Citation for this collection:

MSS 179 Robert H. Richards, Jr., Delaware oral history collection, Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware

Contact:

Special Collections, University of Delaware Library
181 South College Avenue
Newark, DE 19717-5267
302.831.2229 / 302.831.1046 (fax)
http://www.lib.udel.edu/ud/spec
askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu

Terms governing use and reproduction:

Use of materials from this collection beyond the exceptions provided for in the Fair Use and Educational Use clauses of the U.S. Copyright Law may violate federal law.

Permission to publish or reproduce is required from the copyright holder. Please contact Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, for questions. askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu

A note about transcriptions:

Of the original 252 audio-recordings in this collection, 212 of these tapes were transcribed around the time of the original recordings (between 1966 and 1978). In 2012, Cabbage Tree Solutions was contracted to create transcriptions for the remaining tapes. Corrections to and clarifications for all transcriptions are welcome, especially for names and places. Please contact Special Collections, University of Delaware Library, for questions. askspecref@winsor.lib.udel.edu
Interview with Miss Monica Trigg, 116-C Thomas Drive, Wilmington, Delaware, November 5, 1973, by Steven Schoenherr.

Q: Now, to start, why don't you just start with your name.

A: My name is Erdmute Trigg; my middle name is Monica; that's what I go by. My nickname is Mutz--m-u-t-z. And Erdmute is a very old name. It used to be--it is said to be--of one of the Nordic goddesses that are underneath the ground. There are ten of them called Nomen (?), and they hold people's fates in their hands. And one of them was supposed to be called Erdmuthe, as the Germans would pronounce it.

Q: How do you spell that?

A: E-r-d-m-u-t-h-e. But my godparents at my baptism, they forgot the "h".

Q: I see. Can you tell us a little bit about your family in Germany.

A: I wasn't born in Germany. I am one of the Sudetâ€‘Germans--I was born in Czechoslovakia, in the Sudetâ€‘, in the capital, called Reichenberg, now Lieberitz (sp?).

Q: Where is that approximately located?

A: That is north of Prague.

Q: About how many miles?

A: 180 kilometers, thereabouts; you will have to look it up...I don't know too much about it. And my father came from Germany, but my mother's side, they were all German.

Q: Where did your mother's side come from, or live.

A: She does not live here. I came by myself. You mean to the States?

Q: No, in Germany. Where did your mother's family...

A: We had to leave. My mother's family? I don't know, because they went over there in 1100. So I can't trace that.

Q: Was she living in this area when your parents got married?

A: In what area?

Q: The Czechoslovakian area.

A: Yes, she was born there, and for centuries and centuries they had lived there. And my father was from Dessau, and his family then, when my parents got married, was living in Berlin. And during the Occupation, my father was working for the German Court, and he was then transferred to Reichenberg to work for the German Court there. And in 1945 of course we had to leave. But during that time my father had gone to war and he was in Russia. And he was kept a Russian prisoner of war until 1948. So in '45 we had to leave the Sudetâ€‘, and we had no other place to go but to his sister's, who lived 100 kilometers south of Berlin in the so-called Spreewald--s-p-r-e-e-w-e-l-d--in a little village called Radcâ€‘sch--r-a-d-d-u-s-c-h, if you're interested. It's between the bigger towns of Lubben and Cottbus--you can find those on the map. So
we stayed there until 1953. In 1948 my father came back from Russia, and times were very bad. Especially, we were not considered Germans, even though we were. We were considered refugees, and everybody was mad at us for losing the war, because the war had started because of us, and no one really appreciated us. So...plus it was under the communist regime, which I couldn't make a distinction then, because this is all I grew up with. But in 1953 my mother decided--she asked me, rather, would I want to go to the West, because things really had become very rough. I was in...I started fifth grade over there, and they started giving us diaries so we had to write down what we did every day. But not...also that we had to write down what our parents thought, what our parents talked about, what radio stations we listened to, did we ever go to the West, did we have any western magazines. So my mother asked me would I rather go to the West. So we did. At that time there wasn't any wall. Security wasn't that strict. You could go over to Berlin for a day. You could even go for two weeks...nobody asked you. But if you took a suitcase, they would stop you. So you could go, but you couldn't take anything with you. All the clothes you had...all the clothes you wore, that was it. And then you went to the West, and you reported, "Here I am. I'm a refugee..." They wouldn't turn you back, even if you weren't what they called politically persecuted people. There were some that had to jump out the back window, you know, the police were pounding on the front door to get them for something or other. That wasn't our case. But we could stay. So we went to camps. That was January to March. They had...the Germans had a program with Switzerland that--and also the French, I believe--who would take these refugee children who were sometimes undernourished, or just not very well cared for, because if you're over sixty people in one room and your parents are trying to look for work, it's very tough. Also, since it was my mother and I alone...I was always very skinny and pale...I was enrolled in that program, and I went to Switzerland for three months. These were so-called foster parents. They would just take different children--different nationalities, for just three months and feed them and clothe them, and then send them back. And I came back in June and I went to my grandmother's, who was in Oburg and during summer vacation, that was in '53, and in the meantime my mother had been thrown out from Berlin to southern Germany, Dillingen--that was a camp (d-i-l-l-i-n-g-e-n)--Donau (d-o-n-a-u)--there are two Dillingens, but this is the one she went to. And it was a big camp. But this was meant for people that would stay there until they found work and an apartment. My mother had been a school teacher, but the Germans, the German Reich, so to say, would not accept that certificate unless she went to school for another two years and took another exam. Now she was getting too old for this, so she really never professed her profession. So she had always worked for the court, because nobody would accept her certificate. So in Dillingen she--in '53--she was offered a job at the court again, substituting for a girl that had been out sick. So she stayed for three months, then they extended her for three months, and they said it was still temporary, and we did that for about eighteen months until it was decided that this girl was not coming back, so she had the job. Now then we could look for an apartment. So we got an apartment, and my mother worked and I went to school. I went to high school, and I did not finish high school as such, but our school system is different, as you know. We have grade school--eight years of grade school--and anywhere from fifth grade through seventh grade you can go to high school. If you go from fifth grade, then you attend a
nine-year high school, which when it's finished gives you about two years of college here. That's the equivalent. There are several, they are called gymnasiums...they are several of them. The one I went to after seventh grade was majoring in music and languages. We still have all subjects, but those are the major points. And I went there until after their sixth grade. That made me 18. If I had gone on I would have been 22 before I got out. And then you go to the university, and that would have been too expensive, and since...Oh, in the meantime, back in '53, my parents had gotten a divorce. So I just couldn't afford not to work. So I finished the sixth grade of high school which is the equivalent of—it gives you kind of an associate degree, but it's not quite like that. You just don't have this here and it's difficult to explain. And from then I went to Berlitz school because I had decided that languages were the thing for me. So I went to Berlitz for a year and a half, and I completed my English course, which then authorized me to take a job as a secretary with the foreign languages. I also took French, but I never used that too much. I understand it and I can read it, but I'm not too well in it speaking, because I just never used it. And I started to work for Lloyd's Register of Shipping, who had a subsidiary, a small office, in Augsburg.

Q Which company was this?
A Lloyds of London.

Q Lloyds of London.
A Um hhm. I worked there for a year. Then I worked for the Americans for a year, and...

Q What Americans?
A In Augsburg for one of the medical offices in one of the barracks.

Q Army offices...
A Army offices, yes. And then I went back closer to my home town, which was Donauwörth (d-o-n-a-u-w-o-r-h). In the meantime I had gotten involved with an American soldier, which my mother didn't approve of, so she tried to get us apart, but I persisted. But since I wasn't 21, I couldn't do anything about it. So I had to wait until I was 21, and then I ran away. And then we got married, and I had one son, Steven, who is now 10. And he was still in the Army. He got out in 64--February '64. He was then working in Frankfurt, and I was living in Munich, working for (?? Bavarian Motor Works)—you see their cars—BMW's?

Q Oh, yes.
A It was a very nice job, but since my husband was up in Frankfurt, I moved. I think that was in '65—early '65. And in the meantime, he had had two years of college before he came into the Army, and in the meantime his parents said why don't you come back home—he is from Cleveland, Ohio, and said, if you come home, you know, we'll put you through school. O.K. So we sold everything—we didn't have much—we
sold everything and we went to Cleveland, Ohio. And he went to school in Oxford, Pa.—Lincoln University. During the year '65 the G.I. bill was passed, so we could move, and we went to Westchester, Pennsylvania, because Lincoln University's out in the sticks and people don't move... there is no housing, nothing. So Westchester was the closest town. He attended school there for another year, but he went to school during the day and he worked at night. And I took a job after having Christopher, who was born in '66. I went to work in Philadelphia for a company called IRC—they're now a division of TRW. I worked there for not quite two years. I liked the job. It was O.K. But the travelling got to me. It was one and a half hour each way, no matter what you take. So I stopped there because I had found a job here with Atlas, now ICI.

Q How did you get the job at Atlas?

