

EI-797

CLARA BODENHOFER ROHM

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RESIDENCES:

- **GERMANY:ROHERACKER (STUTTGART)**
- **US: RINGWOOD, NJ;**

SIGRIST: Good afternoon, this is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Friday, August 30th, 1996. I'm in Ringwood, New Jersey and I'm here with Mrs. Clara Rohm. Mrs. Rohm came from Germany in 1921. She was nineteen years old at that time. Present, also, with us is Helen Hirtler, and Hirtler is spelled H-I-R-T-L-E-R and Mrs. Hirtler is Mrs. Rohm's daughter and may interject upon occasion during the interview. Can we begin by you giving me your birth date, please?

ROHM: November 2nd, 1902.

SIGRIST: And what was the name that you were born with in Germany?

ROHM: Rorbacher, R-O—should I spell it?

HELEN: Just a minute please. The name—your name, not the town where you came from.

ROHM: Oh.

SIGRIST: What was your name when you were born?

ROHM: Oh, Boden—yeah, Bodenhoefer.

SIGRIST: Can you spell your whole name for me?

ROHM: Yes. Yes. Should I spell the first name?

SIGRIST: Was Clara spelled differently in Germany?

ROHM: With K.

SIGRIST: Yes, okay.

ROHM: K-L-A-R-A.

SIGRIST: Thank you.

ROHM: And my maiden was Bodenhoefer, B-O-D-E-N-H-O-E-F-E-R.

SIGRIST: Good, thank you. Were you named after anyone in your family?

ROHM: No, I am the only Clara. [Chuckles]

SIGRIST: You're the only Clara. Do you know anything about the day you were born?
A story about when you were born?

ROHM: It was on a Sunday. And I was told that my father went right away to city hall and have me registered. And nobody knew what he would name me because we were twelve children and I think I was about the tenth. So he kind of run out of names and he—I was named Clara.

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

ROHM: Roheracker.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

ROHM: It belongs to Stuttgart now. I spell it. Capital R-O-H-E-R-A-C-K-E-R.

SIGRIST: And you said it's part of Stuttgart now?

ROHM: Yes, it's all Stuttgart.

HELEN: Excuse me?

SIGRIST: Excuse me, we're going to pause just for a—[tape off/on] We're resuming now and Mrs. Hirtler has just pointed out a discrepancy in the spellings.

ROHM: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Mrs. Rohm spelled her maiden name as it had been in Germany.

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: And in America it was spelled, and I'll spell it because you've got it typed up here on the sheet. B-O-D-E-N-H-O-F-E-R.

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: Is it—so there was a slight difference how it was in America.

ROHM: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, that's an important thing for us to—to bring out.

ROHM: Yeah, the German in which has the two dots on top of the O. That makes it sound like an A.

SIGRIST: I see.

ROHM: The same with the A, it's the same thing.

SIGRIST: Getting back to the town that you were born in.

ROHM: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about this town and what you remember as a child?

ROHM: Well, it was founded around elev-- eleven hundred. That's how far the history goes back, but—and now it belongs to Stuttgart.

SIGRIST: What sticks out in your mind about the town when you were growing up in it?

ROHM: That was—it was a very pretty town. And the-- the town was in the valley and all around it's like mountains. [Laughs] And we had this—we raised strawberries, all kinds of fruit *hinbeer*.

HELEN: Raspberries.

ROHM: Yes, and currants and—and then of course grapes for wine.

SIGRIST: So it's a lot of agricultural activities.

ROHM: It was yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Is there a building that you specifically remember that was in the town that sticks out in your mind?

ROHM: Well, the schoolhouse.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the schoolhouse?

ROHM: And the church. The church, we have that on a picture hanging out there and I think even the school is on, the schoolhouse is on.

SIGRIST: Describe the schoolhouse in words to me.

ROHM: The school—the schoolhouse had eight classes. The kindergarten and seven school classes and in one room were two classes because there were not that many rooms there. And we were about the—one class was about forty p-- pupils for female and—and male.

SIGRIST: What did the building look like?

ROHM: It's a brick building, a pink brick and it's about four stories high. The teachers had their apartment with their families. We had two teachers and one helping out for the bigger class, like the fourth and fifth. And the sixth and seventh was the—the oldest. And then we had kindergarten in that building and then the other classes.

SIGRIST: What was your favorite subject when you were growing up?

ROHM: Everything in school. I loved school. I loved to read especially. I often got punished on account of that.

SIGRIST: Why? Why were you punished for reading?

ROHM: Because I always had a book with me, which I read in between. I always had the right answer and so took long to take the—the arithmetic and the reading took longer. I always had a book with me to read halfway under the table.

SIGRIST: Do you remember some of the books that you read at that time?

ROHM: Oh, yes. You know -- my brothers. which or old-- they had a lot of those of Indian stories from this country. We did Indian—*die Indianers*, and I read every bit of it and I know I want to go to America. In my school years already, I all -- when I had to write *aufsatz* -- what you--?

HELEN: Composition.

ROHM: I always started with leaving and going to America.

SIGRIST: Did you—did you have any family in America when you were growing up?

ROHM: I had a aunt here, yes.

SIGRIST: Did you communicate with her?

ROHM: No, she was much older than I. The last time she was in Germany was when her mother, my grandmother died, and I was two years old.

SIGRIST: Uh-hmm. Can you describe for me the house that you lived in?

ROHM: Yes, I can. We even have some pictures of it here. We had—it was not too a big house, but every room was used because we were twelve children. And—and the downstairs before you came up the outside steps, there was a door into a room, a bedroom, where four of us slept, girls. And then up the steps there were two big bedrooms and the main floor and one was for my parents and the other one was for some of the children. And up on the upper floor was a big room, cover the whole width of the house and there were three double beds in. My brothers all slept there.

SIGRIST: What was the house made out of?

ROHM: Oh, it was a brick—it was a stone house, like all the houses in those days. There were no wooden houses.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what kind of roof the house had on it?

ROHM: What you call those pieces?

HELEN: Slate?

SIGRIST: Slate or tile?

ROHM: Tiles like. Tiles, yes.

SIGRIST: And how did you heat the house?

ROHM: Each room we had, so to speak, three rooms with a stove in because we were so many children and people. We had one in—in the downstairs where there were two double beds in and had a stove. Wood burning stove. And then up at the main floor was—there were two rooms that had the oven. And only in the top where the boys slept, there was no heating unit.

SIGRIST: They had to sleep in the cold?

ROHM: We had feather beds.

SIGRIST: I see. How did you light the inside of your house?

ROHM: We had electric. It was—it came to the town in I think it was nineteen *hundert* eight or nine. Because I know one of the men that worked on the electric, you know, when they put it in. And then you had to have four—a light in four rooms. Then you got your—you paid only a certain amount for it. I think it was around four marks, four and a half marks, but if you needed more rooms done, you got a -- a meter.

SIGRIST: And then did—did you put money in the meter?

ROHM: No, no.

SIGRIST: How did the meter—

ROHM: No, no.

SIGRIST: They came around and read it?

ROHM: They came and read the meter.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when they put the electric into your house?

ROHM: Oh, sure.

SIGRIST: What did they have to do to do that?

ROHM: They [unclear] for the [not understood]. At the same time we got running water into the houses and all the streets were dug up where people working. Men and helpers.

SIGRIST: What about in the house itself, how did they—how did they install the wiring or whatever that you remember?

ROHM: We had—how they put it in, I don't know, but I know we had a hanging light in—in the kitchen, in—in two bedrooms, in three rooms and then the big family room, which wasn't too big for twelve.

SIGRIST: That's a lot of people for one house.

ROHM: Yes. Yes.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me about the furniture that you had in the house. What—you mentioned the beds already.

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: What else did you have?

ROHM: Closets. They were not built in the closets in Europe, but they were in every bedroom was a big closet. You could not move and it was a piece of furniture with two doors, [unclear] inside and for the linens there were shelves in. And nothing fancy.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the kitchen for me in your house?

ROHM: Our kitchen was not the best, but we didn't have too much. We did not have enough room in our—in the kitchen according to the size of the family, but we had a big stove in there where -- where we cooked on. And then in 19—right after World War I, we got gas for cooking. But then I wasn't—I left in '21.

SIGRIST: Where did you get the wood to burn for cooking and for heating?

