

EI-099

GEORGE (JIRI KAREL) PASTIKA

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SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Thursday, September 26th, 1991. We're here at Ellis Island with George Pastika, who came from Czechoslovakia in 1953 when he was thirty-two years old and who was detained at Ellis Island for four-and-a-half months. Good afternoon.

PASTIKA: Good afternoon.

SIGRIST: Mr. Pastika, could you please give me your full name and your date of birth, please?

PASTIKA: Okay. You want to have it in Czech, I mean, my full name?

SIGRIST: If you would, please.

PASTIKA: Yeah, well, my full name is Jiri Karel Pastika.

SIGRIST: Can you spell the first two names, please?

PASTIKA: Okay. That's J-I-R-I with those hooks and, you know, dashes, pronounced Jiri. And Karel is K-A-R-E-L. And then the last name is P-A-S, or "esh" T-I-K-A.

SIGRIST: I see. And what is the date of your birth?

PASTIKA: Uh, April 24, 1921.

SIGRIST: I see. Well, let's just briefly talk a little bit about your childhood. Where were you born?

PASTIKA: In Prague.

SIGRIST: And tell me a little bit about your parents, your family.

PASTIKA: Well, my family, before the war, I mean, there were sort of prominent in that particular era. My grandfather was one of the founders of the National Theater in Prague, and my grandmother lived until I was about ten months old before she died. And we lived in Prague in the same place. I did, I mean, for twenty-nine years, myself, right. And certainly, I mean, the schooling and everything went as that particular period of time. And in 1938 I volunteered for the Czech Air Force because there started to be the problem with Hitler, right. Then came the occupation . . .

SIGRIST: Before we get this far along, let's still talk a little bit about when you were a kid.

PASTIKA: Oh, I see.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about your mother and father.

PASTIKA: Well, my father was a municipal officer working at the town, I mean, at Prague's townhouse, right, the, as a magistrate, right. And my mother was at home. I mean, at that time they didn't work, right. So I was growing, I had two brothers, who actually died because of the Spanish flu at the end of the war, 1918, 1919. I was the only one that actually made it. I remained alone. And we lived, I mean, just in this small family circle. Besides my uncles and, you know, cousins and all that.

SIGRIST: Did you live in the same house for twenty-nine years?

PASTIKA: Right.

SIGRIST: Can you describe that house for me?

PASTIKA: Well, it's a typical European brick dwelling apartment house, right? No elevator, whatever. We lived on the third floor and you had, between the floors you had landings. When I was a little bit older, at that time there was no central heating or whatever. I used to run with two pails of coal from the basement all the way up to the third floor and all that stuff. (he laughs) I mean, you know, so it was a stable life. No changes, everything. You always knew what was going to be the next day and all that,

right. Until the time when the problem in politics started to get us into another conflict of the Second World War.

SIGRIST: I see. When did that, when was the beginning of that conflict? When did you . . .

PASTIKA: Well, it started in Czechoslovakia, as a matter of fact, on May 21st when for the first time we were almost attacked by Hitler's Germany, right? It was a partial mobilization.

SIGRIST: How did that affect your life immediately? What . . .

PASTIKA: Well, I was at school, right? But that moment, because I was brought in a rather patriotic manner, so I immediately volunteered for the armed forces. At that time I tried to get into the Air Force, the Czech Air Force.

SIGRIST: How did your parents feel about that?

PASTIKA: Well, they, especially my mother, she was from the same mold, so I had to secure a release, so I got it. And as a matter of fact, right after, I still spent my summer vacation in Slovakia where was my uncle as a staff officer of gendarme, right. So I spent that time, it was beyond Bratislava and Malacky, which was a big garrison town. I mean, there was a garrison, a big garrison, right, it was close to the Viennese and Hungarian border.

SIGRIST: What town was this?

PASTIKA: Malacky.

SIGRIST: Could you spell that, please?

PASTIKA: M-A-L-A-C-K-Y.

SIGRIST: Thank you.

PASTIKA: And right after I returned at the end of August, so I was called for the exams, you know, for the Air Force, right, and I finished those. And then all of a sudden came the fact that we were standing and there was general mobilization, right. So I was transferred to a type of border guard, or whatever about three hour training, you know, because it was everything in a hurry. And then came the Munich Agreement between the French, British and Germans, right. And after that the Sudenland was occupied by Nazi Germany. And then next year on May 15th the German army invaded the rest of the country.

SIGRIST: How did that affect your parents? How did life change in Prague?

PASTIKA: Oh, well, I mean, at the beginning it was, I mean, first of all came, right from the beginning, the fist, right. There were fights. I came from one bag, my clothes, my lapel was tore off and all that. But we were occupied. There were German soldiers

all over, all types of troops, I mean, from infantry to armed vehicles, S.S., and what have you. As a matter of fact, when Hitler visited Prague I saw him right on the key of the Vltava River, when he was coming from the Prague's castle traveling I don't know where. But I saw him at that time.

SIGRIST: Did your parents end up in the middle of any kind of, they didn't bomb Prague, did they?

SIGRIST: No, no. At that time, no, no. We were just occupied, in certain areas there broke out fights because, I mean, some of the army units were not in for a long time, you know, so there came a few skirmishes or whatever. But in the end the country was occupied without major incident.

SIGRIST: Now, did you serve for the full duration of the war?

PASTIKA: Well, I was, I came back, went back to school, right. In 1940 my uncle had a textile plant in Nemecky Brod, so that's where I went to work, in the textile plant.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the town?

PASTIKA: Nemecky Brod.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

PASTIKA: N-E-M-E-C-K-Y, and then the second word is B-R-O-D.

SIGRIST: Okay. So you're working . . .

PASTIKA: Today it's re-named. As a matter of fact, it's called Havlickuv Brod, but at that time it was Nemecky Brod.

SIGRIST: So you went to work at this plant.

PASTIKA: Right. And that was, after I finished school, that was in May, no, June. And I was there just about a couple of months when all of a sudden came, you know, the order, and they started to collect young people. It's the first time I was hauled off to Germany, right. And the transport was actually supposed to go to Hanover, but in Dresden with a couple of other guys we skipped the transport and went on our own to Berlin because we didn't want to go into that area. The war was already on. And so then I was there for a few months and they also tried to induct me into the German army very vigorously, and I resisted because I was the protector as (?), and Hitler said that he doesn't want to have any Czechs in his armed services, right. So finally I was released. After that I skipped, and I went back home to Prague.

SIGRIST: I see. Well, kind of fill me in on . . .

PASTIKA: Well, I mean, during the war, to make it the whole story short, you know, concise. I was then inserted into labor force in the industry, right. I worked for (?) in Prague, where I started to work as a riveter on German airplane Seabill, which was a

light bomber, right? Then later on they transferred me to the office, right. And then came the assassination of Heidrich, right, which, of course, at that time, was pretty bloody, with executions and all that, and the extermination of the village of Lidice, right?

SIGRIST: Can you spell that town, please?

PASTIKA: L-I-D-I-C-E. Right after that, since we were not supposed to be drafted into the army, so the years from, I believe, 1919 to 1921 and then '23 and '24, were inserted into the forced labor into Germany. So I was hauled off again into Germany where I worked at Schonebeck, which is very close near Magdaborg, right. And that was Yunker's plant for Yunker's aircraft, right. And then I was also in Leipzig, and but mostly in Schonebeck. For a short period of time I was in for re-training into Genthin in Germany. And after that I turned back to Schonebeck, and naturally during this time started, I mean, heavy bombardment, first by British, later on by American forces. By that time America was in the state of war with Germany. And so it went on. We passed quite a few of those air raids. I have seen them coming in in big bunches over, you know. And in '44, no, '43 I tried, you know, not to get back into Germany and I had an accident, which I more or less caused all by myself, and a Czech doctor performed on me, and a German major doctor was my enemy, actually, saved my skin. Then I was running back to hide in Germany, right. In '44 I, we skipped again from Schonebeck, right. And I was for a couple of months at home, and I got collected. They sent me into the tunnels in Moravia where, at that time, from I believe Wiener Noristat, they

transferred into (?). So I was working there about a couple of months and skipped again. Then I lived without ration, you know, coupons, or whatever. And all the way until there were quite a, as a matter of fact, about two American bombing raids which saved my skin. Two because whenever they made the raid, you know, they synchronized the ins with Gestapo and all that. So at precisely that time I was saved by the air raid because they backed it up and you could run, right. Well, then, at the end, when the uprising started in May of '45, right. So we started, I mean, to get weapons and all that, and on the seventh I was shot. And after that came the Russians, right.

SIGRIST: You were shot, you said?

PASTIKA: Yeah, by S.S. And then I was, at that time, when the Russians came over, I was in sort of medical point, you know. We really greeted them as liberators, but we don't know what they are bringing in, right.

SIGRIST: Yes, that's true.

PASTIKA: So then after I was in treatment for about two months or three. Then I got re-activated, regardless that my right hand was crippled, right. So I went back into the service of Czechoslovak army, and this time as a gunner, as a cannoneer. And since I didn't want to go, I mean, to have my service lengthened, so I didn't care to become an officer, right. So in May, no, in March '46 I got out of the army and started to work, I mean, in civilian life. First for Omnipol, which was the import/export firm of (?) works,

right. After that came one friend of mine I was in the camp in Germany with, and he said that the Czech Airlines, the Czechoslovak airlines, are looking for people who know languages, right. So when I got to work for Czechoslovak Airlines, until 1950 when I was fired because of political unreliability.

SIGRIST: Why did you want to come to this country?

PASTIKA: Well, (he laughs) I didn't even know, first of all there was, again, the question of saving my skin, right. Because I knew I was warned that they are after me, because I got into hot water because of my political views, which I didn't put through rather diplomatically. (he laughs) And so I was worried I'm just about to be arrested. It was just a question of time, so I was lucky enough to manage to cross the border.

SIGRIST: Into Germany?

PASTIKA: Into Germany, Western Germany, which is another long story, but . . .

SIGRIST: Did you have to sneak across the border to do that?

PASTIKA: Oh, yeah, yeah. I mean, if we were to go into details we would have to need another fifty minutes for that, you know. But, anyway, I just managed to get across. Then I was in Nuremburg at the Camp Balka, or Falka, as they call it. And after that I was working interrogator and translator for Local CIC in the camp, and later on I went to work for another unit, it was a Czech unit, but working for the American

intelligence, right.

SIGRIST: Were you married by this point?

PASTIKA: No, not at that time. We met we my wife in the camp, but she, meanwhile, emigrated to England. She wasn't there too long because she felt sort of lonely, so she returned. And after a while she came to the same unit as I was, as a typist. That's where we actually met, and later on we got married in Nuremburg. It was in 1950, '52.

SIGRIST: I see. And so you left for America not a year later.

PASTIKA: Well, after, yeah. The immigration later on, during 1952 and '53 we left together.

SIGRIST: Did you have to wait a long time for papers before you could get out?

PASTIKA: Oh, as a matter of fact, it wasn't that easy to get into the United States as some people do today. There's a whole examinations, I mean, physical and what have you, interrogations that took, in Munich, about three days.

SIGRIST: What sorts of things did they do to you?

PASTIKA: Oh, well, I mean, you were interrogated. You had to go through medical. They took you from your toes to your hairline, I mean, that you were healthy, and all that.

SIGRIST: You said you were interrogated. What kind of questions did they ask?

PASTIKA: Oh, well, they asked all sorts of questions, you know, why I was in Germany, what happened. Is there still relatives, and all that, you know, which I wasn't too comfortable, because there is one thing, you never knew if the word may get out and they may suffer for that, you know. So it was absolutely different period of time. We were all the time looking over the shoulder, more or less, even in Germany, right. So, anyway, we processed. We finally got, another thing, too, how I got my passport. That's another, you know, there are so many details to the story.

SIGRIST: Tell us. You can tell us.

PASTIKA: When I crossed, and I was screened by IRO, which was the International Refugee Organization, right. So the only document, because before I crossed the border I had to get the Czechoslovak i.d., which somebody was supposed to get for me really fast, because when I went to the border, you had so many areas which were, you know, where they first stop you, right. Question you what are you doing there. Second was, let's say, challenge. And the third one, they just were shooting and not asking any questions, right. So in order, I at least going to get through that particular border area that I can say, "Oh, I'm looking for work," or whatever, I had to have i.d. Because my passport was confiscated, right. The only thing, what I had on me was a driver's license with the picture and thumbprint, right. And so it happened when I put all my papers in

order at, you know, my birth and domicile, right, and my report papers, you know, from schools and all that, which all had to be, you know, in that particular i.d., it was a little book, right. So the guy who was doing that for me, for which I paid him some money, so he got arrested. In the end I had to run with only one thing, and it was a driver's license. Now, when I was screened by IRO, so you had to give it up. But I had it first notarized because I had a friend whom we helped to get out when I was still in Prague, right. So he made it that that thing was notarized by IRO. Well, that last piece of my evidence, and my picture with my thumbprint got stolen while being screened, you know, by IRO. Now, in Nuremburg when we were applying for the passport, because we had to get German passports, right. So they asked me where is my document it shows. Well, anyway, at that time, that German police officer was asking what I was doing during the war, and I mentioned that I was in Berlin, right. So it happened even that the Russians occupied the whole Berlin before the Western powers got in, right. So the main registry or carta, as they call it, remained in the Western Zone, and they found there my, for the thin card, what I had before, my print of the thumb and the name, which confirmed that I am who I am. (he laughs) You know, that's how I got a passport.

SIGRIST: So you got your passport and then how did you proceed?

PASTIKA: Then, well, we left for Bremerhaven, I think, on the first or second of January. On the third we were there, on the fourth we were to sail on the S.S. United

States out of Bremerhaven. So we did, and then it took, I think, I don't know, about four-and-a-half days before we got to New York.

SIGRIST: Did you have a private cabin, or did you share . . .

PASTIKA: No, no, no, no, I mean, because we were immigrants. We had very good accommodations, but men were separate and women also were separate.

SIGRIST: Oh, so you were separated from your wife on the boat.

PASTIKA: Oh, yeah, yeah. Except that we met at breakfast and lunch and all that, you know. We were, I think, about six hundred miles from Ireland, what they call Devil's Hole or whatever, and all of a sudden a terrible hurricane hit the ship, right. So there was a big smash into the side, we got into about a forty-five degree angle which we sailed, I think, for a couple of days like that, I mean, you know. My wife got scared, so she went over and knocked on my door, you know. Well, anyway, when we came to New York Harbor, right. So all of a sudden we were all ready to get off to shore. I had my friend here waiting for me.

SIGRIST: I was going to ask you that earlier. Did you have someone here in America that was . . .

PASTIKA: Yeah, well, a friend of mine who was also, you know, as a matter of fact I was in one of those houses which I had under my control. And he was working there.

He was from Czechoslovakia too, but from the northwestern part, right. So we were there for a few months together. And he came to the United States before me. He lived in New York already.

SIGRIST: Do you know what year he came?

PASTIKA: Uh, '52, sometimes, August or September, something like that.

SIGRIST: So there was somebody here.

PASTIKA: He already was here, acclimatized, more or less, right. And we never got to see him because right from the boat, and we didn't know why in the first place.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how much your passage cost?

PASTIKA: I don't know. It was all paid for by the organization. As a matter of fact, what was that, President Truman declared, at that time, the Refugee Act. That's why we got here. I never knew. When I was in Germany I thought, well, maybe I'll go to Australia or Canada or something, you know, wherever I'll be accepted. And when President Truman made that refugee Act, you know, that's how we got to the United States, actually.

SIGRIST: So you had actually considered other countries, too.

PASTIKA: Sure. I mean, who wants to stay, you never knew at that time, there was

always the threat of war, and what have you.

SIGRIST: Were your parents still living when you left?

PASTIKA: Well, when I, that's another story too. My mother was arrested, right. And my father, at that time, was separated, and lived in a different part of town.

SIGRIST: Why was your mother arrested?

PASTIKA: Because I tried to get her across and I ran into a double agent in the camp.

SIGRIST: I see.

PASTIKA: And with her there were a few more people arrested too, you know, because she sent him to get, I mean, lodging or whatever, and some people. And I was trying, also, to get some of my friends, you know, and he was a double-agent which were, I mean, plenty at that time, you know.

SIGRIST: So there really, were you sad about leaving or were you anxious to leave?

PASTIKA: When I was leaving I was anxious to save and keep my freedom, as such, right. I could have spent, I don't know, ten, fifteen years in the uranium mines or something like that, you know. So, in fact, some of the fellows that we met in the camp, in the refugee camp, right, a couple of them lived in Seattle, and they were involved in

sorts of uprising-style, you know, conspiracy in '49, and they got arrested, and they were in jail and what have you. The two of them were in Seattle. I met in Camp Balka.

SIGRIST: Isn't that interesting.

PASTIKA: Yeah, well.

SIGRIST: All right.

PASTIKA: I mean, it's an involved story, you know. If we were to go into the details, boy.

SIGRIST: Sure. Okay. So the boat arrives, what was the date that you landed?

PASTIKA: I think we left around the fourth of January, I believe. It was about that time. We came here, I think, tenth, eleventh, something like that, of January.

SIGRIST: And you were all prepared to get off the pier.

PASTIKA: Yeah. And all of a sudden they called us and, you know, told us, "You stay here." And then we were taken, you know, off the boat. They drove us by private, I mean, in the car. We came down here, boarded a boat, and we were all of a sudden on Ellis Island. I mean, never knew why at that time.

SIGRIST: You were never told at the dock.

PASTIKA: Never told, no.

SIGRIST: Were you the only ones getting off the boat that were brought up here?

PASTIKA: No. They had a few more there, you know, who came in in separate vehicles, whatever. I mean, I know how many people were, you know, in that. We came, as a matter of fact, into that, where the boat landed, not on the side, but where you come in front with the boat, right.

SIGRIST: From the ferry slip.

PASTIKA: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What were you thinking when you couldn't just leave?

PASTIKA: I didn't know. I didn't know why I was here.

SIGRIST: Were you, were you frightened? I mean . . .

PASTIKA: No, I wasn't frightened, you know. I wasn't frightened, but I was thinking, "What's the problem?" Right?

SIGRIST: I see.

PASTIKA: As a matter of fact, I had my camera slinging, you know, on my wrist, and

we are not supposed to take cameras up, I mean, right here, and they didn't notice, so I came with that camera all the way into the main hall and into our quarters where we were billeted, right. And I made a few pictures here. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Do you still have those pictures? Really.

PASTIKA: Oh, sure. Oh, you bet. My wife is looking out of the window, in front you have the grating, right, looking at the Statue of Liberty, which turned the back on us. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: We're going to have to pause here to flip the tape.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: Let's talk about what it was like to be here at Ellis Island.

PASTIKA: Well, of course, the first time, at least I was capable of communicating because I already spoke English, as such. And the first moment, I mean, you see so many people, you know, all different races. You had ship jumpers here, you had prostitutes from Cuba and Canada, and we were all mixed up. You had people who had problem with, maybe, their x-rays or what have you, you know. So a lot of people were around for whatever reason they were detained. Like myself, we didn't know. And then, naturally, we came to interrogation, right, a little bit later. So I was talking to that

immigration officer. He was posing all sorts of questions and all that. So I told him the whole story as I knew it, you know. And when my, my wife was actually interrogated separately from me, and all the time they were asking what was I doing in China. When she came back, she says, "I know he was all the time asking what you were doing in China." It didn't strike me, at that time, what actually happened. After, I think, a week or ten days, another Czech couple came in, right, Fred Brown and his wife. So we got acquainted. We were keeping each other company all the time. And once he was, as a matter of fact, he was working for Radio Free Europe in Vienna, you know. And once he is reading some defunct magazine like Colliers, or something like that, I don't remember. And there was an article of his former boss from Vienna, I mean, from Radio Free Europe, right. All of a sudden he jumps up off the table. He says, "Mira, I know why we are here." What happened, like us, the customs officer comes to your flat or home, checks your luggage out, seals it, you know, and then it goes, right. The same thing happened to them, but in his place he still had printed matters from the archives of free Europe. And they were, I mean, papers, like Communist newspapers and books and all that. When that Austrian customs officer came in he saw that, and he reported that he is a Communist agent. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: I see.

PASTIKA: So he wrote to his boss, right, and they actually left about, I don't know, ten days or two weeks ahead of us. And when this happened it struck me why they

were asking what was I doing in China. During the activities while I was working for that particular intelligence, you know, unit, I was posing, there was another fellow, he was a priest, right, a real priest, a Catholic priest. And we were down in Germany, in (?), where we were posing, he was a missionary from China. I was his assistant who came back with him, right, which was only just a cover story, right. Now, that struck me. I mean, here it is why they ask all the time what was I doing in China. And that got me a little mad, you know. So I wrote a letter to President Eisenhower in which I expressed that the United States had the right to refuse me admission, right. That we came to this country legally after completing all whatever was required to get the visa. And but that I think that nobody has got the right to put me into the prison, because for me this was a prison, you know, without knowing why. Now, a friend of mine was supposed to meet us, right. I gave that letter to him, because I didn't trust them to mail it from here. He mailed it from Manhattan someplace. It took maybe a week or ten days. We were called again, and we were cleared. I have seen the file, you know, on top of that officer's desk, I mean, immigration officer, or whoever he was. I don't know. And that letter was just hanging right on top practically, you know. So I asked him if we were good and okay now, why weren't we when we came in January. And he just told me, "Let the sleeping dog lie. I cleared you, and you just have about time to get the hell out of here. In the next half an hour the boat is leaving for Manhattan." So we (he laughs) threw everything into, you know. And off we went.

SIGRIST: You got out of here.

PASTIKA: And finally we started to live in the United States, and I can tell you the first day (he laughs) I'll never forget one thing. I mean, we took the cab, right. I knew the address. They brought us in because both of these, I mean, my friend was working, right. And the other guy he was living with, so we didn't know him that they met here in New York, right. So he got us, they were living downstairs and he got us a room upstairs, right, but it was the first place when we lived in Astoria on 34th, right. The next day when we went out we went on Broadway towards Steinway, right. So we stopped at one place where they had, I mean, it was a shoe store, right. And it had an entrance from both sides, and in the middle was a glass collimator, they had a display of shoes, and my wife was walking around like that, (he gives a wide-eyed expression) you know, see. (imitating his wife) "Boy, so many shoes, so many shoes." (he laughs) It was really funny. Well, within a week I was working.

SIGRIST: Before we got too far ahead of ourselves I have a couple more questions about Ellis to ask you. One is did you stay with your wife at Ellis, or were you separated?

PASTIKA: Yeah, no, no, no. We were in married quarters.

SIGRIST: Can you describe what that was like, and where it was?

PASTIKA: I mean, it was clean. I mean, we got clean bedding and all that, right. And at night we went to bed. In the morning I went down here, because I omitted to mention one thing. I used to wash these walls around the main back hall for fifty cents a day, right. And my wife worked for a lady who was a social worker here, typing, so she earned more. She earned a dollar a day. That's why we had a few dollars, you know, to pay the cab and all that, (he laughs) to get to the address.

SIGRIST: How did you get the jobs here? Who offered you those jobs?

PASTIKA: Oh, I don't know. It just, to tell you the truth, I, my wife got acquainted with that lady somehow when she was making her rounds, and she took liking to her or whatever, and asked her if she knows how to type, right. So that's how she worked there. And there was, I don't know, some fellow who introduced me to that old guy who was supervising here, you know, cleaning or whatever. So that's how I started to slap the rags against the wall, I mean, you know.

SIGRIST: And you said there was a real interesting cross-section of people.

PASTIKA: Oh, yes. I mean, all people. I remember one lady who was separated from their family because they found something, you know, on their, on her lungs or whatever. You know, she was awfully sad. And there were, I mean, Cubans, for instance. There was one guy I used to talk with. He was very smart, but he was illegally here, right. A very nice fellow. Then that guy, Frank Falcone, from Malta. His

mother was sick almost on the death bed, so he was, that was during the Korean conflict. He was supposed to be drafted into the army, so he showed them, you know, whatever, that his mother is really seriously ill, so he went back to Malta and had, I don't know, extended one more stay before she recuperated. And it was, I think, still in progress the war, but they started to have those first armistices in (?), you know, talks with North Koreans, when he came back, and some immigration officer accused him that he tried to, you know, shy away from his duty, or whatever, right. He said, "I don't care. Send me to the army, navy, or whatever, you know. Here were the papers." And all of a sudden one day they came in around four o'clock in the morning. He even didn't have a chance to get in touch with his lawyer. They put him on the boat, and he was deported. Then there was, I remember, I forgot his name, I remember, but it's too many, thirty-eight years, another Cuban couple who also had some problem, but they were here illegally. And they were kept incommunicado, I don't know, several days. You know, finally they released them. And then finally they were also admitted, because once I met them in the subway when I was going. I used to work at Idlewild at that time, which is now Kennedy, right. I used to work for KLM there. So we met in some subway.

SIGRIST: So there were actually, there were quite a few people there.

PASTIKA: Well, there were a number of all possible, you know, nationalities. Chinese and, I mean, whatever comes to Ellis Island. I met, also, one fellow once,

because there was, beyond the fence there was another health section, right. And there was also this guy who was for one-and-a-half years travelling between New York to Casa Blanca and Southampton to New York. You know, because each country refused to admit him. So he spent about one-and-a-half years at that time on the boat travelling the seas. Whenever, I mean, the boat landed here, so before they turned around, right, to pick up other passengers, he was always transferred to Ellis, right.

SIGRIST: Were you ever allowed out of the main building for any reason?

PASTIKA: No.

SIGRIST: You had to stay inside.

PASTIKA: No. We had to stay, yeah, you could walk out along the fence. That's how we talked with Frank (?), for instance, who was on the other side. We were walking, always, by the fence back and forth, back and forth, you know.

SIGRIST: Were you guarded?

PASTIKA: Well, more or less, they had, I mean, you know, in uniform, women and men. I think, I don't know, there were some who looked like the police in blue shirt and blue pants, but I don't know whether they were, you know, from the police or whatever. I don't know that.

SIGRIST: Talk about where they fed you and what you ate.

PASTIKA: Oh, we used to go downstairs where dining halls, right. Food was good. I can't say any complaints about that.

SIGRIST: Was it different than what you were used to?

PASTIKA: It was different than what we were used to.

SIGRIST: What was different about it?

PASTIKA: Oh, the way it was cooked, you know. It's different than what you have in Europe, for instance, right. But it was good, and plenty of it, you know. About food, we couldn't complain at all.

SIGRIST: Did they supply any entertainment for you of any sort?

PASTIKA: Well, there was just one TV down in the main hall. That's where I watched the inauguration of President Eisenhower at that time, right.

SIGRIST: And that was pretty much it. They didn't show movies or anything.

PASTIKA: That was all. No, no, no, no. No, no. The other entertainment was, like, with those, with that Brown couple, so we used to play canasta or Czech cards, you know, which are different a little bit, you know. So that was just all entertainment. Or

read magazines and newspapers or what have you.

SIGRIST: There really wasn't much to do.

PASTIKA: No, no, no, no. It was very boring in that respect.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me a little bit, again, about how you got off the island and . . .

PASTIKA: Well, when finally that officer told me to get the hell out of here, so we ran off. Boy, were we in a hurry to put everything into our suitcases. You know, I had big footlocker, right. So we put it in, dragged it down, and we came to that slip, you know, the same one as we arrived to Ellis Island. And finally put it on, and then, I mean, it was such a funny feeling when you're slowly backing out, and Ellis Island was disappearing behind us. We got to South Battery Park pier or dock there, right. And then we just flagged down the cab which, I mean, they were already standing. I gave him the address in Astoria and off we went. And we were looking, I mean, the buildings and everything, you know. It was a different story altogether, and it's a shocker.

SIGRIST: In our last remaining minutes here, tell me a little bit about what it was like to be in America and how things were different.

PASTIKA: Oh, you know, New York, for most of Europeans, is United States, except maybe cowboy movies or whatever. And it was precisely the same way as we pictured that way back across the ocean, I mean. And it was, in fact, it's hard to explain because

you're a native and all that, but when you came over here, realizing that finally you were free, that finally you were starting to make a living, right, that's hard to describe these feelings, I mean. Nobody can live by vicarious experience, right. To something, I mean, just, the fact, you're exhilarated.

SIGRIST: You felt that freedom.

PASTIKA: Euphoric state of mind.

SIGRIST: What didn't you like about America when you first got here?

PASTIKA: I didn't, I couldn't say anything, you know. That came a little bit later. Some, not here. I cannot complain about New York. However, when we got over to Seattle it was a different story.

SIGRIST: How long did you stay in New York?

PASTIKA: Oh, we left on the 15th of March, '55. We left for the West Coast.

SIGRIST: So you were here for two years.

PASTIKA: Yeah, two years.

SIGRIST: Not quite two years.

PASTIKA: Yeah, two years.

SIGRIST: Where did you live during that time?

PASTIKA: Well, first we lived in Astoria on 34th, and then we had apartment on what was at that time Grand Avenue and I forgot. It was right, you got off the Grand Avenue from elevated and you went up Grand Avenue and there was the first block you turned. I don't know what street was it. I cannot recall now that. Thirty-something, thirty-second.

SIGRIST: So you lived in several places.

PASTIKA: Oh, and before that I left, after we moved from 34th, so we lived on Crescent Street just beyond the elevated.

SIGRIST: I see. So you had several addresses in that . . .

PASTIKA: Yeah, we had three addresses here. Because from Grand Avenue area we were moving on the 15th of March '55 to West Coast.

SIGRIST: To Seattle. In your time in New York, did you and your wife ever experience any kind of, oh, I don't know, because you were an immigrant, did people outcast you in any kind of way?

PASTIKA: No. New York I can, I mean, I know that's my individual opinion. Somebody may have run into something, you know, different. I don't know. But New

Yorkers as such, you know, they may be rough and gritty or whatever, but at that time they didn't ask where you come from, but what can you do, what you know.

SIGRIST: So you had no problem getting a job.

PASTIKA: No, I didn't have any problem in that.

SIGRIST: Did you have any problems in Seattle?

PASTIKA: Yes.

SIGRIST: Because that's a very different atmosphere.

PASTIKA: That was type of provincial town where, I don't know, I don't want to even use that term, but for some people I was a "white nigger," to tell you the truth.

SIGRIST: So you found . . .

PASTIKA: Not too many, but there were those who told me very plainly, "Get the hell out of here and go back wherever you come from."

SIGRIST: So am I to believe that Seattle did not have a large immigrant population.

PASTIKA: No, no. And it was hard to get a job there.

SIGRIST: Were there any Czechs in Seattle at all?

PASTIKA: Well, to tell you the truth, we didn't care too much to associate with our own compatriots for one simple reason, because you never knew who they are. Unless sure, we met some of them, but most we associated, like those two fellows who came from the army because, I mean, that guy we met in Germany in that camp, he's actually a distant relative of my wife, so he went to the United States as a soldier, right. He was a paratrooper in Fort Benning. The other guy, Charlie, or (?), the same thing. He went into the army, right. That's how they got into the United States. And later on both of them came to Seattle. Those were the people we associated. Sure, we met some of those who came in, but you were sort of very cautious. You never mentioned, you know. You never knew what happened to, like my mother was in the jail. I didn't know that when I was in Germany. I learned it just very shortly before I was leaving for the United States. So you never knew that you don't get, even with writing, that you don't get anybody into trouble, that you wrote from the United States.

SIGRIST: So everything had to be very guarded and very cautious.

PASTIKA: Very guarded, very guarded. As a matter of fact, in Seattle I had twice, I believe, I even now remember the name of that FBI agent, McFarland, who came in. Because there it was from Vancouver, B.C., these agents they were sending, you know, to illegal immigrants, I mean, exilants. I mean, illegal exile, you cross the border. If they were to return back home, or try to engage them, and all that. So we were very careful

for about, you know, you never knew.

SIGRIST: And this is interesting because when you first, when you got out of Ellis Island you said you were just exhilarated by this great sense of freedom, and it seems like in a very short amount of time that freedom is sort of taken away.

PASTIKA: Well, yeah. It was, you know, that wasn't so much, I mean, with the other, but strictly because you never knew whether he is for real, right.

SIGRIST: It's a matter of trust.

PASTIKA: It's a matter of trust.

SIGRIST: You didn't know whom you could trust.

PASTIKA: You know, and boy, after Nazis, and especially after Commies, you get different experiences.

SIGRIST: Do you think that having lived in that atmosphere in Europe, do you think it made you paranoid, really?

PASTIKA: Oh, well, yeah. I used to have a hangup, for instance, and it was from the Nazi occupation, right, that whenever I had to go through the street, whether it was just wall and no any way out to exit, I would subconsciously cross the street that I can see the houses where they have doors on the side. And I haven't even realized that I was

doing that just by, you know.

SIGRIST: You were just conditioned to do that.

PASTIKA: You have to understand one thing. If you think about Nazi occupation, fine. They were your enemy, foreign enemy. There were people who collaborated with them. But with the Commies, you may have, guys you grew up with and you couldn't trust them. Parents couldn't trust their kids. Brother, sister, or whatever, you know, wife, husband sometimes. That's a different, you know, setup for your mind.

SIGRIST: Sure. And couple that, of course, with this atmosphere in Seattle that's very sort of anti-immigrant atmosphere.

PASTIKA: Well, it didn't bother me so much that because I knew one thing. Hell, all right, I'm a new immigrant here, what happened to you? Maybe your father came before you were born here. I mean, that didn't bother me. You know, that shows just, I mean, what kind of span is between his ears. That's all. (he laughs) I mean, you know.

SIGRIST: Yeah, exactly. You know, I guess my final question for you in this interview is are you glad that you came to America?

PASTIKA: Oh, definitely.

SIGRIST: What would have happened had you stayed in Europe?

PASTIKA: Let me tell you, I just got back from the old country.

SIGRIST: You just visited.

PASTIKA: I mean, that fellow that's my nephew, I just took him back, right. Boy, was I glad when I was back here. (he laughs) I mean, that, again, that, you know, one cannot transmit in a real flavor and color, you know, for somebody who grew up here.

SIGRIST: What do you think would have happened if you had stayed in Czechoslovakia, or anywhere over there?

PASTIKA: Well, wasted forty years of my life, like all those friends and relatives who stayed behind.

SIGRIST: Did you see your parents again?

PASTIKA: No. Well, yeah. I mean, I didn't see my father, but my mother came to Seattle in '65. She died in '68.

SIGRIST: So you finally brought her over.

PASTIKA: Yeah, and that was when she was released from prison and all that. Oh, that's another story.

SIGRIST: Yeah. That must have been very difficult for her, sure.

PASTIKA: Well, old trees are very hard to transplant, you know. And in the end she wasn't too happy because we both were working at that time. My wife and myself, right. Language barrier, right. If I remember, it be my kids and her, you know. So she was sort of homesick.

SIGRIST: Well, this has been most interesting. I'm really glad that the Interp ranger found you and brought you up here.

PASTIKA: Well, it's been a rough contour. I couldn't go into the real details, but I'm glad to be of service.

SIGRIST: Sure. Well, I want to thank you, and this is Paul Sigrist signing off with George Pastika. Thank you, sir.