EI-781
MARY HARTFORD
BIRTHDATE: MARCH 19, 1921
INTERVIEW DATE: AUGUST 13, 1996
AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 75
RUNNING TIME: 1:00:20
INTERVIEWER: PAUL SIGRIST
RECORDING ENGINEER: PAUL SIGRIST
INTERVIEW LOCATION: WESTFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE
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CZECHOSLOVAKIA, 19261
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SHIP: THE MAURETANIA
PORT:
RESIDENCES:

SIGRIST: Good evening. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Tuesday, August 13th, 1996. I'm in Westfield, Massachusetts with Mary Hartford. Mrs. Hartford came from Czechoslovakia in 1926. She was five and a half when they arrived in the United States. For the sake of the tape, you may hear a clock ticking in the background. Mrs. Hartford, can we begin by you giving me your birth date, please?

HARTFORD: Yes, March 19th, 1921.

SIGRIST: And what was your name in Czechoslovakia, the name you were given at birth?

HARTFORD: Well, it would be Maria.

SIGRIST: Maria. And your last name?

HARTFORD: Pavlovich.

SIGRIST: And can you spell that please?

HARTFORD: P-A-V-L-O-V-I-C-H.

SIGRIST: Thank you. What town in Czechoslovakia were you born in?

HARTFORD: It was a village and the name of it was Sedlice, S-E-D-L-I-C-E. It's close to—its two cities that are closest to there are Presov, that's P-R-E-S-O-V, and Koscisc, K-O-S-C-I-S-C, I think. And they're not too far, but we were in the little village.

SIGRIST: What part of the country is that?

HARTFORD: They're on the eastern part, almost into Russia, on that end.

SIGRIST: Did your mother or father or anyone ever tell you about the day you were born, the circumstances around the day you were born?

HARTFORD: Yes, my mother said it was a very warm day. [Laughs] Not really, except that I was a very good baby, and I grew up with—we lived with my grandparents. They had a farm and we lived with them, and there was my grandfather and my grandmother, an aunt, an uncle, my father and mother and myself. And I was spoiled. So I do remember playing with other children and down kind of a little hill in back of our house there was a river there, but I was never allowed to go down there because I probably would have gone in. But outside of that, we lived next to the school. There was a fence and there was a schoolhouse there, and I never went to school there. And there was a—I remember going to church, but I didn't behave too well, so grandpa stayed home with me while the rest of them went.

SIGRIST: Let's talk a little bit about the farm house itself. Do you remember what it was made out of what it looked like?

HARTFORD: It was made of bricks and it—well, I'm quite sure it was bricks. Maybe if it's not bricks, it's—what do they call it, the cement?

SIGRIST: Like cinder blocks?

HARTFORD: No, um—

SIGRIST: Stucco.

HARTFORD: Stucco.

SIGRIST: Stucco.

HARTFORD: And the roof was like a thatched roof and we had a big kitchen and several other rooms. I really don't remember what they were. I remember the kitchen mostly and I remember the cellar stairs going down into the cellar. I fell down them one time, so that's probably why I remember that. And—

SIGRIST: Do you remember why you fell down the cellar stairs?

HARTFORD: What's that?

SIGRIST: Why did you fall down the cellar stairs?

HARTFORD: Oh, I was very anxious. My father was coming home and I was all dressed up and I was anxiously waiting for him and just tumbled down.

SIGRIST: Did you hurt yourself?

HARTFORD: No, no, I didn't.

SIGRIST: What sticks out in your mind about the kitchen? Why do you remember the kitchen so well?

HARTFORD: Well, the kitchen had one of these ovens that was built into the wall and that's where they did the baking. Like an old-fashioned, you know, just the way they had them here in the old days, with a pot there hanging for whatever. The tables were there, the table, and we didn't have chairs, I don't think. I think we had benches. We had a table and benches, and I don't know. My grandmother had all around her kitchen or at least one wall—I'm not sure whether it was all around, but on at least one wall, all kinds of cups that she had it decorated with, and it was very pleasant.

SIGRIST: It was your grandparents' house?

HARTFORD: It was grandparents' house, yeah.

SIGRIST: What kind of a farm was it?

HARTFORD: Ah, they—well, everybody raised their own animals, you know. Cows and things and enough for themselves. The village consisted of one main street that went through and the houses

were fairly close together and their farm land was out on the outskirts, so everyday the people who worked—like my grandmother and my grandfather and my mother, they went out. You know, took their lunches and went out or somebody brought them lunch or something like that, but the people were close together living.

SIGRIST: In the farmhouse itself—

HARTFORD: Well, it wasn't very big. They were usually fenced in. Each family were fenced, fenced in, and then in the rear part of the house you had your stables. I know we had—and we raised pigs, too. I remember that clearly because they were going to, you know, butcher a pig and they didn't want me there, but I insisted I could—I wanted to be there. So they put me on a wagon, you know, regular wagon with a horse. The horse wasn't there, though, I suppose. So I could watch from there. Well, the pig got away and got under the wagon and I was screaming on top of the wagon and the pig was down below and my dad didn't know which to go for, me or the pig. [Laughs] I can remember that now. You know, it's silly things like that you remember when you're a child.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what the process was for slaughtering a pig? How they did it and what they did with the pig after it was slaughtered?

HARTFORD: Well, I imagine it was just—I don't know how they—they don't shoot it or anything. It was with a knife or something, I suppose, cut their throats probably or whatever. And then they save the blood for the blood pudding, you know. That's what they call it, anyway, and the neighbors all come together. They all help one another when you're doing this. You're not doing it just by yourself. You have your neighbors there and usually the women are in the kitchen cooking something or other, and then they have a nice time after the butchering and all that is done.

And I know we had cows because right outside the stable I used to have a tin cup and I was the first one that got milk from there. Before they even strained it, I had had a cup of milk. So I remember that much.

SIGRIST: Whose job was it to milk the cows?

HARTFORD: I think it must have been my grandfather and my uncle maybe. I don't really know. My father didn't work on the farm. He wasn't much of a farmer, I guess. He went out and built homes. He

was—I don't know what they call it. Contractor they call them here, and he would be gone all week. He would go for a week at a time because they'd go to other villages and places to build, and he'd have a crew of men that went with them and they stayed all week. And they lived wherever they were building and I imagine they bought their food there or it was supplied by the person who was there. And he only came home Saturday and Sunday. So I know he—I don't think he milked the cows. He might of. He probably knew how, but I don't remember him ever milking the cows.

SIGRIST: And this may be why you were so excited to see him, when you feel down the—

HARTFORD: Yes, that's why I was so excited about my father coming home because he always brought me candy.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

HARTFORD: Michael.

SIGRIST: And what do you know about his family background?

HARTFORD: Well, about his family. There was my grandmother and my grandfather.

SIGRIST: Are these the grandparents you were living with?

HARTFORD: That we were with, yeah, and my grandmother's maiden name was Popo, P-O-P-O.

SIGRIST: P-O-P-O.

HARTFORD: Well, I suppose over there it was P-O-P-O-V because that would be the family of, Popov, but when they came here, that's what they—when his—when her brother came here, it was Popo. And see, they gave you the name when you were at Ellis Island, if it was long or short, they kind of doctored it up sometimes.

SIGRIST: Are there any stories about your father in his youth that either he would tell or that your grandparents would tell?

HARTFORD: Oh, that when the neighbors got together, especially in the winter and they'd get talking, they'd all come and gather in the house, and they'd exchange stories about almost anything. About their families or experiences and a lot of people were very

superstitious, you know, and they'd have all these tales of this, that and the next thing that happened. Some of them were kind of weird and others were, you know, good to listen to.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of those superstitions or things that made people uneasy back then?

HARTFORD: Now, what did I—one time I remember my grandmother telling us that somebody's baby had died and it was buried in the—oh, before I say that. The house where our house was used to be a cemetery, many, many years ago. Well, anyway, this child was buried there and this—it isn't my grandmother, but it's somebody in the family heard a baby crying every night. So she thought, well, that must be the child that was buried there and never had a proper burial or something. So she made an outfit for the baby and she buried it there and she never heard it cry again. Now, that's the story. Now, that's the type of stories they might tell, you know.

SIGRIST: But they were very sort of frightened of the world around them in a way. I mean, they were superstitious.

HARTFORD: They were—yes, they had tendency to be rather superstitious or believe in things that, well, we don't believe in right now. But they were all very nice people. I know when we were leaving, they all came to the house and, as I say, they gave me my little basket full of, oh, candy probably. I don't remember, and—

SIGRIST: Do you know how your parents met?

HARTFORD: Well, they had known each other all their lives. They went to school together and they always knew each other and everybody went to the same church. In fact, there was a nice church there and there were quite a few Catholics. Mostly Catholics, but there were a great many Lutherans there, too, and they used the same church. They didn't have two churches. They just used the same church, which is unusual. And most of the time, as I understand it, if the father was Catholic and the mother was Lutheran, the boys would be brought up Catholic and the girls would be brought up like their mother. That's the way. There was no confliction there at all. They understood each other and they thought that was the thing to do.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

HARTFORD: My mother's name was Makara, M-A-K-A-R-A.

SIGRIST: And her first name?

HARTFORD: Mary.

SIGRIST: And what do you know about her family background?

HARTFORD: Well, they lived at the other end of the village and they had a farm like, you know, the Pavlovich grandparents, and my mother used to carry me down there and we'd visit. All I can remember, more or less, is that they had geese, and my cousin—yeah, it should be my cousin. She was a little older than myself, but she was always run to meet us and those darn geese would just chase us and they nipped and they hurt. In the back yard they had a hill and it was for hay and things, and we used to roll down the hill. That was one of the things that amused us. They all had barns and animals and basically the same.

And the center of town had a store of some kind. I don't remember too much about that, and there was a place they met for social events there, too, like parties and where the men would play cards there. I imagined they served liquor there or something like that. I don't really remember that much of it, but I do know there was a place like that.

SIGRIST: What other sorts of things did people do for entertainment at that time?

HARTFORD: Well, they loved music and there'd be a lot of dancing going on. They had affairs and parties like we do here. They played cards. They played games. They visited a great deal. They had picnics and well, just the ordinary thing.

SIGRIST: But it all seems to—it all goes to gathering together.

HARTFORD: And they use to—yeah, uh-huh. And they—they just amused themselves. There was nothing to entertain them there. There was no movie or anything, you know, like that. Once in awhile maybe a band would come into town or something and that would get everybody going.

SIGRIST: You mentioned music. Is there a childhood song that you know in, would it be Slovak? Is that what you spoke?

HARTFORD: Oh, I used to know a lot of songs in Slovak. I still know some of them.

SIGRIST: Could you sing one?

HARTFORD: No, I can't. I can't sing anymore.

SIGRIST: No.

HARTFORD: I have lost my singing voice completely. Oh, I can't. I can't sing.

SIGRIST: Could you recite the words in Slovak for us on tape?

HARTFORD: Oh, dear. Let's see, what could I—

SIGRIST: Maybe a Christmas song.

HARTFORD: I can't think of anything at the moment, but if I think about it—

SIGRIST: Maybe it will come to you as we go along.

HARTFORD: Yeah, it will come to me later.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit about what your father's personality was like? What was he like as a person?

HARTFORD: Well, he was very good natured. He was a lot of fun to be with. He was outgoing. He was adventurous. He had a lot of friends.

SIGRIST: Is there a story that you could tell me about, I don't know, maybe something that you did with your father when you were a small child?

HARTFORD: Well, when he came home, I was with him all the time, but whatever he was doing, I was with him. I really can't remember any one particular thing. My mother was just opposite. She was very quiet, very easy going, and a hard worker. She used to do a lot there. She used to sew and, oh, do things like that.

SIGRIST: Were there things that your mother taught you how to do when you were a small child?

HARTFORD: Well, not when I was in Europe she didn't teach me anything.

SIGRIST: What did she teach you in America?

HARTFORD: Oh, she taught me how to cook, how to sew, how to do all the things that you do in a house, and that was about it. When I was

over there, I didn't do anything except get in everybody's way, I think.

SIGRIST: Did you have brothers and sisters in Europe?

HARTFORD: No. No, my brothers were born over here.

SIGRIST: After your parents came here.

HARTFORD: Uh-hmm.

SIGRIST: What religion were you?

HARTFORD: Catholic.

SIGRIST: And you mentioned you did remember there being a church.

HARTFORD: Yes.

SIGRIST: What do you remember in Europe about your religious life? How you practiced your religion either at the church or at home?

HARTFORD: Well, it was the masses were said just the way were said here in America, but the people stood in church. There were only pews and places to sit for the older people and the other people stood in church. I remember that. As I say, I didn't go too often. And they had the choir and I don't know whether they had an organ or not, but I know there was always singing. My father was very active in the church and—in fact, he told us after he was over here, he was telling my brothers he used to be an altar boy right up to the point before he got married. I don't really remember too much about the church.

SIGRIST: What about how you practiced your religion at home?

HARTFORD: Well, we all said our prayers together and we always said grace before meals, and as you enter into a person's house there, you don't come in and say hello. You say, "[Slovak]", which means blessed be Lord Jesus Christ. Now, that was the greeting that you do when you enter a family's home. But I learned all my prayers over there.

SIGRIST: Could you say a prayer for us in Slovak on tape.

HARTFORD: Gee, I think I still remember.

SIGRIST: Grace? The grace that you said at table perhaps you might remember?

HARTFORD: Ah, I've forgotten that one. I've forgotten a lot of Slovak because I don't have anybody to talk to now. After my mother's gone, there isn't anybody, unless I want to talk to myself and then I probably couldn't understand it. I still remember a good deal of it. Well, I can say the Our Father.

SIGRIST: Yes, and it would be in Slovak, correct?

HARTFORD: It'll be in Slovak, yeah. [says Our Father in Slovak] Amen.

SIGRIST: Thank you. It's an interesting sounding.

HARTFORD: It's a—it's a fairly easy language to pick up.

SIGRIST: Is that the only language your parents spoke?

HARTFORD: Well, they spoke Hungarian because they were there during the era of Austria Hungary. So they had to go to school and only speak Hungarian. They weren't even supposed to speak it at home, but of course they did. So they spoke Hungarian and Slovak. If you know the Slovak language, you can also easily pick up Russian, Yugoslavian, Polish. There's a difference in them, but words are spelled differently and pronunciations are different and the alphabet might be a little different or something like that, but if you listen to a Russian person, if they talk slowly, you could understand them. But it's kind of a basic Slavic language.