ROHM: Oh, everybody had their supply. You know, in a big way -- like you might see here piles like that. You know, Helen, like the people next door had, and the—the machine—the men came with the machine and he sawed it. He sawed it and then it needed chopping and that my brothers had to do.

SIGRIST: What—what were your chores around the house?

ROHM: Oh, I had to watch my younger sister and then we had, from my sixth—sixth year on for—for two and a half years I took care of the medication. The doctor came to the town. You see, everybody was covered with two doctor. Not at your—when you went to the doctor, you had to pay like it is here. We had a coverage for everybody that worked -- was covered against sickness and medication, too. And then he billed the—when the doctor was there, they brought a prescription to us from that part of our village. And those that

lived on the lower part, brought it to the store. Where the woman that owned that store, she had to—she had a junkstore like, everything except groceries. So she would read—I could not read. But it said on those—on those prescription bottles --- that was when I was only six and I could not read the writing of the men that did the—that filled the medication in and wrapped it and put the name on.

And that woman would read those names for me and she would tell me who they were. And I knew where people lived and then I brought them their medication. And when I went to that drugstore, I left it there and they sent me upstairs. And I got refreshments in their kitchen and then I had to go to the doctor with their papers where they needed the doctor's signature. And I had to go there while he had office hours and they fixed the medication for me. I had a—a big basket which I kept on my arm. It had a cover over it, but that's where the medication bottles were in.

SIGRIST: How did it make you feel as a six year old girl to have such a responsible job?

ROHM: Oh, I liked it very much. It didn't bother me at all. Because when I was home, I would have to watch my little sister.

SIGRIST: How much younger was your sister?

ROHM: Oh, the one that I used to watch, she was about five years younger.

SIGRIST: Do you remember when she was born?

ROHM: She was born in a hospital, not at home. Sure, I remember when my mother—when they came home with the baby. That was quite a

celebration. And when the last one was born, my mother died. That's the way it was.

SIGRIST: Do you know what year that was?

ROHM: 1910.

SIGRIST: 1910.

ROHM: Yeah.

SIGRIST: The reason I'm asking you this is I was just wondering how women who were pregnant and giving birth was presented to children at that time. How—how did they—

ROHM: Some of them had their children at home. We had a midwife in the town, and in later years—in the last years I was in Germany, there was a nursing home in the next town, which the doctor opened. The doctor that treated a lot of the patients in our town, and you know, in Helfingen [ph]. And the—then they did not had to go to the city for—for the birth of their children.

SIGRIST: How did parents explain newborn babies to their children?

ROHM: That was never anything explained to me. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Mom just came home with a baby one day.

ROHM: Sure, there was a baby and that was that. The neighbors had one, too. This was a—that was not outstanding thing.

SIGRIST: How old was your mother when she passed away?

ROHM: She must have been about forty-two.

SIGRIST: She was about forty-two.

ROHM: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And she had twelve children.

ROHM: She had more.

SIGRIST: More? She had lost some children?

ROHM: Yes, a set of twins and the first set of twins was eight years older than I. they both lived and got married and their children, but now they are dead.

SIGRIST: I see. What was your mom's name?

ROHM: Marie.

SIGRIST: And her maiden name?

ROHM: Ruff, R-U-F-F.

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

ROHM: Well, she came from the same town as my father and where we grew up. I emigrated to this country from there.

SIGRIST: So she was from that town, also?

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: Do you know anything about her early years? Did she ever talk about her childhood or her growing up.

ROHM: Well, she had a--- she had a hard time. Her mother was very ill and her father married late and then they had children, too. And—

SIGRIST: So she had step brothers and child—sisters?

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: From the second marriage.

ROHM: Yes. Yes. In fact, one of them that sister—that's that sister of my mother is the one that is responsible for us being in this country. She is the one that—that sol—sent us the papers and all that. Also, the money. Of course, we paid it off. That was one thing which we all did, paid off whatever the expenses there were.

SIGRIST: Can you describe your mother's personality for me?

ROHM: She was—I was eight when she died. I cannot give you too much.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about your mom? What memories do you have of her?

ROHM: I remember that there was one song which she always wanted to sing. [Laughs] I don't know the name of it.

SIGRIST: Can you sing it?

ROHM: No, I cannot sing it. That's—and then of course she had quite a few sisters and two brothers in ---. They were -- they were of ten children, too. In those years, that's the way it seemed to be, that families had children till they couldn't have them any more.

SIGRIST: They had these large families, yeah.

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

ROHM: Christian.

SIGRIST: Christian. And—

ROHM: Bodenhoefen. [noise] I may need a hook on. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: (laughs) Tell me a little bit about your father's personality?

ROHM: My father was very active, and as a young man, he—he was what you call a *Schriftgiesser* [type caster] in German. Now, this is not a trade doesn't exist anymore.

SIGRIST: Can you say that name in German slowly for me?

ROHM: Yeah. *Schriftgiesser*.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

ROHM: Yes. Capital—should I spell it?

SIGRIST: Yes, please.

ROHM: Capital S-C-H-R-I-F-T-G-E-I-S-E-R.

SIGRIST: Thank you.

ROHM: I didn't spell that name for many years.

SIGRIST: [Laughs] And what is that?

ROHM: He—he was in a trade that made the letters in -- in lead or in metal.

SIGRIST: Like level—med—excuse me. Metal letters.

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Like sign letters?

ROHM: For printing.

SIGRIST: For printing. [static]

ROHM: Yes. He belonged to—to this union that did that and they were very early organized. My father was very active in politics and all through that because he read a lot and he traveled a lot as a young man, when he was done with his—with his trade.

SIGRIST: What did your father like to do when he wasn't working?

ROHM: [Laughs]

SIGRIST: How did he—how did he enjoy himself?

ROHM: He would read. He would read. See, in those days there was no TV. We had no radio either, while I was in Germany.

SIGRIST: Do you know what he liked to read?

ROHM: Politics.

SIGRIST: Politics. He was very involved in politics.

ROHM: Yes, Social Democrat. In fact, he was the head of it.

SIGRIST: Was that—was that an active organization in your town?

ROHM: That was in—in Stuttgart, but I mean people worked in that line and lived in our part. See, our town now belongs to Stuttgart. We -- we are not a separate town any more.

SIGRIST: Were women politically oriented at that time?

ROHM: I don't know. No, no, there were no women that I remember that were active in politics. Yes, in later years just before I left Germany in 1921, there were some woman -- women very active in politics.

SIGRIST: But as you were growing up—

ROHM: No.

SIGRIST: It was mostly men.

ROHM: All men. All men.

SIGRIST: What—what kinds of things did your father enjoy doing with his family, if anything?

ROHM: Sundays for a walk and Christmas and on the birthdays we always got a special from him. Maybe a pair of frankfurters. That was a big treat, if you got a pair of frankfurters. See, in Germany the frankfurters come in pairs and all you got one red bologna, which was about the same. Bigger in size, but thicker, too.

SIGRIST: So—so your father would—would go out for these walks with—with the—

ROHM: Sundays.

SIGRIST: Sundays.

ROHM: During the week, nobody had time for a walk. If you went out, you had to do some work.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about—you're in a small house with a lot of people living in a small house.

ROHM: [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Talk to me a little bit about the relationships between the brothers and sisters.

ROHM: Well, we always got along well and of course the older children, the older sisters and brothers, they raised us. My mother died when I was eight in

1910 and there were four—well, one, two, three. Four below me. She died when the youngest one was born.

SIGRIST: Can you name all your brothers and sisters?

ROHM: Of course. [Laughs] You don't want to hear that.

SIGRIST: Oh, but I would—I would enjoy it. If you can do it, if you'd like to.

ROHM: I start on top with the oldest.

SIGRIST: And how many years between you and the oldest?

ROHM: Let me see. I have to figure that out.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

ROHM: I think there were eight. Eight or nine. No, it was ten years because my oldest brother is just seven years older than I on the same day.

SIGRIST: Really? On the same day?

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: All right, start with the oldest and work to the youngest.

ROHM: Okay. Rosa, Sophie, Berta [unclear], Pauline, Carl, Max, Frieda, Gerda, Marta—Marta Gilie—no, after me—after Clara comes Paul. Then comes Marie, Marta, Mina. That's it. You have twelve.

SIGRIST: [Chuckles] And again, talk to me a little bit about how—how everyone got along in the house. What rules did you have to abide by so that everyone did get along?

ROHM: Yeah. We could not talk at the dinner table. After my mother and later my older sister had run the house for three years, after they had said grace, then our father starts dishes out. He—every day it was dished out by my father. There were two big bowls on the table because we were twelve people and we were hungry, and he would dish out and—and then after, when you were done eating, you had to take your plate into the kitchen.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the grace that you said before you ate?

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: Could you say it for me?

ROHM: In German?

SIGRIST: In German.

ROHM: *Komm, Herrn Jesus, zei uns zu gast und segne alles was Du uns bescherte tast. Amen.*

SIGRIST: Thank you.

ROHM: That's it.

SIGRIST: What does that mean?

ROHM: Helen, translate it?

HELEN: Come here Jesus and be our guest and bless everything that you have given to us.

SIGRIST: Thank you. So after you ate, everyone had to take their dishes into the kitchen.

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: What kind of food did you eat on a daily basis?

ROHM: We always—every day we had a pound of soup meat and some bones and was a big pot we had and that was—that was always soup. Every day we had soup for the main meal and then in the evening when we had—if we had noodles or something in the flour things, then there was no meat, but always potatoes and a vegetable.

[END OF SIDE A, TAPE 1] [BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE 1]

SIGRIST: When you say soup meat, what do you mean by that?

ROHM: Well, that—I went to the butcher and one pound of soup—soup meat and there was the bone included. That b-- not all the meat weighed a pound. And it was cooked in the soup and my father cut it all very fine and each got a spoonful of little pieces of meat.

SIGRIST: What kind of animal did that come from?

ROHM: Beef.

SIGRIST: It was mostly beef?

ROHM: Yes, it was beef.

SIGRIST: What time would you eat your main meal?

ROHM: Depending on the time of the year and the weather, of course. In the summer sometimes I know that sometimes it was so late because we had field work which was just on the side. We used to plant strawberries. We sometimes had to over a hundred pounds a day and they had to be picked and carried home. And where we come it's very—not even ground. You have to climb and the stair at that -- in those places was not the best. It was just a piece of stone, from one stone to the other. [Chuckles]

SIGRIST: So—so when—when you were harvesting berries and things, then you would eat later in the day.

ROHM: Oh, yes. Never in daylight.

SIGRIST: So what time would that be in the summer.

ROHM: Sometimes we ate between nine and ten in the evening. In the winter we ate, I guess, around seven. Never later than that.

SIGRIST: What about breakfast? What time did you get up and eat breakfast usually?

ROHM: Well, when --- when we went to school, we got up. School started in the summer at seven because we—we had to special be there. Because we had a lot of field work and we children had to help. And so in the summer school started at seven and in the winter at eight.

SIGRIST: What would you eat for breakfast?

ROHM: Oh, just coffee and a piece of bread. That's all.

SIGRIST: And then would there be a midday meal of some sort?

ROHM: Yes, if you went to school, then you took a piece of bread with jam on or maybe butter or so, whatever, and that at nine o'clock there were fifteen minutes intermission.

SIGRIST: It seems—

ROHM: When you have to go to the bathroom, it was a separate house next to the school where all the toilets were in, and—

SIGRIST: If you had to go to the bathroom, could you go any time or was there only one time—

ROHM: Yes, you had to ask permission.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

ROHM: And that was very seldom that anybody because if we went to school at seven in the summer --- at nine, fifteen minutes. And at twelve you went home and in the afternoon in the summer you had field work to do.

SIGRIST: I'd like to talk about the field work because it seems like your life was very structured around doing field work.

ROHM: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Whose fields were they?

ROHM: Ours.

SIGRIST: They were your—your father's fields.

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: So even though he had a job, he had fields.

ROHM: Oh, yes. That was all land inside and that we worked on after school. And of course we did what we were told. And in the evening when he came home, he came directly to the field before he came home and looked everything over and gave us orders for the next day. You know, what should be done and how it should be done.

SIGRIST: You mentioned the strawberries.

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: What else were you growing in the fields?

ROHM: All kinds of berries. *himbeer* what do you—

HELEN: Raspberries.

ROHM: Raspberries.

SIGRIST: What is raspberry in German?

ROHM: *Himbeer*.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

ROHM: Yes. Capital H-I-M-B, beer.

HELEN: B-E-R.

ROHM: O-E.

HELEN: Oh, okay.

ROHM: Beer.

SIGRIST: *Himbeer.*

ROHM: Yeah, *himbeer*

SIGRIST: Right. Strawberries, raspberries.

ROHM: And currants and huckleberries. We had everything and all that work was--- field work was done on the side. After school or, in fact, we had all kinds of jobs to do.

SIGRIST: Did he hire other people, also, or just the kids went out there to do all this?

ROHM: No, the other people were very busy, too, when that field work was there.

SIGRIST: What did you do with all these berries?

ROHM: We went—they were taken to the market, to Stuttgart. And there was—you had—I remember when you had to carry it on your head, up one hill and

down on the other side into the valley where Stuttgart is located. And that took an hour walk.

SIGRIST: In what? What were you carrying them in?

ROHM: Baskets.

SIGRIST: A basket on your head?

ROHM: Yes, you had a protection of what you call a thing, a *bausch*? (pad)

HELEN: A ring.

ROHM: It's a ring fitted with soft things you put on there. Then you carried that basket.

SIGRIST: So you had this ring which is called a—

ROHM: A *bausch*.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that please?

ROHM: [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Didn't know this was going to be a spelling bee, did you? [Laughs]

ROHM: No, this is a *Swäbisch* (Swabian) expression.

SIGRIST: But this is very interesting information.

ROHM: B-A-U-S-C-H-T.

SIGRIST: Thank you, and that—that's like a stuffed ring.

ROHM: Yes, that's a big like that you put on your head.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

ROHM: And you have that basket on top of your head.

SIGRIST: With berries in it?

ROHM: With berries in it.

SIGRIST: Now, did you go to market in Stuttgart, too?

ROHM: Not very often because before the war, 1914, there were my older sisters that went there and carried it. And during the war we did not had -- carry anything to the market. People came and bought it right when you picked it.

SIGRIST: I see. Did you grow anything else other than berries?

ROHM: Well, of course, wine -- grapes.

SIGRIST: Oh, the grapes. I think you mentioned that.

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit about—

ROHM: Apples. Pears. The very fine pears and apples. Our father was very up to par in that -- that -- all the new things. In fact, we had a special newspaper

for all those things that he read, and I read that, too. You know, how to plant apples and pears and cherries. We had big, big trees, but this is not anymore. The trees are much smaller. See, and the cherries are the same size, but people got smart. We had one ladder with forty-eight steps. That's how big our biggest cherry tree was.

SIGRIST: And—and your father—these—these newspapers or magazines that he had were all about like the latest techniques in planting and all that sort of thing?

ROHM: Yes, and he was also in politics [noise from microphone]. Oh, excuse me.

SIGRIST: No, that's quite all right.

ROHM: Put it—put it right there.

ROHM: Our father was a politician.

SIGRIST: Well, that's—

ROHM: A Social Democrat.

SIGRIST: You mentioned World War I just now, 1914. How was your family effected by the First World War?

ROHM: Terribly.

SIGRIST: Would you mind talking about that a little bit?

ROHM: My father was a *shriftgiesser*. This is a person that makes the letters [unclear].

SIGRIST: And the printing, right.

ROHM: Yes, and my oldest brother was a print-- in the same trade and they all closed up. And then my stepbrother also was—was a *schriftgiesser*.

SIGRIST: Your stepbrother. Does that mean your father remarried?

ROHM: Yes, after my mother died.

SIGRIST: What year did he remarry?

ROHM: 1913.

SIGRIST: '13. 1913, and the woman he married had her own children.

ROHM: One boy.

SIGRIST: One boy. So this was also—

ROHM: Yes, and he still went to school. He was still studying as a *schriftgiesser*, too, you know, like my father was and my oldest brother was.

SIGRIST: To learn the trade.

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: So they closed the print shops down.

ROHM: The state wanted all the metal that was used and so they were all home. But then slowly ,before the war ended, my stepbrother and two of my brothers were in the war.

SIGRIST: They served in the war?

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: In the German army?

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

ROHM: They were drafted and that upset everything.

SIGRIST: Did—can you talk a little bit about how the family felt about your brothers being drafted and how that affected your life?

ROHM: Well, it affected our life very much. First of all, we were homesick and then there was no income from them and some factories or places closed up entirely. They had no material and it took about two years. Overall the war was four years, over four years going, you know, '14 to '18. So there was a shortage of everything. Then my sisters that used to go to work and they worked in the—in the sweater factories. They were all closed for a -- for about a year. And -- but -- and they -- when they got material then they were called right away and otherwise you just did the work that you could find.

SIGRIST: You mentioned there were shortages in everything. What is everything?
What—what were there shortages in?

ROHM: [Laughs] You mean in clothing or eating?

SIGRIST: Everything. What—what was—

ROHM: Food was rationed from 1915, March. March the 15th, 1915 we had food rationing cards in Germany. And specially bread was a shortage because bread was something of our main food during the day. And we ran out of—of stamps. Every month you got your stamps.

SIGRIST: How did you get the stamps?

ROHM: You had to go to the town hall and that's the—you know, the first time you were registered there. It started in March 1915 the bread rationing and later came the meat rationing. Which we never—we could give so many tickets away from our meat rationing for bread tickets.

SIGRIST: You mean like trade with people?

ROHM: Yes, we traded with people.

SIGRIST: I see. You got the cards. You went to the town hall, you got the cards.

ROHM: Yes, every morning.

SIGRIST: And then where did you take the cards?

ROHM: And then you—if you went to the store you have to take your—your ticket along, otherwise you didn't get it.

SIGRIST: And what did the ticket say on it? What—

ROHM: So much bread and so much—it was all separate, you know. Each item had the—bread was the main thing and the first thing that was rationed. When the meat rationing came out, we—we exchanged that with people against bread rationing because we didn't need all that meat. That -- there was no shortage for us.

SIGRIST: Now, were there—were there rules that you had to follow during wartime on how you conducted yourself?

ROHM: Well, of course you had to work. I was—I was confirmed in 1916 and my brothers were all at war. And my sisters that used to work, they all the ones that worked in the sweater line where they made sweaters. That was closed because they had no more material. And whenever they got some wool in, then they called them in and then people could have their sweaters repaired. Like have new sleeves knit into it and stuff like that. It was very short, and sh-- even shoes were rationed, but didn't bother me at all. We never used all those shoes.

SIGRIST: Went barefoot most of the time?

ROHM: No, no. We—our father would not let us walk barefoot because once I think it was my oldest brother that cut himself terribly. And we were—if we did walk barefoot, we did it without our father's knowledge. He does not—he did not want to see us barefooted.

SIGRIST: So that was a rule you had to follow in your house.

ROHM: Oh, yes. Well, and of course he was very, very strict. We were --

SIGRIST: Your father being so politically conscious, how did he feel about the First World War?

ROHM: Well, I told you he was a—he was a Social Democrat. I remember vaguely that there was a Russian woman in the next town of us, in Seelenbuch [ph] and she was in the Social [unclear], the same as my father and she came to our house. But they had a big discussion, my father and her, about these politics and after that, she didn't come anymore. I don't think my father was too—too -- for her too strong in the—in politics.

SIGRIST: I was wondering how he felt about what was going on at that time?

ROHM: Well, he didn't like it.

SIGRIST: You know, the war was devastating.

ROHM: He didn't like it when he was out of work right away and my oldest brother, too, because he had the same trade. Well, he was drafted and a year later, the first time in 1915, my brother. My father was never military educated. He had his finger cut off. He—

SIGRIST: His right index finger, right in the middle of it.

ROHM: Right here.

SIGRIST: Right above the knuckle.

ROHM: And that's why he never had to go into training. He had that—that accident while he was learning his trade. And—and that's—that's why—I don't know how he could even write with his right hand.

SIGRIST: Sure, that's true.

ROHM: Because that finger was that short.

SIGRIST: How old would your father have been in 1914?

ROHM: He was born in '64.

SIGRIST: 1864?

ROHM: '66.

SIGRIST: 1866 he was born, so—

ROHM: Yeah, so thirty-four years.

SIGRIST: [unclear] he'd be in 1916, right. What religion were you in Germany?

ROHM: What?

SIGRIST: What religion?

ROHM: Lutheran.

SIGRIST: Lutheran.

ROHM: Everybody in our town. There was one—two Catholic—two Catholic families in our town.

SIGRIST: And everybody else—

ROHM: Was.

SIGRIST: That you remember was Lutheran.

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: How did you practice your religion at home?

ROHM: At home? When my sister was—you know, my mother died in 1910.

SIGRIST: When she died.

ROHM: And my sister married in 1914, shortly before the—in Easter 1914. And of course her husband was drafted in August when the war broke out, and—

SIGRIST: And she sort of took over the household?

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: Which sister was this?

ROHM: The oldest one, Rosa.

SIGRIST: Rosa.

ROHM: She—they went to Paraguay. They were here visiting us, also, a few years ago.

SIGRIST: I see.

ROHM: Oh, our family is spread out and traveling.

SIGRIST: I've actually—I've interviewed other Germans who went to Paraguay, too. There must be quite a German community there.

ROHM: Sure. Yes.

SIGRIST: So—so Rosa took over the household after your mother died.

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: Did your father live in the house with his new wife?

ROHM: Yes. He married in 1913, three years later and then of course—and my sister got married on Easter, 1914.

SIGRIST: Right, right, and I had asked you how you practiced your religion in the house. What did you do in the house to practice your religion?

ROHM: Well, my sister, we prayed at the dinner table.

SIGRIST: Right.

ROHM: And we had religion in school, of course.

SIGRIST: Was it a Lutheran school that you went to?

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: Oh.

ROHM: And the church. There was a picture of the church hanging out here.

SIGRIST: Do you have any stories that you'd like to tell associated with the church or going to church?

ROHM: Well, we—we were confirmed there, of course, and then I—but I do remember when my youngest sister was christened, Marie, the one that's four years younger than I. She was christened in our church. The other two that came after her were christened in the hospital where they were born. But she was born at home and I remember that I went to church. And we entered the church through a special door with the baby, after, when the service was almost over. And I banged my head. I never forgot that. I looked at that corner when I got confirmed. I had to go through that room again.

SIGRIST: You saw the corner where you banged your head again.

ROHM: Yes, on my sister's christening. Marie's.

SIGRIST: Well, now, you mentioned—you mentioned that you had a relative here in America.

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: Was it a step aunt who—who was it? It was one of your mother's relatives, right?

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: Right, and so as you were growing up, you knew about the cowboys and Indians, you said.

ROHM: Oh, very much.

SIGRIST: What else—how else did you think about America before you got here?

ROHM: I knew it was a big country and I was all involved in the Indians. I read so much my sis—my brothers had all these magazines which they exchanged between each other and I read them all.

SIGRIST: Why did you want to go to America? What—why were you—

ROHM: I don't know. But I knew I was going to go to America. Everything I had to write in school, I always started my trip to America. Some of my school friends now after all this—well, now they are dead -- but when I was here in this country and I went over on a visit in '32; I invited all my guest [unclear], the girls, and the one that was sitting next to me, she remember that all my—whenever I had to write a composition, I always went to America. And I read all the Indian stories I could get hold of.

SIGRIST: Well, now, when—when—in 1921, when—when—was that when you decided that you wanted to come over?

ROHM: Oh, long before.

SIGRIST: It was before that.

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: Well, what did you have to do to—to prepare for going to America?

ROHM: First, I had to have—I needed a passport and entrance permission for this country.

SIGRIST: Where did you go to get that?

ROHM: To Berlin. That was the only American consul we had there in Germany in 1921. Now—a old -- a year later we had one in Stuttgart.

SIGRIST: But then it was in Berlin?

ROHM: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. And what was the process? How did you go about getting this?

ROHM: I had to go to Berlin and to get my entry permission for this country, and it took me—I know I went by train. It took twelve hours. And then somebody of our town was there and through my sister, the one—the older one that was a nurse, she—she knew those people because she was the nurse in our town. And this person in Berlin came to that sick person and was in our town until this person died, and got well acquainted with my sister. And they picked me up at the station in Berlin because I was nineteen—not quite nineteen, and everybody was worried sick about me going there alone.

SIGRIST: Did you have to get exam—get examined while you were there, also?

ROHM: No.

SIGRIST: No.

ROHM: Before I had to get exam—I had—I had to have a doctor's things with me and then of course, an enter permit for here. That's what I got. That's why I had to go to the consul for the re-- enter permit here.

SIGRIST: I see, and what was your intention? What were you hoping to do, once you got to America?

ROHM: Work. I knew that I could get a job in the house and I had no trouble.

SIGRIST: You mean like doing housework.

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: Doing domestic work.

ROHM: Yes, I didn't speak any English.

SIGRIST: So when you were in Germany, that's what you were intending to do, once you got to America?

ROHM: That—before we could get into the -- into this country, I was going to go to South America. I took a Spanish course, which all that I remember is habla Espaniola.

SIGRIST: I've never interviewed a German woman who spoke any Spanish. [Laughs] On tape before. So that—so you just wanted to get out of Germany.

ROHM: Oh, yes. I—see, we couldn't get to this country. But when this was opened, then the only things this country had was in Berlin and we lived in Stuttgart. I took—I was on the train all night.

SIGRIST: And did you go to the doctor in Stuttgart?

ROHM: Yes, I had to bring a doctor's permit and God knows what, from enter permit I got at the consulate.

SIGRIST: How did your father feel about your desire to go to America?

ROHM: He—he didn't like it, but he didn't object. Because when he was young, he—he—he was also going as a young fellow from town to town, after he had his trade.

SIGRIST: Is that what German's call 'wanderlust'?

ROHM: Yes, it's—[chuckles]

SIGRIST: [laughs] How long did it take for all the paperwork to come through before you could leave?

ROHM: About three months.

SIGRIST: So a long time.

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Do you remember how you felt when you—when the papers were in your hand, when you got them?

ROHM: I felt relieved. Very much relieved and I had no trouble getting a—when I went to the ship company in Stuttgart and there was no problem.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how much the passage cost?

ROHM: I don't—I don't remember anymore exactly. Because I had to pay my aunt my ticket back and she sent me money before, so I could go to Berlin and all this. And I had to have twenty-five dollars in cash with me when I landed here.

SIGRIST: In—in American money.

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: In American money. Tell me what you packed to take with you?

ROHM: Oh, a lot of things which I sent back right as soon as I got here. Because this country had everything what I wanted.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what those items were, though, that you sent back?

ROHM: Clothes. I sent a lot of things back what I brought here to this country and I could do very good without.

SIGRIST: Did you buy any new clothes in Germany to bring to America?

ROHM: No, because what I had, I brought. If you want to buy new clothes, you needed permission. A slip --just like I could not buy shoes without a slip from the town hall. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: And these slips that you're talking about, this is still part of the post World War I economic problems.

ROHM: Sure, they were all, yes.

SIGRIST: Well, and of course there was the terribly inflation in Germany after the war.

ROHM: After, yes.

SIGRIST: It was after the war.

ROHM: Then I was here.

SIGRIST: You were there, but—yes, that's right.

ROHM: I was here. We need to pause so I can put a second tape in. so this is the end of Tape One.

[END OF SIDE B, TAPE 1]

[BEGIN SIDE A, TAPE 2]

SIGRIST: Okay, we're now beginning Tape Two.

ROHM: Yeah.

SIGRIST: With Clara Rohm on Friday, August 30th, 1996 and she came from Germany in 1921 when she was nineteen.

ROHM: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And her daughter, Helen Hirtler, is also in the room with us. Mrs. Rohm, we were talking about what you took with you and you said you sent a lot of the stuff back because you didn't need it. Can you describe your suitcase or your luggage or whatever it was you carried the things in?

ROHM: Yes. What did I—it was just clothes and—oh, I brought some of those books with me where—where our food used to be rationed in Germany

during the war. I brought that back because some relative were interested in seeing that in print. Because that was terrible all the stuff that was rationed and how small the rationing were. So and so many grams farina or noodles and I brought them with me for the people here to read.

SIGRIST: Just for their own curiosity.

ROHM: Yes, and I got rid of them after. I did not want to—I did not want to see anymore of rationings.

SIGRIST: Where did your aunt live in the United States? Were you going to your aunt's?

ROHM: Oh, yes. Her husband and my uncle picked us up in Ellis Island. I came with another cousin.

SIGRIST: Right, right, but I'm just curious, where did she live? Where—where did your aunt live?

ROHM: My aunt lived in Driftwood, Mamaroneck. She was housekeeper—

SIGRIST: Mamaroneck

ROHM: For the *famil*--family Strauss, which she worked for them many, many years.

SIGRIST: So she was in Mamaroneck.

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: And she worked for the Strauss family.

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Okay. Where did you have to go to get on the ship?

ROHM: I—to Hamburg.

SIGRIST: Do you—was there any kind of a gathering of the family before you left?

ROHM: Yes, three weeks before I left Germany, my sister got engaged and that was—that was that-- the Frieda and that was the only celebration. Yes, of course, they—my girls from I went to school with, they gave me a farewell party. In fact, from the girls I got some kind—I have it in there. It's, you know, that locket with the silver, in silver with the—it opens—

HELEN: The silver locket.

ROHM: Yeah, a silver locket.

SIGRIST: So your classmates gave you a silver locket.

ROHM: Yes. Yes.

SIGRIST: Before you left, uh-huh.

ROHM: The girls. See, we were separated. The girls were separated from the boys.

SIGRIST: Do you remember saying goodbye to your father?

ROHM: Of course.

SIGRIST: Yeah?

ROHM: That was very easy for me to say goodbye. It was a big party when I left our town and went to Stuttgart—Stuttgart and my cousin was with me, which immigrated with me.

SIGRIST: What was your cousin's name?

ROHM: Pauline.

SIGRIST: Pauline.

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: So Clara and Pauline are going to America.

ROHM: Yes. Yes.

SIGRIST: When—when you—did—did any family members go with you to Hamburg to get on the ship?

ROHM: No. No, no. We—the two of us went alone and we had to be there. We had to stay overnight for twice -- three days before you had to be — had to - . I bought my ticket in Stuttgart and I had to go to—they had an office in Hamburg. We left from Hamburg and there I was checked out if I had lice and all kinds of things. And—and that's where we spent—we went to a—a girls home to stay overnight. You know, something like—like it was a home for where you could stay overnight, but only females and that's where we were for one night.

SIGRIST: How old is Pauline?

ROHM: She—oh, she is dead.

SIGRIST: No, but I mean—not—I mean then.

ROHM: She was six years older than I.

SIGRIST: She was six years older than you.

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: I see.

ROHM: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: So you stayed overnight in this girls' home in Hamburg and you had these examinations. They checked you over in Hamburg.

ROHM: We had to go to the—to the ship company, you know. We were examined by the doctor there.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the ship that you got on?

ROHM: Minnekahda.

SIGRIST: Oh, you came on the Minnekahda.

ROHM: Yes, it wa—and there -- there were—we were—that ship was not full. We were only about a hundred eighty passengers because they couldn't get their visas. There was so many rooms. People that went to South America, they didn't need all that paper.

SIGRIST: The visas were easier to get.

ROHM: So they—that's why Hamburg was overflowed with people that went to South America, when we were there. And this was not a big ship, the Minnekahda.

SIGRIST: Was this the first time you had ever been on a ship?

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: Yes? Can you tell me what you felt as you were going up the gangplank into the ship?

ROHM: I was thankful that I was finally on the way to this country.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me where you slept on the ship.

ROHM: We had a cabin we two, my cousin and I, and there were three beds in there. But we were only two people because it wasn't full. There—we were only about a hundred sixty passengers.

SIGRIST: And what time of the year is this?

ROHM: This—we left at the—the twen-- the 22nd of October. November.

SIGRIST: November.

ROHM: And arrived here the 5th of December.

SIGRIST: I see. So you had just turned nineteen.

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: Just before you got on the ship.

ROHM: Yes, I—I—November the 2nd is my birthday.

SIGRIST: Right. Tell me about being on the ship. What do you remember about being on the Minnekahda?

ROHM: We had a wonderful time. They—there was music played at ten o'clock every morning and they served soup. Just plain soup stock and the music played. We danced. We were not seasick.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what dances you danced back then?

ROHM: Waltz, of course. Oh, yes. [Laughs] I used to be a very good dancer, so they said.

SIGRIST: So you did a lot of waltzing while you were on—on the ship.

ROHM: Yes. Yes. Every day they played there—it was wonderful, and we were on the ship about twelve days.

SIGRIST: Twelve days. Were you up on the deck of the ship ever?

ROHM: Oh, sure.

SIGRIST: Yes. What could you see on the deck of the ship?

ROHM: What did I see? There was nothing outstanding there. We walked around on top of the boat and the music played. And of course, we met some people, which we kept in touch with ---some of them for many years, but lost track. Now we are not in touch with them. In fact, my cousin died long ago, the one that came over with me.

SIGRIST: When you—did you have your luggage with you in the cabin or—

ROHM: Oh, only the hand luggage. The big trunk was shipped before. Was on the -- on boat when we got there and it —and it brought—it was brought to this country. We -- at the same time --we got it.

SIGRIST: I see. Did you have any interaction with any of the staff of the boat?

ROHM: Nothing special. There were—they were very nice. We were treated very nice. We enjoyed the food very much and the music. It was a wonderful time.

SIGRIST: Do you think everybody was German on the ship?

ROHM: No, no, no.

SIGRIST: Oh, other—

ROHM: We were only about a hundred sixty passengers.

SIGRIST: Do you remember some of the other nationalities of the people traveling?

ROHM: Yes, some of them came from Slovakia, from this section. Not many. I know there was two girls that came from there.

SIGRIST: Why do you remember those two girls?

ROHM: They were very pretty and that -- we used to sing together.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of the songs that you sang?

ROHM: Oh, sure.

SIGRIST: Can you sing one?

ROHM: No! I wouldn't like to sing now anymore. No.

SIGRIST: Not even just a little bit?

ROHM: I don't think so. My daughter sings, rather. My—you know, when you are ninety-three or ninety-four, you—I wouldn't put anybody through that.
[laughs]

SIGRIST: [Laughs] Okay. Well, then I won't ask you to sing. All right, so the ship was twelve days, you said. About twelve days.

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the ship coming into New York Harbor?

ROHM: Well, we came in in the evening and there was one woman there which was trav -- on her back to America with her two boys. The boys were in school, school age, and she could get off that ship that evening we landed because she was a citizen and had her papers. And that's what I remember, and then there was one passenger there, I mean, which was very nice to us and it turned out that he—where he lived was very close to where we were going

to. And so those were the only two people that I really remember, and a few couples that went in land, which we parted in Ellis Island. They were pick-- they had to go to Ellis Island. We had to go to Ellis Island the next morning and—

SIGRIST: So you stayed over night on the ship one night.

ROHM: The people—those that were citizens walked off.

SIGRIST: Right.

ROHM: They could go right away. No, there was one family onboard, they went further in. He was a farmer and his wife was with him and a five year old girl, and we—we lost them in Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: Did you see the Statue of Liberty when you came into the harbor?

ROHM: Yes. Yes.

SIGRIST: Even though it was night time?

ROHM: I saw it. It was lit up and I was very pleased. In fact, that's why this country was for me -- America was always like heaven. When—but all the stories I read and, ah—

SIGRIST: So you—so you stayed one night on the ship and then how did they take you from the ship to Ellis Island?

ROHM: In a small boat. We were—must have been like a ferry and then in Ellis Island it was crowded there, and there were many people that had to wait. Somebody would come and get them or maybe their papers weren't in

order, I don't know. We were there only a few hours and I was separated from my cousin because it went by the alphabet. Her name started with N and mine with B, so we were separated and I lost her for a while and then I just followed the others what they told me. You know, I didn't know any English and they spoke English and we were—we were examined by a doctor. And that doctor always said in German, "Hurry up. Hurry up." And then we were—and I followed the others and I had lost my cousin, and I ended up in the dining room and was sitting next to a colored person. First one I saw in my life.

SIGRIST: What did you think when you saw the colored—

ROHM: I couldn't eat. There was a very nice plate with food on. I only—I tell you, that man scared me. The first Black man I have seen, and I ate a little and then my cousin turned up. And then when we were there in that hall, it was a big hall in Ellis Island where we got fed. We were sitting on a board and that's how many people there were because everybody had to go through Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: When you were separated from Pauline, did you understand that you were going to be separated, or were you nervous that you were separated from her?

ROHM: I knew that we would be because it went by alphabet. My name started with B and hers with N. So I know that really was and it was fixed up, that I didn't see her anymore. And she was very thoroughly examined by a doctor because she had a cut here.

SIGRIST: A cut on her neck?

ROHM: Yes, and that—then after about fifteen minutes when I was sitting at that dinner table with that colored man next to me (laughs), then she came. But there was no room next to me, but I saw her at least and I got up and went to her then, and then—

SIGRIST: When you were examined by the doctor, what—what were they looking for? What did they examine?

ROHM: The lumps on the throat and I had a cold, which I had got on the boat, but he—he saw that there was—that this was nothing serious I had.

SIGRIST: Did you have to disrobe for the doctor?

ROHM: Up to here.

SIGRIST: Just your blouse.

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: How did that make you feel?

ROHM: Well, it was something like what you have to do when you go to the doctor.

SIGRIST: So you were not particularly effected by that?

ROHM: No, that didn't scare me at all.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

ROHM: That colored guy next to me, the first one I saw in my life.

SIGRIST: Well, made a lasting impression on you.

ROHM: I couldn't eat my dinner, what was put—what—see the plates were pushed from one to another and it was a long table. We were sitting on the—on a board, not on regular benches. There were so many people there.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you were wearing when you got off the ship?

ROHM: Of course.

SIGRIST: What were you wearing?

ROHM: A raincoat with a lin—a raincoat.

SIGRIST: A raincoat and what underneath your raincoat?

ROHM: My best dress.

SIGRIST: Which was what color?

ROHM: Oh, I think it was a navy blue.

SIGRIST: And how did you have your hair?

ROHM: I had long hair and I had my hair in—in two braids and that was—and that was pinned on the back of my head.

SIGRIST: And did you have a hat?

ROHM: Yes, I had a sports—you know, a sports hat.

SIGRIST: What's a sports hat?

ROHM: Well, not a feather or anything like that on, which I never wore anymore after that. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Did your aunt come and meet you at Ellis Island?

ROHM: Well, you couldn't get off without it, without being picked up. We could not just walk off. We were not citizens.

SIGRIST: Now, you—so did she—she came to meet you? How did you get off of Ellis Island?

ROHM: Eh, my—my aunt's husband and a uncle of mine came and they picked us up and we—we went to the Hudson Tube.

SIGRIST: The Hudson Tube.

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

ROHM: And came up the Hudson Boulevard in Jersey City and that's when I saw that laundry flying on the wash lines, from—from the bus. And I was wondering how they were ever hanging that laundry up. [Laughs] that was—that was something which I had to find out. But we had—it was a very nice time.

SIGRIST: Did—so you went—did you go right to Mamaroneck?

ROHM: No, no. Jersey City.

SIGRIST: Oh, you stayed in Jersey City the first night?

ROHM: Yes. No, in Jersey City I stayed there. That was so-to-speak, our home down here. I was there for three or four weeks and then after Christmas, we looked for a position, and I got a position with an American couple. Nobody spoke German. The man was of Swiss decent and he could say a few German words, but that's where I worked for about eight months.

SIGRIST: And this is—this is in Jersey City?

ROHM: In Jersey City.

SIGRIST: In Jersey City.

ROHM: In the summer we went up to Connecticut.

SIGRIST: With them?

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: I see. Tell me about working for this American couple and what you had to learn so that you could work.

ROHM: Oh. [Laughs] That—they were very nice people. They treated me just like their family, and they took me to their church.

SIGRIST: Do you remember their name?

ROHM: No, and I—I didn't understand anything, but I did learn a little English there. And then my aunt that had sent the ticket, you know, and of course we knew

that we are going to pay—pay her back. I owed her some more money when I had to go to Berlin, you know, for my visa and so on. And I owed her two hundred dollars. My cousin, she had quite a bit of money saved. She didn't have that much to pay back. She paid a little over a hundred dollars. She was six years older than I.

SIGRIST: But that's a lot of money in the early 1920s.

ROHM: Yes. Of course. I worked for that family for twenty-five dollars a month, but my aunt stepped in and she would have taken me away, right away. Then I got fifty a month and that was a lot of money.

SIGRIST: And what did you have to do? What were your—

ROHM: Housework.

SIGRIST: Specifically, what were your chores in the house?

ROHM: That lady showed me the wash machine and I did the laundry.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me what a washing machine looked like in the early 1920s?

ROHM: Yes. Oh, sure. That was very easy. I was very familiar with—with that machine. It was—you put them—the machine in. First you soaked it cold and then you put it through the wringer into that machine in the hot water and soap. You know, treated and set the—pressed the button. No, there was no timer on. You had to watch the clock. Either, if it was very dirty wash, you'd get fifteen minutes and stopped it and rinsed it. Put it through the wringer into the washtub and rinsed it a few times and then through the

wringer and out on the line. And that was—I loved it. I tell you, I loved everything the way things went.

SIGRIST: What—what other things did you have to do in the house for them?

ROHM: Well, they were very easy going to me, and nobody spoke German there. Only the man, he was of Swiss—his parents came from Switzerland, but he was—and he could say, (I'd--I'd just repeat it if he said it.) "Wilst du haben eine Deutsche zeitung?" "Do you want a German paper?" And he-- and he worked in New York somewheres in Broad Street and he brought me a paper every day. And that was very nice of him.

SIGRIST: How did you learn English while you were working for them?

ROHM: That was—I had—of course, I had a book and then they had a 12 year daughter and she was very patient with me. We al--I taught her a little German and she taught me English.

SIGRIST: Do you remember some of the first words that you learned?

ROHM: [Laughs] I really don't. Some of them I had learned, you know, by myself. I had a book, too, to study in. But they were very nice people and you—they got—we got along. It was—was no problem.

SIGRIST: Do you remember ever making a mistake while you were trying to speak English, while you were there?

ROHM: Of course, I made a mistake. Plenty mistakes I made.

SIGRIST: Is—is there a story you can tell us about doing that?

ROHM: [Laughs] That was in later after I worked for—not for these people anymore. My aunt took me away there and I worked for a family my aunt worked for. And they were—that—they were Jewish people and very well known people, and Mr. Strauss was one of the founder of Macys. And his—I worked for his daughter. She was a Mrs. Lehman. Her husband was a judge and that was always something, the explanation between English and German. But we found our way.

There was an Irish girl there. She was the waitress in that house and she would—she would—she really was very good. Every day I would learn a little of her. She made me—I had to repeat it. We could not go to night school because they had their dinner so late, and the night school started at seven o'clock. And my cousin that came with me, she was the cook there and I was the chambermaid and the waitress was a Irish girl. And she was in this country for many years and she taught me a lot of the English.

SIGRIST: So the immigrants all helped them—helped each other.

ROHM: Yes. Yes, and she was a good friend to my aunt. My aunt was not close by, but she worked for Mrs. Lehman's parents. She was the housekeeper there.

SIGRIST: And Mrs. Lehman was the wife of the judge you were just talking about.

ROHM: Yes. Yes, and he was on the main court. Spent a lot of time in Albany. I was also in Albany a few times.

SIGRIST: Oh. When you had a day off—did you work seven days a week when you did—or six days a week?

ROHM: Well, you did—Sundays, of course, you did what was necessary, but otherwise you worked six days. You had to a day off every week, a half a day.

SIGRIST: And what would you do on your free time?

ROHM: I went to Jersey City. I found the way from New York to Jersey City very easy.

SIGRIST: And what would you do for fun?

ROHM: I just visited my sister there. The one that-- that was here already, and we had a very good time. But we had—I had to be back in New York by ten o'clock. The house would be locked. Mrs. Lehman was very old-fashioned.

SIGRIST: Did you ever miss making it back by ten?

ROHM: No.

SIGRIST: Or did you always make it back?

ROHM: Oh, the housekeeper was there. Mrs. Lehman didn't wait for anybody. The housekeeper was—was there and let me in if it was after ten. But, see, the housekeeper, if she went to bed, she had to go up to the fourth floor. That's where all our rooms were and so I had—we could never go to the movies in the evening and see it to the end. Because we had to be there by -- before ten.

SIGRIST: Did you have a uniform that you had to wear?

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: Can you describe what it looked like?

ROHM: Oh, it was a black dress and a—and a white apron. A big white apron in the morning and in the afternoon, you had white cuffs over your black dress and a white small apron.

SIGRIST: How come a different apron in the morning than in the afternoon?

ROHM: In the morning you had a big white apron with a—with the straps and a tie in the back and in the afternoon you had a small apron with a small bib on, fancy.

SIGRIST: Why is there a difference between the morning and the evening? Just the way it was?

ROHM: That's the way it was.

SIGRIST: Did you wear anything on your head?

ROHM: No.

SIGRIST: No, just your hair.

ROHM: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Was there anything about America when you first got here that—that you didn't like? That was difficult for you, aside from the language, which I'm sure was difficult? But I mean anything else that you found hard to adjust to.

ROHM: I don't think so. I can't think of—did I ever complain about something to you? I loved the time here.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

[END SIDE A, TAPE 2]

[BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE 2]

SIGRIST: What were you—did you write to your father?

ROHM: Of course.

SIGRIST: And what were you telling him?

ROHM: Oh, I told him the way life is and I send a package, a food package. The first year I was here, I hardly had the change to pay anything over on my ticket because the money I—I made went into food packages. And then I had to buy some clothes from here. I know I bought a pair of shoes. That was the first thing I bought. But I do -- I had plenty shoes from Germany, but I liked the shoe with the strap and I bought it.

SIGRIST: In the—in the first couple years that you were here, did you ever experience anyone making fun of you because you were an immigrant or because you had an accent or anything like that?

ROHM: Well, I'm sure many people laughed about my expressions. [Laughs] There were quite a few Irish girls working in my line and there was a change and the others had the German house man.

SIGRIST: A house man?

ROHM: A house man, yes, that did Mr. Lehman's --- pressed his -- his clothes every day, you know. And Mrs. Lehman had a housemaid, which I had to replace when she had a day off. And I had to bring—you know, she would tell me which shoes she wants and so on. So I got a little acquainted.

SIGRIST: That was going to be my next question. How did Mrs. Lehman treat the staff?

ROHM: Well, Mrs. Lehman was—was I would say a nervous woman and very particular. People didn't stay long there. Only Lizzie, they wear a dress-- which has -- had been before by her mother, where my aunt was housekeeper. She—she had a lot of changes and usually somebody fresh imported from Germany. The housemen very seldom—we never had a house man that spoke English. It was always one that got off the ship which probably came from Hamburg. And they had a way of getting on the boat and getting off here, you know. Not by regular paperwork, like we got off. See, that was very important that you entered this country after the law. Then nobody could do anything to you.

SIGRIST: Right. Right.

ROHM: And that was quite a job.

SIGRIST: My point for asking about Mrs. Lehman, you said that the first couple that you worked for were very warm to you.

ROHM: Yeah, that was American family.

SIGRIST: They were American, and I get the impression that Mrs. Lehman was not quite—you were her employees and ---.

ROHM: And she was—

SIGRIST: And—

ROHM: And she was very nervous and she was much older. She was in—in—oh, I think she must have been between end of fifties or beginning of sixties.

SIGRIST: Did all the servants get along amongst themselves or did you find that there was tension?

ROHM: Well, there was always a little tension, but it never bothered her—us. My cou-- that my cousin was the cook there and I was the—the chambermaid.

SIGRIST: How long did you work for Mrs. Lehman?

ROHM: Ah, I had my appendix out during that time, too. [Laughs] I was in a Jewish hospital in New York. In Mt. Sinai Hospital, had my appendix removed. And I was with—till she closed her house and she went—they went to England. The city house was closed in the summer and a caretaker took care of it and the summer house was in Port Chester and that was a big estate. And that's where we met a lot of the—the Governor and his help, this and that. And the baker came every day by car. You know, it was a lively thing. We were I think ten in help.

SIGRIST: Very elegant.

ROHM: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Did you work for her for years?

