

NPS-4/MARGARET BUSH

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MARGARET BUSH
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CZECHOSLOVAKIA VIA GERMANY (BORN HUNGARY), 1940
AGE AT IMMIGRATION: 53
PASSAGE ON: *BRITANNIC*
PORT OF EMBARKATION: ENGLAND
U.S. RESIDENCE: NYC

NASH: Today is August 18, 1973 and I am in the home of Mrs. Margaret Bush. Mrs. Bush was born in Hungary. She grew up in Czechoslovakia. She studied music in Germany and later taught music in the Academy of Vienna and the Conservatory of Vienna. She stayed there until Hitler came to power. During this time, she was able to go to the United States where she taught music for two years at Ann Arbor at the University of Michigan. When Hitler came to power Mrs. Bush was imprisoned and later after seven weeks with the help of friends she was actually able to leave Vienna and come to London. In London she worked with the Quakers and she assisted refugees who arrived in London. Later in 1940, she came to New York City. At this time she had two children and she had no money. She had to survive by taking all kinds of jobs. She worked washing dishes

in the Waldorf Cafeteria, she worked with knitting machines, she worked packing glass in a glass factory, and sooner or later she went to the offices of the Council for Immigrants in the Professions. She began working in the office and later she worked her way up until she finally became the Director of Music and Arts in the Humanities. And that is a very, very, very brief review of some of the events of Mrs. Bush's life. And now I would like Mrs. Bush to really tell her story in more detail, especially relating to her experiences as an immigrant.

NASH: Mrs. Bush, when were you born and where?

BUSH: I was born in Neopressborg, [PH] Porjornt Saint George in Hungary, then Hungary, in 1887. I'm not afraid to say so. I left with my parents as a little child for a city in Czechoslovakia where I grew up. At the age of sixteen I went to France in order to practice a little more French. I knew French. From there to different conservatories in Germany where with wonderful, famous teachers I had the chance to study music, got my doctor degree and started to teach in Vienna. In the meantime of my teaching, I decided to go to America and see it. I was a rich woman then. I was in America about two years, studied in Ann Arbor, came back to Vienna, taught in Vienna.

NASH: Mrs. Bush, could you tell me when you first went to the

United States, on what ship did you sail?

BUSH: Britannic.

NASH: Could you tell me about the crossing?

BUSH: Lovely. Any day again. It was a beautiful ship. I loved the ship very much. I don't think it exists anymore, but when I went first as a guest in '26, it was "Olympic." This I remember very well. It was first class and all the luxury that I could have, but the second time I was a refugee and yet I was treated wonderfully. It was Britannic, yes. But when I arrived I looked in my purse and there was nothing in it.

NASH: This was in 1940?

BUSH: Yes.

NASH: Could you tell me a little bit about your experiences prior to your second trip. Something about when you were in prison, for example, and the efforts that were made to release you from prison.

BUSH: I was seven weeks in prison. My crime was that I am a born

Jew, but I have no other crime, I believe, at that time. It may be different now. I never asked why I am in prison. That was a help. In the meantime, my students, which were very attached to me, tried to save me, and really they could arrange an interview for me with the ruler of Vienna, a very, very famous Nazi Berger, and a very cruel interview, interview with Berger. I got my freedom. I told about this prison time and my interview, my final interview with Berger, on the Office of War Information here in New York. I had several lectures there and the title was, "I Was the Wife of a Nazi." And when I got out of Vienna, I first stayed short time in Czechoslovakia with my mother who had to go to a prison camp. Then I went to England where I did social work with the Quakers and in '40 had to leave England as this war started, to America. In America, as you heard before, I started without a penny and had to work myself up in order to have enough to live for my children. Didn't mind at all.

NASH: Mrs. Bush, I am interested in knowing something of your experience when you sailed the second time and did you have to go to Ellis Island. In what way did you experience the immigration procedures?

BUSH: Not at all. It was a sailing like everybody's sailing. Not as comfortable as the first time in the Olympic, in the luxury of the vessel, but when I arrived it was all

prepared by the Quakers. I went for the first night to a hotel, a very dirty hotel, I imagine. But then the next two or three days I had to try to have enough to eat for my children and myself. No, I did not have to go to anyplace.

