

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Germany During The 1930's and 1940's Project

Personal Experience

O. H. 1010

BARBARA M. BERNDT

Interviewed

by

Steven R. Ard

on

April 27, 1981

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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INTERVIEWEE: BARBARA M. BERNDT

INTERVIEWER: Steven R. Ard

SUBJECT: Childhood in Nazi Germany, Naziism, and World War II

DATE: April 27, 1981

A: This is an interview with Barbara Berndt for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on the Germany During The 1930's And 1940's project, by Steven R. Ard, on April 27, 1981, at 4792 Ardmore Drive in Liberty, at 4:20 p.m.

Okay, would you like to start by telling me where you were born?

B: I was born in Berlin, Germany.

A: Okay, what date and year?

B: May 5, 1934.

A: Do you want to tell me a little bit about your parents? What did your father do?

B: My father was an engineer for the city of Berlin. He took care of the bridges, buildings, maintenance and things like that. I don't know. That is what he did.

A: Do you know how long he had worked for the city?

B: As far as I know, as long as I have known, he had worked for the city. After the war, when we had to leave Berlin, he had some kind of government job over there. Again, I don't really know what it was. It was work for the French. It was some French language work involved or something like that. I really don't know if it was

with the French government, but I know that he received a pension and so on. So, he must have worked for the government, again.

A: You say your father went to the University?

B: Yes. Well, I don't know. He went to two parts. One part, he went to some city above Berlin. I forgot the name of it. Then later on, he went to Berlin University. I guess that is what they called it at that time. I don't know.

A: Where was your father from?

B: My father was born in Hausen--I guess the German name of it. Sometimes it's, right now it's Poland again. The time when my father lived, they had to leave the radio off because sometimes it was Germany sometimes it was Poland. I don't know. It was one of those cities that changed hands every time somebody coughed or something like that.

A: What can you tell me about your mother?

B: My mother was born in Berlin, Germany, and I guess she lived most of her life there. My grandparents were in the grocery business, so that my grandfather was a butcher. My mother was very young when she was married. She just was out of school when she was married, and she spent all her life bringing her only daughter up. (Laughter)

A: Can you remember school? Can you tell me about the schools you went to in Berlin?

B: Well, I went to a grade school in a villages in Germany. They had grade school from six to ten years old. So, I came to school early because, I don't know, I started when I was five. When I was nine, you have to go through a test to go to high school. One year, I went to Berlin to grade school, and then, I went to the outskirts of Berlin because my mother claimed I had . . . What did I have? I had Chronic Bronchitis or something like that. It was suppose to be better for me on the outside of the city. So, we lived a half an hour, forty-five minutes drive away from Berlin. The house was burned out; it was bombed out, and that's when we moved back to Berlin, I guess.

A: You mean after the war, the house was . . .

B: Yes, I was born in 1934. I started in 1939, which was the beginning of the war, and then, I went to school in Berlin for a year. In 1940, I think it was. I think it was about 1942 or 1943, something like that, when it was burned out.

A: Can you tell me some of the types of classes you took? Do you remember some of your teachers and the things that . . . ?

B: Well, the classes in Berlin were I think like regular grade school classes. Here, the classes were more or less like a country school. You had different grades all put together. You had boys and girls together and so on. When I went to high school, we didn't have that. We were not quite so . . .

A: We were talking about your school and some of the classes you had there.

B: Well, I would say that it was more or less like a country school. So, it wasn't too bad. I guess there were a couple of things that were missing that I noticed when I started high school that other kids had in other schools. And, I do believe, because I went to school outside the country, that it was different. But, I still passed the test with my brains. (Laughter) Teachers, I really don't know. My father's father was a school principal so I was kind of brought up with people who were kind of strict and so on. So, it really didn't bother me too much to have teachers around. I never could get to know teachers anyhow. So . . . (Laughter)

A: What do you mean by strict?

B: Well, I don't know, my grandparents were kind of, well when we went to visit them, you said your hellos, and asked for their well beings and so on. Then, you sat down with a book, and you looked at pictures. And, you looked at drawings and so on. There was nothing . . . Well, I was the only child anyhow. There were not too many other kids around, so I couldn't go running around, chasing around. On the other hand, my grandfather was very artistic. Like around Easter time, we'd go into the woods, and they hid eggs. He would make up the traps from the rabbits and so on to make it look like the rabbit left the eggs and stuff like that. Oh, it left us good things around there. He painted the eggs always very beautiful. He would put the eggs out, and he painted them and so on. My grandfather had quite a bit of knowledge in the arts and so did my father. But, it was never the little bit of rowdiness, the running

around, chasing around, and so on. Usually, kids like to have fun when they go some place.

