

THE HOBOKEN ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEWEE: GERTRUDE SAG
INTERVIEWER: ANN SCAVETTA
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Ms. Scavetta: Mrs. Sag, I'll ask you the first question. How long have you lived in Hoboken?

Mrs. Sag: Since 1951. 10th of December.

Ms. Scavetta: How long have you lived on Hudson Street?

Mrs. Sag: On Hudson here live in 1967.

Ms. Scavetta: That's great. How has Hoboken changed during the time you have lived here?

Mrs. Sag: It..how shall I say? It changed a lot. Too crowded. You know it is no more like years ago, more family, now it is too much stranger here. You know they're building too much what's not fits in Hoboken. Is my opinion.

Ms. Scavetta: Yes. You don't like the new buildings?

Mrs. Sag: I do not. You know. It is little bit too crowded. You know, a lot a lot of strangers. Cars...we sure not can take it anymore here. You know, really. But you want that I gets this really the truth, you know. Who used to be here is excellent, you know, I thought that was more family. Now, it's everything is so strange, everybody.

Ms. Scavetta: Is there a lot of people that you know that have moved? Or. . . .

Mrs. Sag: Well, let's put it that way, it's come a lot of new people, you know. In ... before used to more family, you know, but now a lot of single people and it is, it is different.

Ms. Scavetta: Well, why have you enjoyed living in Hoboken for so long? Have you enjoyed living...?

Mrs. Sag: Well, let's put it...I enjoyed it and my husband was working here for 30 years in one place.

Ms. Scavetta: Oh ...your husband worked in Hoboken?

Mrs. Sag: In Hoboken for 31 years.

Ms. Scavetta: Oh. Oh wow! What did he do?

Mrs. Sag: The first he had emergency jobs, you know, for carpenter furniture. The same in Hoboken but then he -- he did not, was so good in paying, you know, so he changed

the job to be Cornell and Underhill. And he was working thirty years and after thirty years, you know, they closed the place and my husband retired and I retire mid 62 years. I used to work....

Ms. Scavetta: You also worked in Hoboken?

Mrs. Sag: Yeah, I work in Hoboken. I work on sewing coats and suits that is the Stern clothing. And I done pretty job when I work on children clothing, Jackof Brothers in Hoboken.

Ms. Scavetta: Oh. And, was it a factory?

Mrs. Sag: It was factory. It was sewing. And I used to sew snowsuits, design emblems for the children, you know, their clothing. And then I got in '54, you know, a little girl was born, the second, and I stayed home and had furnished room[ing house on Garden Street].

Ms. Scavetta: Oh, so that's when you had rented the apartment, your apartment?

Mrs. Sag: Yes. Yes. And then in '82 I quit because I couldn't take it anymore, so different people you coming, you know, and you have everything according to what the government wanted you have, you know. And I say to my husband, "Let's retire and let's take care of our little one and the rest of the house."

In '82 my husband retire and we're still here 'til, the whole family, in between my younger one got married, oldest one got married. I have two daughters, and but you like to know more. That's what is, you know, in '82. Then I said to my husband, "Now it's time to quit," you know. I feel like I'm home here, you know.

Which in meantime, you know, my husband got a stroke, one, the second and then the third. Our oldest daughter died, she had the sickness, Parkinson's, and in '99, September the 8th, and then my husband he got too much, I had too much, you know. In 1994 he got a stroke, I told him I am going to be right here and take care of my husband. Til 2000.

In 2000 my husband closed his eyes and he gone up to Pedros and now I'm by myself here in my house, which belongs to me and I have lovely two tenants, you know, sometimes I have couples and I have senior person again and somebody very special on the top floor. She feels like she is my daughter. [Oh, thank you.] Her name is Annie Scavetta and I like her very much. [Thank you, thank you!]

Ms. Scavetta: I'll ask you one more question. What customs or traditions did you continue when you came to the United States? I know that you bake a lot and you cook a lot..

Mrs. Sag: Well I cook a lot and bake a lot and I sew a lot. I was, while I was at the couple of years in a, like I told you, I work on coats on Washington Street in a Stern Coats and Jackof Brothers, you know, childrens' clothing, you know, like snowsuits, you know, and the emblems I done.

And then another thing I tried too which I did not like too much, you know, men's shirts, the work, but I still continue for the family and some friends. I make sewing, you know. I design myself. I tried men's suits too, which I done for my husband, you know, and I still doing my own clothing what I own, I still sewing coats, dresses, anything. Ask me, I do it.

Ms. Scavetta: That's great. I know, you showed me some of your work. It's very beautiful, very beautiful work.

Mrs. Sag: Thank you. I try, which I now I have to recutting because I lost a lot of weight, you know, like you see it yourself, I have size 18, everything 18. I have to go all of them back to 12.

And I'm still that is my home, that's my happy, and I brought a lot of my family home to see America. He say Pierre no believe, I say yeah, we adopted this country. So I have my citizen paper, my husband, my oldest daughter and the younger one, she was born here in Jersey City, she was born you know. So that's it.

Ms. Scavetta: And what types of... tell me about the type of things that you bake.

Mrs. Sag: What I'm baking? Anything, anything what you want! For birthday cakes, chocolate chip, any kind like how you call this bow-tie little cookies. Anything you want, I will bake!

Ms. Scavetta: And what is your specialty?

Mrs. Sag: Well, let's put it that wayspecialty, you know that I have five grandsons, three from the oldest daughter, you know, two from my second daughter, and now Pierre got married, living in Rutherford. You know then I have now great grandchildren, five of them.

Ms. Scavetta: That's wonderful. Wow! And they all want some of your cooking?

Mrs. Sag: Oh, there is every month a cake! I have to make birthday cake! That is their favorite. They don't want a store-bought cake, any different taste to it than what I make, you know. So they insist on it, I try to change different tastes to cakes. They say, no, oh Grandma we wanted the same thing like Daddy's one and Mummy's one, everybody's one...so you have to do the same thing!

Ms. Scavetta: Yes! And what about your strudel? You gave me some strudel..?

Mrs. Sag: Oh, apple strudel. Well you...I did not give you to taste it, you know, the plum dumplings. I did not, was not fast enough to get, you know, the smaller Italian plums are better, so I tried the big ones, you know, but it is a little bit too much work for it.

And, ah, chocolate chip to go out my ears already, so many every week I can make it, two dozen, three dozen maybe even 200 at once! You know, when you have four families, you know, it's never enough. So special for Christmas anybody who comes in my house and they say, gee, your house smells like a bakery, which it is not a bakery, it is only for the family. Or then I have a few friends, you know, okay I give them a little, how you say it, container and they bring me the empty container back I give them next time again, otherwise no! Costs too much money! So..?

Ms. Scavetta: Okay, Mrs. Sag, do you want to say anything else?

Mrs. Sag: Well whatever you can come in your head would you like to know? But this is my country. Since my husband pass on, you know, I couldn't hang the flag out. It was too heavy for me. He bought such a big stick, you know. I had to, when somebody passed by I said, "Could you please help me to put the flag up?" That is my pride.

And now I have grandsons, our younger daughter's, you know, he is...competes in the high school, you know, he like to play trumpet, to play music, you know. So we are going to the different, you know, schools, which I go every time with my daughter you know to see it and this time I saw to the college was the . . . but you come up. It was so beautiful that around me people was looking, saying, "Hey lady, why you crying?," and I say, "I'm not crying, my heart cries." I said, "It was so beautiful." When they come up, they carry the flags around. I no can express what it does to me when they start to sing the, My country 'tis of thee. It is something nobody can take out of you, out of my heart and I hope I going one day, you know . . . you know my age already, but I'm still proud of my country.

And my family, whoever was here, my in-laws I brought them from Yugoslavia. My husband did not see them 28 years and I made them to come and my husband, I want to surprise him. That Mum and Dad going to come – ah no, they're not going to come, they're too old. You know, I say, "You leave it to me!" I kept a secret for them to come, you know, and I -- the last day I needed, you know, from my husband's boss to sign, you know, that he sold almost 30 years to be in the office and have a steady job. I need a signature so before I bring them from the airport out, suddenly my husband find out from the foreman. He say, "You never check up on your husband?" and he say, "Here, your wife is in the office," which I never gone there. But, I couldn't tell him and I say, "Well, you better be quiet. Don't say anything to my husband I'm here." But some big mouth, he spill the, you know, that my -- his wife was in the office by the boss. But it was not because my husband, just I want to surprise that his Mum and Dad were going to be here.

And he come, he go and he come home and he say, "What the heck, are you not trust me? You know that you keep it from me?" And I say "Oh, come on, the big mouth. He have to let you, the secret out?" And I say, "Tomorrow you going to find out the real truth. We'll go to the airport, Kennedy Airport" and who is, everybody come out but Mum and Dad. Did not come. So

then I go down and I say, "You stay with the younger one" and the other one was in school and I say, "I want that you stay here. I'll go down and see why they not come out."

The guard let me in. And I said, "It's my in-laws. And I don't have anything by me. Could I least speaking English?" And then I shout, I said to the guard, "You know I kept so long a secret that the papers going through and now they come, you know, Mum coming." And just who I go in, the officer from the airport, you know, international officer, she come out and she said, "Are you Gertrude Sag?"

I say, "Yes, I am!" I said, "What happened? Could you tell me?"

"Well," she say, "Gertrude, you take Mum and Dad home, and tomorrow morning, when they are rested up, you can go up to the a... to Newark, to the office, and you'll find the rest out."

And while I go the next day, I ask Dad, I say, "What happened?" He give me his document, passport, which was expired already! And Daddy, he said, "No!" I said, "Daddy, let me see it!" Sure enough, the officer was right. And when we was in Newark, you know, people in the line, you know, I guess for needing passport and the officer come out, woman officer, and she said, "Gertrude Sag, you here?"

And I said, "Yeah, and Mum and Dad too." I say, "Ya!" So we go in and he say, "How was the evening?" and I say, "Thank you, crying and laughing and happiness but what I have to do now?"

She say, "You give me.." I have to pay the stamps, you know, for the passport and Mum and Dad was here for a year. And then I ask, "Is it possible that with a passport, you can go to Canada?"

"Of course," he say, "you can. You have your citizen papers, you can go with Mum and Dad."

And so they was by me six months and by their other son in Toronto, Canada. So he brought them back to us and enjoyed a day and he had to go back because he had business there

and they stayed another month and til was time to go. I would like to keep the old people but they have another daughter and a grandson, you know, they not want to leave them alone.

So, this was the end and Mummy was back coming to Yu--, Belgrade, where she tried, she would like to sew, you know. I said, "But she need clothes?" I make couple of dresses for her and she is a white sewer. You know the white sewer is, it means shirts, you know, underwear, like this. Was not like today, you go buy these.

And while Daddy was here, I bought...we had a nice store in Hoboken and I say, "How about?" to the salesman to have a little secret. We're going to tell Daddy I want to buy this for my son-in-law. You know, I bought him a suit, underwear, anything that I did not sew for him. Why to sew when you can buy everything else? He was very happy.

But he was...my husband said, "Dad and Mum, I going to be happy where you going to be happy. You want to stay in Belgrade, you stay, but this is my country."

So, that what happened, really the real end of... but, umm, two years later, Mummy pass on, and Dad, he lived another seven years. But my husband, he say, "I saw them." He cried, you know, like everybody else. And this was our happiness.

And I miss my husband, one of the finest guy a woman want to have. Okay, you have few, how shall I say, disputes, you know, you never agree everything on it, but somebody else will...you try somehow to find the middle, to have a nice life.

Ms. Scavetta: Yes. Thank you, Mrs Sag.

Mrs. Sag: Well, you want to...that is the truth. And I love you very much that you think of me.

Ms. Scavetta: Oh, thank you. Thank you for letting me do the interview.

Mrs. Sag: Well, that is the truth. That is the happiness what we're carrying.

Bigger now.