I was absolutely myself. I have an affidavit by somebody who told me in a letter, registered letter, that he gives the affidavit, but cannot take any responsibility and I agreed to accept that.

NASH: (?) World War II.

BUSH: It was a very different America that I found again and a very different me. When I came first, I was an invited guest and professor at the university. But I came the second time I was a nobody and very poor and very worried about my children. But I found always places where to work and did not dislike it at all. People were nice to me whether I did this or that.

NASH: I would like to know about your first experiences working at the Council.

BUSH: I was at the Council from its very beginning. I was one of the people who assisted when it was born. The Council is a child of Ivan

Johnson and if I may say so, and Elza Soutinger. There was Mrs. Strouper, Mrs. Kenney, co-workers and very dear colleagues of mine. My director was Elza Soutinger, of whom I think every day, every hour. She gave me a lead from the low-class work that I did. I did not even know how to type, I had to learn to type, from the low-class work that I did to my real later work as a social worker in placement of musicians who really were related to me, as I am a musician. And since I was experienced in social work already in the First World War in Vienna and in England, with the Quakers, it was nothing new to me, but something I loved to do.

NASH: Are there any stories that you might tell us about some of the people that you worked with during that time or perhaps later?

BUSH: There are hundreds of stories I'd love to tell. I could not take your patience so long. And in my book, From Charwoman to Chairwoman, you will find stories, very sad ones, very gay ones and maybe I'll tell you one quickly. It is that of a Rumanian who came from South America with a young wife who had two and a half children, one was just to be born. He had no knowledge of English, he had no work permit, he had no passport, but a beautiful voice. And the children were hungry and they were very gay people. They didn't realize that they had to eat. It was possible for the Council to find an excuse for his being in America and I found out that he knew Orthodox songs that nobody knew and could place him in a church because

he knew these songs. On the basis of that, he started to have a work permit. Today he is in the Metropolitan Opera.

NASH: Mrs. Bush, what was your happiest time in life?

BUSH: One of my happiest times in life was my childhood, was wonderful. The studies with my great masters, wonderful. The teaching, even with non-advanced students. It was fun to teach non-advanced, non-gifted, the gifted students--the gifted students. Finally, the work for social purposes. I realized it was so necessary. My love for people. I was rich and I could do plenty for them. But I never enjoyed my own self. After prison, after Hitler, when I came out of the danger to America, was very poor and not young at all. I was 57 when I came as a refugee to America. That means old for America. Then I started to be happy. I am happy now.

NASH: Being fifty-seven in Europe is different from being fifty seven in America?

BUSH: Yes. Fifty-seven in Europe, a woman is not too beautiful anymore and doesn't flirt anymore, maybe in secrecy, but fifty-seven to start work. Why should one take a woman of fifty-seven if one can have a pretty, very taut girl of twenty-three? Wherever I came--I didn't look old

at that time--they had excuses. Nobody wanted to have me. Fifty-seven is old. There are so many very, very able young people, why should they take an old woman.

NASH: Well, finally someone took you though and you were able to make a great contribution.

BUSH: I love to do it and I feel young with my 86 years, and I am very happy and grateful that I am still permitted to work.

NASH: Could you tell us a little bit about what your duties are with the Council now?

BUSH: I am the mama. I am the counseling mama, so if there are difficult cases for advice, for help, for assistance, it is me who has the great privilege to be called. I go to the office two or three times a week according to necessity and I work at home, and I have all the past clients in mind and correspondence into hundreds and whenever they come to America for a vacation or by letters we are in touch with each other. You should see my correspondence. It is very, very heavy. It is all the clients of (?).

NASH: Mrs. Bush, I am interested in knowing something about your children. I would like to know a little bit about--

BUSH: My son is the Chief Editor of Better Homes and Gardens. He grew up in America from his sixteenth year on and studied here. Had different positions in different magazines and newspapers. Taught also at different universities, and is now working as a writer of several scientific books and, as I said before, Chief Editor of east of the Better Homes and Gardens. My daughter studied singing and she is on the staff of the State Opera, under the direction of Mr. Julius Rudel.

