NPS-160
ANNA KIKTA
BIRTH DATE: JULY 29, 1920
INTERVIEW DATE: MAY 11, 1988
RUNNING TIME: 41:29
INTERVIEWER: BRIAN FEENEY
RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME
INTERVIEW LOCATION: CLEVELAND, OHIO
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 5/1995
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: LYDIA HANHARDT, 6/1995

CZECHOSLOVAKIA, 1928
AGE 8

FEENEY: Ann, can you tell me when and where you were born?

KIKTA: I was born in Czechoslovakia, the eastern part, in Bardejov, near Bardejov. It's Hertnik is the little village, uh, July 29, 1920. And I lived there with my mother and father, with my grandparents. I have one brother, and I also had two baby sisters who died. I never had a sister. I have one brother that was born here in America. But the four of us ventured on the journey to America in 1928.

FEENEY: What was it like living in your native country?

KIKTA: Well, we were very poor. We lived on the farm. And the only time you wore shoes is when you went to

school or a Sunday to church. But I happened to have father who was a shoemaker, he made shoes. So we had shoes, but still not as much as people here where you can just, two, three pairs or whatever. Over there you had one pair of shoes and you saved them, even if your father was a shoemaker. And my father also was a carpenter. He used to make furniture for the rich. We lived near, there was a duke that lived in a palace in, not a palace, there was an estate. And my father used to take me there sometimes and I'd watch while he was making the furniture. My grandfather was a, he had a horse-drawn coach, and he was a coachman. He used to drive the rich people into Poland, into Hungary, into Germany, all over. And that was, his father before him, my great-grandfather had the same job, and he inherited that. But they made very little money even with, if you had a job like that you didn't make that much. You eked out a living from the farming. And my father had two sisters. He was the only boy. So being only one son, he kind of worked hard on the farms and took care of his parents. He was in the Second World War, fighting against Russia. And he was a prisoner of war for two years, and that's where he learned carpentry at that time, that

he was treated very well by the Russians. This was before the Communists. He learned to talk German in the German Army because Czechoslovakia, or Austria-Hungary, is what they fought, on the side of Austria-Hungary, on the side of Germany, against Russia. He was wounded in the war, and he spent part of the time in the palace with the queen mother, that was Franz Josef's mother. And she turned her rooms, part of the castle, into like a hospital. And I even have one picture there of my father where the queen mother made a big Christmas party for them with a big Christmas tree, and he used to tell us these stories. I mean, I have it in my mind now all that I've heard a thousand times. When we were kids, we were tired of listening to it. But then as we got older, we used to ask questions. And he did recover. He was sent back in the front. He was an officer. Because he was educated. He educated himself, and then when he went in the army he received more education. But when he was captured as a prisoner of war in Russia, then he had to go work, and they assigned him to go with a carpenter. And he would travel from country, from, uh, city to city with this carpenter. That's how he learned the carpentry work.

FEENEY: Can you tell us some of those stories that he told you?

KIKTA: Well, one story, when he was in the service he said that they were so, they had such raggedy shoes and uniforms, they were so hungry that the cook used to mix sawdust in with flour to stretch, to make bread. And he says as they were going through these villages, they were taking, this was when they were going towards Russia in the Austria-Hungary in the German Army. As they were going towards Russia, they just ran out of food. They didn't have any food, and they were hungry for a couple of days. And they went knocking on doors and asking these people for food. And they came to this one big apartment, and the lady opened the door, and she says, "All I have is some dark bread." Black bread, they used to call it. "One loaf." And they said, "We'll take that." So this other soldier that was with my dad, he took the bread and as they left the doorway there was a big, like a big dresser or chest against the wall. And this man says, "I don't like bread. I never ate the black bread." And he took and he threw this bread behind that dresser. He hid it. And they went to the next