A At Atlas? I had applied there when I first got to the States and was in the labor market. But they wouldn't take me because if you don't work for a year, your shorthand goes down, your typing goes down, and plus I didn't have any references. All my references were in Germany. So whoever took me, you know, took me on my good faith, or on my looks, or whatever it was. So but then they had my record still, and one day in the paper they had an add for a German or Italian-speaking secretary. I said, oh, forget the Italian. So I put in my application and I was hired. And I'm still there.

Q How difficult was it for you to come to the United States—even though you were married to an American. Was it difficult?

A It wasn't difficult. It was just a lot of red tape. But if you're a German you're used to a lot of red tape. So it didn't really bother me. You know, you had to prove everything...well, that you were born, that your father was born, and that you were really here. And your background. You had to bring a record that you had no police record. You had to have a certificate from your minister or pastor that you were a good human being. And of course you had to be healthy. And... oh, yes. I had to go...since my ex-husband was in the C.I.D....he had it especially difficult. I had to have special clearance, because they just didn't trust any foreigners. Plus I had come from East Germany. That made me very very suspicious. They even took...I had to sign a form, even, that I would be willing to take a lie detector test to the fact that I had never been associated with the communist party, neither was I interested in them, hadn't supported them. You know, questioning this long. They never made me take the lie detector test, but just my assurance that I would take it. So after that was settled, you know, you just get your certificate. You have to go to the doctor, and you get tested. It takes about three months. But the difficulty was, we wanted to leave in July, early July, or rather end of June, and the immigration quota does not go by your nationality, but by your country of birth, which makes it very difficult. Because I had to immigrate on the Czech quota. And I'm not Czech. And of course the Czech quota is very low. So for the month of June they had filled up the Czech quota, so I had to wait until July so I could get in. So in that way—and it was not really difficult, but you know, it was just kind of complicated.

Q And any difficulty...you flew over?
Yes, we flew over. We stopped over in Denmark for twelve days, because it's the same price. And we landed in New York and went on to Cleveland.

And no difficulty in the United States—as long as you had a passport, I meant.

No, I never encountered any difficulty.

Once you got here there was no difficulty.

Once you got here, did you have any trouble adjusting to the country. This would be the first time you came here...

No, I had been for a visit in '64, because my father-in-law had had a stroke, so they thought he wouldn't live, so we had to come over. But I could at least build an impression. The first time I came I was overwhelmed. Because everything is so different. You know, the lights alone...you take your commercial advertising. In Germany it's all black and white, you know, even the lights, and it's kind of dull and dreary. But here you come all these flashing lights in green and blue and black and white and it's just overwhelming. You look and you feel like a child that sees his first Christmas tree. That was overwhelming. Also the housing is so different. You know, all these porches. It's...I can't explain it...it's just like another world. And you come inside and you have all this space....And of course, I'll never get over it, are the bathrooms. They're all...maybe in the new houses in Europe, but you just don't find any bathrooms like the Americans have in Europe. You just don't. You know, anytime...it's kind of like a miracle...you turn on the faucet and there's hot water, day or night, and you can take ten baths if you want to...and that's been great.

You didn't have that where you came from.

No, I didn't have a bathtub until I was 14. You know how we took a bath was a big tub in the middle of the floor, you know, and once a week, Saturday night, big pots of water were heated, and that was how we took a bath. So, if anybody wants me to take a shower, I don't take a shower. I like to sit in the tub. But that was overwhelming. Oh, what I found disturbing, now I've gotten used to it...I find that the Americans talk very loud. If you are in a party, everybody is yelling at the top of their voices, and I used to hold my ears. I said, my God, why are these people screaming so! But you know, you get used to that. But at first that was different, I thought. Also, I don't find this now any more, I think Americans are very open, you know. When you come to somebody as a stranger or not as a stranger, "Oh, how nice to see you!" and everybody is just overwhelmed, and "How lovely you are!" I thought it was rather phony at first. I don't know if it is or not, but I...I'm not like that. I don't particularly like it.

Any other impressions from your first trip? How about means of travel—automobiles, cars....
A: Oh, of course... that was surprising. Because I had flown in an airplane before I had been in a car. And I enjoy cars. I thought that was great.

Q: What means of transportation did you have in your home country?

A: Bicycles... bicycles, bus. Rarely the bus... but the train was... and we had a little--it was not one of the main railroads, it was one of the side railroads. And they put in the--it must have been made before the First World War, because they were wooden benches, and if you didn't watch out the windows would fall down, or you would freeze to the seat, and the next cabin would be so hot, you know, you would sit like on a chair with steam coming up. This was the type of transportation we had. So I found the automobile very very convenient. But of course I was scared when I first came, because I didn't drive, and of course you know German driving doesn't do anything to enhance your zeal for driving. Not at all. But I learned how to drive, and I think I'm a good driver. But I won't drive a Volkswagen.