NASH: Mrs. Bush, in your experience working with immigrants, how has the immigrant experience changed? How has the immigrant himself changed or what he undergoes when he comes here?

BUSH: It is very different, of course, but you see all the immigrants have the feeling they are safe now, they are in America. They dreamt of the America that will give them an easy life. It was not easy. They had to fight to get a job and they thought it would be so easy to get a job in New York. They did not want to leave the city of New York because they came to New York and they thought this is where they want to stay. We had to make them believe that it is much better to go away, to go west, south, in smaller places, in smaller cities, in smaller towns, in order to

make a living. We, in other words, had to teach all these newcomers America, that was the main purpose, to learn what America is, what it is today. We had to teach them languages. Many of them did not know English at all. We were in a position to give by and by English teaching. Now we have very many English teachers for our refugees which was not in the very beginning. They had the trouble with the language and we had the trouble in persuading them to go somewhere else. I'll tell a very short story. A conductor, also one of my kids, from Rumania, part of Rumania which is Bukaren in Austria. He was married, he was a very fine musician. His wife was a very fine designer. He had an older mother. They had nothing to eat, no chance to perform. I came from a professional trip from California and I told to this man, "Mr. Kingald, it is so nice to starve in California. Why don't you go to California and start starving there instead of New York?" And we provided the money for them to go to San Francisco. It was not easy to persuade him to go to San Francisco. Today he is director of the Children's Opera in San Francisco, all year-round opera. His wife is designing. He is a composer of the operas. He has so far produced self-composed and written operas, twenty-eight of them. He has two houses, one in San Francisco and one out in the country. He has a car, etc., etc. That's how they fare when they go away from New York. The competition was too big here and those people whom we placed out of New York were faster placed. There was a Hungarian professor of art history who thought he could not leave Philadelphia. He didn't know English. How can you teach art

history if you don't know English? But I found a place where he could do it in California. He went to California, he learned the English, he became a very fine teacher. He is now in one of the big universities in California.

This is when we succeeded to make them go away from this city where so much competition is. And the competition grew. When we came in '40 or later on, it was also quite a competition, but not as bad as when this many hundreds and thousands came from Hungary. They were placed easily because they were so good, so ambitious, so efficient, intelligent. And all these storms, the Cubans, etc., more and more came and we were involved with the question, "How to place them?" They all insisted they wanted to be placed here. This couldn't be done. It never occurred to us or to me that they would like to go to a university down south. They should. I placed a senator from Czechoslovakia in Atlanta, Georgia much to his dislike. He is happy still now. Really, it just depends only in the beginning to make them go. I will not say that nobody should stay here, but it was really a question to learn how to live in America, to see how America really can be the haven that they expect it to be.

NASH: Perhaps you could make some other recommendations regarding immigration to the United States.

BUSH: I think that people should be prepared. When I came as a visitor to Austria, about six years ago, I realized what was going

to happen in Czechoslovakia and I was in Vienna when the refugees came from Czechoslovakia to Vienna. I realized that they were not prepared to go to America. Many were not prepared as far as language is concerned. They thought knowledge was going to be, practically be, if somebody wants a singer at the Opera in Praha, he thought he would be tomorrow a singer at the Metropolitan Opera. He did not think, they didn't wait for me. He thought, yes, they are waiting for me. They have no other tenor because I am the best. Oh, they have plenty of very good tenors in America without him. He may be a very good one. He must know it. He must be informed and the language should be taught to all people who intend to go to America from whatever country they come. They should know that English is the language.

I have heard it so often. They have said, "I'm coming to New York. Everybody is speaking Italian, everybody is speaking Russian or Polish or German." No, they should know that they have to learn even a little bit of it. Not coming so unprepared. It was very often a great hardship for us to place people who were otherwise quite authentic, but couldn't explain it. They couldn't speak it.

NASH: Do you find that more people after World War II could speak English than those who are arriving now?

