

KECK-102

MARY GAISER

BIRTH DATE: DECEMBER 13, 1909

INTERVIEW DATE: DECEMBER 17, 1985

RUNNING TIME: 37:00

INTERVIEWER: DEBBY DANE

RECORDING ENGINEER: FLAWN WILLIAMS

INTERVIEW LOCATION: CHICAGO, IL

TRANSCRIPT ORIGINALLY PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 1986

TRANSCRIPT RECONCEIVED BY: CHICK LEMONICK, 11/1995

TRANSCRIPT NOT REVIEWED

YUGOSLAVIA, 1920

AGE 11

PASSAGE ON "THE RYNDAM"

DANE: This is Debby Dane, and I'm speaking with Mary Gaiser on Tuesday, December 17, 1985. We're beginning the interview at 10:30. We are about to interview Mary Gaiser about her immigration experience from Austria-Hungary Yugoslavia in 1920. She was eleven years old. Okay. Mrs. Gaiser. if you would tell me what the name of the town that you were born in and what year you were born.

GAISER: I was born December 13, 1909 in the town of Kernei, which was at that time Austria-Hungary. After the First World War, they made into Yugoslavia, and that's what it is today.

DANE: Would you spell it for me, Kernei.

GAISER: Kernei? K-E-R-N-E-I.

DANE: And what kind of a town was it? Was it a big city or a small town?

GAISER: No, it was a very small, peasants, you know. Uh, we had cows and chickens and we raised pigs. And, uh, we'd take the animals out into the meadows, you know, during the day, and then come back at night. And this is what we lived on. And we also worked the land for a percentage. Uh, we, you know, whatever we, uh, my grandfather owned his own home, and I lived with them. But you couldn't buy homes like you do here, or land, which is very scarce.

DANE: Was it owned by a nobleman? Is that who you were--

GAISER: That, I, I don't know.

DANE: And chores, did you have chores that you had to do on the farm?

GAISER: Well, we all worked, you know. From the time we're able

to, uh, in the winter we did our knitting for our, uh, shoes, actually, and stockings. And in the summertime we worked in the fields, you know. Like we had a big garden and we'd plant corn and , uh, whatever else we needed. And I helped with that.

DANE: Would your mother, grandmother, put up fruits or vegetables for the winter? Did you, were you involved with--

GAISER: We had a cellar and we put, what I remember, we had potatoes and carrots in our cellar for the winter. There wasn't too many cans, you see. It wasn't as plentiful as it is here. So, uh, there was not much fruit preserved. They also couldn't afford to buy as much sugar as they needed for that.

DANE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Did you have horses, or was that an extravagance?

GAISER: No. we did not have horses. Only the ones, the farmer had the horses. We did have a cow and we, we made our own cheese. We spun, spun our own--

DANE: Wool? No.

GAISER: Wool. A lot of it. Uh, we made our own butter. About the only thing that I remember buying in the store, in the grocery store, would be like vinegar, sugar, I don't remember too much else. And we had very little beef to eat. But we did have a pig, and that would have to last us all year.

DANE: And would you slaughter him the fall?

GAISER: Yes. Make sausage and bacon and smoked it and everything like that. Lots of sauerkraut, from the garden.

DANE: Was it a big occasion, the slaughtering and the preparing of the food for the winter?

GAISER: Yes. Uh, most of the family got together then and, uh, helped with the sausage, you know, and render the lard, which was very important. And, uh, my mother's parents did own a vineyard and they also celebrated when harvesting came for the grapes. And they made wine and, not whiskey, but schnapps.

DANE: No kidding.

GAISER: Yeah.

DANE: Would you go and help with that process?

GAISER: Yes.

DANE: And as a young girl, was it a festive, were there lots of people from the town that would come and help?

GAISER: Yes, yes.

DANE: Would they let you taste it?

GAISER: Oh, yes. (She laughs.) The sweet, in fact, you drank too much it made you sick.