A: Did you have as much free time or play activity when the war started, or how did that change?

B: Well, after we left the country, the school I went to, I think later on, it was completely burned out or something like that. And, then after a while during the war, when the attacks got too close during the day. They did not want to leave us in the schools in Berlin. There was a plan that these children could go out into the country. Well, some of them--they had been completely out--went into a camp or something. But, my mother would never have allowed that. She thought that was impossible because I was not strong enough to do this stuff and so on. (Laughter) But, that's not here nor there. The other opportunity was then, that we took a train, and we went to the neighboring schools where they were out of town, something like that. And, that was sometimes lots of fun because after you had one of those air raids, you didn't go back to school. You just walked home or something like that because the train didn't come, and it was actually pretty loose because they really didn't have any possibility of keeping track of the people. So actually, during that time, we had a very good time. We had studying and so on, but eventually it probably did catch up anyhow. Our schools were run a little differently. We have everything done with notes. All subjects were mandatory. Except you could take an art course or a craft class or something like that. You had your choice between something like that. But otherwise, you had to take languages, mathematics, physics. You had to take physics. You had to take biology. Well, Germans who didn't have any more up to high school had--I don't know if we had anything else. But, I mean we had to take all the sciences, all the other courses, and everything else. You did not have any other choice, you know. The school usually lasted from morning till about 2:00 or 3:00 in the afternoon. I think we had, on Saturdays, usually half a day or something like that. We didn't get quite as long a vacation in the summer, maybe only six weeks or so.

A: How old were you at the time of the air raids?

B: Well, five, six? Six until eleven.

A: Can you describe the air raid to me?

B: When you are a kid, it is not really that . . . it is more like an adventure for a kid. What my mother did, she had one of those radios that caught up with everything ahead of time. And, I don't know if this was true, but you could get warning ahead of time. What she did when she got the warning ahead of time, she got me out of bed, or wherever I was, and took me down into the air raid shelters. These were called bunkers or something like that. And, she took me down there, and we stayed until it was over again. And then, it was a walk home. I guess at one time, the apartment building right next to us got hit by a fairly large bomb. It was torn down. Oh, it was like all kind of junk on our heads or something like that. I don't think that you, when you are kids, realize death or anything like that. I mean, I know my mother was more scared for me. I was more or less annoyed that I couldn't sleep at night and had to get up fifteen times a night. I didn't have any really close relatives getting hurt. There was one family, cousins of my uncles or something like that, where the whole family was destroyed. They lived in a small house like this. When I heard about it, I didn't know the people or anything like that. It was more or less like reading it in the newspaper or something like that.

A: Can you remember what the Bunker looked like? Can you describe the Bunker to me?

B: Just like a big room with about three foot walls. Some people had special priviledges, or if you were a smallchild like that, they had bunk beds. The ones who needed it got it. We just came in there, we were standing or sitting. Whatever was available, you know. There were wood benches over there. Usually, my mother had a habit of carrying all kinds of stuff with her. She usually had a suitcase with her, and that is what we sat on.

A: Was there a lot of people, like a hundred or a thousand? How many people were in the bunker?

B: Oh, I don't think . . . It was just like a small neighborhood bunker. There were some that had quite big ones. There were, like downtown Berlin, they had these three story ones or something like that. I was in there a couple of times when we went in there. When we got caught downtown. You know, you could go upstairs and everything. I think that they were two or three stories high. There must have been quite a few people who could

have went in there. I don't think that they could have had more than a hundred, two hundred people in there. It was a small neighborhood because there was only one floor level.

A: Okay, by high, you mean deep in the ground don't you?

B: No, no. They were not in the ground; they were above the ground. They were built above the ground. They were built out of cement. At that time, the bombs that fell did not destroy. I mean, they were not quite as bad as the ones right now, you know.

A: Were you ever in any part or near the fires that took place in results of the bombings?

B: Yes. There was the one street. The one block was burned out on the one side when we came home. The street was completely in flames.

A: How did they fight the fires?

B: As far as I know, there was nobody there who fought fires.