BUSH: No, they are better and better now. People, well it penetrates, you know. We all here are writing letter and they said in these

letters, "Don't come without knowing English." Many of them said, "Oh, they will know it enough for me." And many realized they don't and they learn English. And there was a long time it was not allowed to learn English in Russia. And the Russian and English, they are very distant languages. However, I find now that one of my students, I have also a Russian piano student, learns English so fast. I don't think I ever could learn Russian as fast as that. But it depends the talent, it depends the ambition and the strong will that the Russians have. But one cannot generalize a nation, but really a little generalization is really true. If some people of Hungary came and told me they will not do it and they found out that that will help them, to do whatever I said, they did it. And it happened also with the people of Germany. It doesn't happen with the people of Austria. I am an Austrian myself, and today, the 18th of August, is the birthday of my formerly Kaiser. And I shouldn't say that. But the Austrians were so sure that with their "Charming ways," and I say that under quotation marks, with their "Charming ways," they will get New York. They will not get New York unless they know it. And they said, "Oh, I don't learn English, I will know it." These people did not learn it, but the Hungarians learned it, the Russians learned it, the Czechs learned it. Oh yes, they are very matter of fact and they are placeable. But it depends very much how you want to learn, how you want to get accustomed to the new country, how you want to accept the new country as your country.

NASH: What comparison would you make with people who come from Spanish-speaking countries in the degree to which they learn English?

BUSH: Quite difficult people to handle, the Spanish-speaking people. They are very polite, well-educated. They have a good, what we call kinderstube, a nursery, They are very well-educated and very polite and they have difficulties in learning and a certain hesitation, also. I try to speak with the Spanish people--I do not know Spanish, I cannot speak Spanish--I try to speak Italian with them. It is really very similar. They refused to speak Italian. They wanted to insist on Spanish. Now many of these Spanish people are in our English classes and they learn it, but it is not easy for them because they don't have the intense wish.

NASH: I am interested to hear your experience with other nationalities. Have you had any experience with people from Africa?

BUSH: We had two clients, quite well-known to me. I liked them very much. And I hear from them often. They were from Uganda. They were here--one of them had even a professorship and was fine, but when there was a possibility to go back to his country and help his country, he left everything here and went back to Uganda. They are in touch with here and they would return anytime they are needed here. But they are not refugees

from Uganda. They feel they are home there. The same with the people from India. We had people from India, from Pakistan, but the same they are here but they are not seeking citizenship. They are not becoming Americans. They are Indians being in America, giving what they have, taking what they get, full of appreciation. It is different with the nationalities who came as an only refuge. The Rumanians, the Polish people, all these people who most of the time took only their naked life, left everything behind.

NASH: Could you tell me a little bit about the groups that are coming at the moment as refugees or what are the countries with the largest number of refugees right now?

BUSH: Quite a few Russians are coming and I know a few of them, but I am sure that my colleague, Mrs. Ballen, and the other colleagues have more to do with them and could tell more about them than I do. I am in touch with the Russian musicians who come to see me as a music teacher, but in this case I am not a social worker and take only care of their music or, if they need medical care. For this I am the mama. I take them to my doctor. I have very nice doctors. When they see me they know I want something. I find them great, my American doctor friends.

NASH: The Council also brings many doctors from Europe. Is that not true?

BUSH: Yes, but the doctors, the medical department, is not mine. I know it only from next door and I never had to do with them. I had only to do with women who wanted children or did not want children or were sick and had an operation or not an operation. So when I come to my gynecologist with one of my women he says, "Does she want a child or does she want not a child? That is the only thing you are bringing me."

NASH: Mrs. Bush, I have enjoyed my visit with you very much and I found all that you spoke of today very interesting. Thank you very much.

BUSH: I thank you very much. I can only remember a little story.

When I was sitting at the park here with a friend of mine from Vienna, we were sitting in the park and looking at the lake, Central Park, and he said all of a sudden to me, "God bless Hitler." And I said, "What is the matter with you?" And he said, "Well, without Hitler I wouldn't be here."

NASH: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW