There she is! you know. And ah, all of a sudden a mist would come and cover the Statue. I thought why, hurry up! I wish that mist would go away and so I could see the Statue again. I'd sit there by myself. I was always a loner, you know? I guess maybe growing up on a farm in Germany had something to do with it. Not too many children to play with. And then, then, the fog, the mist would disappear and there I would see the statue again. And when they had the Statue of Liberty celebration I said maybe I can write a little something about it. Since I always wanted to be a writer. And um, I wrote the poem "Sweet Miss Liberty", and um, I remember when I was sixteen years old, my parents had, gave me a piano for a present and I had a few lessons at the Juilliard School of Music; plus a private teacher. And I said, well, maybe I can put music ah, to the words that I had written. And I had ah, joined the Elmont Senior Center in Elmont,

New York, and there was a piano. And I decided to sit down at that piano and in between all the noise and conversation going on, I, I created a melody to go with the words that I had written about the Statue of Liberty. And I had also worked part-time in a small restaurant in Franklin Square. And ah, still in the restaurant business, which I had grown up in. I was doing waitress work and two men were sitting at the counter – young men, well-dressed. And they were talking about music. And I said to the men, would you like to see what I wrote? And one of the men said, oh, this is great. May I have a copy of this? But in the meantime, I'd had it copywrited. So I said – cause someone had said to me, always have your material copywrited – so I followed through with that, so I said to him, sure. I have other copies at home. You can have this. What I didn't know was he was connected with someone working with Channel Four over in New York. He was acquainted with the man, his name was Michael Drucker. And he says, I'm going to give this to Michael Drucker to look at. Maybe Channel Four could use it. So ah, he did. And a few days later, I have no telephone, but a friend of mine has a phone, and I'd given him the phone number if ah, if for any reason they were interested in it. And I got a phone call saying Channel Four was going to come to my house that night. That very night. That they liked what they had read and they wanted to use it in a show. I was overwhelmed. So quick, in a few hours, you know, that my material would, was so well liked. So, my girlfriend said, she says, you can stay here and we will, I will take any messages. So that night, she came running over to my house and ah, she said, Channel Four is going to come to your house tonight. The Senior Producer, Lucia Suarez, is going to come to visit you with her assistant, Michael Drucker. I said, well, how will I handle this? You know, I wasn't prepared for anything like that. So they called back, they used her phone and they called back and they said, ah, and I waited there for the call. I said, well, I'm not prepared for anything like this.

Oh, we will only stay fifteen minutes. We only want to use your permission that we can use the material that you wrote for, we're making a half-hour show called "Portraits of Freedom". It was about all these successful women in America that have contributed to the American way of life and you were chosen as one of them. So, I said, well, I says, I'm not prepared for anything like that. So that night they did come. They insisted on coming where I lived. And I only have a small studio apartment. And I had, I had been in Florida for a year and I had no furniture for them to sit on and ah, I said, I really don't have a place where I can entertain you. So she said, oh, we'll sit on the floor. We'll wear our jeans and we'll sit on the floor. Ah, we just want to have your permission to use your material. So I agreed, and they came and I only had one chair because I had put all my stuff in storage. And ah, they interviewed me for three hours. And ah, ah, they asked me many questions which they wanted to use in the show, and ah, when I gave them the answers she, she didn't believe some of the answers that I gave her. And I said to her, you weren't there, I was. And she said, oh, come on, you can't tell me those are your answers. You know, she was a little rough on me, you know. And I wasn't prepared for it. So I still wanted to respect her. She had a job to do, you know, and she seemed to doubt some of my answers. So I said to her, I tell you what. Give me a week to think it over about the show, I says, and I'll let you know. And ah, she says to me, why? Do you have money? And I said, yeah. I found five pennies today. And ah, then I said to myself, what does my having money or not having money got to do with my material? I thought the material is what they were after, what they wanted, you know? I said, I'll tell you what. Give me a week to think it over. Oh, she says, Emma, we'll come and pick you up. And she says, ah, we'll take you over to New York, to, to, to ah, tape the show and all that. In the meantime, they had already planned a whole show within a few hours that I was not even aware of, even without my permission. And

ah, finally I said to her, I'll tell you what. Let me think about it. Oh, she says. You have money. I said, yeah. I found five pennies. I have money. I says, I've been wealthy when I was younger. I said, I know what it's like to have money, and I wasn't ah, at all impressed whether I had money or I didn't have money, you know.

LEVINE: Do you remember what it was that she was questioning?

KREMER: Well, about how my grandparents used to say, oh, there's gold on the streets in America! There was gold on the streets in America, but you had to work for it. There was gold there. There were opportunities there, but you weren't going to get it overnight. You had to work for those opportunities. Step, by step, you had to work for those opportunities. They were there. And ah, but when I had given her some of these answers, she, she seemed, she was a lovely lady, and I realized later on when I thought it over, I realized they came all the way from New York, you know, really, and they had a show to do, but they were going to do the show their way, okay? And ah, they sent me a lovely letter in return, I have it in my, my, my desk at home. And ah, as I said, they had a job to do. But in the meantime, ah, they gave me a week to think it over, and I waited a whole week. And I wasn't going to be pressured into something that, where she wanted me to give certain answers that were not going to be mine, you know? So at the end of the week, I called back, I called Michael Drucker, who was her assistant, and ah, he said to me, I'm sorry, I have to tell you, but you were cancelled out. You took too long to make up your mind. I says, well, you gave me a week to think about it, you know. And I realized they had a job to do. And what I also realized was, when I saw the show, oh, Dr. Ruth was put into my place. In to take my place. And Dr. Ruth's part of the show was where she's talking to a naked statue. You know, to me, I didn't think that was very patriotic. I thought it was

strictly a patriotic theme about how women in America made it, you know. And then when I saw the show, people that they had, they had, Channel Four had put on the show, were all millionaires. Okay. I was not a millionaire. I may have been close to it when I was younger, but I was not any more. You know? So I realize. But Michael Drucker, a lovely person; we remain friends. And he wrote to me several times later on. He says, your material is great. I have the letters. He says, stay with it. For the whole world to hear, to see and to read. And the letter that he wrote gave me such a lift, that I, I think it sort of helped me stay with it a little bit. And then, when they (something dragging in the background)...

FV: I'm sorry!

LEVINE: Okay, we're resuming now, after a few interruptions. We were talking about Michael Drucker and that you remain friends with him.

KREMER: Yes. Yeah. I still, I send him Hanukah cards and he sends me Hanukah cards. And his family too, his mother. Mrs. Drucker. Yeah. Because he gave me such encouragement. Ah, beautiful young man. He is now in the ah, producing business. He works for a producer, hoping to be an actor and I wish him lots of luck. Oh, he had his own show on TV later on too, Fast Forward. Well anyway, and ah, so then he gave it to Channel Four and then I said to my, he says to me, continue with what you're doing and then I ah, ah, then I don't which came, which I did first now. The All American Flag or Ellis Island. I'd have to check back the dates on either one. I know the American, I wrote about the American Flag interviewing people as they came out of the Elmont Library and how the American Legion hung up the ah, Star Spangled Banner poem, they have it hanging up in the hall, and how they, one night they had the state troopers, Nassau County police, firemen, they had a special

awards night, and my name was chosen, and they gave me an award for contributing towards Americanism. And ah, then um, I think, and then Ellis Island, ah, they had the renovation of Ellis Island, and I wrote to Lee Iacocca, asking if in any way I can ah, make a contribution in any way. And I think I sent him one dollar, okay? And in return, I got the certificate which was awarded to people who went and gave a contribution. Which I was very proud of.

LEVINE: The wall of honor?

KREMER: No. Not the wall of honor. That was the Statue of Liberty. Right. Lee Iacocca gave out awards for the Statue of Liberty. I'm jumping ahead now. Then ah, when Ellis Island ah, ah, ah, had a notice in the paper that they were going to renovate the place, and then I had my memories of Ellis Island and I thought I'd write about it. And ah, also, they were looking for contributions. And I thought, well, I'll, I'll send them, I think it was a hundred dollars, the first one. I sent in a hundred dollars. As a contributor to have the name put up there. Ah, just mine alone, not the other members of my family, which later on I added when they had another addition on to the wall. But then in the meantime, I received a notice in the mail from Ellis Island, if I had any old documents at home ah, would I like to contribute them if they were in good condition. And I said, yes. I, I, have some of them at home, and they told me how to wrap them and how to send them, and then I received a thank-you ah, ah, letter in return with a gift release form for me to sign that they could keep the document, you know, and I think they have it in the case over there. Ah, getting around, around the time too, I wrote how did I get started with the plaque? The Song of Ellis Island? In between I had ah, ah, composed the ah, Song of Ellis Island, and ah, I had written the words and then I went to the Elmont Senior Center where they have a piano and I composed the music to go with the words. And ah, I'm

trying to remember now, how I... (pause) yeah, how I started the plaque. After I had written the words and music to Song of Ellis Island, I met a perfect stranger in a parking lot. Another senior, a man around my age. And ah, ah, we became acquainted, and he said, you, you're into patriotic material? I said, oh, I love it. I says, I thrive on it, you know. So he, what he did was, which I didn't know, he sent my name into the National Flag Foundation newspaper. And the National Flag Foundation newspaper printed an article about me in their national newsletter. And the Veterans of Foreign Wars, in Dallas, Texas, read, a man, Leo Sirian, from Dallas, Texas, read the article in the newspaper and contacted me and sent me one dollar so he could have a copy of the poem, which I had post cards made out of it. And I sent him the post card and he said, the Veterans of Foreign Wars that he was connected with in Dallas, Texas, loved it and would I give them permission to make a bronze plaque ah, ah, from it. So if I would get the words together, make it very brief, you know, not too lengthy, something that they could put on a plaque, which I did. And ah, I sent it to them and I gave them written permission and they ah, they, this Leo Sirian, a very patriotic man, contacted many organizations, including the Dallas Cowboys, to get donations. I think US General contributed, a radio station contributed, so many people contributed towards the project of having a bronze plaque made with part of my Song of Ellis Island on it. And when the, ah, ah, ah, when the plaque was completed it was shipped to – no. First they contacted Ellis Island to see if it would be approved and accepted. And ah, ah, Diana Padue, was her maiden name at that time, okayed and approved it and ah, when the plaque was completed it was shipped to Ellis Island and it was ah, standing in the ah, library at Ellis Island, locked away, and I called up Mr. Barry Mareno, wanting to know what was going to be done with the plaque. And he said, well, in time, they were going to make a special display room and the plaque was going to be placed at the entrance to that

display room, which would be a great honor. In the meantime, ah, I think Miss Padue contacted me through the mail and she said what is needed is stand for the plaque. And ah, ah, so I went around and I tried to get donations the second time around. The first time was for the plaque itself. But for the stand now, people weren't that enthused about it, so I decided to pay for the stand to make sure that it would be shown to the American public. And this was my way of showing my true patriotic feeling towards America.

LEVINE: How did you feel when the American flag group in Texas? How did you feel when they approached you about having a plaque? Making a plaque of your poem?

KREMER: This larger group of men, and they were all in accord and they all agreed and they were so, I have the letters at home, they were so enthusiastic about the project, that oh, I, I felt that they were on board. That these veterans were on board. Oh, it was a great, great feeling. I never thought that from my little sweet Miss Liberty poem that I, I, would you know, that I would have something placed in a national monument. To this day, it's unbelievable. And I've had so many people along the way help me. I always said it wasn't me alone, it was the American people with me, that were with me in it.

LEVINE: This is a big question but, what does it mean to you to be patriotic?

KREMER: What does it mean to me to be patriotic? I've had that great feeling. Like during World War II, um, ah, during that war, I ah, I didn't go in for the defense work right away, cause I, in a way, I didn't believe in killing, you know. I don't think anyone should be killed you know. But towards the end of the, the end of the, towards the end of World War II, when I've had some friends coming out of the service and some of them were

wounded and all that. I said to myself, I've got to do my part too, to, not just to feel patriotic but to do something about it. So I got a job in a defense plant. I worked for the Ranger Aircraft Company. That was another way of my contributing to this country that I had adopted as mine.

LEVINE: And what kind of other responses can you think of that people have had to your writing these poems and songs?

KREMER: What other responses to my writing? I've had people say to me, oh, you're so talented, you're going to be so famous. And I say to myself, well, those are just words. It's what you do and what you should do for this country to keep this country safe. To me, that's important. Whatever way you can contribute, you know? You can do it step by step, but it doesn't come overnight.

LEVINE: Why do you think you ah, you, you wrote them to begin with and you...

KREMER: Why was I chosen? I have no idea. Yeah. I have no idea. From the little immigrant that sat on that bench at Ellis Island waiting to be called. When I see the movie, The Godfather, and I see that little boy sitting there, sometimes I feel that, that's me sitting there, waiting to be called. But not to go into that area, to go into a world of crime and hatred, you know, there's so much good here in America, if you, if you only look around you and reach out for you. I'm still reaching out. I'm still trying. And you know, you have to try. You have to do your best. Give whatever you can give.

LEVINE: And how did it feel to you to go to Ellis Island and to see it again?

KREMER: Oh, I can't wait to go. I have not seen the plaque.

LEVINE: Oh.

KREMER: I have not been there to see. I'm waiting, when the plaque is, is, in a special display room, when it's there, in it's, if it's placed where the public can view it, I'd like to share it with everyone that goes there. The visitors, Americans, I'd like to share that. And through that plaque and through my writing, this is my way of saying, thank you to America.

LEVINE: Well, that's a beautiful place to end, unless you can think of anything else you might want to add that we haven't covered. I just want to say that we have a lot of written material and some photos, we're going to have that on file in the Oral History Library, and that ah, anyone who wants to make use of that can contact you before they do so.

KREMER: They need to contact me only if they decide to use it into a commercial area. Otherwise, I gave it as a gift to Ellis, to Statue of Liberty/Ellis Island Monument. And, and as I say, that's my contribution as an American. And but for anyone to use it in a commercial area. No. I gave it a gift, as a gift to the US government.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I think we'll close here. I want to thank you Emmi Kremer very much. It was a privilege.

KREMER: Thank you for coming all the way over here to give me your time, you know.

LEVINE: Well, it's been a pleasure. I think you very much. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. It's January 23, 1996. We're in Elmont, New York, and I'm signing off.

END INTERVIEW