SIGRIST: So when you were a small child then, you only spoke Slovak, right?

HARTFORD: Yes.

SIGRIST: What about your grandparents?

HARTFORD: No, they just spoke Slovak. I think my grandmother was Russian. I'm not sure, but she came from Russian heritage anyway. I don't really know whether she was born in Czechoslovakia or whether she came from Russia. I really don't know.

SIGRIST: We talked a little bit about this before, but perhaps you can talk a little more extensively about the food that people ate.

HARTFORD: The food?

SIGRIST: In that part of the world.

HARTFORD: Well, it was plain food. There was always—they baked their own bread. They made their own butter. They made their own cheese. They didn't eat meat as much as we do here. It was just on holidays and Sundays and, of course, they ate chicken. I never saw a turkey there, but they had ducks and geese, as I said, and they had their own eggs. They were very self-sufficient, really.

SIGRIST: Who did the cooking in the house? Who did—

HARTFORD: Who what?

SIGRIST: Who did the cooking in the house?

HARTFORD: Well, either my grandmother or my mother.

SIGRIST: And what would be just like a typical middle of the week meal? What time would you eat it, first of all?

HARTFORD: Well, it would probably start with soup because that is one more or less a basic thing. Then you would have your bread and probably cheese or butter or then they baked, you know. Not cake, but kind of a sweet bread or different things that they made, you know. And then you would probably, if there was leftover meat from a meal before or something, you'd probably finish that up. They ate a lot of pasta. They made their own noodles and little dumplings and things, you know. Used a lot of milk in their meals, had creamed dishes. Vegetables. Potatoes were very popular. Everybody liked those and they raised all their own food.

SIGRIST: Do you remember as a small child what your favorite food was? The one you looked forward to the most?

HARTFORD: No, I really can't remember. I've always had a great appetite. I probably ate just about everything. No, really I can't remember any particular thing that I favored.

SIGRIST: Was there a special dish that was prepared for holidays?

HARTFORD: Yes, at Easter there would be the ham and the kielbasa and, oh, eggs. Almost what we have here and at Christmas time there'd

be all kinds of meats. Beef and pork and chicken and what have you. Made a big, big day of Christmas.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit about what you did on Christmas, and how they celebrated?

HARTFORD: They had a Christmas tree and it was—it was lit up. It must have been candles. I don't remember now, but that's what it must have been and then they had straw on the ground and before they went to midnight mass, they fed all the animals so that they wouldn't have to do anything on Christmas day, you know, until they had to milk the cows or something in the evening. They gave them special treatment, too. Gave them food that, oh, that was a little extra, you know, special. I don't know too much about that, but that's what they did, and everybody—the children got things and it wasn't from Santa Claus. It was from Saint Nicholas that they got their toys, and they got them when they woke up in the morning, Christmas morning and they would be near the tree or something and of course there'd be something for everybody. But that was about it.

SIGRIST: Is there a toy that you remember in your mind that you received?

HARTFORD: Ah, no. I don't remember what I played with. I don't remember that at all.

SIGRIST: Was Christmas the most important of the holidays or was there another holiday that was really more important?

HARTFORD: Well, Easter was equally. There was food to be blessed and everybody went out and had their food blessed at church and then came home and—

SIGRIST: Does that mean you carried the food to the church?

HARTFORD: Yes, you did in a basket.

SIGRIST: I see, the priest didn't go to you.

HARTFORD: No.

SIGRIST: You went to him.

HARTFORD: Yeah, and then on the 5th of January—I think it's the 5th or the 6th is the Epiphany and the priest came around and blessed your

home and put some initials of the three kinds over your doorway. When Father Noverolski [PH] was here many years ago now—

SIGRIST: What was his name?

HARTFORD: Noverolski. He was our pastor here way back in, oh, about 1928 or so, and he used to do that. He used to come around and do that and, in fact, in St. Peter's Church we still have our food blessed at Easter time. All the priests have done it because it's a tradition with the Slovak people and I think the Polish, too. I'm not sure.

SIGRIST: Do you bring all the food to the priest or just like one dish?

HARTFORD: No, no, you just bring a basket of different things. You might bring a little bit of everything that you're going to have for your Easter meal or you know, something like that.

SIGRIST: I have this image of these European peasant women sort of, you know, carrying the food to this—

HARTFORD: No, no, they just took what, you know—

SIGRIST: Just little bits of stuff.

HARTFORD: Some of everything.

SIGRIST: I also—before we get you out of Czechoslovakia, I also want to ask you what you remember about what people wore at that time.

HARTFORD: Well, they—

SIGRIST: What did women look like at that time?

