

**EI-885**

**MICHAEL ALBERT HRASNA**

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**AUSTRIA HUNGARY, 1909**

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**PORT:**

**RESIDENCES:**

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Saturday, May 17, 1997. I'm in Bridgewater, New Jersey and I'm here with Mr. Michael Albert Hrasna. And I'll spell Hrasna. It's a capital H (which is silent)-R-A-S-N-A. Mr. Hrasna came from Austria Hungary. He thinks it was around 1909.

HRASNA: Uh-hmm.

SIGRIST: And he thinks he was about five years old at that time. Thank you very much for letting me come out.

HRASNA: You're welcome.

SIGRIST: Can we begin by you giving me your birth date?

HRASNA: [clears throat] September the 29<sup>th</sup>, 1904.

SIGRIST: September the 29<sup>th</sup>—

HRASNA: That's right.

SIGRIST: —1904. Great. You said you were born in Austria Hungary. Do you remember what part of the empire you were born in?

HRASNA: As far as I know, it was a little town. It might have been Pressburg, from what—from what have I gathered up.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

HRASNA: P-R-E-S-S-B-U-R-G. Pressburg.

SIGRIST: Pressburg.

HRASNA: Yeah, at that time.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what the nearest big city was to that?

HRASNA: Well, it was—that, I don't recall. No.

SIGRIST: No, okay. What memories do you have of—of being in Europe? What memories do you have about that town?

HRASNA: I remember that we got ready to leave home to go by train to the French Coast to get the boat. And from—from France, we left. I don't know what port. But we left for the United States.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the house that you lived in Europe?

HRASNA: No, I don't.

SIGRIST: Nothing like that?

HRASNA: No.

SIGRIST: Let's begin then by talking about your parents. What was your mother's name?

HRASNA: My name—mother's name was Theresa.

SIGRIST: Theresa.

HRASNA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And do you remember what her maiden name was prior to—

HRASNA: Wolarik.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

HRASNA: W-O-L-A-R-I-K. Something like that.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

HRASNA: Wol—Wolarik.

SIGRIST: Do you know anything about your mother's family background? Where she came from and her growing up?

HRASNA: No, that—that—that goes beyond my knowledge to be—

SIGRIST: Did she ever talk about her childhood?

HRASNA: Not—that, I don't—don't recollect.

SIGRIST: Okay. Do you know where she came from?

HRASNA: N—no. At that time, of course, as you know, it—Austria Hungary and Germany were very closely allied. And you know, they were partners in the World War. And Nazi Germany had, I guess, the upper hand of—of the—of the—of the—the—the joint [clears throat] feeling of being together in—in—like in the war. They—they—something—something happening and then, of co—you know, what, the war started. And [clears throat] that's as far as I know. I couldn't tell you anything about her youth. That I don't know.

SIGRIST: Do—do you remember grandparents in Europe?

HRASNA: Not in Europe. But I remem—I remember my grandmother, my mother's mother had been brought here by my uncle, her brother, my mother's brother. Now, when—when he—when he brought over, that, I don't remember the date and the time. But she, naturally, was with my Uncle Steve. That was my mother's brother.

SIGRIST: Steve was his name?

HRASNA: He was here at the time and where he lived, I don't remember.

SIGRIST: Were you already in America when that happened?

HRASNA: No.

SIGRIST: No, you were still in Europe.

HRASNA: That—when that happened, that—I'm not sure whether it happened be—be—while I was still in Europe or after I came here. But Grandma was a sort of a—a—a babysitter, was used as a babysitter. I know I used to take her back and forth in—in this country to my sister, my older sister. And that—and of course, my uncle also used her too. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Tell me—tell me a little bit about your grandmother. What was her name?

HRASNA: Oh, she was a saint. She—I think I took after her, her disposition, very easygoing person. Not violent, no temperament. That's the type I am today.

SIGRIST: What—when you were a little boy, what kinds of things did you enjoy doing with your grandmother?

HRASNA: Well, she used to tell us stories, naturally, and she was a sweet old person.

SIGRIST: What kind of stories would she tell you? Do you remember?

HRASNA: Well, about the nicest things of life, about doing good things, you know, and—and behaving yourself. It was a—it was a classic. I missed her terrible.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me what she looked like?

HRASNA: She was a little old lady and there was—there wasn't a—there wasn't a c—c—crude way about her. She was so—you couldn't help but like her. She had that disposition, you know, would never argue with you.

SIGRIST: She was very gentle.

HRASNA: Very gentle.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Do you remember what her first name was?

HRASNA: Oh, my goodness. I—that's—that's very hard to—very hard to remember. That's very hard to remember.

SIGRIST: Okay. Can you—let's get back to your mother then. Can you describe for me what your mother's personality was like?

HRASNA: My mother was a sweet person. She—well, she was the mother of nine children, seven boys and two girls.

SIGRIST: How many were born in Europe?

HRASNA: They were all born in Europe.

SIGRIST: They were all born in Europe.

HRASNA: All born in—and my father come here first originally. What year, I don't know. But he come here with three or four of the oldest ones, who were able to work and they—my father had an apartment on—in Newark in East Ferry [PH] Street. I remember the name. And what—how soon after we—my mother brought the rest of the brood over, that I couldn't say.

SIGRIST: She brought all nine children over?

HRASNA: No, there were four here with my father.

SIGRIST: I see.

HRASNA: And the rest of them were brought over here. I remember the trip from Europe by train through France, through Ger—I mean through Austria and through France and to the—to the coast where the boat that we were supposed to go on—we had to go. See?

SIGRIST: Okay, good. Well, hold onto that because we're going to talk about that in a minute. So nine children were all born in Europe.

HRASNA: In Europe.

SIGRIST: In Europe. Can you—can you name all nine children?

HRASNA: Roughly, I think I can. [clears throat] Was Brother, Steve, Charlie, Brother John, [clears throat] Brother Gus, Brother Joe.

SIGRIST: Gus, you said? G-U-S?

HRASNA: August. August.

SIGRIST: August, uh-huh.

HRASNA: Brother Joe and myself and my brother, Freddy, the youngest one. I was next to the youngest one. And then we had two sisters. I had two sisters, Mary and Emma.

SIGRIST: How many years are there between the oldest child and the youngest child?

HRASNA: Well, I would say brother Steve was—was the oldest by 17 years, at least. That, I found out, I think lately at the last couple of years. He was the oldest, Steve. And then, of course, the—the others come—the—I can't—I—I just can't mention their names or I mean their ages because I don't remember. But my brother—

SIGRIST: That's a long span of time.

HRASNA: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

HRASNA: My brother, Freddy, was the youngest. Fred—Ferdinand, they call him. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Do you remember in Europe—of course, you were quite young, I realize. But do you remember your brothers and sisters at all when you were growing up?

HRASNA: Not one bit. I don't r—I don't recollect any of that period.

SIGRIST: Okay.

HRASNA: I do remember, if you want to know about the trip, as we left Europe to go to the—

SIGRIST: All right. What do you remember about—you said you remembered getting ready to leave in Europe.

HRASNA: Yeah. [clears throat]

SIGRIST: What do you remember about that?

HRASNA: I remember the train inci—incidents. My mother was looking for one of the—the—one of the boys. Whether he was not around or—you know how it is when—when—when you have youngsters with you. [clears throat] That was brother John. He was—I—I think he was a lame one. He had a short leg on the right or left; I don't remember. But he—we—while we were on a train, I know sh—my mother was looking for him and then I do remember when we arrived at the pier. And—and I do remember the trip on the ocean, two weeks.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about being on the pier? W—why do you remember that?

HRASNA: Well, because we—we had to—we had to go on—on the—on board the ship. That's about all. And I do remember the days we—we spent on top of the deck during the daytime. My mother brought us up when the weather was clear. And then I used to watch and see the terrible amount of water surround this—surrounding the boat. And my mother always had the youngest one and I along side of her. We were the youngest. The others took—more or less took care of themselves. They were able to because my sister had come before me. She was a—about four or five years older than I was at that time. So [chuckles] that—that's all. I don't remember the others on board the ship.

SIGRIST: But you remember being with your mother.

HRASNA: Oh, yeah. That was—that was an everyday—everyday occurrence because we—we were—we were down at—at, well, what is—well, whatever you call it, wherever that was. I'm not sure. We didn't come first class by any means. [laughter] I guess we—my mother had enough money to—to bring the four or five, whichever it was with, you know, to come with her. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: And your father's in Newark with your—

HRASNA: Father in—down in Newark, yes.

SIGRIST: Down in Newark.

HRASNA: At East Ferry Street.

SIGRIST: You mentioned one of your brothers—John, I think you said—had a—had a—a short leg.

HRASNA: A short—yeah. He was handicapped that way. That—

SIGRIST: What—what do you remember about that as you were growing up? I mean, how did that affect the family and how did that affect John?

HRASNA: Well, no way. Not—nothing ever was brought up or—or mentioned that his—his—his—his whatever you call it, his—his—his problem. But we were all more or less healthy. We were—they were all workers, you know. They—they got jobs as soon as they landed here, I suppose. And even with myself, we—well, you know, them days you're—you were able to—to get a job, even with a—with a—a—a—a permission by the [chuckles] authorities [unclear]. [laughs]

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

HRASNA: My father's name was John and I do not recollect him. Only—only on a couple occasions. I—now, you see, I was quite young yet and I don't recollect his name because I wasn't around him much when we come—when we come over, when we landed in Ellis Island and stayed there two or three days to be ch—checked health wise. But I do remember his face a little. But the—the—the worst thing what—what's in my mind at times and if I was old enough and if I had a gun I would have shot him, what he done. He deserted us and as he come—as we were all brought together. He—he said to—he just left—left the home. And my mother had a hard time tracing him, find—trying to find where he was. And through with a lawyer that she had hired, I suppose, she finally found him in—after seven years, in Paterson or Passaic, either one.

SIGRIST: Paterson or Passaic—

HRASNA: So my mother took me and my youngest brother on the trolley car to go to Passaic to see him. Well, whatever transpired while we got there, the—the conversation, I was too young to listen. They had—they talked things over, you know. But I do remember him putting me and my brother and my mother on the trolley car in the summertime on open—open-air trolley car. And my mother in the back of the tr—trolley car said to my father, "John, please come home. We miss you." And he said, "I will not come home until you get rid of all the children except the two youngest ones." And that was the last I—we've seen of him. And I don't—I—and I can't recollect him anyway, being in this company. That's—but that's all right. I guess I was quite young [unclear].

SIGRIST: Do—do you know what he had trained for as a profession in Europe?

HRASNA: I—I understood, from as close as I could remember, that he was a—a policeman, an officer or something to that effect. Now, what he done here, that I don't know. I couldn't tell you. I don't—I wasn't sure.

SIGRIST: When you got to America, did you have any objects that your mother had brought from Europe? Do you remember what she took with her to the United States?

HRASNA: No, that—that's something that I—I don't recollect. But I do know walking up after—I do know the period in EI—Ellis Island, how the doctors with their long white coats, you know, checked our throats and—and made sure we were more or less healthy and that we had someone here that would—that we wouldn't be on the—on the—on the front of her authority—authority, see. And—

SIGRIST: You said you stayed overnight at Ellis Island for a couple nights.

HRASNA: At least a couple of days.

SIGRIST: Yeah?

HRASNA: You had to be examined. You—they—they—they checked you. That's what I don't—what I didn't like what happened at—with our—with our—with our—our—our—our—[clears throat]—we—we got careless and, up to 1965, we got so careless, anybody could come here.

SIGRIST: Well, I—you mean the immigration policies?

HRASNA: Immigration policies, yes.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. I see.

HRASNA: We—there was a quota at that time. I remember very well, as I went to school, we had a quota that—and that I—I really—I was very interested in our country. Oh, I think this is the greatest story in the world. I think it's better than the Bible. Now, that's going—saying quite a—quite a strong—those are strong words when I think this country, the history of this country is—is a—is a great—has a greater meaning for me, and I loved it—than the Bible. [clears throat] Excuse me. And—

SIGRIST: Can I ask you a question? What language did you speak when you came to the United States?

HRASNA: Well, you'd be surprised. My mother spoke to me and my youngest brother, German.

SIGRIST: Spoke in German.

HRASNA: That's all we spoke.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

HRASNA: My mother spoke Hungarian. She spoke a little—I think she knew a little Slavic, being in an area where—where that was neighbors, you know. And she spoke Hungarian and—and German. And you'd be surprised. When she went to Europe with my stepfather later on in life, I can—corresponded with her. I wrote in German and she sent me letters in German. I could read the German newspapers. I could understand it. I could speak it very fluently. But then as I grew up and went to school—I

went to school in—in the Catholic school there for seven years, and that—

SIGRIST: Did your f—did you remain in Newark?

HRASNA: We remained down in—down in what they call East Ferry Street in Newark. That was our home. And then gradually, as—as years passed, we moved up towards the center of Newark and then—and above Newark, the—the better areas where the—you know, where—where the—the people were a little bit different, although I did enjoy Down Neck [PH]. That was a nice area.

SIGRIST: Uh-hmm. D—do you remember—I just want to go back a little bit here.