house, and they got some food. But they were coming back, when they were pushed back, my father said they came through the same city or town. They used to call them towns. They were just little hamlets, like. They came to the same place. By that time all the natives had left, and they couldn't get any more food. And then this friend of my father's that was with him, he said, "Wait a minute." He says, "When we were passing by through here about a month ago," he says, "remember that loaf of bread I threw behind that dresser there?" He says, "Let's go see if it's there." And they went and they found it, and they wet that bread in water, and they ate that bread, they divided it up. So it was stories like that that he told. So then he was in the service, when he was a prisoner of war in Russia, they were in these barracks. And they weren't, I guess the guards didn't watch them as closely as they do some places, but anyhow my father, another soldier talked my father into escaping. He said, "Listen, we can get through here." And my father says, "And then what if they catch us? They'll shoot us!" He says, "No, it's dark." He said, "They're probably sleeping." So my father went with this other man, and they came to a

body of water. My father didn't know whether it was a lake, because it was pitch black. And my father said, "But I can't swim." And the other man said, "Neither can I. We'll learn," he said, "before we get to the other side." My father says, "I can't. I'm not going. I can't swim." So the other, his friend went into the water. My father sneaked back, all the way back to the barracks. They never heard from the other man again. I guess he eventually drowned. So it was . . .

FEENEY: Did you go to school in Slovakia?

KIKTA: I went one year. There you start school when you're seven years old, so I went one year. And then when I came here, then I continued.

FEENEY: Do you remember your early childhood in Slovakia?

KIKTA: Yes, I do. We lived with my grandmother and grandfather. When a man married, he brought his bride to his side, whether they were poor or rich or whatever. And so we lived with my father's parents. And they had farming, they had lots of land. They bought, it was very, they sold what they could. And we lived on potatoes, sauerkraut, what they put in

cracks for the winter. And some, maybe, we never ate meat, only on holidays. What they saved, or they killed the pig, or for a wedding. It was very, very poor. I mean, a big deal was a wedding. Or, just like when we were leaving for America, that was the first time I tasted cake. It was sponge cake. I can still taste it to this day. One of my aunts was in America. She came back. She got very sick here, and she thought it was something here. So she went back, and she learned a little bit to bake like the Americans did. And I remember she baked us this sponge cake, and that was the best thing. I thought it came from Heaven, it was so good.

FEENEY: Was your family religious?

KIKTA: Yes. They were very religious. Ah, my father, my grandfather was here in America, but my grandmother never would want, and now I'm talking about my father's side, the Palsa side. And my grandmother didn't, wouldn't come here. She had three children, and she just said that she was afraid to go. Most women were afraid to come on the ship, that's what it was. So my grandfather came back. But he urged my father to come to America, go to America. "Because,"

he said, "that's where you'll get a job. You'll always have something to eat." So my father, I was only six years old when my father traveled. My grandfather took him by coach to Bardejov, where he got the train to go to Prague, and there he had to fill out papers for, requests for a visa to go to America. He didn't have any money, but he wrote to a friend of his, and one of his friends, like a distant uncle, told him that he would, you had to sign, he would sign for him that he could come live with him if he came. You had to have a sponsor to come here to the United States. So this Mr. Minchak sent him this letter, I still have it in the files here, that he would accept him. My father went for two years, oh, anyhow, my father went and asked that he wants the whole family to go. I had a two-year-old brother, and I was six then. And they told him they don't send families. They said, "You go to America, and you make some money, and then you can come back and take your family or you can send for them. But we do not send families, nobody."

FEENEY: Who said that they would not take families?

KIKTA: At the, where he went to, the government office where

he went to get the visa, the arrangements to come to the United States. Everything had to go through Prague. That was the capital.

FEENEY: So this was a U.S. official who told him that?

KIKTA: No, I think it was a Czechoslovak official. I don't think it was a U.S. official. So my father said, "But I am not going without my family." He says, "I want my wife and my children with me." So they said, "Sorry." So my father, in a few months, he tried again. And he said, "I, every single day I was in church praying that they would let us go." He said, "For two years." Then finally he went to Prague again. Two years, well, he went every few months. He said he went like three or four times a year, any time he could scrape together a few crowns for the train fare. So finally they sent him a letter that they will accept, they will let us go, the whole family. They told him we were the first family to be sent over. Nobody before went with the whole family. Always just the man went.

FEENEY: How did you feel about leaving Slovakia?

KIKTA: Oh, when you're eight years old, it's an adventure. I

really was excited about it. I didn't feel bad. I saw my mother crying, my father, my aunts and uncles, grandparents, crying. But me, I was happy. I was going to go, a new adventure. I didn't start crying till we end, when we were on the train about an hour, I started to cry. And my mother says, "What's the matter? What are you crying about?" I said, "I'll never see my grandparents again." And she said, "Well, how come you didn't even cry? They thought you were glad to leave them." And I said, "No, I just was so excited." I remember that. About an hour away from home, then I started to cry for Grandma and Grandpa. But I just thought, they said, "We're going on a big water, big body of water." And I thought it was going to be like a river where, I have a son that lives on the banks of the Ohio River down in southern Indiana. And I thought we would see houses, and we were going to wave to the people on each side. That's the way my, in my, that's the way the ocean, the Atlantic Ocean, was. But here we get out on the ocean, and it's just water, water, water.

FEENEY: What port did you leave from?

KIKTA: We left from Cherbourg. We started out, and we were

going on a ship, but my mother got sick. She got strep throat. They call it quincy. I don't know whether it's the same thing. But, anyhow, she was in the hospital in Prague for about three, four weeks. So we missed the ship that we were supposed to go on. All our friends, there were some friends with us from other villages that we were going with, all these people had left, and we were left behind. So we stayed like in little barracks we had there in Prague. I remember it was one little room and there were four cots in there, two bunk beds, like. And my mother would, my father used to go visit my mother every single day, and he would lock us in there, and I would watch my four-year-old brother there inside. My father used to tell us not to open the door, to wait till he came back, and that's the way we spent Prague. And then when my mother got well, the doctors told her she can go, uh, they had to make arrangements again for another, for us to go on another ship. So we went by train through France. As I remember, that's where I tasted my first bananas. There was a man who was bringing his family from Can, to Canada. He came back to Europe, and he had a wife and a daughter. And there were peddlers out the window

selling bananas. And we didn't know what it was, and this man, he said, "That's very popular in America. Everybody just loves bananas." So my father, I remember, bought two of them, and he, they, we peeled them and taste them, and we all made faces, spit them out. And as the train started we threw the peel, I remember we threw the bananas out through the window. We didn't like them. (she laughs) Now we . . . (she clears her throat) The first part of December, it was.

FEENEY: Anna, can you tell me the name of the ship that you traveled on?

KIKTA: Yes. It was the Cunard Line, the Coronia. And I have a picture of it. Those postcards we bought on the ship there, I still have one.

FEENEY: Do you remember what the voyage was like?

KIKTA: Yes. Uh, we came on the, through the English Channel. We went on a smaller boat and brought us to the big ship. And it was close to evening, as I remember. We got on the ship. And we were in third class, which was the cheapest, down below. When we looked out the, those portholes it was, we were in the water. And we

had two bunk beds on each side of the room. We had one room. My mother and father slept down below and we children slept on top. And we had very good time on the ship, except the second day all the women, and even some of the children, were seasick. There were days when just my father and my brother and I were the only ones in the dining room, as I remember. The waiters used to just cater to us, because everybody else was sick, seasick except the three of us. Ah, they didn't give us as much as, I mean, when you're at home, you eat what you want. There you eat whatever they gave you. I remember they gave us very little bit of soup, and we grew up on soup. But we had the run of the ship. We used to go different place, walk around. There was not much else to do. They had a playroom, as I remember, a rocking horse in there, and all kind of toys that we children never saw before. Also my father would walk around the deck with us. When we came we, the smell of bread, we came where they were baking the bread. And we stood in the doorway and the baker would come and give each of us a roll that he had just baked. That was, we found out from the first day there, and every day we went to see the baker, so he would give us a fresh roll of bread

there. And we used to, that was my first time that I saw black people. There was a couple. They were in first class. We were in the cheapest. And they were a black couple, must have been coming from somewhere in Europe. And I remember that I never saw them, only on a picture. First time, and we just stared and stared. We couldn't understand why their skin was black like ours. We just thought that it was fiction, all that we used to see. Anyhow, we were on the ship just before Christmas. As we arrived, I guess it was December 22nd, Ellis Island. (she clears her throat)

FEENEY: How long did the voyage take?

KIKTA: I think it took about ten days. I really am not sure about that. I tried to figure it out from the invoice there, how long it took us. It seemed longer, but I think it was only eight, between eight and ten days.

FEENEY: How did you feel when you saw New York and the Statue of Liberty?

KIKTA: Oh, well, first of all, I'll tell you something. Everybody, like I said, everyone was sick, and the men kind of recovered. But the ladies, we didn't see the

ladies from their cabins all through the voyage. But, as I started to say, we had a Christmas party. They had a Christmas party for us children there. In the big ballroom, the night before, there was big dance in all these rich people there were dancing, and we kids stood in the doorway and watched them in these beautiful gowns, waltzing to the Strauss waltzes, as I remember. And the next day they had a Christmas party for us. They had jello. That's the first time I saw jello. I remember we were afraid to eat it. We tasted it, and we wouldn't eat it. They had candy and cookies and everything that we never saw before. And then all the rich people, they had a balcony at the top. All the rich people, we called them rich people, they were just better off than we were. They were on the balcony watching us, and they had games for us. And a man came dressed as St. Nicholas, and he gave us each a gift. We had a toy and a knitted cap for each child, and the rich people then start throwing pennies, nickels and dimes down to us, and we kids were scampering and gathering up the money. And they invited our parents to watch in the doorway, but they wouldn't let us, let them come in with us. So that was our party on the ship. Then about, when we were

out in the middle of the ocean, one morning one of the women came and knocked on the door and they asked us, my mother, "Why weren't you, why weren't you out? Where were you? The ship was sinking." And my mother said, "What do you mean the ship was sinking?" There was such a terrible storm that everyone was asked to go and put their life, a life preservers on, life jackets on, and go up to the top, to the deck. And here we slept through it all. The steward said he knocked on our door, but we, nobody ever heard him. But, of course, the ship wasn't sinking. There was just a terrible storm, and they wanted to be prepared, that they were getting the lifeboats ready already. But we didn't know anything about it. My mother says, "Well, thank God," she says, "I would have been scared to death, and this way we slept right through it." So then when they were ready to site ship, they told us all to get ready, that we were going to land, that we were approaching New York. And everybody came up on the top deck there. And this was strange because I remember all the ladies and the men, all these people, they knew about America, and they knew the Columbus discovered America, but they didn't, knew nothing about the Statue of Liberty. And I remember my mother

and other ladies holler, "There's Columbus! That's the statue of Columbus!" And I was in the fourth grade when I started learning history, reading history books. And I told my mother, I said, "Mom, that wasn't the Columbus statue in New York. That was the Statue of Liberty." Then I explained to her how the government of France, how the people of France presented the United States with that statue, the statue of freedom. But when many, many thousands of people, they talk about that it was the Statue of Liberty, but I'm sure that they didn't know that it was the Statue of Liberty any more than we did.

FEENEY: Do you remember landing in Ellis Island?

KIKTA: Yes, we landed, and, um, we landed Ellis Island, and we had to wait in long rows. There were, you had to stand in lines there. And as we came, my father, I remember he said, so they wouldn't mis-spell our name, he wrote the name out for them. Because he has heard of other people where they just told them the name and forever after your name was mis-spelled. Our name was so simple, but still, in English, they ask you right away, "How do you spell it?" And my father wrote it out so they would spell it P-A-L-S-A. Then they put

us in long lines there and they separated the men on one side, the women on the other. And I was with my mother, and they told us to go in these little cubby holes and to disrobe. And I remember I started to cry. I said, "I don't want to take my clothes off! I don't want to take my clothes off!" And my mother said, "It'll be all right. You're going to be with me. You'll be with me." She was assuring me. And that's what we did. We had to disrobe. We had to take all our clothes off. And a lady doctor came, and she examined my mother, and she examined me. And my father took my little brother on the other side where the men were, and they told us it was the same thing they did to them. You had to strip naked, and they examined you there before they would, before, at Ellis Island, this was. And so then they prepared us for, to go to New York. And we went on this ferry. As I remember, it was getting dark already. And we got on this ferry. It was December, so it must have been already dark, across to New York. And in New York, as we got off the ship, we were assigned a social worker. And this man took us in, either in a cab or in his car, that I don't remember what kind of car, automobile, it was, and he took us, and he said he was

going to put us on the train to go to Cleveland. And he said he wanted my father to give him the information where we were going. So he said he'll take us in a restaurant, and I remember we went in this restaurant. We went down the stairway. I remember the restaurant was in the basement. And he told my father that it would cost my father whatever. He said he didn't have any American money, so he gave him whatever he had, I guess. And after we ate supper, this man says we will go with him and he'll take us, drive us to the train station, and that's where we were going to take the train. But he asked my father for the telephone number and the name, wherever we were going to in Cleveland. So my father gave it to him, and the man went to the telephone and he's calling and calling, and the operator told him that the phone has been disconnected. My father said, "Now where will we go?" So here what happened is the man, Mr. Minchak, he lived in Ashtabula on a farm, that's a city not too far from here. He lived with his four children on a farm. But it took my father two years to come here. In fact, maybe it was three, four months before my father, since my father had written to him. This man had sold the farm and he

bought a building and a store in Cleveland here. And right then you couldn't trace him in a few minutes. So I remember that the social worker said, "Do you have anyone else?" And my mother said, "Well, I have a brother in Cleveland, but he's got twelve children. How are we going to go there?" And he said, "Do you have anybody else?" And my father had a whole book full of names he was going to visit, all countrymen and relatives. And he says, "Well, here's Charles Palsa." He said, "And he has this grocery store. He might be able to afford to take us in for a little while. And he has a telephone." So they called Charlie Palsa, and he said yes, he would accept us. Now, this was December 23, two days before Christmas. So he put us on the train for Cleveland.

FEENEY: Do you remember anything else about Ellis Island besides the medical exam?

KIKTA: Ellis Island, I remember there were a lot of cages, and there were like rows and rows where you had to go down each row where people, some of them they detained. If they found you had some kind of illness, some kind of disease, it seems in the other countries in Europe they didn't, I don't remember being examined

by doctors or anything, but when you got to New York they examined you there, and they'd send you back. I remember that one man and a woman were crying there, and my father said, "They're sending them back because they think he has TB." So it's just that Ellis Island you didn't spend that much time there if you were healthy and if you were ready to be, you just got processed, and that's it.

FEENEY: How long were you there?

KIKTA: We were there about a day. It took a whole day, a day-and-a-half, perhaps.

FEENEY: Do you remember if you were there overnight?

KIKTA: No, we were not there overnight. By nightfall, like I said, we got on this ferry, and it was dark, and we saw all these lights of these huge buildings in New York as we were approaching New York City there.

FEENEY: Did they ask you any questions when you were on Ellis Island?

KIKTA: My father was the one that answered everything. My father knew German, Russian, Polish, Slovak, of course. he didn't know English. But he was the

translator on the ship, whenever they needed someone, the captain would come and call him, the ship captain knew German, and my father would translate for these other people.

FEENEY: Do you remember any of the questions they asked?

KIKTA: No. I don't remember. It's just they ask you the same questions that you would ask. "Why did you leave? Why did you want to come here? Who are your relatives here?" And what kind of a living will you make?" And my father said, well, he didn't know, but he assumed that his cousins maybe would find him a job when they came here. Because at the time when we arrived in Cleveland, you had to be here five years. You could not go on welfare. We had no way, we were very poor and there was no way to, you know, now if anyone comes here they get welfare, they get help. But that time I remember my dad telling us that you had to be here five years before you were able to get help. So they wanted to make sure that you had relatives here who would take care of you.

FEENEY: Do you remember eating any meals on Ellis Island?

KIKTA: No, they, I don't remember that they gave us any food

there. That part I just don't remember. Just huge crowds of people, and we were processed through these narrow, uh, if you pardon the expression, when I see these in Chicago when they put these cattle in rows and rows as they're going to slaughter, that's the way I remember the Ellis Island. Just lines and lines of people.

FEENEY: What was your impression of the big registry room when you went in there with all those people?

KIKTA: Well, we, it, I never saw anything like it before. Even in Prague, everything was smaller, on a smaller scale. The banks were very small, that I went into one with my father. The stores were very small. Small shops. There was nothing big in Europe there that compared to New York. But Ellis Island, I don't remember that we got a meal. Of course, my mother had, she brought from Europe, cookies, that my uncles had given them. Things that would hold up for a week or two that we were eating on the way.

FEENEY: Did you have a lot of possessions with you?

KIKTA: No. We each, my mother and father had two, the size of a large suitcase, and they were out of straw.

These straw baskets, like the straw baskets. Those were like a suitcase. They opened up at the top, and they had hinges on where you could put a little padlock on it. And then one huge, big roll, and that was a featherbed pillows, bedding, that was. And that's all we had, the clothes on our back, and a few possessions, clean underwear and socks and stuff that were in those baskets. We had no gifts for the people here. We didn't have anything.

FEENEY: When you came to Cleveland, tell me again who you stayed with.

KIKTA: When we came to Cleveland, this Mr. Palsa, there was a train station on East 55th and Euclid. That's just below here where we are now. And he came, we arrived about seven in the morning, seven, eight o'clock in the morning. And he came with a Model T Ford. I remember he had plastic windows, looked on. And he drove us back to his house. When we got there, he already had five children of his own, but his wife accommodated us. There was empty room upstairs. They were just renting there, but they were building a new house in another neighborhood at the time. It had just been started, and they were renting in this

place, but there was a huge, one empty room upstairs. So when we arrived in the morning, they gathered up the relatives that we had. Everybody came to visit us, and the all went down Woodland Avenue to the used furniture stores. They bought two big beds, mattresses. They bought extra clothes for us. They brought us some dishes. Although we didn't need it, they each brought us something there. And that was Christmas Eve. That was December 24th.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

KIKTA: And, uh, Mrs. Palsa, that was our distant cousin, she, they had a Christmas tree there, and they had all these gifts for the five children. And what she did, she took some of those, all she needed was two. She took, I remember. I got embroidery set and my brother got a checker set, checkers. And she had that, it might have been for another child, and she wrote our names on it, and that was our first Christmas gifts that we got. And we ate there. My mother helped with the little ones, and she washed the clothes, and we helped with the dishes, as I remember. We ate downstairs, and we slept upstairs for one month.

FEENEY: One month?

KIKTA: One month. And by that time, friends of Mr. Palsa's there worked at American Steel and Wire, and they found a job for my dad there, but it wasn't every day. (static is heard on the tape) Nobody worked full-time, a full week there. He got two, three days a week. So then they found us living quarters, five little rooms down the street, and we lived there. And then the relatives, when we moved in there, they brought us dishes. Each one brought us some plates, some silverware and everything that we came.

FEENEY: Can you tell me about the new home that you settled into, what area it was in and were there other immigrants there?

KIKTA: Yes. This one, everyone, when an immigrant came here, they always settled among their own people. We were Slovaks, and we settled in a Slovak neighborhood, which was 20, East 23rd, near Woodland. And there were all our people around, our church, and we lived right across the street from the school and the parish house there. And the man that owned the house lived elsewhere, but he was also Slovak, and he rented these

place, this house, and we lived upstairs in five little rooms. But as my father did not have, did not make enough money, we were still very poor. My mother went out and she worked at Charity Hospital in the kitchen, but she got sick. She didn't have enough clothing. She had a very thin coat, as I remember. There was nothing, nothing that, ah, she wouldn't have, she never complained, but she was glad that she was working like at a charity hospital because she got enough, at least one meal to eat, and then she would bring us some stuff, the chef would give her some cookies or something for the kids, for the kids. And I remember she said it was a black man, and he was chef. And all those years she lived she always thought the man's name was Chef, until I told her, "A chef is, Mom, is a man that cooks." And she said, "The chef, the chef. (Slovak)" "No, Mom. That was chef is a man that cooks." And I remember it. He says, he was always so nice to me. He was always giving my mother something, because he knew she was, and she could hardly talk English, but he knew that she had a family and that she was poor.

FEENEY: What language did you speak in your home?

KIKTA: Slovak. We spoke in Slovak. I, we arrived, like, at Christmas, and by a week later we had to go to school. We didn't know any English. But while we were there for a week, the Palsa children, our, these cousins we were living with, they had one daughter that was older than I, then they had a boy my age, and the other three were younger than I. There were five children. This Rita and Charlie, they taught me the one, two, three, up till ten. I knew how to count to ten. ABC, I knew only in Slovak, but I was starting to learn in English. So when I arrived in school, the teacher called me, and she introduced me in front of the class. She said, "This girl just came from Europe." And she said, "We're all going to have to help her, because she does not know any English." I knew hello, that's all. So she said, "Now I will show you," she said, she was telling me in Bohemian, she was Bohemian, and I was Slovak, which is very close. She said, "I will show you, I will write these numbers on here, and you tell me, in Slovak." And so I went, "(Slovak)," up to ten. Then she said, "Now we will say it in English." She says, "One." I says, "One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, uh . . ." I couldn't remember ten. I said, "Ten."

And she says, "Oh, you know already how to count." So then our landlord, he had a grandson there that was in the same class as me. He told me years later, he says, "You know what? When my George, little George came home," he said, "there was a girl that came from Europe. She can't talk English. But boy is she smart!" (she laughs) So I said, "Well, that's all I knew." But I guess I did very well in the first grade, from January, February, March, April, May. Five months, because they put me in the third grade then. I skipped the second grade. I did very well. I've tried very hard, and my father couldn't help me, so I had to do it myself. And then my brother, my brother was still little. He was only four when we came. But the children were very good. The nun used to keep me after school, and she'd sit there and she'd go over and over again till I would learn the lessons that. And I learned the phonics way. Now they said that was a new way, and that's the way I learned, the way, on sight, the way it's pronounced, and I teach reading now to these people. I teach reading to these people that don't know how to read or read very well. And that's the way I teach them, just the way I learned it, and it seems it works better.

FEENEY: Was your family happy in America?

KIKTA: Yes. I think we were happy. We were happy here because my father says he worked very hard there and he didn't get anything, and over here he saw that his children would get educated and that we would have a better life, because all the other relatives that came here wrote to him that, like I said, no matter how poor you are here, you can always make a living.

FEENEY: Was it ever, (he pauses) was it ever difficult for your father to have a job, especially during the Great Depression?

KIKTA: This was, the Depression just started. My father just had one job, American Steel and Wire. My father says, "They must have liked me there." He said, "Because you know why?" He said, "They didn't have any work for me yesterday and today." He says, "They gave me the broom and I swept just so they could pay me." He said, because he was a wire drawer. He used to draw the wire through these little holes to make thin wire out of heavy wire that was, that's what they did at American Steel and Wire. But my father got at least a couple of days a week of work, but he never, he never,

never got rich. He borrowed the money from a friend, a thousand dollars, I didn't say that way back. He borrowed this money from a friend, his buddy, that lived in Pennsylvania, Wilkes Barre. And he also, uh, so he wanted to pay him back. So he used to send a buck or two every time he had some, to pay this man. We came on a thousand dollars, and I don't know how much my father had left when we arrived in Cleveland. That's how we arrived here. He didn't have any money back there.

FEENEY: Did your father ever consider going back to Slovakia?

KIKTA: No, he didn't. In fact, when I was already out of high school and I was working, I said to my father and mother, "Go back, visit your mother and father. You still have sisters and brothers living there." They didn't want to go back. My mother said, "What am I going to mortgage the house to go back?" I said, "Yes. Just go, go." My father says, "She's afraid of the ship, and she won't go on the airplane." So they never went back.

FEENEY: How did you feel being an immigrant in America?

KIKTA: Very, well, I'll tell you. They made fun of us. They

called us greenhorns. That was kind of tough. When I think about it, I always think of the happy times, but there were bad times. Everybody called us greenhorns. "They're the greenhorns. They just came last year." For years and years I wouldn't, I didn't want anything green. I loved green, but because it connected me with greenhorn. I remember, we were greenhorns. Everybody called us greenhorns. But my mother and father were very nice people. Everybody liked them. But it was rough, it was rough. And then these other kids used to taunt us. I remember that first summer. After I finished that five months, I didn't know English much yet. I was just learning. And there was a black girl going down the street, and this one boy says, "Go say, 'hi, nigger' to her." And I went up. I didn't know what that was. And I said, "Hi, nigger." And she came and she slapped my face. And I said, "Mickey, what did you, what did I tell her?" And they all laughed, of course. They thought it was a great big joke. But that's the way we were. That's, it was pretty rough.

FEENEY: Did you try and stay within your own immigrant community here?

KIKTA: We had to. We had no other choice. You don't have a car. We traveled to my uncle. My uncle lived on Brook Park in, oh, State Road, near Brook Park Road, and we would go on, it would be like an all-day affair. You would go, and it would take you two hours to get there and two hours back to visit my uncle. And then, as we got older, when I was already in high school we used to go to Brooks Heights or wherever my father and my mother would take us. For years I don't, we went, even to Euclid Beach. When we went to Euclid Beach, my mother used to bring a lunch. We never got, she never bought us anything, because we didn't have any money. All we had was for the streetcar fare. And I never went on the rides. I used to pretend I did. The next day I'd go to school, I said, "I was in Euclid Beach!" And they'd say, "Oh, which, were you on?" "Yeah, yeah." I used to lie about it. I was ashamed to tell them we never went on the rides. I was out of high school. I was working, before I went on a ride, in Euclid Beach. And then we would go on the streetcar, go down to East 9th and Pierre. And for three cents you'd get an ice cream cone. That's what we got in the summertime, in July and August. That was our entertainment.

FEENEY: Would you like to go back to Ellis Island some day?

KIKTA: Yes, I would. I want to go back. I'm waiting when they have it finished to go back there and take a couple of my children. I have six children.

FEENEY: How will you feel about going back to Ellis Island?

KIKTA: Oh, it'll be like the way I felt when I went back home. This was my first America, Ellis Island was my first America. When I went to New York on my honeymoon, I just stood there, and I just stood there, and I stood there mother and just looked and looked. And I says, "This is where I put (?) . . ." And just a cold, kind of a cold shiver runs through me when I think about it. Because my husband was born here, and he didn't realize that, what that meant to me. And, uh, I said, "I'd like to go there and look." Where I went through those gates, through those. He said, "They won't let us. It's closed up." So then we went into the Statue of Liberty and we went way up, and that was a thrill. That was a thrill.

FEENEY: Anna, thank you very, very much today.

KIKTA: You're welcome.