A: They just let them burn until they burn down?

B: Well, I do believe in this case that Napalm, or whatever it is, I don't think that you can use normal fire equipment. You can't do anything for it. I mean it's gone. If you have the whole side of the house, your whole apartment building burning, then I don't think that you can do anything for it. I know we had sometimes a couple of those things when they only dropped one or two [fire bombs]. What they did was that they caught them. You can throw sand on them, you know. We had a flat roof on our apartment building. I guess there were a couple of times where one or two come on there, and we had like a line, you know. All the houses had a certain amount of sand and stuff like that around there. I mean like water, you can't do nothing at all. What can you do if you can't get a bag of sand or something like that? You can't do anything without it. You just have to let it burn.

A: Let's go back a little bit before the war. Do you remember some of the political elections that were taking place? Do you remember the election time? Do you remember like . . . ?

B: No, this is what I already said. Because before the war

I was too young. You really don't remember anything about . . . I don't really remember anything. I was only five years old. (Laughter)

A: As the war got going, and more and more countries came in, was there any discussion of that in your family or with your friends? How did you feel, for instance like when the United States came in?

B: I don't think I really realized that the United States was in the war because we had the attacks from England. The United States really didn't make that much of a difference to us. Because when you get attacked, you know, you could care less where the airplanes come from. So, it really didn't make a difference. I think the difference later on was in 1945 when Berlin was taken by the Russians. That put the Americans back in to Berlin. So, that was probably the first time that I realized that there were other troops around. Before, it really didn't make any difference.

A: Did you follow the course of the war? Did you know what was happening, like in Russia or Africa?

B: Well, I think I heard about most of it after the war was over. As a kid, I was not really interested in the war. I got a little excited, but not that interested. I do believe that my father mentioned Field Marshal Rommel a couple of times. My mother tried to keep me out of it [the war]. She kept me very sheltered.

A: Were you ever in any of the youth movements?

B: No. I never was involved. This was already towards the end of the war. My mother would not let me get involved. She always kept watch over me. I never was involved in things. Actually, personally at that time, I would have probably like to be involved with something like that because I always lacked that kind of friends. I always wanted brothers, sisters, and things like that. Personally, as a kid, I would probably have gone out for something like that just to have the company, you know. Just to get away from taking walks with my parents and stuff like that. (Laughter) So, I probably would have, as a kid, have like to go out and been with other kids and so on because I would have like whatever they were doing. I never could march in a straight line or anything like that. (Laughter) I don't know if I would say it, but I probably would never find out if I said it anyway!

- A: You mentioned you would like to go out taking walks. Did you . . . you mentioned your grandfather for instance, hiding your eggs in the forest. Did you ever go on those walks throughout the forest?
- B: Well yes. My grandparents lived closer to us when I lived out in the country. And, they were retired, but they were kind of nature loving people. They always lived kind of in the country. They always had a house and a garden and a balcony, stuff like that. That was always procedure, that he went for walks, went to a restaurant in the afternoon, had some coffee, and stuff like that. It was very boring. (Laughter) The only thing that I remember was one restaurant, and it was like the garden. In the summer-time, you could see outside and have your coffee or whatever. And, in the middle of the garden, they had built a train track going through the mountains. It had little pines and little bridges. Almost like a whole mountain that was going different routes and different trains were going this way and that way. And, which I said was the only thing, I do believe, that I remember.
- A: You mentioned a type of procedure in terms of your walks? What did you do on your walks? Did they point out trees and different types of trees?
- B: Oh yes. As a matter of fact, when I was a kid, I probably could draw birds. I did know all the birds; I've forgotten. Flowers, I was very familiar with them. And trees--I don't know whether I was that interested in trees--But, when I was a little kid, I did know quite a bit about nature.
- A: Now, that was mostly with you grandparents, what you did?
- B: Yes.
- A: Okay.
- B: Well, grandparents and my parents were there too. It was usually because most of the visiting was done with parents together. They didn't let me loose too easy. I was not allowed to go any place by myself. (Laughter)
- A: Alright, let's go to after the war. After, you know, when it is all over. What was life like in Berlin then as far as . . . ?

B: Well, I don't really know. As for a date, of being all over, you really couldn't say. I was there during the Russian occupation. I think for about a week during the whole commotion and so on, we hid. And, that was kind of a loss of time. After that, it was between hiding and between--I mean, I wasn't even allowed outside or anything like that. Most of the time, they had like, during the Russian occupation, where there were people just coming and going. You really didn't have any privacy or anything like that. Somebody would knock on the door, and they were just going through everything and so on. My mother usually covered me completely with a blanket, and I was suppose to lay completely still or something like that. And, it was always the same. Well, I was about eleven or twelve years old, and I was already well developed then. And, I guess they really didn't care what they did to the kids and stuff like that. I was very lucky that nothing happened to me. I guess my mother's messages were quite useful there. One time, they had us--It was during the occupation-- They took us out by machine gun, my mother and I, and put us in one room. And, my mother screamed and talked her head off, I do believe, but I don't remember anymore. But, she said she convinced the guys that she had veneral disease or something like that and so they, finally, pushed us out of the room and let us go. That was during the occupation. Usually, my mother said that I was sick. "The little kid's sick," and stuff like that, you know. Somebody got mad, and if there was a book laying around or something like that, they would hit you in the head with it. Maybe it was better to be hit in the head than to be put in a room like that.

After this incident where they got us up at the room there, we got away from that. We hid for three days under the stairs in the apartment building. When you have regular stairs going down, you usually have three or four steps going to the first floor. And under there, was the hollow room. I guess it was used for storage for the cleaning person or something like that. They had a dirt floor, and we hid under there for about three days with three or four other people, some young girls and so on. The guy that took care of the building, he always guided people somewhere else, you know, when soldiers came or something. When they went to the door, he guided them elsewhere and stuff like that. Then, I guess finally, they got suspicious and I wanted to see what was in there. So, we got out of there, my mother, myself, and my uncle. He was there. He had typhoid fever during that time. The occupation for that was not

too good either. He had typhoid fever. You get kind of delirious and stuff like that. And, I guess it was my grandmother who was there when we left the building and, we walked out of Berlin. You know, you saw everything, like dead horses and dead soldiers. We walked over bridges that were cracked down, hanging in the water, and so on. I really don't know how we made it. But, we made it all right! And my uncle, he had like a summer house. Well, it wasn't outside Berlin. It was still in the city limits, but it was farther out, like Liberty Township is here to Youngstown, you know. And, he went to his house, and he said that maybe it would be better if we wouldn't be coming with him because he had the typhoid fever. So, my grandmother went with us, and we were kind of stuck on the street. And, for some reason, we were very lucky because there was an older couple. They came and asked us if we were just stranded and said they had an attic. You know, like you have the eaves of the attic, and you have the room built out, and then you have the sides there. Well, even though we never knew these people, they hid us in the eaves there. When anybody came, there were no young people around. And, so they hid us for about three or four days. And then, we started making the trip back again, seeing what our old house was like. We had a first floor apartment. They threw us out of the first floor apartment because some Jewish people who were living in the same building for many years . . . They wanted to have that apartment. They let us have the third floor apartment then. Oh, well. It didn't make any difference.

A: Was food pretty hard to get then?

B: Well, it was, yes. My grandmother, she used to go out to the farms. My mother had quite a bit of jewelry, like those watches and crosses and stuff like that. And, she had very good china and stuff like that. She also had a sewing machine and things like that. Even when the Americans were there, my mother's brother, he built these doll houses. They had elevators. We would sell that for food because my father, at that time, was taken prisoner by the Russians. When he came back, my mother didn't recognize him. He was, only for about two or three months, in prison. And, I guess after that they let him go. He wasn't too far out of Berlin when they took him prisoner, but his legs were almost swollen like giant elephant legs. He had water, I guess, up to his waste, and his head looked like a skeleton. Like I said, my mother didn't recognize him when he came, and the doctor's didn't give him too much of a chance to

come through that. This is why my grandmother went out and got, like, potatoes and stuff like that. Well, my father, he wasn't used to any good food. He used to eat the peelings of the potatoes; which, we really don't do. I mean, over here, you eat them because you have baked potatoes, but over there you don't do it. I mean, he got used to even eating that, but, he finally got out of it and lived for another--Well, when did he die--five or six years ago? So, he lived through that. Most of the time, it was like you didn't get regular food like you buy it in the stores. It was potatoes, and you got corn, you know. Not the corn, but the meat was processed, and you could cook it in your soup or something like that. That's what mostly we had. Then the other stuff we got, especially when the Russians were there, they always had the same thing. They had saurkraut. They had 15 million barrels of saurkraut that I didn't eat anyhow because I didn't like it. One thing, mashed potatoes, they had four months they gave you nothing but potatoes. But, I guess that didn't last too long because then the American troops came through.

A: How did you find the American occupation?

B: I did not really complain about it. I was going to school. I joined over there, and they had clubs where you could use . . . They had houses that were run by the Americans. You know, where young people could get together. We had piano and dance. We had dances there and stuff like that. That is where we went and where we usually congregated. Well I, at that time, wasn't really in the market for it because I wasn't really that much developed. But, I do believe that some of my girl friends used to wonder. I probably could have gotten a boyfriend. I guess the girls took advantage of that.

A: When the Americans came in, did you first hide from them too? Did you fear them?

B: Well, I wasn't that lucky to see that part. I lived on the border. It was about ten minutes from where the Americans had to go. All that we saw was a couple of times when some stray Americans didn't know the border. I knew that. When I was over there on the American side, I usually hid from the Russians. There were street cars in Berlin, and when the Russians came on the street car on the one side, I went off on the other side. Never mind where I was. I mean, that was for a very long time. I mean, there was no way that I would . . . (Laughter) The Americans did not bother me.

A: When the Russians captured your father, did they put him to work? What did they do?

B: I don't have any idea what they did. At that time, when he came back, we were kind of worried. But, I mean, he might have told my mother, but I don't know. I don't think there was too much work because he was captured pretty close to the end of the war, and they always took him on big long walks out of Berlin and out toward the East. And, I guess they didn't feed him or anything like that. I know they had these long lines of the troops captured who had gone through Berlin, and sometimes there were people, like you know, there were women that had those long coats. And, some of the soldiers, when they were smaller, they would stand out of the lines and hide. And, that is the way they could get away, out of the lines. But, I guess, my father never had an opportunity to get out of it. But, there were long, long lines that were just going. And, I guess they made them march weeks at a time or something like that. I don't know where to. And, I guess they had too many, and I guess if they got too sick then they said, "You can go home." So, they started to walk back again, which was probably worse because the people, you know, there was no way that they would get anything to eat because no one really had anything. But, he made it back again. I really don't know how far he went.

A: As a child, growing up in school, did they ever tell you or did you ever hear stories about Adolf Hitler? What did they tell you about him?

B: Not really, no. Because . . . I know what I know, now. I mean, I didn't know that he was a leader of the country and stuff like that. But, there was really nothing. Well, you see my schooling after the war started, and that was already different. Before the war--I already told you this--was mostly grade school, and I just had a couple of years in high school at the end of the war. And, I really cannot remember any specific way of history I had then because I don't think anybody would have touched it with a hot poker because everybody was living more right in the middle of it. Then after that, nobody really wanted to touch it either when I was in school because really nobody wanted to say anything about it. There was, you know, everybody had their own opinion about it. I don't think that we had any history classes or anything like that. I remember everything else. I remember geography, and so on. But, I really don't remember any history classes. We had to learn

certain dates and things like that. I still remember certain things about all the other things you know. So, I probably would remember all the history too. I mean, I remember we went into the history. Like the German History and the kings and all this, you know. And, I remember all those things. We, even went to see Frederick the Great and stuff like that. But, the time when we were living there, I don't . . .

A: As a youngster, you said your mother did have a radio that she listened to. But, even before that, did you ever hear any of the speeches that Hitler or maybe Goebbels gave? Did they ever listen to those on the radio?

B: Some might have listened to it. I mean I was, from that time, I really don't remember them. I more or less learn from what they give here, you know, the screaming and the hollering and so on. So, I don't know. I think my father was more or less a passive person. He really did not like to go to war. My father was quite a bit older than my mother. My father was about thirteen years older than my mother. At that age, he had an engineering job, so he really wasn't that interested in all these things. So, I really don't . . . personally, I really don't remember any of these things. I know that we took, a couple of times, these ride in Berlin. You had these carriages with horses, and if we went by the buildings, they had guards in the front. You know how kids are. They like to tease the guards. (Laughter)

And, this is the way we were, especially when you are kids, and you get a hold of the horse and carriage. But, nobody every really bothered us or anything. Most of our life was interrupted because . . . I started dancing lessons. I couldn't take them anymore because there was no transportation because there were too many airraids. So, this was where I mostly got interrupted with things.

A: When you said you used to take rides and go by the guards, what did you used to do to tease them?

B: Oh, tell them something, or, you know, something like that. Make faces, stuff like that. I mean, as far as I can remember, most of them, they looked like young kids. I don't even know if they would have even noticed us.

A: Do you remember, as an engineer, your father talking

about Albert Speer who was the Engineer for Hitler? He built much of the projects that Hitler wanted. Did he ever talk about him?

B: No, I know that he worked for a while. He was involved with these airraid shelters, with the construction of them. But, that was more or less in the city level.

A: Why don't you tell me how you eventually got here to the United States?

B: Well, as I said, my father called my mother. She got some things, and we started walking out of Berlin. The borders at that time were already . . . You had to have passes to get over to the American side because there were already differences there. We started walking for some reason. It was night time, and we got over there without the hassle or anything like that because we had a kind of case or at least a larger suitcase. If you went over there, you probably would have had to explain that. But, we went over there, and as I say, we lived there for a while. The people who were living around there said that there were cars coming that had Russian liscences plates and were going by the house looking around. Well, the people felt that they did not want the Russians to come around there, and they did not want us there either because they didn't know where we came from. My parents went over to the authorities in Berlin, and they said, "Well, it would be better for us to leave Berlin." At first, they were going to take me out, which they did. They put me on a plane and sent me over to West Berlin or to West Germany. I was supposed to be surrounded by my parents. They goofed up. They were not there, and I was by myself. I had to stay with the Salvation Army and all this blah blah blah. And then finally, after a couple of days, they sent my parents out. They came, and we finally got together. We only had suitcases and so on. They had camps over there for these people. My mother took one look at these camps . . . When we came into these camps, they kind of tried to spray you with some kind of spray or something. She [my mother] took one look at these people, and she said, "You are not going to do that to my daughter!" And, she turned around. We had some relatives in the North, of the Rhine somewhere, so we took off. She left my father there. She didn't mind if my father got the flea spray! She said, "Well, you stay here and get a job." And, we left.

We went up to some area around Cologne. We had some

relatives from my father there, and we stayed a while. My mother thought that that wasn't the right environment for me either because my one Aunt was a little bit kooky in the head. At that time, money got kind of short, too, and she hadn't heard too much from my father. So, we hitchhiked back down the Rhine, and we got lucky. We got a ride down from a truck driver all the way down. We came back, and they had loosened up a little bit at these camps. We got into one of them, but it was still, you slept six families in one room and stuff like that. Well, you didn't have too much work to put in, you know, like a soldier would have in a metal box there and so on. Well, then my mother got on her horse, and she got busy and finally got an apartment.

But now, I forgot about . . . During that time, when we were traveling back and forth from one end of the Rhine to another, I liked the travelling. I got kind of tired of "Mama Bear" shoving me up and down. When I went to the unemployment office, they have these things that you could get a job in Canada. So, I lied about my age, and I did speak English which they liked. So, I signed up for work in Canada. Naturally, my mother signed up too. We both signed up so . . . because she couldn't let me sign up by myself. Then, we came back. She got her apartment and stuff like that. And, I had forgotten about this, I thought I would never hear from them again. Then, I suddenly was called in from the employment bureau, and they asked me if I still would be interested in going to Canada? I said, "Sure." Naturally, my mother was right on my feet, and she said, "Well naturally, I am going to." Then, it came out that she was married, and they didn't want her. And so, she didn't want me to go, but I said, "I have already everything planned. I got my passport." The way you got a job there was you worked for a family for a year. They paid you for your work, and part of the payment you got for your work, they put on for your passage. I did not have any money at that time to go over on a passage. Then, we were free to move in Canada the way we wanted to, or you could go back or whatever you wanted to, if you had enough money. And so, I thought, "You know, everybody always told me about coming to the United States. I had talked to a couple of married people there and stuff. I am going to show every-everybody! I am going to come one of these days. I am going to come visiting from Canada," you know. So, I went up to Canada. I had fun in the boat. I had more fun the last few days in the harbor. We couldn't get out because of bad weather. The weather was really bad when we were

there. It was winter time. We came up through Halifax. It was pretty cold out there. Then, we took the train down through Toronto. We played a card game "Irish Wisk." We were not suppose to, but we snuck into the compartments and had a party. We snuck through and we played all night, cards and stuff like that. Well, they offered to let me stay in Montreal; but, everybody thought it was nice in Montreal because Montreal was more or less an open city.

I had my eye set. I wanted to go to the United States one of these days. But, I said, "No," and I went to Toronto. I worked for Dr. Cook for four or five months. And then, my mother finally managed to get a divorce so that she could come to Canada because I couldn't handle myself. I sent her the money. I had enough money then. I sent her the money to come over. She bought me a fur coat and all this and that. At that time, I had a falling out with Dr. Cook whom I was working for. I do not know how it happened. Dr. cook was a young doctor. She was a doctor, he was an architect. She was very busy. I took care of the baby. I helped her out when the kids got to throwing up. I was a good receptionist for her. One day, I went . . . I wrote this down. I went to art school for a year, and I talked to her husband. He said, "You know, I'm selling these jobs. I'm an architect of houses, and there are some people that would like to meet you. Would you like to go with me?" I said, "Oh, sure!" I thought it was very interesting. I got some evenings off so I went with him. Then, he came and said to me, "Did you ever to go to a drive-in movie?" I said, "No. What is a drive-in movie?" I didn't have any idea what a drive-in movie was. "Oh, come on. I'll show you." Okay, I went with him to a drive-in movie. I sat smack against the one door, and he sat against the other door. His wife did find out that he went with me to a drive-in movie, and she blew his strategy. She turned completely around. She try to keep me like a prisoner there. I wasn't allowed out of the house. She tried to make me do jobs that were ridiculous, like cleaning off muddy shoes and polish silver. The woman completely flipped her lid!

There was another hired help there, and I asked the lady whether she would cover for me with the child. I went down to the immigration office. I went down there. I asked the people, "I hate to tell you, but what am I supposed to do here for a year? I'll never make it a year." Circumstances have gotten so that I don't want to stay there anymore." I know that maybe the woman

thought that I had something going with her husband, or something like that. I hoped they could get me another job. They had tried ways. They said, "Well, I could start work as a nurse's aid at the mental hospital that's there." So, I started working there, and that's when my mother came over and blew her stack because she found me working in a mental hospital. She took me out, and we rented an apartment in Toronto. I worked as the medical records clerk in the Toronto General Hospital. And, she worked for the Monsignor Hospital there as a housekeeper. That's the way I came to Toronto--Then from Toronto to the United States.

Well, I met somebody in Berlin, just one day, and he wrote me a couple of letters and stuff like that. When I went to Toronto, I did what I said. I called him, and I said, "Hey, I made it to Toronto." What he said, at that time, to me was when I met him in Berlin, he said to me, "The only time you ever will be getting over to the United States would be with an American soldier." That kind of bugged me, so, because I thought it really was not necessary. So, when I called him, I said, "See, I made it without you." He eventually came up to Toronto several times, and we finally got married. He was a poor kid from Poland. He died after we were married for twenty-one months. But, that is not any German History. That's of no use.

A: Where did you learn English?

B: In Germany.

A: In Germany, they taught that as one of the foreign languages?

B: Yes.

A: How many years did you study English?

B: Seven years.

A: Seven years. Did you take any other languages?

B: French. I'm even worse with French grammar. I was able, at one time, to write business letters in French. Now, to be very honest with you, I don't even know what I did with French. I learned from one lesson to the other. I was very good at it. I could rattle those subjects down, and I could write and so on. Nothing ever sank in. It was just, like you have children that read a book, and they don't know what's in it but they

read every word in the book. I didn't know the words. As for the lesson, I didn't know how to put it together. But evidently, somebody must have goofed there because they must not have checked on me, right, because I did not keep anything from that. I had about a year of Latin, which didn't help me much either. I must not have been too talented for languages.

- A: When you came over to Canada to work, do you remember how much they paid you? Did they pay you by the hour, or a salary?
- B: No. I think it must have been, like I said, they paid a certain amount back for my passage. Then, I did not have to pay anything for my room and board. I had my own room there and family and stuff like that. And, I think I still got about \$75 or something like that, a month. At that time, today \$75 is nothing. You go once to the store, and you don't even get to step into it because, you know, you probably won't have enough money with you. At that time, I was able to put money away.
- A: Do you remember how much they took out to pay for your passage, or didn't they tell you?
- B: I really don't know. Maybe I did know, but I really don't recall anymore. I don't have any idea. I think, I remember that my mother's passage was about \$300 or something like that at the time. I really don't know what it was. She had to come over by train, so it was all together about \$300. But, I don't know whether she had paid anything else or whether that was just the tickets. So, I really don't know what the whole amount was that was owed here or anything like that. I must have paid it because they let me out of the country.
- A: Were there a lot of other people that came over to Canada?
- B: First me, when I went, I did not know anybody, I mean personally. It must have been four days at least. Four or five days on the boat. I didn't know too many people in the cabins. There were about fifteen or twenty girls in the cabin. All the girls were sick because the weather was so heavy. I wasn't sick. I couldn't go down there because the smell was so bad. So, what I did, I went down there, and I changed my clothes. And then, I went up. I had little contact with anybody there. Otherwise, we rode the boat.

A: Was it a passenger liner, or what kind of boat was it?

B: Yes. It was a passenger liner. I forgot the name of it. Then, when we went to Toronto, there was this meat market. They had all the girls there that gave us breakfast. They had all the girls there. There must have been as many girls there as there were other people there. These people were just standing there. Everybody was kind of looking around and saying, "Well, I want her, and I want her and so on." This was the way that we ended up with these people. I guess that they sponsored people, and they just picked who they wanted. It was quite an experience.

A: Going back over to Germany, do you remember the blockade that was put up in 1949 when the Russians were trying to close down their sector?

B: Yes.

A: Was that about the time that you escaped?

B: During the blockade, we were still in, I think, in the Russian District. But, shortly after that, we left. It was interesting. That was another time, when you didn't always know when the Russians were getting an idea or whatever they were bringing over. Diets were very easy. You got one, two, or three things unless you were able to buy it on the black market. That's what you could buy, anything on the black market. I don't know, food for me was never really that important. I don't think so.

When I was brought up, I almost ate anything. There were certain things that I disliked or something like that. But, I didn't have, like my kids, I put some mushrooms in the spaghetti sauce and everything, and I was more or less satisfied with what ever they had. Later on, I got into the habit that I started loving ice cream and stuff like that. And, I got big and fat. I wasn't. I really didn't miss it. Maybe it was tough. On the other hand, I was introduced to an awful lot of food when I was a small kid. When my father, during the war, when he wasn't there, my mother always went to a restaurant to eat. Because when you ate in a restaurant, you needed less of your stamps for food. So sometimes, there was fish, or you could eat anything. So, we always went to restaurants to eat. I was introduced to all kinds of foods and all kinds of desserts. Maybe later on, then, I didn't miss it so much because I did know all of these when I was a little

kid. I guess, at that time, I really could have cared less. I hated restaurants. I really didn't miss these things. I missed some of it. I resent, probably most of all, that I didn't get any clothes, and I didn't get my own room back. Stuff like that I resented more than the other things.

A: During the war, did you have any changes of clothes? How did you manage to get by?

B: During the war it wasn't too bad because we had been living in a certain area for a long time. You could imagine all the ways to get things. My parents really didn't have a lot of pressure put on them because it was just my mother and me. My father was in the war. My mother, at that time, got paid from where he worked. He got his whole pay, it was put in the bank. I think the only thing that was always hard to get was shoes. I guess I had more blisters on my feet when I was a kid. I had, there must have been some vitamin deficiency that I got as a kid. I thought that it was from being cold that the fingers got swollen and got red. I think, later on, I learned that it had something to do with frostbite. But, frostbite never goes away, and after you came into a regular diet, it went away. And, you didn't get it anymore. As a little kid, I had the itchy hands, and they were swollen. And, it went into the toes. It must have been, probably, being cold and the diet and stuff like that. We had a house. The apartment was centurally heated. I guess one year, the last times of the war, they shut this all off. So, they went out, and we had a chimney going to our apartment. My father made a metal stove out of cans or something. I think we had a park in back of us, and I went at night and stole the wood enough to heat it. We had at least one warm room. It was very good because of the chimney we had. If we wouldn't have had that chimney, we wouldn't have done that because we probably would have burn the whole house down. But, we put the light into the regular chimney of the house, and it kind of helped.

A: Can you, just in general, think of anything else that might be important to know here?

B: I really don't know right now. I don't know.

A: Well, shall we call an end to it?

END OF INTERVIEW