HARTFORD: Oh, I wish I had a picture to show you, but they wore a skirt. Kind of heavy. You know, they had like the pilgrims when they came, they used to wear two, three layers of skirts and things around and a top, you know. The married—you could tell a married woman from a single woman. All the married women have to wear a kerchief. Like a big—I don't know what they call them.

SIGRIST: A babushka.

HARTFORD: A babushka, yeah. Something like that. And the single women don't wear anything on their heads, and when they're married, they're married with a thing like a—it's a special thing that covers

their head and it's very ornate with sparkles and everything. They really dress up for that, and they always wear an apron over their skirts.

SIGRIST: Are these long skirts? How long are the skirts?

HARTFORD: Ah, I don't think they wore them long. They were probably past the knee, but I don't think they wore them long, and the kids dressed the same way, more or less.

END OF SIDE A
BEGIN SIDE B

SIGRIST: And how did people wear their hair?

HARTFORD: Ah, most of the women wore long hair and they would probably do what the people anywhere do. Either pug or up on top or any way you wanted it, and the children just had the regular hair. And there was no such thing as curling it or anything, you know. So it was all natural. But that's about it.

SIGRIST: Well, let me—let me get you on your way to America. Why did your family want to come to the United States?

HARTFORD: Well, my family didn't want to, I guess. I guess it was my father. His two best friends were here. They were all married, but these two fellows, they were both into Bridgeport, Connecticut and he kept in touch with them, and they were telling him how wonderful it was here and that he should come because they were more or less in the same business together. And so he was going to come alone and leave my mother and I there, just like they did and then send for them later when they got established here. Well, at that time they were changing the system. They were starting quotas on who can come and they told him if he wants his wife and daughter to be with him, now is the time to take them with you. Don't wait because you'll wait a long time. So that's what he did. He came home one day and says, "We're going to Europe." My mother was in tears, of course.

SIGRIST: Going to America.

HARTFORD: Yeah, to America. My mother had no idea he was thinking that way. So that's what happened and we had it—he had all the things made out, the date and just when we went and how we went and everything.

SIGRIST: So your mother didn't want to come?

HARTFORD: No.

SIGRIST: No.

HARTFORD: No, she didn't. She didn't care to go at all, but she went. When she was eighty years old, she and my oldest daughter went back to Europe and she said she wouldn't know it. It has changed so. It's very up-to-date and she was amazed and she said you didn't even know your own people. You know, you didn't remember your sister. My mother was the oldest of the girls and she said, "I didn't even recognize my two sisters." We had seen pictures of them, but they didn't recognize them at all. And it was just different, but she enjoyed going and my daughter enjoyed being there, met all her cousins and things.

SIGRIST: It was adventurous of her to go at eighty years old.

HARTFORD: Hmm?

SIGRIST: It was adventurous of her to go at eighty years old back to—

HARTFORD: Well, she always said she didn't think she'd go and then all of a sudden she says, "I think I'll go, if Suzanne will come with me." So my daughter was in Newport at the time. She had been in the navy and she had just got through getting her, you know—that was the end of her term and she was still in Newport. So I called her and asked her if she wanted to go. She says, "Well, I'll see." She was working at the Newport Hospital. She's a nurse, and she said, "I'll see if I can get any time off." So she got one week. She couldn't get two weeks off. So she and mom went down and stayed a week, and while my mother was there, her brother died. So she saw everybody of her family while they were still alive, and then shortly after she got back here, maybe another year or so, her youngest sister died. But she had seen all of them. She felt very good about it. She was glad she went.

SIGRIST: When you were a little girl l Czechoslovakia what did you know about America?

HARTFORD: Nothing. No, no, I had no idea whether it was across the road or way over the ocean. I didn't know anything about it.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the process of getting ready to leave Czechoslovakia?

HARTFORD: Well, I know my mother and the family were all very busy packing, taking things. I don't think I realized what was going on then, because even when we left, I didn't know we were going. I thought we were going to the city for something to pack, and that picture that I showed you on our passport, I cried because I didn't want them to take my picture. I'm still that way, and I know my uncle took us to the city and we had pictures taken in the big city and that was about the extent. And I couldn't understand why we were having our picture taken and I was—I didn't want any part of it.

SIGRIST: What do you remember of the packing? What did they take? You showed me a little while ago that wonderful little basket. Can you tell me how you got that basket again?

HARTFORD: Well, all our neighbors and the friends that were right in our little locality filled the basket. They had something for my father and mother, too, but I don't remember what it was, and they gave me the basket and it was full of—I know there was candy in it and there was ribbons for your hair, you know, and handkerchiefs I think in there. And, oh, I hung onto that all the way and I've still got part of it.

SIGRIST: What about some of the things that your parents took that you know you brought?

HARTFORD: Well, they took some clothes but not too much because they knew that they would dress differently here. But they took bedding, you know, their feather bedding, and things that needed or my father needed for anything. My mother what she needed, and they took stuff for me, too, I suppose. And when we were leaving, we went down by horse and wagon to the railroad station in the city and we took the train from there to—the Mauritania left from France. Now, let's see if I can think of the name of the town or the city. [pause] It will come to me maybe.

SIGRIST: Do you remember saying goodbye to your grandparents?

HARTFORD: Yeah, yeah. My grandfather was so, so upset. He cried. They said that he wouldn't talk to anybody for about a week after that, and they didn't want us to leave. But my father said, "Well, if we don't like it, we'll come back," but we never did. In fact, he never went back either because he died quite young.

SIGRIST: Let me just move your hand away because it's on the microphone.

HARTFORD: Oh, I'm sorry.

SIGRIST: That's okay. So you went by horse and wagon to—what was the name of the city that you went to?

HARTFORD: It must have been Koscisc.

SIGRIST: Koscisc, and then you took a train to France.

HARTFORD: Yes. I remember being in Paris because it was night time and it was all lit up and there were all lights above and it was beautiful. I was fascinated with that. We stayed one night in Paris and then we continued the next day to the coast—oh, what is the name of that place?

SIGRIST: Was it Cherbourg?

HARTFORD: Cherbourg, yeah, that's what. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you have any recollection of the train ride from the town to Paris?

HARTFORD: Yes, it was very boring and as you went, the telephone poles seemed to be going one by one by one and there was nothing to do, you know. It was just a long, long ride and my mother was sick all the way. My mother always was even carsick after she got here, and she just, you know, didn't see anything. That's probably why she didn't want to go anywhere, either, because she knew she'd be sick.

SIGRIST: What did you think as a little five and a half year old girl when you saw the Mauritania. It was a big ship.

HARTFORD: Yes.

SIGRIST: I mean, what's running through your mind as a little girl knowing you have to get onto this?

HARTFORD: Well, you know, they have all these platforms that were kind of wide, so I just thought we were going somewhere else. I just followed my dad, you know. He probably was carrying me around, you know, too.

SIGRIST: What are your memories about being on the ship?

HARTFORD: Oh, I had a great time. My mother, as I said, was sick all the way down and of course my father would be on the boat somewhere and they had a lot of things to do. So I had the run of the ship, can I say? I wondered around and I found the kitchen and they had one of those doors that opens at the bottom. What do they call them?

SIGRIST: Like a Dutch door?

HARTFORD: Dutch doors.

SIGRIST: Open on the top and on the bottom.

HARTFORD: And I was, as I say, very small. So they used to let me in through the bottom part of the Dutch door. They'd feed me there. I was, you know, there just—I don't know how we conversed. I didn't know their language and they didn't know mine, but they—we got along just fine, and before I left, after I had visited there, they would always give me an orange to take to my mother because they thought that would be good for her because she wasn't eating much of anything and that would be good for her seasickness. I remember the dining room. We had a table for six, but half the time there were only my father and I there. The other people were sick. They always had milk for me and it was very—the food was excellent. It was very nicely set. I can remember the round tables and the chairs and there was always a bottle of wine on the table, and as I say, there was milk for me all the time. I wasn't sick at all.

SIGRIST: Do you remember being on the deck of the ship while you were in the ocean?

HARTFORD: Ah, yes. My father took me on the deck, but I really wasn't too impressed.

SIGRIST: Did you see anything on the ship that you had never seen before?

HARTFORD: Well, we had bunks and we were in a room and we had the bunks and there was also running water from like a sink, you know. There was a toilet like. In the old country we just had the outhouses. And things like that, but outside of that, I don't as I remember too much more about it.

SIGRIST: How long did the ship take to get to New York?

HARTFORD: About a week. Yeah, about a week.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the ship coming into New York?

HARTFORD: Yes, I do. I remember being on deck then, you know, going over the gangplank or whatever they call it, getting onto land, and my uncle was there to meet us. My uncle was the one that sponsored my father. You had to be sponsored by somebody to come and he sponsored us, and he was in New York waiting for us. But we were on Ellis Island about a week.

SIGRIST: Oh, you stayed a week at Ellis Island.

HARTFORD: Just about a week, yeah.

SIGRIST: And tell me what you remember about—first of all, why were you detained for a week?

HARTFORD: Well, it seems that—you know, you have to go through very much of a physical and mental and every kind of test before they would accept you in this country. It isn't like now that you can just come in. They were very, very particular, and the men were separated from the women, so I was with my mother and my dad was in that other building that, you know, as you said hasn't been renovated yet. He had high blood pressure and they would not let him stay unless his blood pressure came down. Probably the anxiety and everything else, you know, raised it. So that's why were held up.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you remember about having to be there for a week.

HARTFORD: It was a great big place and that room that you first come into, that open area, that was all the tables there. That's where we ate and then they—some of the tables they left. I guess they got rid of the chairs, but the tables were left there because on every table there was a bowl of—this is what I remember—of sugar, sugar lumps. I had a feast. [Laughs] And that's where we ate and then upstairs in the rooms we had, we were rooming with other people, women and children. There was a place to do your clothes and there are things for the kids to play with and different things. You got acquainted with people.

SIGRIST: Do any of those other people stick out in your mind?

HARTFORD: No, no. No, we didn't know anybody there and it was—well, my mother didn't enjoy it. I'm sure she didn't. My uncle came and he

couldn't come onto the island just then, until we were ready to come off.

SIGRIST: Did your father ever talk about his side of the story after you saw him later? What he experienced?

HARTFORD: Well, he said they gave him a very thorough examination and there was nothing they could find wrong with him outside of the high blood pressure, but they would have to keep him until that blood pressure went down to a certain point, and it did. Of course, we all had—oh, they'd examine you from head to toe and they saw that you were clean and that you—oh, they asked a lot of questions. You had to take a test after you got there, writing. You had to know reading and writing and some of them were sent back because they couldn't read or they couldn't write.

SIGRIST: Could your parents read and write?

HARTFORD: Oh, yes, they—

SIGRIST: Your mother, too.

HARTFORD: Yes, yes, they had a good education. Uh-hmm.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the staff at all, like the doctors or the nurses or anybody that you as a child would have come in contact with, an authority figure at Ellis Island?

HARTFORD: Yes. There were the doctors were there and we had to be vaccinated again. We had to be vaccinated before we left and then we had to be vaccinated after we got here. I remember the vaccination and then I can remember them looking down my throat and things like that. Otherwise, I was just out playing with the kids, I guess.

SIGRIST: You said that your uncle, you weren't allowed to see your uncle during this time.

HARTFORD: No, because you were still under observation. Then when we were ready to come, I think the day before, he came and we met him because I know my father never even had seen him. He was my grandmother's brother.

SIGRIST: So he's really your great uncle?

HARTFORD: He was my great uncle.

SIGRIST: Your grandmother's brother?

HARTFORD: Yes, he was my father's uncle, and then my brother had—my father had a brother in Pennsylvania that was—that he had never seen because he was the oldest one. Then there was another brother that had been in Pennsylvania, also, but he was killed in the mine. Mine accident, so he never saw him. So he did have a brother here.

SIGRIST: When your uncle came to get—your great uncle came to get you, did he bring gifts from you, that you can recall?

HARTFORD: Well, we didn't go directly back to Westfield. We stayed in New York for a few days because my father had friends there, too, and we stayed with them. They lived in one of these big apartments, you know, and there were two girls who must have been, oh, maybe fourteen, fifteen years old or so. They were sitting there waiting for us and their father and mother both worked, and my uncle said, "Well, how are you going to get into the house?" and they said, "Oh, we'll do that." Opened a window, got in. Opened the door and in we went. [Laughs] They had ways. And we stayed there. They took me shopping. Oh, the first thing they did was got my haircut. I had long hair, and oh, I cried. I didn't want my hair cut. I didn't know what they were doing so I cried, but the barber gave me a quarter. I remember that. Then after that we went shopping and that's where that little dress came from and I got a coat. Well, we came in late October or into November. Either late October or the beginning of November, but it was still fair weather, but I got a new winter coat and new clothes, new shoes and, oh, the whole outfit, and we stayed and visited with other people that had come earlier at some other time there. We had a great time there and then we took the train to Westfield.

SIGRIST: So you were in New York just a couple of days.

HARTFORD: Hmm.

SIGRIST: Yes. I should say for the sake of the tape that the dress that you're referring to is a small child's dress that was your first dress in America.

HARTFORD: Yes, that was my first dress.

SIGRIST: That you showed me before we did the interview. Do you remember, does anything about New York stick out in your mind as having been really unusual or different?

HARTFORD: Well, I had never seen so many people and I really—and I never saw tall buildings like that. As a child, I guess you just acclimated to the situations rather soon.

SIGRIST: So you took a train to Westfield.

HARTFORD: Uh-hmm.

SIGRIST: Where did you stay when you got here?

HARTFORD: Well, we stayed with my great uncle and his wife. We stayed with them for about, oh, eight months or so and then we found a place to live and my father had a job.

SIGRIST: Were you put into school when you arrived?

HARTFORD: Oh, I went to school. We came home on a Friday, I think, and Monday I went to school.

SIGRIST: Tell me about that experience.

HARTFORD: Well, I went to kindergarten. I didn't know a word of English and I just went and most of the children were—she would give them things to play with, like a sandbox. Kindergarten was different then than it is now. They learn things in kindergarten now. They're teaching them to read and write and everything else, but we went to kindergarten, it was just play. There was a sand table and you made things out of paper. You color or something like that. Well, the teacher would give them that to do and she would put me on a chair. As I told you, I was very little. She put me on a chair and she would show me different things and I would repeat after her and that's the way I learned English. My great aunt was the same way at home, with she told me—would hold different things like a knife or a fork or a spoon or a plate or something, and she would tell me what it was and I repeated after her. That's how I picked it up and by the time I was in first grade, I was doing pretty good.

SIGRIST: What about your parents, did they learn how to speak English?

HARTFORD: My father did. My father went to school, to English classes.

SIGRIST: Was that a night school or a day school?

HARTFORD: Night school, yeah, and he learned his English very well. But my mother went for a little while, but she wasn't too interested. We lived in a neighborhood where it was a Slovak neighborhood. It's called—everybody called it Lozierville. It's down where the Columbia Manufacturing Company is.

SIGRIST: Lozierville?

HARTFORD: Yeah.

SIGRIST: How do you spell that?

HARTFORD: L-O-Z-I-E-R-V-I-L-L-E, Lozier.

SIGRIST: Why was it called that?

HARTFORD: Because it's on Lozier Avenue and Cleveland Avenue, in that area they just called it Lozierville.

SIGRIST: So Lozier Avenue and Cleveland Avenue was the Slovak population in the 1920s.

HARTFORD: Yeah, East Silver Street down.

SIGRIST: East Silver Street.

HARTFORD: It's not that way, but that's what it was. And she felt she didn't, you know, have to go. Then when we moved to Cleveland Avenue, the people upstairs were English and she and the grandmother there were very good friends. They more or less taught her and she got so she did more English and she could read it, but she couldn't write it. But she did much better after that.

SIGRIST: Of course, your mother didn't really want to come in the first place.

HARTFORD: No.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about her adaptation to the country and how she felt about being here and having to function in this society?

HARTFORD: Well, she got—well, as I say, it was a Slovak neighborhood and all the neighbors right around us were Slovak, and like most

women they all cooked and liked to cook. She had a lot of recipes that they didn't know about because they came here as they were probably children or in their teens or something, and they remembered having, but weren't sure just how to make it or something. So they exchanged ways of doing things and they taught her how to cook American and she—you know, women kind of do things right from home to home. And they helped her with anytime she needed anything. I used to do most of the shipping after I got—you know, was out running around, going places. But she'd go down, she could shop and everything. She did well.

SIGRIST: Were there Slovak organizations at that time like social organizations or did your parents belong to a club, for instance?

HARTFORD: Well, they had clubs, yeah. They had—there was a Slovak Hall down on the corner of Cleveland Avenue and that used to be something else, and they had a—yeah, that was always a Slovak Hall. And then they had on Cleveland Avenue there was a place called the Sokol and you probably heard about them. They go into gymnastics. They have a great many of them down towards New York and Florida.

SIGRIST: How do you spell Sokol?

HARTFORD: S-O-K-O-L.

SIGRIST: Is that the name of the organization?

HARTFORD: Yeah, yeah, that's the name of the organization. And they had clubs there and that's where they had entertainment and things. Of course, they had the church and they were all, you know, active in the church and the church sponsored different things. There was things to do. Of course, there was like the other things like the movies and other things that were around, and they just got used to those. They used to have picnics on Sunday during the summer down Hebda's [PH] Grove, and, oh, you know---

SIGRIST: So they had an active social life.

HARTFORD: They had an active social life, yeah. Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Did your family, once they got to America, ever experience any kind of prejudice against them because they were immigrants?

HARTFORD: No, not really. There were—we didn't come from the part of Czechoslovakia that most of the people in Westfield came from. They came from the Tatra's [PH], you know, further west and so our speech was a little different than theirs. There's like, you know, you go down south you know how they talk there and then you go somewhere else and it's a different lingo. Not a different lingo, but a different variation of the English language and so on, and it was the same with these foreign languages. So they always used to think we were Russian.

SIGRIST: And is that a less desirable thing?

HARTFORD: They didn't hold it against us, but we were just a little different. But we did have people from the same village that we were, the Fedoras here in Westfield and the Strinkskis [PH] and the Yazimas [PH] and the Marachecks [PH]. They were from that village. So they felt—well, as they went on, they felt at home here.

SIGRIST: When you think about yourself as a person, what do you think is truly Czechoslovakian about you? What part of your personality is typical of Czechoslovakian people?

HARTFORD: Well, I really don't know. We kind of stick together and I have never forgotten my heritage and I'm very proud of it. I don't know. I just—I'm just a person that does what they think they want to do. I don't care what people say and I don't change my ways.

SIGRIST: Do you think of yourself as American or as Czechoslovakian.

HARTFORD: Oh, I'm—not, definitely American. Yeah, yeah. I'm very happy to be here and I'm glad my parents came here. I'm sure that it's a hundred percent better. My cousin came—you can turn that off now.

SIGRIST: Well, let me just sign off quickly because we're just about out of time. Mrs. Hartford, thank you very much. You've been wonderful. It's been a great interview. I'm very happy to have found you.

HARTFORD: Well, not much I could remember.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Mary Hartford on Tuesday, August 13th, 1996 in Westfield, Massachusetts, and again, thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW