

KM-038

BARBARA FEBER (FABER) SMITH

BIRTH DATE: JULY 29, 1901

INTERVIEW DATE: APRIL 25, 1994

RUNNING TIME: 1:08:10

INTERVIEWER: KATE MOORE

RECORDING ENGINEER: DR. KRISTA VARANTOLA

INTERVIEW LOCATION: CHICAGO, IL

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 11/1994

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 12/1994

AUSTRIA, 1909

AGE 8

PASSAGE ON "THE CARPATHIA"

Oral Historian's Note: Chirping birds can be heard throughout the recording of this interview. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of the Oral History Project, 12/9/1994.

MOORE: This is Kate Moore for the National Park Service.  
Today is the 25th of April, 1994, and I'm in Chicago, Illinois at the home of Barbara Smith, who came from Austria in 1909 when she was eight years old. Why don't you begin by giving me your full name and date of birth, please?

SMITH: My full name is Barbara R. Smith, it was Feber. And my date of birth is July the 29th, 1901.

MOORE: How do you spell Feber?

SMITH: F-E-B-E-R.

MOORE: And where were you born?

SMITH: In Austria-Hungary.

MOORE: And what town?

SMITH: It was called Bukinn.

MOORE: How do you spell that?

SMITH: B-U-K-I-N-N.

MOORE: And what size town was it?

SMITH: It was not a big town, but it was a very lovely town.  
We had a very, very charming church there, and most  
of our activities centered around the church.

MOORE: And what did the town look like?

SMITH: What did it look like? Well, it was, almost  
everybody's home was, they had sort of a big fence  
around all homes, but the fence were wooden fences so  
that you had to come, from the street you had to come  
in through the little door, or if you had horses there  
was a huge, huge gate that you came through, and then

there was a courtyard, and all those kind of houses were around that courtyard, and you came in there. Then the gates were closed and you were strictly inside, but it was only one family. However, my mother was a widow, my father was a widower when they were married. And my mother apparently inherited the home from her first husband. And she did not like a stockade around her, so she had the fence taken down, and it was, we were the only people there that had a metal fence around, like, you know, you see now, like in farms and so on. We had a beautiful, beautiful, beautiful garden. Every kind of fruit you could wish for. It was just, just, everything was just lovely. The grapes were this big. ( she gestures )

MOORE: What was the town that you lived in noted for, what industry, major industry?

SMITH: I don't know if it was noted for anything. I really don't.

MOORE: What was the nearest town? The nearest big city?

SMITH: Believe it or not we had, my grandchildren are quite, you know, they wanted to know where was it, how was it. I have no idea. Now, it could not have been too

far from Vienna because I had a cousin who was a doctor, and he would take a trip. He would walk to Vienna. Once a year they'd have sort of a seminar or something, and he would walk there very jauntily. I still remember he was the most beautiful person, and he, I can still remember the little jacket he had, and his pants came up to his knee, and then he had these long, these very high cordovan boots, and his knapsack was the same color as the boots, and we always used to just think he was the most handsomest thing in the world. And he walked to Vienna. Now, could that have been close? We never, I never . . .

MOORE: Unless he hitch-hiked on the way.

SMITH: I don't know.

MOORE: No.

SMITH: I don't think so.

MOORE: That's a joke. What was your father's name?

SMITH: Andrew.

MOORE: Andrew. And what was his occupation?

SMITH: He was the town crier.

MOORE: And what did the town crier do, exactly?

SMITH: Well, he would have been called a public servant, and his title was de Bleine[ph] Richter.

MOORE: How do you spell that?

SMITH: I don't know. ( she laughs ) Just forget it.  
( they laugh ) Just another Richter. He's a little judge, that's all. That meant that eventually he would be working in the courthouse. But up to now his duty was to read the paper, and then he had to go to different corners at different times of the day, and he would read the paper there. And he had a little boy that ran ahead of him, and that little boy had a bell, run ahead of him. And then all, everybody, we all run and listen to what Andrew Feber had to say. ( Ms. Moore laughs )

MOORE: What was your father's personality and temperament?  
What was he like?

SMITH: Uh, he was a very jolly person. Not too jolly, but he was a very, oh, he liked to tell us stories. That's one of the things. We had no TV or anything like that in those days, so we depended on the stories that my

mother and dad told. And my dad always had very funny stories to tell, some that kind of scared you and made you behave yourself, and others that were funny. So that's the type of person he was.

MOORE: And what did he look like?

SMITH: Uh, he was not a very tall man. He, not very tall. Slim. He was never, never a big man. And . . .

MOORE: What about his eyes and hair?

SMITH: Uh, brown, brown. Uh-huh.

MOORE: And is there a story about your father that you associate with your childhood, some story when he did something that you remember?

SMITH: ( she laughs ) Silly things that one remembers, but he was complimenting me one day. We were eating cherries, and I lined up the cherry pits.

( she laughs ) And he complemented me on that, and I've never forgotten it. It was a stupid thing.

( they laugh )

MOORE: What was your mother's name?

SMITH: Magdeline.

MOORE: Magdeline. And what was her maiden name?

SMITH: Her maiden name was Welsch, W-E-L-S-C-H.

MOORE: And what was her occupation?

SMITH: She was a housewife.

MOORE: What did she look like?

SMITH: Mother was a very pretty woman. She was slim, and we used to get annoyed with her. She liked to run around barefooted. ( she laughs ) Isn't that silly? And I was never a barefoot person. ( Ms. Moore laughs ) So I wasn't used to, it kind of shocked me to see my mother pattering around. She always had those little full skirts on, and ( they laugh ) she was a very, very pretty woman, and she was very, a very good mother.

MOORE: What was, describe her personality and her temperament.

SMITH: Her personality? She liked to sing, and go around the house singing, dusting and cleaning. And she was the best, even my grandchildren now will say, "God, can't you make what Grandma used to?" She was the best

baker in the world. She was very, very, very talented. And she couldn't tell you because she put in a little of this and a little of that.

( she gestures ) She was a, she was an orphan, and lived with her oldest sister, and she was not happy with her oldest, she was not happy there. And she said, she used to sit in the corner, and her older sister and her husband, they had a farm, so they had a farm, horses and things like that. But nobody lived on a farm. Everybody lived in town. They'd just get their horses and then go out to their, wherever the farm was. So, anyway, Mother said she used to sit there and cry all the time, and her sister could do nothing with her. So one of her nieces came to visit, and this niece lived in Switzerland. I can't tell you the name of the town or anything like that. I just know that she was in Switzerland, and she said to my mother, she said, "I'll take you home with me if you'd like to come and live with me." But she says, "You're going to have to learn to be a lady." And she said, "I'm going to teach you how to cook, and you'll be able to cook for the kaiser when I get through with you." And she went to live with her cousin, then. Am I talking too much?

MOORE: No, no, no, no. No, this is interesting, but . . .  
( break in tape )

SMITH: She went to live with her cousin, and her cousin did just exactly that. Her cousin was married to a high official of some kind. And she taught my mother how to make these beautiful desserts and things, and my mother loved making them. And she tells about every, they had a big dog, one of those big, big, enormous dogs. And she would go down to market with her basket, and apparently they were up high, and she would go down to market, and the dog would carry the basket for her. So that was my mother's story, and she, and she told some very good stories.

MOORE: How about brothers and sisters? How many brothers and sisters?

SMITH: I had one brother and a younger sister.

MOORE: And what were their names?

SMITH: Uh, John was my brother, he was two years, he was two years older than I, and he was the son of my mother's first marriage, so. But he was a wonderful brother, and we adored him, everybody did, as a matter of fact.

And Katherine, she was a typical little, little German girl. Just typical, blonde and with cute little rosy cheeks. You just wanted to hug her. She was very adorable.

MOORE: Describe your house a bit again.

SMITH: My house?

MOORE: The house where you lived.

SMITH: The house we lived in.

MOORE: How large was it, how many rooms?

SMITH: Well, there was one big main room, and off of that big main room there was a smaller room, and then outside of that was what they call the summer kitchen. The kitchen was out, it was connected, but it still was not. You sort of went out into the, what shall I say? You walked over to the kitchen, and there was the kitchen. And apparently the weather didn't get too cold there because there was no, no enclosure around the kitchen.

MOORE: How was your house heated?

SMITH: There was a big, I suppose it's a stove. It was

heated through this, the stove was a big, big, big, tall thing. And they heated it through the bottom by throwing branches in, I thought. I really don't recall that too, I don't recall it being heated. But I know that it was warm, because behind, behind it was this little room that I'm talking about, that was behind the stove.

MOORE: How was it lit, the house?

SMITH: How was it lit? We had kerosene lamps, something like that, anyway.

MOORE: What type of furniture did you have?

SMITH: Uh, isn't it strange. The main thing I remember is the big bed we had. The beds were high, you know, you had to, you had to get a stepladder to get up onto it. Not a stepladder, but it was up high. It was a big, that's the only thing I remember.

MOORE: Hold on just a second. Let me check this noise.  
( break in tape ) You're doing great.

SMITH: I'm talking too much.

MOORE: No! This is great stuff. All right. So you remember

this bed. Do you remember any furniture else?  
Anything else?

SMITH: No, I seem to think there was kind of a wooden chair,  
but I don't remember. I don't even remember the table  
we had. Vaguely, vaguely I seem to remember a big,  
rough table. But I don't, I can't actually tell you  
what it was like, and I can't recall the dishes,  
either.

MOORE: The house as made of what material? Was it brick?

SMITH: It was brick, uh-huh.

MOORE: And you talked about the garden, how beautiful the  
garden was.

SMITH: Yes.

MOORE: Well, what did you grow, exactly, in that garden?

SMITH: This was strictly a, oh, my God, see, you bring up a  
memory. This was strictly an orchard garden. It was  
beautiful, as I say. You come into our yard, and you  
could smell the apricots. We had apricots about this  
size, ( she gestures ) and pears, plums, I don't know.  
I'm quite sure this is not a childish vision, because

I know we had them, and because I used to hunt for fruit like that. Way on the end of the garden there was a quince tree, way at the end. That was my mother's pride and joy. And apparently we lived up high, because down below us, right at the end of our garden was this big, deep ravine, like. The water ran through there, and they said it was a tributary of the Danube that went through the back there. And sometimes the water was high, sometimes it wasn't. And I remember my little sister and I were playing down there one time, and she fell in, and I had to go and call my mother. And I had to climb up that high ridge to get my mother to come and save Katherine, which she actually did, just that we were playing down there where we shouldn't have been. But there was a walk that went thorough, there must have been other families that lived there, too. And there was a sort of a walk, but not a private, not for everybody, and somebody used to come and snatch mother's quince. Oh, that made her very unhappy. "Somebody's been taking my quince again." ( she laughs )

MOORE: Did you have hired help?

SMITH: No.

MOORE: What were your mother's chores?

SMITH: No.

MOORE: What did your mother do for chores?

SMITH: Hmm? Whatever had to be done.

MOORE: Cooking, or?

SMITH: She did all the cooking. She did the cooking. I know she used to take her bread down to a place sort of in the middle of the street and bake it and they had the big, public ovens there, and she'd put her bread in there and bake it, and then go back and get it, and that's how she baked her bread.

MOORE: What was your favorite food? ( electric saw heard in the background )

SMITH: Just about, I was not much for, no fuss at all. I liked fruit, of course.

MOORE: Did you help cook?

SMITH: Did I help cook? No.

MOORE: And what about the kitchen? Tell me about your

kitchen.

SMITH: It was a big kitchen. But, as I say, it was wide open. It was a great, big, flat thing on job. And then we had a chimney that went up, too, and we had storks on top of the chimney. They built a nest on top.

MOORE: And what was mealtime like? How did you eat? How many meals a day did you eat together or alone, or?

SMITH: Well, I just recall that we had dinner together, that my dad was always home for dinner.

MOORE: Which was when, about what time? Do you remember?

SMITH: I don't know. It must have been fairly early. I don't, I really don't remember that at all.

MOORE: Where did your other family members live, like grandparents?

SMITH: Well, my grandfather and grandmother lived, you might say, up the road a ways. I'm feeling this is the way they lived. And my grandfather was a musician. He was not a farmer or anything like that. He was a musician and, but my grandmother was a lovely lady.

It's funny, I wanted to show you a picture of us as we were. But my little daughter had it and, as I say, she passed away a couple of years ago, and her husband sold the house to get rid of it. So all of her things are still in boxes. And I talked to him about it yesterday, I saw him at the church, and he said, "Well, I know it's there somewhere," but I have no way. Otherwise I'd show you a picture.

MOORE: Who were you closest to in your family?

SMITH: Who was I closest to? You mean mother or father, or . . .

MOORE: Anyone.

SMITH: Brother and sister?

MOORE: Brother and sister, mother and father, cousin, anybody particularly close to you?

SMITH: Well, Katherine and I were very close. We were. And John was very good to us. He was a wonderful brother all the way through.

MOORE: How about your grandparents? Where did they live, exactly?

SMITH: Uh, they lived down the lane from where we lived but, as I say, my grandfather was a musician, so he was away a lot, and, now, he went to Vienna, too. We must have been close to Vienna. And we used to visit my grandmother a lot. She, too, lived in a house that had a big fence around it, but she had no, she had no servants that I know of.

MOORE: What about religious life? You mentioned a church. What was that like?

SMITH: The entire, you actually, your life was laid out according to what the church was doing. I don't mean that they told us we had to do this or that or the other thing, but we'd go to church on Sunday and whatever came up. Our life just revolved around the church?

MOORE: What church was this, what denomination?

SMITH: Catholic, right.

MOORE: Right. And have you ever seen The Sound of Music? Did you ever see that one little picture where she's singing, and there's just a picture of a little church with kind of an onion top on the top? That's what our

little church looked like. I was very . . .

MOORE: How close was that to your house, the little church?  
Describe it for me.

SMITH: Um, how close? Oh, we walked to it. I don't suppose  
it was too far.

MOORE: And what did it look like, that church?

SMITH: Just that onion top is the only thing that I remember.  
And there were graves around the outside of it.

MOORE: Now, did you learn prayers for every night and . . .

SMITH: Oh, yes.

MOORE: How often did you go to church?

SMITH: Well, whenever there was anything going, every Sunday  
naturally. But if there was a feast day, which many  
times there were, and funerals and things like that,  
we always went to church. I had a cousin who was a  
priest, and he was the, he was not the pastor there,  
but he was the assistant pastor. And he was a teacher  
also. He taught school. He was one of my teachers.  
As a matter of fact, it's a very nice memory. I was  
sick a lot. And I couldn't go and do the things that

children my age were doing. I'm just home sick. And one day, Valentine, his name was, Father Valentine, he came over and he said to Mother, he said to send me to church, to school the next day because he said, "The children are going to learn how to go to Confession."

And do you know anything about Confession? Well, okay. To be taught about going to Confession, and so on. He said, "So send Barbara over there, and I want her to get in that class, and then she can make First Communion with the other kids, and then, well, whatever she has to do, you can do it." All right. So, okay. Mother took me to church, to school the next day, and the kids had already been instructed, so when I got there they were all ready to go into church and receive or, you know, confess, to go to Confession. ( electric saw can be heard in the background ) So I'm coming in there, and I just was this dumb kid. So the kids turn around, and they said, "Oh, you should see what's in there! Oh!" And they were scaring the heck out of me, telling me that terrible things going on in there and all this and that. So, okay. I'm timid. So I let them push me back and push me back, and one after the other got ahead of me, and I kept going farther back in line.

( she laughs ) And I said, "Well, go right ahead. I don't care." All of a sudden the confessional door opened up, and it was my cousin. And he looked around, and he saw me. He said, "Come on in, come on in." So, from the back of the line, I was called in. So that was, that was kind of a triumph.

( she laughs )

MOORE: Was it scary?

SMITH: No. ( Ms. Moore laughs ) He was in there, he was in there, so why would I be scared? Isn't that funny that I'm talking about it like that?

MOORE: No. What about your favorite holiday? What was that then?

SMITH: Uh, well, there was a festival. I don't really remember what they called it, but there was a, it coincided with the religious, with the church, but I don't remember what festival it was, but it was very, very much fun.

MOORE: What did you do that made it fun?

SMITH: Oh, everybody dressed. We all had lots of ribbons and it was just lots of fun. I don't remember what we

did.

MOORE: And what about your school life? Did you go to school then?

SMITH: I did but, as I say, I was sick so much, I was out of school.

MOORE: In Catholic school that you went to?

SMITH: Yes.

MOORE: And where was the school in relation to your house?

SMITH: It would be in the small town. It wasn't far away. I think if we looked down the street I think we could see it, so it wasn't such a long distance.

MOORE: What were the conditions in school? How many students to a class?

SMITH: I couldn't tell you. I really couldn't tell you. I remember getting very sick in school one time, and I had to be taken home by not only my cousin, but a couple of the other teachers made a big fuss about it, and I was embarrassed, and I don't remember that. That's something I'd just as soon forget. It was unfortunate.

MOORE: Did you learn any English prior to coming to the United States?

SMITH: I don't think so.

MOORE: What did you do for entertainment? You mentioned your father telling stories.

SMITH: Uh-huh.

MOORE: Did you have any other childhood games you played?

SMITH: Oh, we played with dolls mostly, doll things, and dressed them. I really don't remember that we did anything else.

MOORE: Who decided for your family to come to the United States?

SMITH: My father.

MOORE: And did he know someone already in the United States?

SMITH: He had a distant cousin in Milwaukee. But when he came he, he docked in Youngstown some place. I don't really remember. But it took him quite a while to really get settled.

MOORE: And why did he want to come to the United States? Can you tell me about that?

SMITH: Oh, yes, oh, yes. It had very much to do with his work, because he was trained, I don't know whether this would be interesting to you or not, but over there it seemed as though the oldest son of the family, he was the head of the house, and he took care of, he took, my oldest uncle, he took care of the whole household. My grandmother lived with him, or he lived with her, or something like that. And then whatever else went. Then the next son, he had to go to school, and he had, his education was to become a public servant, and so that was what my father did. The third son had to go into the army, and had to make the army his, that was his arm. Anyway, so anyway, my father was, worked in the court house all of his life. No, he was in the army, too. And then when he came out of the army, then he went into the court house and worked there. And after that he was to be promoted, like everything. And when the promotion came up for him to be in the office, see, he's been outdoors all this time, reading the paper and doing the outside work. Now it was his turn, and there was an opening,

the judge brought his nephew and gave his nephew the opening that my father was supposed to, was looking forward, thought he should get. And so that made him angry, and he said, "I quit. We're going to America. I'm through with this country." And he came home very upset, and he said to Mother, "I'm going to America." And she said, "No." And he said, well, he's going. So he did.

MOORE: How did he get the money for the United States?

SMITH: Well, I expect he had it.

MOORE: He saved it?

SMITH: Oh, yes.

MOORE: Did your mother want to eventually come to the United States?

SMITH: Yes, eventually, when he wrote and said that he had, you know, had . . . ( tape ends abruptly )

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

MOORE: What did your father know about America before he decided, had this idea?

SMITH: I really don't know.

MOORE: What did he describe about America when he wrote letters?

SMITH: Well, of course, at first he sort of tried to find himself. He had to try to find, his first job was working in a, working for a golf club, a golf course, a golf course. He was out working on the golf course, cutting the grass and stuff like that. That was his first job. He always liked, he always like gardening, and I think he, well, I shouldn't say that, but anyway, I think he would have taken, been a good substitute for his brother. He would probably have been a better farmer than his brother was, because that was always his. So, anyway . . .

MOORE: And, all right. Tell a bit about how you finally got, what led up to the whole family finally going. He came here, and he went to where?

SMITH: Uh, well, he worked in Pennsylvania for a while, and then I think that's when he contacted his cousin in Milwaukee, and then he decided to go to Milwaukee. And, uh . . .

MOORE: How did he get all of you over there?

SMITH: Well, then, eventually he persuaded Mother to sell whatever had to be sold, and to come and leave.

MOORE: Do you remember anything about getting rid of things and selling things? Do you remember the selling?

SMITH: Uh, no, I don't. I don't remember that at all. I don't know how she got rid of the garden or the yard or the house or any of that. Just not . . .

MOORE: Do you remember packing?

SMITH: Yes.

MOORE: What did you pack?

SMITH: I remember getting some new clothes. She had new, well, after all, we were peasants, you know. And, so she had some, she had, we each got a very cute little suit. We thought they were very cute, little suits with the little jacket and little skirt. We thought it was real cute. And we were excited about that. And the girls in the neighborhood were excited about our getting these new clothes and stuff like that, and I know that was exciting for not just us but for our

neighbor kids, too.

MOORE: Did anyone give you a goodbye party?

SMITH: I suppose so. I suppose.

MOORE: Do you remember any?

SMITH: No.

MOORE: All right. What did your mother take with her?

SMITH: Well, my father had written occasionally that he would, ( she laughs ) like we're talking about clothes, that he would like some ham, to prove how hungry he was for a certain kind of ham. So she packed that whole ham and packed it, and some other things. She did some baking and all that. And, you know, the first thing that happened when we got on board the boat? Overboard it went. They wouldn't allow anything to come along.

MOORE: Hmm. Did you yourself take anything, special belongings?

SMITH: No.

MOORE: Anything in the family survive from that time?

SMITH: My father apparently had given my mother this gorgeous shawl, very beautiful. And she took, brought that along. And a picture of my father when he was, when he was in the army. And after a while he worked with the Lippizan horses, and he had his picture taken with the Lippizan horses. So she took that out of the frame and rolled it up and brought it along. Now, that's the funny little things that I remember. And that shawl, after she passed away, they gave it to me, and I, at that time, had thought of sending it to Ellis Island because there were things being sent there. And I left it in the dining room cabinet at my mother's, and it was sold. My niece didn't know that I had wanted it, so it was sold. But that would have been something that I always thought I'd like to have her.

MOORE: Who came to America, then, with you? Your mother came.

SMITH: My mother, John and Katherine. And then a cousin, sort of a cousin of my mother's came with us. I mean, she didn't, she, her husband died, and she thought, well, this would be a good thing for her that she could, she would come to America, too. She had a

little boy. I don't think I should talk about that.

MOORE: So how did you get from home? Do you remember leaving home for the last time?

SMITH: Yes. Isn't that funny, I don't remember that.

MOORE: How did you get from home to the port?

SMITH: That I don't remember.

MOORE: All right. What port did you leave from?

SMITH: Fiume.

MOORE: How do you spell that?

SMITH: F-I-U-M-E, I think.

MOORE: And where is that?

SMITH: It's really in Italy, I think. It's sort of on the coast.

MOORE: How did you get there?

SMITH: Well, we took a train somehow, yeah.

MOORE: You don't remember that part?

SMITH: I don't remember it all. I remember going on the

train, but isn't that funny how your mind blocks out?

MOORE: Do you remember seeing the ship for the first time,  
the boat? Do you remember seeing that?

SMITH: Uh-huh.

MOORE: What was the name of that boat?

SMITH: Uh, Carpathia.

MOORE: C-A-R . . .

SMITH: C-A-R, something like that. I've got a little . . .

MOORE: But you have it written down. Did you have to wait  
for the boat once you got to the port?

SMITH: No. It seems to me we got right on to the boat.

MOORE: Were any family members seeing you off? Did anybody  
come with you?

SMITH: No.

MOORE: When did the ship depart? What month of the year?

SMITH: I really don't remember exactly, but it seems to me it  
might have been early November or . . .

MOORE: Which year?

SMITH: Of which year? 1909, I think. That's about what it was.

MOORE: Tell me about the accommodations you had in the boat. What class was it?

SMITH: Well, actually, when you're a kid, you don't pay any attention to what class it is. I, that's what somebody said to me the other day. Not the other day, some time ago, and I said, "Well, I don't know!" I know we came, we were on board ship, and I know we got bunks, because my mother was on the lower bunk, and then my brother was on this one. ( she gestures )

MOORE: How about the food on the boat? What about that?

SMITH: What's that?

MOORE: The food.

SMITH: The food? Oh, it was passable. My mother was sick all the time, so she couldn't, she couldn't even go to the dining room with us, she got so. But, uh . . .

MOORE: Describe the boat, what you saw, you smelled, you heard.

SMITH: Well, I remember Katherine and I just enjoyed it. We were out there on deck. The sun was shining on us, and we played, and there were big ropes around and we just had lots of fun. It was very, it was a lot of fun.

MOORE: And what's the voyage, you said your mother was ill. Was it rough?

SMITH: I don't think so. It wasn't so bad. We weren't sick. But she was sick all the time. But my brother, as I say, he was a very likable kid, and he was very inquisitive. And he made friends with the waiters and with the help or with the, with the kitchen help. Maybe he was even down there washing dishes. I don't know. You don't know about that boy. And he would bring Mother some special thing that she could eat. So he was always bringing her food from. So we thought that was wonderful. We did. We just enjoyed it.

MOORE: Were there any organized activities in the boat for you?

SMITH: Uh, oh, I guess there were some things we were

supposed to do, but yes. No, Katherine and I liked to be by ourselves, and we liked to climb around on different things.

MOORE: How long was the voyage?

SMITH: Oh, golly, it must have been two weeks or so. It seemed like forever.

MOORE: Do you remember seeing land for the first time? What was the first thing you saw on land when you came into the harbor?

SMITH: Well, we came to America. See, the trip was really kind of interesting, going out of Fiume, because some of the Italian boats would come out to the big ship, and they'd have special little trinkets or special candy or special things like that. So that was always a lot of fun. But when we came here, I've often thought about that. And, you know, the Statue of Liberty was this great, big, huge thing. We couldn't figure out that it was supposed to be the figure of a person. We just thought, does she have her back to the, to us, when we come in?

MOORE: That's a good question. I don't know.

SMITH: ( she laughs ) It seems to me she had her back to us.

MOORE: Well, do you remember the reaction of people seeing land for the first time on the boat?

SMITH: The reaction?

MOORE: What was it like?

SMITH: Oh, well, we didn't see the land right first thing.

MOORE: I mean the Statue of Liberty, did they have a reaction to the Statue of Liberty?

SMITH: No, just kind of amazed, that's all. We just, just amazed at it all.

MOORE: What about New York City itself?

SMITH: We liked it. We, see my father didn't come to meet us in New York. So somebody else did, and I don't remember who it was, but somebody else came and met us, and took us for a walk down in through New York.

MOORE: Well, talk about Ellis Island. How did you go from the boat to Ellis Island?

SMITH: From the boat we went, it seemed like we went on a ladder but, you know, there was quite a distance. And

then we went into Ellis Island, and that was most beautiful, beautiful, the interior. We were so impressed. It was so shiny and so, oh, so shiny and clean.

MOORE: Were there many people?

SMITH: Yes. But it didn't seem crowded. There were people . . .

MOORE: What about medical examinations?

SMITH: I beg your pardon?

MOORE: Did you go through medical examinations?

SMITH: Oh, yes.

MOORE: Did you go through one before you left home?

SMITH: I don't think so.

MOORE: What was the medical examination that they gave you on Ellis Island?

SMITH: Well, they looked at me, and they put a cross on my back. I think I mentioned that, didn't I?  
( she laughs )

MOORE: And why did they do that?

SMITH: There was something wrong, and don't ask me what, because I have never, I have never found out why. But my mother passed fine, even though she had been ill. My brother and Katherine, fine. But when it came to me, they put a cross on my back, and it meant I had to go into another line. So I went into another line, and they looked at me and sent me elsewhere. And three doctors came in there and checked me, and ( she laughs ) by that time I was pretty petrified, and my poor mother was, too. And then finally another doctor came in, and he looked at me and he said, "Let her go." And he went over and gave my mother a little pat on her behind, and I thought that was so cute when he did that, that she shouldn't worry about me.

MOORE: So you weren't detained for any days? You were just there for the medical exam.

SMITH: Well, we spent the night there.

MOORE: You did.

SMITH: Uh-huh.

MOORE: Were you separated from your family?

SMITH: No.

MOORE: How were you treated in general?

SMITH: Just beautiful, just beautiful. It was so clean, and it was so, the thing that amazed us, everybody was so good to me after I came out of those, you know, everybody thought, well, anyway, the thing that amazed us is we had never seen black people before, and there were so many black people. And, I shouldn't say that, should I?

MOORE: Oh, no, that's fine . . .

SMITH: And they were all chewing, and we kept walking around and following them and wondering, "What are they chewing? What are they chewing?" They kept chewing gum, you know. And we couldn't figure out.  
( she laughs ) That impressed us so. It shows what little hicks we were.

MOORE: What about, any food when you were there that you never saw before? Any food that was new?

SMITH: No, no.

MOORE: Where did you sleep when you had to stay overnight?

SMITH: Well, it was all a very white, marble room, and we had double beds there. So wherever it was, that's where we . . .

MOORE: And you had sheets?

SMITH: Yes.

MOORE: And everything was clean, you said.

SMITH: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. It was remarkably clean.

MOORE: Was there any entertainment there at all?

SMITH: No.

MOORE: People? Okay. So tell me how you got off Ellis Island finally. What happened? They released you?

SMITH: Yes.

MOORE: And you're here now, so obviously they did. But how did you leave Ellis Island?

SMITH: Well, I know we walked down somewhere in New York, and then we took a train and came to Milwaukee.

MOORE: What were your expectations about America? ( the sound of a door slamming is heard on the tape )

SMITH: Good Lord, what was that? Oh!

MOORE: The door. It must be the door for history.

SMITH: Just close the door so it doesn't do it again.

MOORE: ( she laughs ) Okay. I was asking what your expectations were about America.

SMITH: Well, actually, as I say, we were so excited to see my father that I think that was all that we were building up to. We couldn't hardly wait to see him.

MOORE: And so you took a train to . . .

SMITH: Milwaukee.

MOORE: Milwaukee. And how was that trip?

SMITH: That was very fine.

MOORE: Was it? Was it fun, you mean, as a kid?

SMITH: Oh, we enjoyed it yes, yes, yes.

MOORE: And where were you going to? What address did you go to in Milwaukee?

SMITH: In Milwaukee I don't recall.

MOORE: What, all right. You got here by train. Who met you once you got there?

SMITH: Our father.

MOORE: All right. And why don't you describe to me going home to your new home for the first time.

SMITH: To the new home, our new home. Well, by that time I was sick. ( she laughs )

MOORE: What were you sick with?

SMITH: I don't know. But, anyway, now, we, it must have been a nice house because there was one room that they put me in. I had to go to bed right away. They put me in that room, and the doctor came, and he said, "This is too light. You'll have to pull the shades down, put the shades down." So they took me out of that room and put me in the room that my brother was supposed to have, which was a little dark room. That's what I was in for about two weeks. And do you know I never found out, because I never wanted to know. I was scared, and my mother and dad used to talk about it to their friends. They'd say, "Oh, yeah, we almost had to send Barbara back." And the minute they said that I was

out of the room and I was gone, I didn't want to hear anything about it. So I have often thought, "What was wrong?" I don't know.

MOORE: Describe the apartment or house that you went to.  
What was the house like?

SMITH: ( she pauses ) Oh, what was it like? It was right off of the street. The street was here,  
( she gestures ) and the house was right there. And the fascinating thing about it is, silly things you remember, the bathroom had the toilet stool, and then they had a flush bowl up on top, and we had to pull the chain, and the water came down. ( she laughs )

MOORE: How was it lit?

SMITH: How was it lit? Kerosene.

MOORE: How was it heated?

SMITH: I used to pull something like that, too. I don't know.

MOORE: What type of, coal?

SMITH: I don't know, but I imagine it was coal. I don't know.

MOORE: How many rooms were in that? Was it a house, your own house?

SMITH: It was an apartment. There was a barber shop next door. How was that? How was that? There was a barber shop, and then our door went in here, ( she gestures ) so I imagine we were next door to a barber shop.

MOORE: What about plumbing? You said there was a toilet. Was it a building that was a wooden or brick building?

SMITH: It was brick building.

MOORE: And was it in town?

SMITH: In town, yes.

MOORE: Did any other family members live nearby besides your family?

SMITH: No.

MOORE: Did you get along well with the neighbors?

SMITH: Well, we were discriminated against.

MOORE: Really? How?

SMITH: The kids didn't want to play with us. They called us names.

MOORE: Like what type of names?

SMITH: Do you want me to say it?

MOORE: Yeah, go for it.

SMITH: Okay. They, we'd come out to play with them, and we had our cute suits on. ( she laughs ) And the kids would say, "Here come the Pollacks, here come the Pollacks." And I'd say to them, "No, no, we're not the Pollacks." I'd say, "I'm Barbara, and this is Katherine." And we'd try to convince them of that, but no. They were, we were still the Pollacks. But we didn't know we were being insulted. We just thought that they were, they had us confused with someone, and we tried to explain to them.

MOORE: Do you remember learning English? How was it learning English at that age?

SMITH: That was one thing my father had arranged for us, which I had often thought was very thoughtful of him. He had a young woman come in, in our home to teach us a little, little fundamentals of the English language.

MOORE: Before you went over?

SMITH: No, no. Well, while we were in Milwaukee. We did not go to school right away, because he had this little English teacher come in. She was a very lovely little gal, and so she came in and she tried to teach us a few, whatever she could. And I remember she'd always say, "Now, look out of the window and do this or that, count." "Why would I look out the window to count for? There's no, I can't see anything out there that I would learn how to count." ( she laughs )

MOORE: So when did you go to school?

SMITH: ( she sighs ) Uh, well, let's see, I didn't go to school, we didn't go to school, I didn't go to school all that winter until, then we moved. My father got a different type of a job.

MOORE: What job did he have before that?

SMITH: Before this he was working in a factory, and so this, now he got a job working, this was kind of a, well, he spoke English pretty well, because he had learned English before he even came over here. So he worked with a company that wanted a man. This was sort of an

itinerant farmer, wanted a man who could speak English and talk to the farmers and talk to the people that were going to work there, so this company sent these workers to these different farmers. So my father was the in-between man. He could talk English to the man, the farmer, and he could talk German to the German people that came. So he was working for them. But that was just sort of a summer job, after the summer was over, then. So then we moved to Fondulac, Wisconsin, and that's where we . . .

MOORE: How do you spell Fondulac, again?

SMITH: F-O-N-D, D-U-L-A-C. So that's where we kind of settled down. And there's a picture of our home right on the wall here.

MOORE: You spoke German at home as a child.

SMITH: I beg your pardon.

MOORE: You spoke German at home as a child. Then later at home what was the language of your home?

SMITH: German all the time.

MOORE: Did your mother learn English?

SMITH: Yes, she did, enough so that she could get by, but we always spoke German.

MOORE: Any stories associated with learning English, that you have?

SMITH: Well, there were a lot of things. I can't think of any right now, but there were a lot of confusions, and we'd take one thing for something else.

MOORE: What about your religious life? You were pretty religious before you left.

SMITH: Yes.

MOORE: Did you continue this?

SMITH: Yes.

MOORE: You did.

SMITH: Yes. We went to a Catholic church, and we had Catholic school in Fondulac.

MOORE: What about school here, when you went to school? How was that?

SMITH: Oh, it was not pleasant for me.

MOORE: How was it not pleasant?

SMITH: Uh, well, let me see. ( she laughs ) I was nine years, almost ten, and I'm in first grade.

MOORE: Everybody else is seven years old.

SMITH: Yes. And so . . .

MOORE: Were the teachers, do you remember any teachers or playmates that helped you, or had problems with? Were there other foreign children?

SMITH: No.

MOORE: You were the only one.

SMITH: Uh-huh. We were the only one.

MOORE: How long did they keep calling you Pollack? How long was that?

SMITH: Well, after we left Milwaukee and we went to Fondulac, we didn't have, of course, when we went to, when we went to Fondulac, the school was a German school, it was a German school, so we went to the German school.

MOORE: And your classes were in English?

SMITH: I beg your pardon?

MOORE: Were your classes in English?

SMITH: Yes, yes. We were taught English and German. But, so it was, in that way, oh, I guess they still called us Pollack, but then World War One came around, and that was kind of bad.

MOORE: How?

SMITH: Well, ( she sighs ) some of the merchants wouldn't serve my mother. One of the barbershops where my father had been going all the while, he wouldn't cut his hair any more. He told him he wouldn't cut his hair.

MOORE: Did they say why?

SMITH: Because he was German, that's all. Because you're a hiney. ( she laughs )

MOORE: They called you that.

SMITH: Yeah.

MOORE: What about school?

SMITH: The school was all right.

MOORE: And did you have anybody else, how about the German school? That was a German school, right?

SMITH: Uh-huh.

MOORE: Did you have anybody else discriminate against you for (??)?

SMITH: No. I think after that, after the first, as I say we, I didn't even know that they were, you know, calling us names and stuff. Well, they don't know. But then, of course, when the war broke out, and it was difficult because, as I say, my father could no longer go to a barber shop, and there was a lot of places that couldn't, although they didn't pick on us kids, that I know of. Maybe they did, I don't know.

MOORE: Now, you talk about religion, when you were home in Austria, who was more religious, your mother or your father?

SMITH: I guess it was sort of the same.

MOORE: When you came here, was there a change?

SMITH: Yes. My father didn't go to church as often as my mother did. He used to take us to church on Sunday,

but he probably didn't, you know, it was not quite  
as . . .

MOORE: Important?

SMITH: Hmm.

MOORE: Did you ever move from that house in Fondulac?

SMITH: Move from it? No. We lived there, and I came to  
Chicago and got married, and the house is no longer  
there, but, uh . . .

MOORE: Did your parents ever want to move back to Austria?

SMITH: No.

MOORE: Did anyone return, the cousin that came with you, did  
they return to Austria to live?

SMITH: I don't think so. I think she's still in Milwaukee,  
or I don't know.

MOORE: Did your father and mother, did your family adjust to  
American life?

SMITH: Yes.

MOORE: And there were no family members who did not?

SMITH: No, no. That's the one thing we were very determined.  
We were going to be Americans right quick.

MOORE: Did any family tragedy occur during the years  
following you coming to America?

SMITH: Uh, no.

MOORE: Briefly describe the course of your life, your  
marriage, your children, your occupation, and  
anecdotes about meeting your spouse. Tell us a little  
bit about your life afterwards briefly and what you  
did.

SMITH: Well, as I say, God has been very good to me. I've  
had a very good life. I did not have the type of  
education that I might have had had I been born here,  
that my girls had. ( she laughs ) But, anyway, it  
was all right and, in spite of the fact that I never  
liked school because I was too old. And . . .

MOORE: Did you finish high school?

SMITH: No.

MOORE: No? When did you finish school?

SMITH: I went, instead of finishing high school I went, I

came to Chicago. That's the reason I came to Chicago.

I came to Chicago because I wanted to get into the beauty business. A friend of a friend had a beauty shop, and she said, "Well, if you could, if you could get a license." She wanted to put in hair dyeing, I think. And you had to have a special, you had to have special training for that, and she said, "If you can get that for yourself, then I'll give you a job." And my father did not think that girls should work. He was very much against that. He said, "You stay home and help your mother." Well, all my mother wanted was somebody to wash the dishes, so . . .

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

MOORE: You said your father, you had to talk your father into letting you go to do the hair styling job.

SMITH: Uh-huh.

MOORE: And you went to Chicago?

SMITH: Uh-huh. I came to Chicago.

MOORE: And you said you met your husband in Chicago.

SMITH: Uh-huh.

MOORE: And was he, was he born in Chicago?

SMITH: No, no. He was working in Chicago at the time. He was from New York, and he was working here at the time. And . . .

MOORE: What was he working as?

SMITH: What was he working as? Um, at that particular time he had come with, he had just gotten out of the army again, and he came with some friends, the father and son, and this father was what they called a, oh, I would call a tile, not tile, but marble, marble setter. And he, he worked in marble. So he came with him, and worked putting up marble in one of the big places downtown. I think it was a railroad station or some place. And that's where he worked at the time, but that's what brought him here, I should say. Then he went to work for the Edison Company, and that's where he worked all the rest of his life.

MOORE: And you said you have two daughters.

SMITH: Uh-huh.

MOORE: And when were they born?

SMITH: Ah, now, let's see. When was, my goodness. Nancy, I think, was born in 1934. ( she laughs ) Isn't that awful? I can't think. And Phyllis was born eight years before that. She, so, uh, I can't even remember what the date, the year was.

MOORE: And what professions did they become?

SMITH: Uh, what profession? Well, Phyllis was like myself. She was never only a housewife. I never did work for, in the beauty shop after all, because, as I was going to say, my husband was like my father. He didn't think a woman should work outside. He said, "I didn't get married to come home to an empty house." So that was the end of my career. And Phyllis was never married, uh, never worked, and Nancy, of course, went into teaching. Each one had five children. Phyllis' children are very lovable kids, all of them are. She's got two doctors, and her kids were raised in England. One of them went to school in Switzerland. So . . .

MOORE: When you look back over your life now, how do you think about the decision of your parents to come to

America? Was it a good decision?

SMITH: Wonderful, just wonderful.

MOORE: Did you ever go back to see your house?

SMITH: Uh, no. We did, let's say, Phyllis and her husband were in England for a while, and we went to visit them. And at the time we were going to go, going to go and see what it looked like, but we couldn't go across the border. They wouldn't give us a visa here, and we got to Europe, they, the border was closed, so we didn't. And Phyllis tried many times while she lived over in England and Germany, she tried many times to find it, but could never could find any. And our, my father's family was moved anyway. They, some time during the war, they took over that part of the country, and everybody had to leave. And his family were sent into Germany, so that's where they all died, in Germany.

MOORE: Were your parents satisfied with coming to the United States?

SMITH: Yes.

MOORE: So if you were to do it all over again you would do

the same thing?

SMITH: Definitely.

MOORE: I'd like to thank you on behalf of the Ellis Island Oral History Project for helping us and taking time with us. And this is Kate Moore in Chicago, Illinois on April 25, 1994, for the Ellis Island Oral History Project with Barbara Smith.

SMITH: Goodness, I talk.