HRASNA: Hmm.

SIGRIST: You have some memories of being on the ship, you said. You remember being with your mom—

HRASNA: Never forgot that. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Is there any—is there anything else about being on the ship that you remember? For instance, like where you ate, maybe, on the boat?

HRASNA: Well, that part I don't remember. But I guess we must—had our—our share of food. But I do remember my mother brought us up every day when the weather was clear to be above on deck to get the air. See? And—

SIGRIST: Did anyone in your family get sick on the ship that you remember?

HRASNA: That I don't remember either.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

HRASNA: But I do know my mother sitting—standing next to her, you know, and—and—and spending time. I—what length of time, I'm not sure—

SIGRIST: Right.

HRASNA: —of what—[chuckles] how much time we spent on board—on—on deck. But I know on clear days she brought us up [unclear].

SIGRIST: Do you know how long the ship took to get to America?

HRASNA: I would—I often—I wasn't sure but I—I—I imagine about two weeks at that time. See?

SIGRIST: Do you remember the name of the ship?

HRASNA: Well, I might—I always thought it was Rot—Rotterdam. I'm not sure. It isn't—that isn't—that isn't—I wouldn't say that—

SIGRIST: Your face just lit up when I asked you that question. [laughter] You just broke out in this big smile.

HRASNA: Because I—I—I thought that that was the name of the ship. That was an old, old ship [unclear] about that time, you know. [chuckles] But I do remember the—the days on board ship. When—when there was nice weather my mother brought us up. And you know, in—and what would ha—whatever happened after that, eventually they—the year after that I—I felt so—so—so—so sure I had a good mother because she stuck with us. And when my father deserted us she didn't leave us. She—she just brought us up. And she had a hard time raising us.

SIGRIST: Did your mother get a job when she came here?

HRASNA: No, she couldn't. She—there was enough peo—enough adults, brothers and sisters working that—to run the home, to feed us and pay the bills, you know, so forth. They were—well, you—they were quite—there were quite a few adults that—that were able to work, you know. So we—

SIGRIST: The older children.

HRASNA: The older—the oldest ones. Sure.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me what jobs they had, the older kids?

HRASNA: Well, my brother, Steve, was the oldest. He learned—he learned to—to be a—a—a—a salesman in the grocery store. He learned a trade. Now, what he done here—oh, I think he learned to be a toolmaker eventually. He learned the tool, machine shop business.

SIGRIST: Are you saying that he had learned to be a—a salesman in the grocery store—

HRASNA: In Europe.

SIGRIST: In Europe? Oh—

HRASNA: Yes. Well, that's what I was told.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

HRASNA: He was the groceries—like a salesman in the grocery store. And that was a trade in itself at that time.

SIGRIST: So he was old enough to actually have worked—

HRASNA: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: —before you left.

HRASNA: He—Steven and then the—there was four or five of the oldest ones that were able to get a job and support the family. See?

SIGRIST: Uh-hmm. So Steven worked in this country in—in a tool factory, you said or [unclear]?

HRASNA: He learned—he learned the tool—he worked for Singer for many, many years.

SIGRIST: Worked for what?

HRASNA: Singer Sewing Machine.

SIGRIST: Singer Sewing Machines. Uh-huh.

HRASNA: Many, many years. He retired and he got a—he re—received a pension too.

SIGRIST: What about the other children?

HRASNA: And the others were—they were all—Brother Charlie and Brother John were polishers, metal polishers.

SIGRIST: Polishers.

HRASNA: In—in—in the—in the plant, factory, as it were. And—

SIGRIST: What kind of metal—I mean—

HRASNA: They were—well, they were classified in—as—in the—in the paper as polishers—

SIGRIST: Just polishers.

HRASNA: —and buffers, did that, polished on metal, metal parts, you know. And of course, my mother was a dressmaker and so was my oldest sister and my youngest sister. They were both very excellent dressmakers. In fact, my mother made our clothes, my clothes and my brother's, you know. A—I do remember that.

SIGRIST: Is there a—is there a—a—a set of clothing that your mother made for you when you were a kid that you remember that sticks out in your mind?

HRASNA: Oh, yes. The—the—

SIGRIST: Can you describe it for me?

HRASNA: A nice little—a nice little suit, you know, with a jacket. And we always wore patent leather shoes. My mother—Mother always dressed us up and that was the—that was the thing that makes me so bitter. I—I wasn't—well, I was pretty close to her. Out of all the children, I think I was the closest. In fact, she—she—she always had—used to talk to me and advise me about a lot of things from the young, on. I was quite close to her.

SIGRIST: What kind of advice did your mother give you about how to lead your life?

HRASNA: Well, she must have—she must have taught me something wonderful because I never—I never hurt anybody and I always try to be nice with people and—and be pleasant with people. And I had a wonderful disposition. I never got angry, very little. I had no temperament—that temperament that some people have, you know. And they would burst out and get nasty. My—my lady friends in my life then, they called me a pussycat. [laughter]

SIGRIST: Well, tell—when you were a little boy growing up, what were some of the things you enjoyed doing with your mother?

HRASNA: Well, we—we used to mind my mother very well. We were—of course, my kid brother, he was a little bit hard to—to handle, you know, and that she used to threaten him that she would pack her bag and—and would take me and leave him alone, home alone. If he didn't behave himself, you know, as sort of a—an example, you know. But I know she done that a few times because he—sometimes he wouldn't mind her, you know.

SIGRIST: Do you remember a time where he—where he got into trouble doing something?

HRASNA: Well, some—a little—some—nothing—nothing serious.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

HRASNA: But it—what—when we were—we—we got a good bringing up there. Nothing happened to—ever—to us. We were never in prob—have problems in the court with the police or anything at any time. We—the people—them days were—had the—had the strict training. Nothing like today. The kids don't get much—some of them. Now, there may be—there may be certain people that—that still have that idea of training a child up until seven and eight years old, and then when you get them to that age and that they behaved and minded you, you had no trouble later on in life. See?

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me the apartment where you lived in Europe—in—not in Europe—in Newark? The first one that you moved to.

HRASNA: That was on Ferry—East Ferry Street, was a five- or six-room apartment.

SIGRIST: Is that Ferry, F-E-R-R-Y?

HRASNA: It's East—that was East Ferry Street.

SIGRIST: East Ferry Street.

HRASNA: Now, Ferry Street starts from the Pennsylvania Station. And then as you come down into East Ferry is—was a side street. Well, it was—was quite a—a trolley car used to run down that way, see. And—and then you—we were—were on the corner, East Ferry and Ferry. And right on the corner of that street is still a church there that was—that's still there, I think.

SIGRIST: Okay. Let's talk about the apartment though. Can you walk me through the apartment? What—what—

HRASNA: Yes, it was a sort of a—a—sort of a—what—as they call it, a railroad flat. It was five or six rooms in rotation [unclear], one room after another. And there—there must have been quite a few rooms because there was—oh, be—the family was quite big. And of cour—naturally, Steve got married eventually and he left. They each gradually got married, you know, at certain times and the family got smaller eventually, you know. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: How did you light the apartment?

HRASNA: Very much. It was a nice place. It was easy living.

SIGRIST: How did you light it? What kind of—

HRASNA: Well, it was a three-story—three-story apartment. It—of course, downstairs were stores and the upstairs were family—apartments for—and then we had—I do remember that we had an Irish family [chuckles] on the top floor; we had problems with once in a while. You know, they created the little rumpus on the weekends, you know, and would—like, which happens sometimes. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: How did you illuminate the apartment?

HRASNA: Well, we had—I guess we had a—gas. I don't—

SIGRIST: Gaslight?

HRASNA: I don't think we had electric. I know we—and not—in our lifetime, we used candles and we used the kerosene lanterns. Finally, we got the gas—gas lamps, you know. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Do you remember how the gas lamp worked?

HRASNA: Well, we had—we had a sort of—you had a sort of a—a white thing at that—you used to insert it to the socket. And that was what—you—that was gas. And then eventually, in time, we got elec—electricity. Yeah. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: And how did you heat the apartment?

HRASNA: Well, it was coal. Now, see, it was coal. We had a coal stove in the—coal stove in the ki—in the kitchen and we had a—probably a range in the living room, front room with sliding doors. [laughs]

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of the furniture? Does—does that stick out—

HRASNA: No, not—

SIGRIST: —in your mind at all?

HRASNA: That, I—I don't remember. I know we had a bed to [chuckles] sleep in, you know. And at some time we had to sleep two or three—

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

HRASNA: —at—at a time. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Whom did you sleep with?

HRASNA: I'm—with the youngest one, the brother. And then, of course, maybe my—my oldest—my youngest sister. She was the—she was about four years older than I was. And then, of course, the—the brothers, some of them slept together. Maybe two or three. Who knows? [unclear]. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Tell me about going to school. How old were you when you started school?

HRASNA: Well, I started school quite early on—on—on the—on Wilson Avenue, was the name of the town. It was Hamburg [PH] P—Place originally until the war started. Then it was named Wilson Avenue.

SIGRIST: The First World War.

HRASNA: The First World War, because after President Wilson. [chuckles] I do remember that. And the—then finally—

SIGRIST: When you first started school were you still speaking German?

HRASNA: Well, I probably was. I spoke German with my mother. Of course, she didn't—she didn't pick up the English language as quick as we, the youngsters did, you know.

SIGRIST: Do you remember tr—lo—trying to learn English?

HRASNA: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Yes. Tell me—tell me about that.

HRASNA: We—we had—we were—we were trying to tell her that you had to learn how to speak English. And she finally mastered it somehow. Of course, with a little ac—a little accent, you know, which, naturally, an elderly person can't lose as—as suddenly. But I—they tell me I had a little accent too when I was a—in my ear—early and late teens. [chuckles] I had a slight accident—accent. I—

SIGRIST: Well, what do you remember about when you first started school?

HRASNA: Well, I—I do remember I—I enjoyed it and that I got along with—with the youngsters then and—and the other boys and girls. And I—I got a big

kick out of it. I used to enjoy those—the—the—the baths that they had on Wilson Avenue. They used to go once a week and—

SIGRIST: Baths.

HRASNA: The baths where they'd go in a pool or go in a shower. And, well, that's one thing we didn't have at—when we were first in—were living here in America. We had no bathroom. We had a toilet out on the porch. [chuckles] That's where the bathroom—that's where the toilet was, you know. And I remember very vividly we used to cut up the newspapers in smaller sheets for—for toilet paper. [laughs] I'm sorry I brought that up. Maybe—

SIGRIST: No, no. Please, that's good information.

HRASNA: Oh. [laughs]

SIGRIST: No, by all means.

HRASNA: Yeah, we used to use newspaper. And then finally, till we—till we got to using toilet tissue, you know.

SIGRIST: Was there running water inside the apartment?

HRASNA: Yes, we had—we had water and we had heating—no troubles heating the place and, of course, the bathroom out on the porch was—was where we had water where you used to flush it, you know. And then, finally, we—that all disappeared gradually as we grew—grew up in the years and then we got bathrooms, you know.

SIGRIST: Tell me about going to the baths. These are public bathhouses?

HRASNA: Yes. We used to go on weekends, especially, and we used to get—we used to pay five cents for a nickel, for a—for a bar of soap and—and a towel. And every Friday or a Saturday you would—we enjoyed the pool and we enjoyed the shower. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: But they were separate things. You—

HRASNA: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: There was a swimming pool and there was a shower.

HRASNA: That was run by the city of Newark, the—the shower. That—in fact, every—every neighborhood had—had their place where you can get a free shower and a pool, you know.

SIGRIST: How often would you go?

HRASNA: Well, regularly. You know, my mother—my—seen to it that we—that we used it, as long as it didn't cost too much. I think it was five cents for a bar of soap and a towel with it. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Would—did the men and women go at the same time?

HRASNA: Well, it was just the men that—men and boys and then the—the ladies had—the girls had their days too, see? Eventually, that was—it was a separation there. There was nothing, you know—no togetherness, like—like the colleges, they had the—you know, where they—they let the girls—

SIGRIST: Things are different now. [laughter]

HRASNA: A hell of a lot different.

SIGRIST: Tell me about—what religion were you?

HRASNA: Well, my mother was a Catholic but a broad-minded one. She was not—she was not severe or—and if we—if we—if we—if we didn't—if we missed Sunday school once in a while she would never give us a bawling out. She—she would tell us it wasn't right but she was never strict about religion. She was very broadminded. And then as I got older, I left my religion because I—I went to Catholic Church. I went to—I went to church in the morning before school, after school. And we went to church in the morning and Sunday afternoon. I got too much church at that time. And I—the Catholic religion more or less frightened me. It was a scare religion.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

SIGRIST: Let me ask you a question. When you were a little boy, did you learn your prayers in German?

HRASNA: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of that?

HRASNA: Oh, I used to—

SIGRIST: Can—can you say a prayer for me in German right—

HRASNA: No, you see—

SIGRIST: No?