DANE: Was it named after your mother's, father's last name? Was it a special wine that would be--

GAISER: No. That's just a, they didn't sell it or anything. More or less, you know, for the family use through the year.

DANE: Uh-huh. And as far as clothing and, you say you shopped

for just the basic necessities for the kitchen, but what about, uh, dresses?
Would you make all at home. or would a tailor come to your home, or--

GAISER: You know, I don't remember that. How we, uh, whether they
bought them or had them made. I don't really remember
that.

DANE: Uh-huh. Oh-huh. Other children, were there friends on
visiting farms that would play with you?

GAISER: Well, I played with the children on our street. During
the summer we went barefoot and the wintertime all we had was our woolen
stockings, almost, like with the wooden shoes.

DANE: Wooden shoes, like what we see in Holland? Those kind of
wooden shoes?

GAISER: Pardon me?

DANE: Wooden shoes like what we see in Holland?

GAISER: Something, yes. Oh, yes. Very much so. We didn't have
any leather. No leather shoes until I came to this

country.

DANE: Your father, your grandfather, would also wear wooden shoes? Everybody did?

GAISER: Yes.

DANE: Wow. And how often would you have to have those remade?

GAISER: Oh, they'd last for a long time, because you took them off when you went into, inside the house.

DANE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. School. Did you go to school when you were there?

GAISER: Yes, I did. But I didn't learn very much because I was deaf at the time and, uh, they also thought I was stupid. And I looked it because, you know, I had adenoids, and I couldn't breathe through my nose, you know. And you had to walk around like that. You look stupid. So I didn't learn. I was kind of an outcast in many ways, uh, because of that.

DANE: Your parents. Tell us the story of how your father came here and then your mother. What year, and why they came?

GAISER: My father came in, in 1909, before I was born, because he couldn't make a living. There was just not enough work for him to make a living. He came her and he got a job for seven dollars a week, saved money to bring my mother over, paid for his fare, and were willing to bring us over, but then the First World War came and, you know, then they couldn't.

DANE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Did he come to Chicago?

GAISER: He came to Buffalo, New York. and why he came to Chicago I never did find out. But my, my brother John was born in Buffalo, New York. As far as I remember, my youngest brother was born in Chicago.

DANE: So somewhere in between that they made their move.

GAISER: Yes.

DANE: And how old were you when your mother came over?

GAISER: I was eight months old when she left me.

DANE: And left you with--

GAISER: My father's parents.

DANE; So, when you were growing up you didn't know your parents.

GAISER: No, I did not. So I was very anxious to come over here to have a mother and a father.

DANE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Would you get letters, before the war broke out? Do you remember hearing about what they were doing here or what it was--

GAISER: Well, they, my grandparents got letters. But, of course, at that time, they didn't tell us too much.

DANE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. The war came. Do you remember that at all as part of your childhood?

GAISER: Oh, very much so. We, uh, we didn't go hungry, but it was a long time between meals.

DANE: Was life totally altered because of it? Did you still keep your same routine of farming?

GAISER: Well, yes. We kept our, we had to work in order to put food on the table and, uh, instead of paying taxes in money they took part of our wheat, because that's what they needed. I remember, I don't know why this stays with me. They had a big bag of wheat, you know, and they were going to put it under the bed. And they changed their mind because they were afraid they were going to be caught.

DANE: Huh. So they were really pinched?

GAISER: Yes. Yes. Uh-huh.

DANE: Any troop activity? Do you remember seeing soldiers or hearing?

GAISER: My uncle, my father's youngest brother, is the only one that I saw. And he came home on leave. But outside of that no, we did not see any, anything of the war.

DANE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. How were you even aware that it was even going on? Just because of the hardship?

GAISER: Yes. Mainly for that. Uh, there wasn't too much talk about it, you know. They don't sit down and discuss these things with

children. At that time, you know, children had their place and the adults had their place.

DANE: Were you close with your brother?

GAISER: Yes, very much. We fought like cats and dogs, but we were still close.

DANE: Would you ever get together and talk about coming to America, to your mom and dad?

GAISER: Well, I don't fully remember talking about it too much, but I just know that in, in '20 my father was able to send us tickets. And we were supposed to come first class, my bother and I. But my uncle, my father's brother again, was in service and I guess he was in trouble with the Army. So he fenagled tickets into six third class and we all came at the same time.

DANE; Oh, no kidding. So it was you and your brother, your uncle--

GAISER: My aunt and two cousins, Theresa and Michael Rill.

DANE: Do you remember the day that you left your town and your family?

GAISER: Oh, yes, I did. We did a lot of crying. But I was glad to go. And I remember riding on a train, first time. And I still don't know how we slept or what we did, but I just know we were moving around an awful lot before we got to, uh, I think it was Rotterdam. And from there we took the ship Ryndam. And I think before we left Europe we stopped at Cherbourg, and from Cherbourg we crossed, and I saw, I went through Ellis Island then, and they separated me from the rest of my family because I had smelly ears, you know. My ears were running and they were also smelling. But I think my father helped there. Otherwise I don't know if I would have been able to come in this country.

DANE: When you got, when you were separated from your family--

GAISER: I cried a lot.

DANE: Do you remember was it a man that just came and took you by the hand and--

GAISER: No. They had, you know, like a partition. The sick went in there, and the others went that way. So I just, uh, you know, was just

pushed along and they examined me. And rally I don't remember an awful lot. I know I wasn't overnight in Ellis Island. I just went through there. And my father net our boat, so I know he was at Ellis Island waiting for us and, uh, of course, we took the train and came to Chicago. We didn't stay overnight anywhere.

DANE: Right. When you were on Ellis Island still, were you aware of the fact that since you weren't physically a hundred percent fit, that you might be sent back? Had anyone--

GAISER: At that age, no. No, I was not aware of that. Secondly, you must realize, I didn't hear so whatever they were talking about, you know, unless they were actually talking to me and shouting to me, I did not hear what they said.

DANE: And the building, was it at all impressive? It's a huge building and that's--

GAISER: Yes, it was. There's nothing outstanding that I could tell you at this time.

DANE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. The train ride that you took from your small town. I've had people tell me that they had never been on mechanized

vehicles, and that they actually became seasick on the train. Do you remember feeling--

GAISER: No, I didn't get seasick or anything, and my uncle was more worldly and he was able to, you know, guide us around, uh, as far as getting on and off trains. I didn't get seasick even on the ship. But we had such a bad storm that they didn't let us walk out on deck, but I couldn't get up any more. But, I, uh, wasn't really sick. But the food wasn't, I wasn't used to the food, so I didn't eat very much.

DANE: How was it different? Was it soup, or--

GAISER: Well, rice. I'd never tasted rice before. And it's prepared much differently, you know.

DANE: Boiled or--

GAISER; Yes. Uh, don't forget, we were more used to having, like, noodles, many things made out of flour, because meat was very scarce in Europe at that time.

DANE: Would they feed you three meals a day on the boat?

GAISER: Yes, they did. But, uh, I was, I did eat some until I started to lay down. And then, uh, there was nothing else to do. You just laid in your bunk.

DANE: Friends. Did you meet other children? But, again, you were deaf, so it's harder.

GAISER: Not too many, no. Uh, I can't remember too many on the boat, if that's what you mean. I had, I had a girl cousin that I , but she was younger than I was. But we got along okay.

DANE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. And had you imagination at all set to work on what America would be like? Did you have any ideas that you had?

GAISER: Well, some of the had come back, you know, and they always gave you the idea, you know, that the streets were paved with gold. But I didn't know, realize, what that meant.

DANE: Uh-huh. The Statue of Liberty. Did you see the Statue of Liberty when you came in?

GAISER: Yes. I remember, uh, not very vividly, you know.

Vaguely.

DANE: And had anyone spoken to you about what it was, or what kind of monument?

GAISER: No. No, not at that time, no.

DANE: Then your father came and you were picked up from being separated from your folks.

GAISER: Yes. He got us from Ellis Island, and we went to New York and caught a train. My uncle and his family stayed there for a while, but they also came to Chicago later on.

DANE: And you went up to Buffalo at this point.

GAISER: No. I came strictly to Chicago.

DANE: Huh. Then what happened? Did you come to an apartment? Did he, was he living in a--

GAISER: Yes. My father was a janitor and, uh, they had an apartment, and I, they took me to school, you know. I went to school. They

also, my father also had a doctor, an ear doctor, in his building. He's the one that treated me, and I got a lot of my hearing back. But that took time. But they did take me, and I had to start in first grade. I was very tall. I couldn't even tell time. So you know they didn't bother with me at all.

DANE: Uh-huh. And how did find school? Was it an enjoyable experience?

GAISER: Some of them taunted me, but I had several of them. There were, some, some young people. I remember one girl, she was especially nice to me.

DANE: In first grade, did you feel like you were totally different from everyone else and could you, was it enjoyable? Did you like going to school? Were you learning, or--

GAISER: Well, at that time you didn't think about yourself so much. You did what you were supposed to do. And I had no choice. and I made, I made the best of it. I wasn't unhappy. I was a very lonely child. But, uh, if that's unhappiness, I guess that's what it was.

DANE: Did you miss your grandparents? Did you ever think about

the old country?

GAISER: Well, see, my, my grandmother died before I left, so I had two aunts who were raising me, and my grandfather was very, very strict with me, also because he didn't realize that I didn't hear. And, uh, so I didn't miss him that much.

DANE: Right. It was probably a relief.

GAISER: Yes.

DANE: Was it strange to be with a mother that you hadn't, was there--

GAISER: Yes. Very much. Very. I don't know. I thought for a long time that my mother showed preference to my younger brothers, which I can understand, you know. I wasn't a beautiful child to look at. (She laughs.) I was a mess when I came.

DANE: Uh-huh. How did you learn English, then?

GAISER: By going to school and playing with the kids on the

street, and it didn't take me long at all.

DANE; Would you, were you around radios at all, or--

GAISER: At that time there weren't too many radios yet. Uh, my mother and father still spoke German in the house, so I learned it on the street and I learned it very fast, because I, I was quite eager to learn, you know. Uh, I wanted to play with the children, you know, and I wanted to jump rope with them and everything. So I learned. And you can learn. There is no such thing that you can't learn if you want to.

DANE: Uh-huh. And clothing, you have a picture her, uh, that the clothing is very much of the old country and the beautiful kerchiefs and the big wide skirts. Do you remember dressing differently than the other children on the street?

GAISER: No, we dressed the way, uh, that it shows in the picture here. But they did buy us a, uh, a more American dress before we left.

DANE: Do you remember that? Do you remember thinking that this is different from what I usually wear?

GAISER: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Uh-huh. I wish I could remember what

kind of shoes I wore, and I don't really remember that even.

DANE: And did you get your first leather shoes over here?

GAISER: Yes. High button shoes, and they hurt like the dickens.
(They laugh.)

DANE: Oh, that's funny.

GAISER: Yeah.

DANE: Was your name Mary in the old country, also?

GAISER: Yes, Marianna, which is Mary.

DANE: Did they start calling you Mary right away over here?

GAISER: Yes, over here.

DANE: Did you notice that as a difference, or did you prefer it,
or--

GAISER: No, I don't think I cared. You know, I think every name

is so beautiful.

DANE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Were you ever treated any differently as, as an immigrant, as someone who had come from another country that was speaking a different language?

GAISER: Well, you had to go through a transition, you know, regardless. Children know that. Some were a little cruel, some were very nice. I don't remember unhappy moments. I guess I didn't have too many, I mean, as far as children were concerned. I got along with them.

DANE: You stayed in school for three years and then you decided that you didn't want to do it anymore. And by this time you were about fourteen or fifteen. Did you go to work.

GAISER: Yes.

DANE: Where did you get a job?

GAISER: I went to a box factory. I worked there until they found out how old I was. Because, you know, it was against the law. And then I worked in a, several factories. Smith Lithograph is where I stayed the longest. And then, when I was about sixteen, I worked for Bloom's Wool

downtown.

DANE: What is that?

GAISER: They, they make clothes, you know. At that time they had, you know, uh, form fitting clothes, and that's where I worked in, you know. Uh, I'm trying to-- (Another voice.) Yeah, seamstress. Like, I can't think of the names now. Uh, wealthy people came and they had their figure, you know, made out, and we fitted their clothes to them. Today they don't do that, I don't think.

DANE: So it was custom design.

GAISER: Yes. Yes.

DANE: And what was your job specifically? What would you do?

GAISER: I started in patterns, and then I worked myself up.

DANE: And you would make the patterns and cut them out?

GAISER: No, uh, I did eventually get to that, yes.

DANE: And in the, your first job, tell me just specifically what your task was? Where would you sit, and what would it look like? Do you remember those details of, was it a big factory?

GAISER: Oh, sure. There were a lot of factories at that time. I'm trying to remember, well, you know, when I worked at Smith Lithograph they, they were making labels for cans. And I, you know, they used to have cutouts and they'd have forms for that. And I'd, uh, you know, take that and put it under the machine, and would come down and cut it. And, uh, I worked there for a long time. I had a lot of nice friends there.

DANE: Would you, how many hours a day would you work?

GAISER: Started seven thirty until five thirty, six o'clock, half day on Saturdays.

DANE: Do you remember how much you made?

GAISER: (She sighs.) Very little, compared to today. You know, uh, eight, nine dollars a week.

DANE: Were there other young people like you?

GAISER: Yes.

DANE: Really, Wow. And you would sit everyday and--

GAISER: Yes. And then we'd wrap them, you know. Uh, they'd have machines. You know, some of them were just labels that went around the can and they, you know, we'd wrap them, we'd have to wrap them in, uh, so there was not one, just, job. You know, we'd work, we'd work all the way around , in every department.

DANE: Were you able to save that money, or did you have to give it to your parents?

GAISER: Oh, I gave it to my parents.

DANE: And how long did that go on? How long did you live at home, and--

GAISER: Till I got married. Not really. My father had accumulated an eighteen apartment building, but during the Depression he lost it. And then they moved out of Chicago, and I stayed in Chicago and worked for Bloom's Woolens. And when I got married, instead of them giving

me something, I gave them the money I had.

DANE: Was that the custom?

GAISER: They were broke and they needed it and my father had borrowed money trying to save this building and couldn't. So he owed a lot of money. And, uh, this is what you did.

DANE: Hmm. When you were getting to be, uh, a late teenager, in your twenties, were you going around with other German speaking--

GAISER: Yes. Very, yes. Well, we spoke a lot of English. There was a lot of English. In fact, I'm very bad in my German already because I, when my husband and I married, he's, he's strictly from Germany, and our dialects were so different that half of it I didn't understand what he was saying so we went, and I'm sorry now, I should have stayed with the German and with the boys. We have four boys. We should have taught them how to speak German.

DANE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. So would you end up speaking English after a while?

GAISER: Yes.

DANE: Uh-huh. Social clubs. Were there--

GAISER: Oh, yes, yes. We had, uh German Beneficial Union, you know. And our young people, we had a big group, you know. We used to go around a lot.

DANE: And would there be dances and parties?

GAISER: Oh, yes. A lot of it. We had more fun than they have today.

DANE: Uh-huh. Would they be neighborhood oriented, or city wide?

GAISER: Yes. We lived down near Halston and Bissel, uh, Larabee, in that neighborhood there. On North Avenue and halston there were several halls there and then we'd meet, uh, Saturdays and have dances.

DANE: Food. Would you all make food and bring dishes, or--

GAISER: Not when we went to the dances, you know, but we used to

have parties, you now, and, uh, my Sweet Sixteen birthday party I had, you know. My folks gave me a piano.

DANE: No kidding.

GAISER: Yeah. A player piano. I'm sorry I didn't keep it.

DANE: Would it have rolls.

GAISER: Yes.

DANE: Oh, do you remember any songs that--

GAISER: Oh, yes. We used to sing a lot. Radio wasn't as prevalent then, you know, as it, uh, it just came out. I'm trying to remember when, when did radio start?

DANE: Well, it was going, probably not one in every home until the thirties, I would think. I'm not very good at that.

GAISER: I'm trying to remember when we got our first radio. It was quite a while.

DANE: Hmm. I don't remember.

GAISER: We had a lot of sing alongs. You know, we'd get together.

DANE: What kind of, what songs would you sing? Do you remember?

GAISER: Oh, sure. "You Are My Sunshine" and, uh, oh, I can't think of it now, you know, but, uh, there were many beautiful songs.

DANE: And, were most of the people in your group from Europe, from the same sort of area, or--

GAISER: Some were, and some were native born, you know. Uh, we, I met them through my father and mother, because they belonged to the club. And the parents came together, and therefore we met the young people like that. And that's why we have a large group and, uh, very enjoyable.

DANE: What was the club called? Did it have a name?

GAISER: Uh, Kernei Pleasure Club, and that's about the only one that I know of that we, uh--

DANE: So it's after the town, named after the town.

GAISER: Yeah. Yeah.

DANE: Were there a lot of people in your group that were from, that you knew from the old country?

GAISER: Well, not all of them. Some of them were from the surrounding areas, from where we came from.

DANE: Uh-huh. And customs, we were talking about earlier, and you had mentioned that on May Day, when you were still living in Europe, was it a day to be celebrated, and--

GAISER: Yes. We had, May Day was usually nice weather. And we'd have a May pole and we'd have dancing around it, you know. And we were very active in the Catholic church. Uh--

DANE: Oh, just a second. Lets-- (Addresses the recording engineer.) How are we doing? A minute. Why don't I have you hold that thought for just a second. We're running out of tape. We'll do it on the other side. This is the end of side one with Mary Gaiser, Interview Number

102. It's eleven o'clock.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

DANE: This is the beginning of side two, Mary Gaiser, Interview Number 102. It's 11:00 AM. We were just talking about the importance of social clubs to you when you came over and were growing up as a young person and the difference today with young people.

GAISER: I think in my opinion there are too many women working. When they have a family, I think there is nothing as important the whole wide world as your children. They need you. I, we had four sons. You know, he wasn't making that much money at the time, my husband, and many times I would have said, you know, I could get a job. But the kids, the children, the boys would walk in the door and say, "Mom?" And I'd be there. And I think that is worth, is so much more important than anything they can buy with the money. They don't deny themselves anything in my opinion today. They don't go without anything. And I think a woman belongs in the home. I don't care, that's my belief. And the children, until the children are out of school or of age, like going to high school, or if they can manage to work while they are in school, that's fine. But, in my opinion,

there should be somebody home when these children come home.

DANE: And some other differences that we talked about, uh, in points of view that really are shaped by your experience, we were talking earlier, and I was hoping you could re-state some of your opinions about bilingual education. You learned how to speak English when you came to this county. Uh, and acclimated to a new society, basically. What are your, do you have any opinions about bi-lingual education today?

GAISER: Children may need a little more help when they come. They gave it to me. But I think it should strictly be in English. They have to learn it here in order to get along. First of all, let me tell you, I think the whole world should only have one language. Your whole problem is because the translation loses too much, and that's why there is so much trouble in the world. If they all spoke one language it would be much better.

DANE: English?

GAISER: The one that's the easiest to learn. And, of course, I speak English. (She laughs.) And how many countries are there where they do not speak English. They're teaching is all over the world. And I think

they really should go to one language.

DANE: Hmm. That's an interesting idea, especially someone that's come from two different worlds. We were talking earlier, just to get back, so we don't forget, about the May Day celebration.

GAISER: Yes.

DANE: Could you describe that again? You were saying there was a May pole and it was a nice time of year. What, would you help put up the May pole?

GAISER: I'm not aware of helping putting it up, but I just know I was aware of being dressed, you know, up for it and walking around the May pole. And, of course, the procession going to church and so on. Of course, the Church was, uh, political stability, almost, out there. And it was all Catholic.

DANE: Did it play a major role in everyone, in your life, as a child?

GAISER: There was, there was a lot of respect for the church. When the priest came along you knelt down and, uh, until he went by. Uh, my

grandfather was involved in some ways. He was, I don't know exactly what he was, but he was involved in political, uh, you know, aspect of the town.

DANE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Was the church the center? Would you go to church every day? Was there a pretty--

GAISER: No, not every day. Uh, we had, you know, like the Lent, we would go every day. We'd go, uh, sunrise mass, you know, or, Easter time, we did a lot of that.

DANE: And you said your uncle painted the ceilings?

GAISER: Yes.

DANE: What was his job exactly?

GAISER: He painted in the church. He was really what they'd call a painter. He also did that in private homes. You know, they decorated the ceilings up there. Not the walls so much, but the ceilings, like they did in the churches, beautifully done.

DANE: And that was a trade that he had been taught as an apprentice, as a young person?

GAISER: Yes.

DANE: Did you bring any foods or special holidays with you from the old country that you still--

GAISER: Well, my father and mother were still that "old country" yet, you know. That when I came, we still, uh, celebrated that Catholic, the religion, and so on. I made my first Holy Communion out there and here. I was confirmed and, uh, here.

DANE: Uh-huh. Holidays, special holidays? Or, did you ever bring, have customs, or clothes, from the old country, that you would wear only on special occasions here?

GAISER: Surprisingly, no. I did not have any.

DANE: And citizenship, did you become an American citizen?

GAISER: When my father became a citizen, and he waited until we came, I was on his papers, but I wanted my own citizen papers. So I applied for it before he passed away.

DANE: Did you go in and take a test, did you have to do that? Did you have to go in and take a test, or, at that point-- It changed, very much, at the time that you came, that you could either--

GAISER: No. I didn't have to go for a test. I just had to appear and answer, uh, just, you know, the facts that they had. My father went with me. So I had no trouble getting my own citizen papers.

DANE: Uh-huh. And then one final question that sometimes makes a difference and sometimes doesn't. You came when you were so young that maybe it isn't something that you thought about, but did it ever, when did you feel like you were an American and longer from Austria-Hungary?

GAISER: I loved this country from the beginning. You see, if, a lot of people, I think the government should almost send each, each person to not even live over there but go. I remember the advantages I had when I came. And, to this day, I'm more American than some American-born. Because they do not know what they were born into. I know what I left. I know what I would have become if I wouldn't have come here because I had the handicap and I know my life would have been much, much worse. Indescribable, because at that time, already, they were, well, like I said, they thought I was stupid. My own mother thought so when I came.

DANE: So America's been, been a tremendous opportunity.

GAISER: Oh, God, yes. They should stand and be proud. And when they, you know, a lot of people have come from Europe and they say, "Oh, you know the Americans." And I say, "Look, there's boats and planes leaving every day. Nobody asked you to come. Nobody's making you stay. If you don't lie it, go." I've told many that already.

DANE: And your children, do you think you were able to pass that sentiment on to them somehow?

GAISER: Oh, yes. Uh, three of our sons served. Well, yeah. Three of our sons served in the service. One was in two year, and the youngest went to Vietnam. I'm very American. I have never gone back. My, I wanted, my goal, to see where my husband comes from. He says, "I'm an American. I want to see America first."

DANE: I think that's great. This is the end of side two with Mary Gaiser, Interview Number 102. It is 11:15.