

**EI-964**

**MAX BERGMAN**

**BIRTHDATE: DECEMBER 27, 1903**

**INTERVIEW DATE: OCTOBER 7, 1997**

**AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 93**

**RUNNING TIME: 21:02**

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

**RECORDING ENGINEER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.**

**INTERVIEW LOCATION: NEW YORK CITY**

**TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE**

**TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:**

**GERMANY VIA ENGLAND, 1940**

**AGE: 36**

**SHIP: THE LANCASTRIA OR THE YORCK**

**PORT: BREMERHAVEN**

**RESIDENCES: BREMEN, GERMANY; NEW YORK, NEW YORK**

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is October 7<sup>th</sup>, 1997, a Tuesday afternoon. I'm at the Kateri Residence in New York City with Mr. Max Bergman. Mr. Bergman, you came from Germany, correct? What year did you come? What year did you come to America?

BERGMAN: 1940.

SIGRIST: You came in 1940. And—came in 1940. And do you remember how old you were when you came to the—

BERGMAN: Pardon?

SIGRIST: How old were you when you came to the United States?

BERGMAN: How old?

SIGRIST: Yes. What's your birth date?

BERGMAN: Next month, a good 94.

SIGRIST: You're 94 now.

BERGMAN: No, next month.

SIGRIST: Next month, you'll be 94.

BERGMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you say your birth date for me on tape? No?

BERGMAN: I—I don't want to make nothing.

SIGRIST: You don't want to say your birthday?

BERGMAN: Since my wife is sick, I have no [unclear].

SIGRIST: Do—do you mind if we talk about when you were growing up—

BERGMAN: [coughs]

SIGRIST: —in Germany?

BERGMAN: Why not?

SIGRIST: [chuckles] Okay. Well, let me just say for the tape that I have your birthday down as 1903. You were born in 1903?

BERGMAN: 1903, I was born.

SIGRIST: Right, December 27<sup>th</sup>, I have. Yeah. And I should also say that in the room is Jody Parsowith, who is with the activities—

PARSOWITH: Right. Recreation therapist.

SIGRIST: Recreation therapist, and also, Roger Herz. What was the name of the town in Germany where you were born?

BERGMAN: Of what?

SIGRIST: The name of the town in Germany where you were born?

BERGMAN: Was [unclear].

SIGRIST: Where—where in Germany were you born?

BERGMAN: Frankfurt am Main [PH].

SIGRIST: You were born in Frankfurt am Main. Yeah? And is that where your family was from? Yes? Do you re—have memories of Frankfurt? What can you tell me about Frankfurt? What do you remember?

BERGMAN: First of all, my father killed himself.

SIGRIST: Father killed himself.

BERGMAN: Yeah. He couldn't take this anymore when I was in concent—concentration camp.

SIGRIST: You were in a concentration camp. Before, when you were a child, when you were j—growing up, what do you remember about Frankfurt?

BERGMAN: I remember I—I know I had a good time.

SIGRIST: Yeah. What did you like to do?

BERGMAN: I was—my father and me had a g—[unclear] business.

SIGRIST: What kind of business?

BERGMAN: Textile.

SIGRIST: What kind?

BERGMAN: Textile.

SIGRIST: Textile business. Did your father have a factory in Frankfurt? No? What—what kind of a textile business?

BERGMAN: Wholesale.

SIGRIST: Wholesale textile. So you sold the textiles. I see.

BERGMAN: Hmm.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

BERGMAN: Joseph.

SIGRIST: Joseph. What was your mother's name?

BERGMAN: Paula [PH].

SIGRIST: Paula. Do you remember what her maiden name was?

BERGMAN: Yeah, Paul—Paula Mair [PH].

SIGRIST: Mair. Can you spell Mair for me?

BERGMAN: Hmm?

SIGRIST: How do you spell Mair?

BERGMAN: See, M-I—M-A-I-R [PH].

SIGRIST: Okay. And what do you remember about your mother when you were growing up?

BERGMAN: Pardon me?

SIGRIST: What do you remember about your mother when you were growing up? What did your mother do back then when you were a kid?

BERGMAN: My mother, she [unclear]. What—she—she didn't have to work.

SIGRIST: Didn't have to work. Did you have brothers and sisters?

BERGMAN: I have a son.

SIGRIST: Did you have brothers and sisters? No. You had no brothers and sisters in Germany. I see. Tell me a little bit about what life was like in Germany.

BERGMAN: What?

SIGRIST: What was your life like when you were growing up in Germany? What kinds of things did you do?

BERGMAN: Look, there is a good time. We did dancing and all this. And we could afford it. It was k—kind, no hardship.

SIGRIST: Did you enjoy dancing?

BERGMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Who taught you how to dance?

BERGMAN: Huh?

SIGRIST: Who taught you how to dance?

BERGMAN: Look, y—you getting older. You getting busier and you cannot do e—everything.

SIGRIST: [chuckles] What kind of food did you eat in Germany?

BERGMAN: Oh, German food, you know. Not this type of food.

SIGRIST: Who did the cooking in your house?

BERGMAN: [unclear] has a m—a c—housemaids.

SIGRIST: Housemaids. Uh-huh. When you were a child, what was your favorite food?

BERGMAN: [several words unclear] my—my mother was a housewife, was—she [unclear] on the [several words unclear].

SIGRIST: What religion were you in Germany?

BERGMAN: Pardon?

SIGRIST: What religion were you? What was your religion?

BERGMAN: Jewish.

SIGRIST: Jewish. Was there a synagogue near your house?

BERGMAN: No.

SIGRIST: Where did you go to worship?

BERGMAN: We had in Frankfurt, on the [unclear], which was burned out [unclear] my father's congregation.

SIGRIST: Who was the most religious person in your family?

BERGMAN: Oh, my—my parents [unclear]. They keep the holidays [unclear] was.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

BERGMAN: [coughs]

SIGRIST: Do you remember how you celebrated Passover back then?

BERGMAN: Oh, sure.

SIGRIST: How did you do it? Can you describe it for me?

BERGMAN: Pardon?

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me how you celebrated Passover in Germany?

BERGMAN: Usually, [clears throat] Passover—see, my—my [unclear] was not home. He was in Düsseldorf.

SIGRIST: Düsseldorf.

BERGMAN: [unclear]. We usually were invited.

SIGRIST: Did anything special happen on Passover? Nothing, no. Did you go to school in Germany?

BERGMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah? What was your favorite subject when you were in school?

BERGMAN: I tell you, I was happy when I was out. [laughter]

SIGRIST: Did you play any sports when you were growing up?

BERGMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What was your favorite sport?

BERGMAN: Soccer.

SIGRIST: Soccer. Uh-huh. Did anyone else in your family play soccer? No. Well, tell me a little bit about what happened when Hitler came to power. What happened to your family?

BERGMAN: My father killed himself in 1936. He couldn't take it no more. And my mother and me, we had make—made the best out of it. See, we could go to America.

- SIGRIST: When you say that your father couldn't take it anymore, what happened to him at that time that made him so unhappy?
- BERGMAN: He look—he h—he couldn't take this. And this morning, I remember one of—these young boys were working for us [unclear] office in uniform, [unclear] uniform. And the same night—evening, he killed himself.
- SIGRIST: How did that affect your family? How did your life change after your father killed himself? You said you and your mother made the best of the situation. Well, what did you do?
- BERGMAN: First of all, I—I helped the business another year. Then I sold it [unclear]. And I went to England.
- SIGRIST: You went to England. Why did you go to England?
- BERGMAN: Hmm?
- SIGRIST: Why did you go to England?
- BERGMAN: Why? I was [unclear] this guy's—or this Nazi [unclear], be away.
- SIGRIST: You wanted to get away. What did you do in England when you got there?
- BERGMAN: England, nothing. I I—[unclear] me to—[unclear] work.
- SIGRIST: So how did you live?
- BERGMAN: You only get a visa [unclear] England's, depends you to go to America, that you—you have to register. And depends [unclear] so much money you has [unclear]. Otherwise, you don't get a visa.
- SIGRIST: What was your mother doing during this time?
- BERGMAN: My mother was a housewife and took care of the house.
- SIGRIST: Did she come to England with you?
- BERGMAN: No, she came to England—I—I came in—in January and my mother was out [unclear]. She [several words unclear]—she [several words unclear]. She [several words unclear] English [several words unclear].
- SIGRIST: Why did you want to go to America?

BERGMAN: Hmm?

SIGRIST: Why did you want to go to America?

BERGMAN: She has [unclear] to give us [unclear].

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Did anything else happen to you in Europe before you came to the United States? Did you—did you leave from England and went to America? Are you saying yes?

BERGMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes, okay. Well, do you remember getting on the ship to go to America?

BERGMAN: The—on the boat, when I left from Southampton.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the name of the ship?

BERGMAN: Yeah, Lancastria.

SIGRIST: The Lancastria. Uh-huh.

BERGMAN: We went down by the invasion of Normandy.

SIGRIST: Had you ever been on a s—big ship before? No? How did you feel about having to get on the ship?

BERGMAN: Nothing special.

SIGRIST: Is your mother going with you to America?

BERGMAN: My mother has [unclear]. She—my mother [clears throat], she [unclear] the [unclear] American Line and I was in England, and she signed me up for [unclear] over an hour how beautiful the—and couldn't find the ship. Says, "Well, [unclear] that the Germans [unclear]." Says, "Just let the ship go."

SIGRIST: So what happened to her?

BERGMAN: What?

SIGRIST: What happened to your mom when that happened?

BERGMAN: My mother—my mother died [several words unclear]. My mother [unclear] 35 years this—

SIGRIST: She died when she was 35, you said?

BERGMAN: N—no. My mother died [unclear] I think was '46.

SIGRIST: Oh, in 1946. So you were in America already. Yeah. What—what do you remember about the crossing of the ship to America?

BERGMAN: [unclear] crossing [chuckles] [unclear] what you call German [unclear] as a ship. [coughs] And you only [unclear] German [unclear] and we had a very good ship.

SIGRIST: So everyone on the ship was a German Jew.

BERGMAN: Yeah, mostly.

SIGRIST: Mostly.

BERGMAN: Eighty percent.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Do you remember—do you remember how many people were on the ship?

BERGMAN: Oh, a full dining room.

SIGRIST: Full dining room. What did you eat when you were on the ship?

BERGMAN: Lunch. Whatever you get.

SIGRIST: I see. Do you remember being up on the deck of the ship?

BERGMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What—what do you remember about being on the deck of the ship? What could you see?

BERGMAN: I—I—I can see nothing.

SIGRIST: Okay. How long did the ship take to get to America?

BERGMAN: What?

SIGRIST: How long did the ship take to get to America?

BERGMAN: That [unclear] [coughs] New York took us six, seven days.

SIGRIST: Six or seven days. Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when you came into the—

BERGMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah? What did you feel when you saw that?

BERGMAN: Feel—we all—they all feel that it was with [several words unclear].

SIGRIST: Did you have to go to Ellis Island? Didn't have to go to Ellis. Well, who—who met you when you got off the ship?

BERGMAN: We had a—we heard about a few organizations who took care—took care of us.

SIGRIST: Do you remember which organizations took care of you?

BERGMAN: We had—very much [unclear] groups, [unclear] groups. They took care and [several words unclear].

SIGRIST: I see. So these different organizations—

BERGMAN: Yeah—

SIGRIST: —were responsible—

BERGMAN: Or—organizations.

SIGRIST: Yeah. What happened when you got off the ship?

BERGMAN: My—my brother picked me up, a very good feeling.

SIGRIST: And where did you go when you—when you left the ship?

BERGMAN: We—maybe on 105<sup>th</sup>.

SIGRIST: 103<sup>rd</sup> Street. Uh-huh. Do you remember what the apartment looked like? Can you describe it for me?

BERGMAN: Y—[unclear] had the best home, you know and was very nice. [unclear] this woman who [unclear] made a good business. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: [chuckles] Did you get a job?

BERGMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What was the first job that you got in America?

BERGMAN: [unclear].

SIGRIST: What did you have to do?

BERGMAN: Picking up d—dresses.

SIGRIST: Picking up—picking up eyeglasses, you said?

BERGMAN: Picking up dresses—

SIGRIST: Oh, I see.

BERGMAN: —from [unclear].

SIGRIST: I see. And do you remember how much you got paid for that?

BERGMAN: Yeah, my dress salary was [unclear] dollars.

SIGRIST: [chuckles] And tell me how you learned English.

BERGMAN: Pardon?

SIGRIST: How did you learn English?

BERGMAN: First, from hearing and from doing, you know. Soon, you get used to it.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what the first word what you learned in English?

BERGMAN: To tell you the truth, no. [laughter]

SIGRIST: Did your mother get a job when she came to the United States?

BERGMAN: My mother didn't work.

SIGRIST: No, even in America, she didn't work.

BERGMAN: No.

SIGRIST: What about your brother?

BERGMAN: My father killed himself.

SIGRIST: Your brother, you said.

BERGMAN: My brother?

SIGRIST: Yes.

BERGMAN: My brother, well, my—well, my [unclear].

SIGRIST: I see. Did—did you ever want to go back to Europe?

BERGMAN: What, to Germany?

SIGRIST: Yeah.

BERGMAN: No.

SIGRIST: Even to visit?

BERGMAN: For business, [several words unclear]. But returning to Germany, I haven't got no interest.

SIGRIST: Did you become an American citizen?

BERGMAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes? How old were you when that happened?

BERGMAN: Pardon?

SIGRIST: How old were you when that happened?

BERGMAN: When I came over here.

SIGRIST: When you became a citizen.

BERGMAN: Oh.

SIGRIST: U.S.

BERGMAN: That was—I came, 1940, and my birthday is next month and was [unclear] and—what was I going to say?

SIGRIST: Well, that's okay. Tell me—tell me what you had to do to become a U.S. citizen.

BERGMAN: What?

SIGRIST: What did you have to do before you could become a United States citizen?

BERGMAN: Oh, we have—fill out some forms. What else [unclear]? Well, [unclear]. That's very hard because every citizen who wants to be citizens has to be guaranteed to the government to [unclear]. There was no problem.

SIGRIST: How did you feel when you became a citizen?

BERGMAN: Very good.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Did your mother become a citizen too? Yeah, great. Well, I think I've asked all the questions I need to ask, Mr. Bergman. Thank you very much for letting me ask these questions. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Max Bergman on October 7<sup>th</sup>, 1997 with Josie Parsowith—ah, Jody Parsowith and Roger Herz in attendance. Thank you, sir.

[END OF INTERVIEW]