HRASNA: I—I left my relig—my nation—my German la—German—my—because I—I got married and I spoke English. And I—I married American girl. My brother married a German girl with—from a German family and, of course, that German was spoken in his—in his marr—early marriage stage when they lived—when he lived with his in-laws. And so, you see, he didn't lose it as quick as I did. He was with a family that spoke German, especially the—the mother and father. Not his wife. She—she understood and spoke a little bit when—when they talked to her. But it was—it was in—it was in my brother's favor that he was a little—with a family that spoke German often in—in the home, not outside, unless they met some pe—friends that were—that would—would—especially the older folks. They would speak in German. But that gradually—that disappeared as—as we—as—as we lived and got older, and that the German was just—it was—the German language more or less was shunted aside, more or less, see. And that's why I lost my—my German tongue [chuckles] and my voice, because I—I was married to an American girl in my time and I—I didn't—it—it—well, we—we, more or less, spoke English.

SIGRIST: And you just kind of forgot whatever—

HRASNA: And we sort of more or less forget and we were glad because—because today we had—we had different nationalities here. And people don't seem to want to go to school and learn how to speak English.

SIGRIST: When World War I happened—America got into the war in—

HRASNA: Yes.

SIGRIST: —1917, now, you're a—you're a German-speaking family. Can you tell me about if—if that caused any problems for your family?

HRASNA: Well, we were—we were a little, sort of on the German side in the—in the beginning.

SIGRIST: Of course, it starts in 1914—

HRASNA: Yes.

SIGRIST: —in Europe.

HRASNA: And, right. Naturally, we had—my mother had brothers—had—had a brother and—and family in Europe, you know, that she used to correspond with occasionally. And the—the feeling was—was—was a different feeling then in—in fir—at least the first year or two until finally, we—we—we started realize what a terrible thing is what the Germans done. It—it was not their problem to—but they—they really actually agitated the Hungarians and had a war.

SIGRIST: Do you know how your mother felt about her brothers having to serve in the army or whatever branch of the military—

HRASNA: Oh, well, she—I—she—she felt—she—well, she worried about her—her—her brother. And in fact, he had to serve in the army too. And in the course of—he—he had a couple of sons. I think he lost a couple of sons in the war. And the feeling was—well, after the war when my step-fath—my moth—mother remarried after quite a bit of time. And my fa—stepfather took her to Europe to her—to—to her people. And they spent about three months over there. And they—they discussed a lot of things about the war, which was a terrible thing that had happened and all that killing for—for what? For what reason? It was senseless. And of course, what could you do? You—you really h—really had a—you had the Germans up—the propaganda, you know, that—that was instilled into the other nations, you know. And that's how you—you, more or less—you started to realize that Germany was out to try to rule the world. See? Which was [unclear]—was—was a—was the original idea of—of Germany.

SIGRIST: How was your life affected in the United States by the war or—

HRASNA: Well, we had to be careful of what we had and what we said, you know. We—we realized that we were—this country was—was—was helping the Allies because it was for a good cause. See? And we got to realize eventually that the—the German nation was—was actually egging the other nations on, their—their—their—their—their friends. You know, the different nations that were on the side of Germany. And we could see in that—that—what—what they were doing was—was wrong, you know. And eventually, we—we had a—we—we were—[unclear] actually with this country, when we went into the war—in fact, my brother, when my brother, Gus—August—he went—he was—and he had two—not a very long time and he learned how to speak English. He—he joined the National Guard for one year. And he was—he was in Mexico fighting Villa.

SIGRIST: Pancho Villa. Yeah.

HRASNA: And—and, naturally, he was down there for six months and then my mother never hesitated that he join the National Guard, because on a Monday night he used to take me to the armory. And that's where I got to be sp—sport minded.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about going to the armory with your brother, Gus?

HRASNA: Well, he—we—they had a lot of athletic events, you know, my brother—my brothers—quite a baseball fan. And the—he played a little baseball and he got me excited. And of course, baseball was the—was the game. In fact, today I still follow it. I don't believe in—in the owners, what—the way they run it.

SIGRIST: But back then, tell me about going to the armory with Gus—

HRASNA: Oh, well, it was a—

SIGRIST: —and what you saw.

HRASNA: It was an evening—it was an evening affair on a Monday night. Of course, the brothers, naturally, would ask me to go along and I would see them have relay races, you know, and different kind of sporting events. And that—that instilled me as sports.

SIGRIST: Were there things that you could participate in when you went to the armory, or—

HRASNA: Well, no. I had—

SIGRIST: —just spectator?

HRASNA: I, more or less, went to watch. And that's what I got a big kick out of. See? And Brother Gus was—was one of the—one of the ones—the few brothers that I was pretty close with, you know. And—and then, of course, when he went to—when he went to Ger—when he went to—and he'd been in the National Guard. He—they—naturally, they—he was—he had—he was called to go to Mexico to fight Villa. And they had a rough time down there. You know, they were trying to find him. They couldn't get him. But eventually, they—he come back after—after six or seven months and we made a—a—quite a homecoming event for him, welcome home after so many months down in Mexico fighting—chasing the Mexicans, you know.

SIGRIST: I think that was in 1916?

HRASNA: That—that—again, that part—

SIGRIST: Yeah, you're not sure. I think it's—

HRASNA: I'm not sure.

SIGRIST: I think it's around 1916.

HRASNA: But anyway, it was after the war. I—no, before the war. Now, that I—  
that I don't remember the exact time.

SIGRIST: Hmm.

HRASNA: But I know we—we got a big kick—we had a big sign painted in the front  
of the house. "Welcome home, Gus," you know. [chuckles] And we  
may have—had a good time for him. We—we had a lot—a lot of food,  
things that—that kind. And friends stopped in to see him. And that I  
remember very vividly.

SIGRIST: Hmm.

HRASNA: [chuckles]

SIGRIST: W—were there any other ways that the war affected your family? For  
instance, like food shortages that might have happened in the United  
States?

HRASNA: Oh, well, yes. We had—we had trouble with sugar. We had trouble with  
butter. We had to get a—our certain quota, you know. And of course  
there was a lot of black market going on when the—which we couldn't  
control, you know.

SIGRIST: Can you talk about what you know about the—the black market?

HRASNA: Oh, yes. The—the people—people used to know somebody that—that  
could get you sugar. And you used to know somebody who would get  
you meat or something like that. But we were very careful to—not to  
break the law. We were quite law abiding, I would say, you know. We  
were—well, you—most Europeans were law abiding. The families,  
when they—when they got married and they had children, they were  
trained. They were severed—like I was with my two daughters.

SIGRIST: Tell me how you got the sugar and the butter. What was the procedure  
to get—

HRASNA: Well, we—we got—we got coupons or—or stamps, sort of. And—and you got your certain quota. And then when the—when that was gone you had to just wait till the—the next period. See? And once in a while somebody would say, “Well, here. I’ll—we’ll tell you where to get the sugar,” and through—through some crazy way. You know how—how they do those things. [chuckles] But we never got in it too—too strong to get into a problem, see. We, more or less, had—had to abide by the rulings. Not like it is in some time—in some cases where people know where to go and get this and—and get that. You know how those things are.

SIGRIST: What about in school? Were there any ways that the—that World War I was discussed or you participated in something in school?

HRASNA: I wouldn’t—I wouldn’t say—not too much.

SIGRIST: Because you would have been in school at that time.

HRASNA: Yes. Not too much. It—of course, the youngsters were—talked about it a little bit. But we were naturally—had other things, you know, to discuss, especially youngsters, you know.

SIGRIST: How did your family—what did your family do for entertainment in those days?

HRASNA: Well, they were—they were—they—we—we had a quartet, the—of the four older brothers. They used to sing on holidays. [chuckles] And we always had a—wonderful Christmases. We had—we had a lot of food. You know, we had—we had a lot of visit—visitation.

SIGRIST: Can you describe how your family celebrated Christmas?

HRASNA: Well, we—we—we had a lot of visitations there. We didn’t live too far from one another, like it is today. You don’t see one person for a whole year. And today, it’s—it’s a different, crazy life.

SIGRIST: Right.

HRASNA: And then they—they’re—we were more family-oriented. You know, the brothers—then they got married. They used to visit, holidays, and visit the mother and father or the parents. And they visited one another—

SIGRIST: Would you decorate the inside of your house, somehow, or—

HRASNA: Well, yes. We had our Christmas tree and we had the wreath in the door, you know.

SIGRIST: How did you decorate the Christmas tree when you were a kid?

HRASNA: Well, we—we—we got the—the tree was—sometime when we were quite young, of course. That was—the tree was put there and you—and we were told that Santy Claus brought the tree. But eventually, as you got older, you were—you bought the tree and you helped to decorate it, you know. And it was—it was a wonderful time, years ago, because we were so close together. We were so near one another, was by—either by trolley or you walked, which you do—done an awful lot—you—as—as youngsters. We didn't have no—didn't have the accommodations we have today, a car, you know. It was all—all—it was really a wonderful time.

SIGRIST: Were there special foods that you ate at Christmas time?

HRASNA: I would say yes. We had our—we had our cookies, especially homemade cook—cake.

SIGRIST: Who made them?

HRASNA: My mother, naturally, and my dau—my sisters. They—they helped in the—in the—you know—

SIGRIST: What was your favorite holiday food that—

HRASNA: Oh, a—a nut bread. Walnut—ground walnut bread. It was—had ground walnuts in it, or poppy seed cake. That was a favorite cake and—and is today yet. There are some Hungarians out—down in New Brunswick, an area where there's a cluster of them, you know, a colony of Hungarian. And once in a great while, we—we would go down there and—and at this stage of the game, why, we'd go to the restaurant and still buy that nut cake, that walnut cake around—[chuckles] walnut and poppy seed cake.

SIGRIST: But your mother made these kinds of things—

HRASNA: Oh, yes. She used to make a—a—oh, what wonderful cakes she made! Wonderful cake.

SIGRIST: Did your family exchange presents at Christmas time? [clears throat]

HRASNA: They—they did to a—to a—in a mo—modern extent. They would—wasn't—it wasn't the volume that it is today. It wasn't—there wasn't the—

SIGRIST: What would you get for Christmas?

HRASNA: Well, mostly clothes and then a little toy from the—from the Woolworth store.

SIGRIST: Do you remember a toy that—

HRASNA: Yes.

SIGRIST: One stick out in your mind?

HRASNA: When we—when—when Christmas come around, we were so tickled to death to get a stocking full of oranges, apples, nuts, figs and so forth. A full—a full stocking. And we got, maybe, shoes. We got, maybe, underwear, a shirt, very little—very little toys. But we were grateful. We—we—we were grateful. I don't know. It was a different feeling, them days.

SIGRIST: You mentioned that some of your brothers sang as a quartet.

HRASNA: Yeah, we had a—we had—we had four brothers that sang as a quartet. And they were great players of a guitar. They—the—now, I think most of them played the—a couple—most of them played—learned how to play the guitar. And I think one of my brothers played the violin. And they finally got me to—to play the guitar years ago, which I progressed and was coming along very nicely. But we were—we—we liked music, you know, Christmas music, stuff like that.

SIGRIST: Were there other ways that you—that you enjoyed music in the house? Other than just sitting around and singing?

HRASNA: Well, we had a—we finally had a Vic—a—a record machine, you know. [chuckles] And we used to play that quite—

SIGRIST: The Victrola.

HRASNA: Well, we—it wasn't quite a—as elaborate as that. But it was—it was used constantly. You know, we—we—we liked good music and [unclear]—

SIGRIST: Do you remember what kind of music you listened to at that time?

HRASNA: Well, a good—a good music, good—

SIGRIST: But what is that? Tell me what—

HRASNA: Ball—a good ballad or a good—what you call a good—what you h— what you would listen to if you liked good music while you're ea—eating dinner or something like that. So it was—was not—not no junk. You know, it was no junk years ago like you had—we got. [laughs]

SIGRIST: Tell me about the first job you ever did that you got paid for.

HRASNA: Well, I left the seventh grade and I'm—I was out till the—my brothers kept after me to learn a trade. And they finally got me—which I—I wasn't—I wasn't sorry by a darn sight. They—they got me into a place where—well, I originally worked for Hahne and Company. I worked on the soda fountain for three or four months and I worked in the restaurant department for a while.

SIGRIST: Can you spell the name of that?

HRASNA: Hahne and Company.

SIGRIST: Hahne. H—

HRASNA: H-A-H-N-E. They're—they're extinct today.

SIGRIST: They were in Newark?

HRASNA: They were in Newark, yeah.

SIGRIST: H-A-H-N-E.

HRASNA: H-A-H-N-E. Hahne.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

HRASNA: And a beautiful store and I—that—that was my first job but it wasn't long because I learned the trade. I went to work in the plant where the tool—the youngsters were learning the tool making trade, machinists, tool makers. And I put in about four and a half years.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me how they went about teaching you how to do that? What was the process?

HRASNA: Well, I went to night school too in order to help me with my profession. I—I went to the [unclear] Technical School one—one winter, one—one season to learn machine shop, learn how to operate certain machines. And I learned, went to Central High on High Street to learn mathematics and blueprints, reading, stuff like that. And I finished my grammar school in nights in—in Newark. I finished my eighth grade. I got a

diploma for that where I did—did—where I should have stayed at—at school. But them days, the—if you were—if you were ambitious you would—you would go out and earn—earn—earn money or learn a profession. Oh, I loved to work.

SIGRIST: How did you feel about—well, let me—let me rephrase that. Was it your choice to decide to learn to be a machinist?

HRASNA: A tool maker, rather.

SIGRIST: Tool maker.

HRASNA: Well, yes. My brothers often advised me that I would have a tr—a trade and it would stay—it would stay—help me in—in all my years later on if I get married. And I'd have a—a pr—profession to go to, where to work at any odd job, you would—you would be willing—you had to work for—you would get no—no—no—any benefits of any kind. And I really learned the trade and I liked it. But the end—after 15 years and being married, I told my wife. I says, "I don't like this profession. It's—the—the pressure, the pressure. Hurry up. Hurry up." It—it got to me and I thought, 'Well, if I stay at this business I—I probably wouldn't—I would be maybe sick half the time.' So I said to the wife—I said, "I'm going to learn another business." I learned how to grow flowers. So I worked for a florist for about—oh, about three or four years. I learned through a correspondence course. I learned through books in the library and I learned when—learned with—with the grower who was on the job. And as tough as he was, I learned and I kept records, you know. I wrote everything down that he'd done, you know. And finally, after four years, this fellow retired because he was drinking too much. And I asked for the job to run those two greenhouses, 25 foot by a hundred. And I worked in the place where they had an endowment fund where the money was there and I was—I had a steady job all my life.

SIGRIST: Where did you develop your love of flowers? Did—does that go back farther when—

HRASNA: Well, we—

SIGRIST: —you were growing up?

HRASNA: Yes. We had—norm—naturally, we—we had—people in those days had a garden. They grew vegetable. They grew flowers. They—and they had, like, a garden. Understand?

SIGRIST: But what—I'm—what—earlier on in your life, like when you were growing up—

HRASNA: Well, my—my elder—older brothers and—and my folks, they—they—they had a little garden. They always had a garden.

SIGRIST: In Newark, you had a garden?

HRASNA: In Newark, that's right.

SIGRIST: What did you grow in your garden?

HRASNA: Well, we—we grew, maybe, carrots, string beans and tomatoes and stuff like that, you know.

SIGRIST: What about flowers? Did you grow flowers?

HRASNA: Well, we had a few flower but mostly vegetables.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Do you remember what kind of flowers they were that [unclear]?

HRASNA: Oh, they were the run—natural—the run of carnations, maybe, and geraniums, you know, and—and maybe sweet peas and stuff like that, you know, that was easy to—easy to grow or—or buy the plants. Either way. But that's the business I—I was in for many, many years.

SIGRIST: So—so from—from your—your—

HRASNA: Tool making.

SIGRIST: Yeah, fr—from your early adolescence, you—you worked as a tool maker until well into your marriage.

HRASNA: Oh, yes. I was married. So I was married, maybe, about three or four years when I decided to make a change.

SIGRIST: Yeah, so you were—you were well into your adulthood.

HRASNA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And then you turned around and did something completely different.

HRASNA: And naturally, you know, [chuckles] the—the funny part of the—I—I—I was—oh, they kid the life out of me because—my folks did because I left a good-paying trade and—and to work in the flowers, which it didn't pay as much as what I was making in the tool-making business. But I didn't care. I—I thought—I always thought your health comes first. And if you

like what you're doing you got it made. And that's what the trouble is—and I've found out with friends, relatives and neighbors, they were working—they were working at certain jobs they didn't like. They were complaining about the hours. And I always thought, "Jesus, why don't they get out of that job?" Or I would tell a young fellow, "Learn a trade that you like because, if you don't like it, you'll never—you'll be grumbling all the time. And sure enough—

SIGRIST: When you were first a—apprenticed—it was like an apprenticeship—

HRASNA: Yes.

SIGRIST: —to the tool maker.

HRASNA: For four and a half years.

SIGRIST: Were you paid for that time?

HRASNA: Yes. Very little pay.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how much it was?

HRASNA: I started off with \$3 a week. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Three dollars a week.

HRASNA: [laughs]

SIGRIST: Oh, those were different days. [laughs]

HRASNA: But then, dollar was a dollar. [laughs]

SIGRIST: And what did you do with your \$3 a week?

HRASNA: Well, I give it to my mother to run the home. And then when my mother—when my father was gone so many years—after seven or eight years, my mother—some landlord at the home we lived in, the house where I—we lived in a small house—she—they—they got together and they—they—they seen one another, went together for a year and then finally got married.

SIGRIST: So your mother remarried but it's several years.

HRASNA: And I was—yeah, I was about maybe 10, 11 years old or 12 years old, see. And then the—well, [chuckles] you know, it was a case of where I was—was so close with my mother. Then when she got married, that—

that thing just separated. I was not as close with my mother as I was—was all these years, them young years. But anyway, she was a good mother anyway.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the man that she married?

HRASNA: Zander.

SIGRIST: Z-A—

HRASNA: Z-A-N-D-E-R. Albert Zander.

SIGRIST: Albert Zander.

HRASNA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And—

HRASNA: They went together a year or so and then they finally decided that—that the young—two young boys needed a father. You know. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Had he been married before?

HRASNA: He was a widower, yes.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

HRASNA: He—

SIGRIST: Did he have children?

HRASNA: No, he had no children but he lost his wife and she was sickly and of course—and he was a widower and then, finally, he used to come around with—collect the rents and then they'd—get in good with my mother. And after maybe a year or two, they finally decided to get married.

SIGRIST: Oh.

HRASNA: And—but that made the home a little different. I—I was up in—up in years. I was out of my time, my apprenticeship. I was working. I was making fairly good money at the age of 16 and I decided to go out with girls. And I went out with three or four girls and I finally found, at the age of 17 or 18, I found a—a girl that I liked. That's the—only went together for her for a year. I finally decided I wanted my own home because my stepfather didn't allow me to have a piano. I wanted to take—buy a

piano and take lessons and play—learn how to play the piano. That was uppermost in my mind. Well, when he said, “I—I don’t want you”—he wouldn’t let you buy a piano. So naturally, I decided it was time for me to get out. I had a trade. I was earning good money. I could support a wife. I got married.

SIGRIST: What was her name?

HRASNA: [chuckles] Gertrude Gawler, originally.

SIGRIST: Can you spell the last name, please?

HRASNA: G-A-W-L-E-R.

SIGRIST: And tell me why you liked Gertrude. What—what attracted—

HRASNA: Well, she—she had a rough life and I used to hear what—what she had to go through. Her mother and father separated when she was young and she had no mother since she was maybe six or seven years old. Her father had to raise her. And—

SIGRIST: Kind of a similar situation—

HRASNA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —[unclear].