ROHM: No, no.

SIGRIST: Was it a long period of time?

ROHM: From Mrs. Lehman I went to Mrs. Strauss, Jr., and there I took care of children.

SIGRIST: Ah, was that the first time that you had to deal with children?

ROHM: Yes, small ones. They—they had four boys. Four children and four boys. They—the smallest one was a baby. The nurse was still there, but that -- she took care of that baby for the first six weeks, and she left and then they—the governess took over, too. The one that --- and then I was with the children. First, I— one, one season I worked in the kitchen with my cousin, the one that came over with me.

SIGRIST: Pauline.

ROHM: Yeah. She was a cook and we—we met a lot of Irish and American people there and—

SIGRIST: When—when did you—did you get married soon after you came to the United States?

ROHM: No.

SIGRIST: No, it was a long time.

ROHM: I got married in—six--

HELEN: 1926.

SIGRIST: 1926.

ROHM: 1926.

SIGRIST: Well, so you had been here five years.

ROHM: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: That wasn't so terribly long.

ROHM: Yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me how you met your husband to be?

ROHM: Oh, my husband was a friend of my brother. They were soccer—soccer players.

SIGRIST: Soccer players.

ROHM: My brother was a very good soccer player and they played together in Germany. They went together to South America and they came here from South America the following year in Octo—in October.

SIGRIST: October of 1922?

ROHM: Two, yes.

SIGRIST: 1922.

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: But you didn't know him then?

ROHM: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Oh, you knew each other in Germany?

ROHM: Of course.

SIGRIST: Oh. Oh.

ROHM: His parents were our butchers, but he did not learn as a butcher. He went to school, but when the war broke out, he got out of it.

SIGRIST: And got—went to South America.

ROHM: And then he—no, the first—the first [unclear].

SIGRIST: [unclear]

ROHM: Then he took over his father's things over there, but he was too young, but his mother kept him in line.

SIGRIST: Well, did you—did—did you see him as soon as he came to this country?

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: Yes.

ROHM: He came with my brother.

SIGRIST: Were you surprised to see him or—

ROHM: I was surprised to see both of them.

SIGRIST: Oh, you didn't know your brother was coming?

ROHM: No, they were—they were supposed—they had to spend a year down there and somehow they got out of that and they came here and we got a telephone call the night before, and that they were landing tomorrow.

SIGRIST: Did your brother come in through Ellis Island?

ROHM: They had to go through—

SIGRIST: Did you have to go meet them there?

ROHM: No, no. I was working for the Lehmans.

SIGRIST: Oh, right.

ROHM: And I could not—I didn't even know—know. My sister's husband went and the whole thing, his wife was expecting a baby and that baby came a month early through that [unclear] these two fellows would arrive.

SIGRIST: [Laughs] So you got married in 1925.

HELEN: No, six.

ROHM: '26.

SIGRIST: '26, excuse me. And what was his name?

ROHM: The first name?

SIGRIST: Yes.

ROHM: Eugene.

SIGRIST: Eugene Rohm?

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: Yeah, and tell me a little bit about the wedding. Where did you get married and—

ROHM: In our apartment.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

ROHM: I left the Strauss's place at the fourth of July in 1926 and my future husband and my sisters, they had took for an apartment. And then my sister and I went and bought furniture and we lived there for a year. We got married two weeks after. We got—I left the Strausses on the fourth of July and I got married on the 24th of July.

SIGRIST: 1926.

ROHM: Yes.

HELEN: In the rectory of the church. Wasn't it in the rectory of the church?

ROHM: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: You were married in the rectory of the church.

ROHM: Oh, yes. Yes.

SIGRIST: Lutheran Church?

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: What other details do you remember? Do you remember what you wore for—for the ceremony?

ROHM: No, I did not go and buy any clothes.

SIGRIST: Uh-hmm.

ROHM: Because I had quite—quite a bit on hand, and we just wanted to get through with it and be done.

SIGRIST: And can you name your children for me? Helen. She's pointing to Helen.

HELEN: Me.

SIGRIST: You have Helen. Helen was your child, and can you tell me something about what Helen was like as a baby?

ROHM: Well, she was a normal baby.

HELEN: I'll leave the room.

ROHM: She was a normal baby.

SIGRIST: A normal baby.

ROHM: Yes, and she grew up, we had lots of fun. And—and of course she had what every child has on sickness, you know. Nothing—nothing that she wouldn't recover from.

SIGRIST: An average child. Did you become a citizen?

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: What year did you become a citizen?

ROHM: Now, I have to think. I had my first paper and didn't go in time for the second, so that—and that was in New York, and we lived in New Jersey, and I went for—for my citizen paper. The final paper I got, we lived in [unclear].

HELEN: Was it 1936?

ROHM: No. Yes, I think it was 1936.

SIGRIST: 1936. Can you describe for me what you had to do to become a citizen?

ROHM: That, I had—I had to go through some examination, which wasn't that bad.

SIGRIST: A written examination?

ROHM: No, no. well, a—you had—you had to write your address and name and all of that and you where you lived and so on. And I had no problem getting my citizen paper. Yes, I got it in 1936.

SIGRIST: Do you know how you felt when—when—during the ceremony when you became a citizen?

ROHM: I felt very good. I felt really good. I had taken out my first citizen paper. Somebody took me in New York downtown to get the first paper and that, I never went for the second [unclear].

SIGRIST: That's right, because you only had so many years between each time.

ROHM: Yes, and so that's why I only became a citizen in the '30s. According to that, I should have been a citizen in 1926 already.

SIGRIST: Was your husband a citizen?

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: Was he a citizen before 1936?

ROHM: Yes, he came here in 1922 and he went to Germany on a visit in '24. He was not a citizen then. He had his first paper, but that lost its validity. You have to go again for your first one and he became a citizen in the early—he became a citizen in the late '20s.

SIGRIST: In the late 1920s.

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: Did you go back to Germany?

ROHM: In 1932.

SIGRIST: In 1932 and tell me what it felt like when you were in Germany, when you saw it for the first time, having been here for ten years. More than ten years.

ROHM: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, I saw my people. That was the main thing, and I was going to stay longer. My sister from Jersey City went along. We [unclear] Helen was four and my sister's daughter was ten and we got a very good ride on a boat, not flying. Flying wasn't in style in those days. We paid for half the price. That's why we went so unexpected.

HELEN: Can I say? A hundred and ten dollars for the adults and sixty dollars for the children.

SIGRIST: And do you remember the name of the ship that you went over on?

HELEN: The Berlin?

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: You went over on the Berlin?

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: Yes, and how long did you stay?

ROHM: We arrived there the beginning of—the end of June and we left—we were there six weeks about.

SIGRIST: Six weeks.

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: Was your father still living?

ROHM: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Yes?

ROHM: Yes.

SIGRIST: How did you feel when you saw your father?

ROHM: Well, I was very surprised how old he got and I was not happy over there in—in that time. I—I know that I had in mind to stay about three months and my sister wanted to be back because the other had to go to school the beginning of September. So she had—I made reservations to go back with her. That I was not going to stay until end of October, also. And I was very glad to get back and very happy in this country.

SIGRIST: When you think of yourself in terms of nationality, do you think of yourself as a German woman, as an American woman? How do you think of yourself?

ROHM: There is no difference. If you are not an honest person, then you will never make a good citizen, no matter what country you join. That's my idea, and I was very glad to—to become a citizen in '36. See, it takes [unclear] years, but it went—everything went very smoothly. I passed the examination very easy and—and I could vote.

SIGRIST: And you could vote. Do you remember, what was the first Presidential election that you voted?

ROHM: That was in '40.

SIGRIST: Yeah, do you remember what President? I'm trying to remember.

ROHM: Of course.

HELEN: Roosevelt.

SIGRIST: Franklin Roosevelt.

ROHM: Roose—the one we had four times. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Well, I think that's probably a good place for us to end. Mrs. Rohm, thank you very much. You've been delightful. You have a great memory.

ROHM: Well, I hope I didn't bore you.

SIGRIST: No, not at all. We've been at this for almost two hours now.

HELEN: Really?

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Clara Rohm, with Helen Hirtler in attendance and today is Friday, August 30th, 1996, here in Ringwood, New Jersey. Thank you very much.

ROHM: You're welcome.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