HRASNA: And do you know that she turned out to be the greatest wife in the world? She—she kn—she knows she had a good man and had a home. And she was contented and that was the big thing in anybody’s life, contentment. You’re—you’re—you’re never sick when you’re contented.

SIGRIST: When you’re happy.

HRASNA: That’s right. So—

SIGRIST: What—what was the date of your marriage? Do you remember?

HRASNA: I think it was March.

SIGRIST: Of what year?

HRASNA: Oh, gosh. Gosh, I don’t know. [chuckles] I was—I wasn’t—I was not quite 19.

SIGRIST: Not quite 19. So if you were not—you would have turned 19 in 1923.

HRASNA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So if you were not quite 19, it was probably 19—

HRASNA: I think '20—I think it was '23. Yeah, then we got married and we decided not to have no children until we paid our fur—bed—bedroom furniture and kitchen fur—paid that off. And maybe after five years we would have a family. So we—for five years, we enjoyed life. We went around, you know. We had—we didn't have no children. We had a plan where we decided children after five years.

SIGRIST: And did you have children eventually?

HRASNA: Yeah, that—the daughter that you seen here.

SIGRIST: Can you name them for me?

HRASNA: Well, Dottie.

SIGRIST: Dottie? Dorothy?

HRASNA: Dottie. Dorothy.

SIGRIST: Dorothy.

HRASNA: And Janet.

SIGRIST: And Janet. Two girls.

HRASNA: Two girls that were there. They're about three and a half years apart.

SIGRIST: And did you get your piano?

HRASNA: Oh, I got my piano.

SIGRIST: [laughs]

HRASNA: And I learned how to play the piano. I was self-taught. I took lessons for three months when—when I was still single. And my sister had a piano and I took lessons there but on the conditions that was cold many times, and I was never I could go there and play. But I had—I—I was taught—I took for three—three months and then after that I had to be on my own. When I got my own piano I had a—I learned how to play by myself.

SIGRIST: Will you play something for us that I can record? Not—not yet. Not yet.

HRASNA: Oh.

SIGRIST: It—I'll—what I'll do is I'll sign off and then you can play. So—so you married, we think, maybe in 1923.

HRASNA: Roughly, yeah.

SIGRIST: You had two girls.

HRASNA: Uh-hmm.

SIGRIST: Dorothy and Janet. Did you ever want to go back to Europe?

HRASNA: Never. Never. I thought there was too much problems over there.

SIGRIST: I mean even just to visit.

HRASNA: No, I—I always—this—this country is my home.

SIGRIST: Did your mother go back?

HRASNA: Yeah, we—

SIGRIST: Yeah, I think you said that.

HRASNA: She went with—with my stepfather. My stepfather took her to see her brother and sister-in-law in Europe.

SIGRIST: Was your stepfather an immigrant also or was he American?

HRASNA: I think he—I think he was. Yes.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

HRASNA: I think he was an immigrant too. I—I—I certainly do.

SIGRIST: So your mother went back for a visit.

HRASNA: Just for a visit for three months.

SIGRIST: When she came back, did she tell you how she felt about having been in Europe?

HRASNA: Oh, it was a pleasure to see her brother again after—after leaving Europe so many years ago, you know, and then to see him. He was—

they were pretty close, you know. T—to people living—them days were really closely oriented, you know. It was—it was a—it was a different situation than today. Today, you got your brother in another state, your uncle in this state here—

SIGRIST: But you never had any interest in going to Europe?

HRASNA: I wouldn't go. I wouldn't—if I did have the chance, I never desired to go. I did travel in this country. I think this country is—to me, was—was—it was just it.

SIGRIST: So you've gotten a chance to travel around the United States.

HRASNA: Yeah, I did—I did a little traveling with my wife and—and—and—and other—second wife. But I'll tell you—

SIGRIST: So you've been married twice.

HRASNA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes.

HRASNA: After 55 years, I lost my wife. Heart—heart condition. And then, finally, I—I—I—I was brokenhearted. After 55 years, that's a long time.

SIGRIST: That's a long time.

HRASNA: And we were still holding hands at—at—at a late date. So you could see we were married—really, was—was the real thing. And finally, [clears throat] my granddaughter—Dottie's da—grand—Dottie's daughter introduced me to a nice lady. "Why don't you go and visit Florence? She's a nice lady. She likes to play cards. You like to play cards. Why don't you go and visit her?" "Oh," I says. "I don't know. I'm so upset," I says. I couldn't go on a road with my car. I used to cry like a baby. I was heartbroken. M—married 55 years is a long time. So I finally went to visit this lady after I—after I had my bowling session. And, well, I liked what I seen. She liked what she seen. And after one whole year of going together, we decided to get married. We were both 75. And what made the—the thing binding was we had a verbal agreement, anything happened to me, what little bit I had would go to my family. Whatever home—she had her own home and she had—she was worth money—would go to her family. And I told her to tell her family that, "that I'm not marrying you for your money or your property." And she told them before we got married that's that conditions and we were getting married.

SIGRIST: And her name was Florence.

HRASNA: Florence.

SIGRIST: And her maiden—or her name before?

HRASNA: White.

SIGRIST: White.

HRASNA: Florence White.

SIGRIST: I want to save a few more minutes on the tape to hear you play. So let me just kind of sign us out right now and then we'll relocate over to the piano—

HRASNA: Whatever.

SIGRIST: —and you can play something.

HRASNA: [chuckles]

SIGRIST: We're going to listen to Mr. Hrasna, who is 92. Correct?

HRASNA: Ninety-two.

SIGRIST: You're 92 now.

HRASNA: We—I will be 93 in September.

SIGRIST: That's right, he'll be 93 in September. He's going to play us a little bit of music on the piano. And let me just take this opportunity to thank you for letting me interview you.

HRASNA: Well, it's a pleasure. I—I often thought that I—I had a friend of mine who—who left to go to California some years ago. He was—

SIGRIST: Let's save some tape for the—for the—

HRASNA: Oh.

SIGRIST: [chuckles] Just going to pause for a second. [tape off/on] Okay. Back on tape and this is Paul Sigrist and it's Saturday, May 17<sup>th</sup>, 1997 and Michael Hrasna, whom I've just been interviewing, who is 92, is sitting down at his piano and he's going to play "Peg of my Heart" for us. And

he's going to play us right out of the tape. We'll just let it play until—until the tape runs out. So Mr. Hrasna, take it away.

HRASNA: [playing piano and singing]

SIGRIST: [chuckles] Thank you very much.

HRASNA: You're welcome.

[END OF INTERVIEW]