Q: Did you travel while you were in Europe... in Germany? To any other countries, like France, or Italy.

A: No... I only went to Austria because my mother's first husband was from Austria, and he was in Vienna. As a matter of fact, he still is. And we went for vacations there in southern Austria. I love Vienna, really, very much. He used to work for the court, also, and after the war he was on the Italian front, and after he came back he never wanted to work for the court again. So he became a museum attendant. And this might seem kind of dull, you know. Gee, you know, a guy with all this education, and now a museum attendant. But he loved it because he could be together with all the emperors, and he knew history inside out. Because Vienna is a very historical city. He used to quiz me and test me--"What happened in 1530?" Well, what happened in 1530? So that's where summer vacations were... mostly three to four weeks that we went. And I've been in Italy once, just across the border, in northern Italy. It was just one day, so I can't... I don't know Italy at all. And Switzerland I know a little bit about. But that's all. Oh, Denmark. But Denmark isn't very big, so if you have seen Copenhagen, and if you have gone out to Hamlet's Castle, that's pretty much all of Denmark, you know.

Q: Do you hear from your family?

A: I hear from my mother, yes. And I haven't been back since '65, and I'm now, this year, trying very hard to go back. Not so much for my sake, but my mother's getting old, and I think I should see her. She was here once, in '68. But she did not like it at all. She was frustrated. First of all, she doesn't speak English, so, you know, she couldn't read any newspapers. She didn't understand T.V. And I make a mistake. I should talk German to the children, but I just don't, because like I said, more important when I come home at night that they tell me what happened to them during the day than trying to beat German into their brains. So also she objected to... she missed her walks. Because it's either private property, wilderness or highway, so you can't really walk here. Maybe around the Brandywine here, yes,
but up in Westchester, there was nothing much, you know, who wants to walk in town. So she didn't like that. She found the food very different. She said people used too much salt here, and in general, when people are getting old, you know, you get all kinds of ailments. I never realized that. It's very humid and hot here, compared to Germany where we are from. You know, it never goes above, I don't know the computation from...but when we have up to just slightly below 30 Centigrade, that's pretty warm for us, but compared to here...I think I can remember once when we have in the 90's, that's up to 40°, and that never happens...oh, maybe once every fifty years. Plus the humidity...it's not humid over there. So she didn't like it, and she won't come back. So I have to go.

Q Do you...what was your impression of Delaware when you first came?

A I thought Delaware...what's Delaware? When I was leaving in Cleveland, Ohio, I was going to see my husband in Washington, D.C. because he has relatives in D.C. So I took a bus ride all the way from Cleveland down to Washington, D.C. And we visited his school, so we went through Delaware. So that was my first impression of Delaware...I didn't really see very much of it. I never thought too much about it. I think this area around here is very pretty. If I had a choice, I would not be living here. I don't have anything against it, but I just don't think it's very attractive. But this is where my job is, this is where my children go to school. That's why I'm here. This is where I know most of the people, because I don't have any relatives here. So I'm just here by accident.

Q Any other impressions of Delaware...you didn't like the climate, you've mentioned that.

A No, I don't like the climate. I would like to live in New England. But in New England there are no jobs...plus I don't like the winter. I'd like it 365 year-round. So I think that's Mexico City. So, you know, I don't resent it, and I'm not angry about it. I just don't feel particularly attached to it, really. And I always say when I get old and I retire, I'd like to go back to Europe, because...Oh, yeah, one thing that disturbs me here is...I used to go to the Academy of Music quite a lot. Now, it's a pretty building. If you go to a concert, it's not like you decide five minutes before you're going to the movies, you know, you're putting your old dungarees, you know, let's go to the drivein. And I see people that have season tickets and know this very well in advance and they know the kind of people they will associate with, or at least in honor of the masters, they would put on some decent clothes. I don't mean evening clothes. But they come in their loafers, and it just shocks me. You know, they just don't do that. And that's what I find disturbing. You know, it is kind of a festive atmosphere when all the chandeliers are on, and Eugene Ormandy comes up, and here is this woman smelling of onions beside you. But that's what I find disturbing. But you know...I don't think too many other people have that impression.

Q What are your impressions generally of the United States? You say you would like to go back to Europe. Does that mean that you're disenchanted with the United States?
A No, I'm not. I think everything has its good things and its bad things, and I'm not a patriot. You know, I'll always be German, whether I become a citizen or not. But to me Europe is where I was born, and you know, people are different there. They attach different...attach values to different things from what they do here. I think this pace is very fast. I think it's a great country for material things. If you have to make a living...if I had to make a living in Europe with two boys, I couldn't do what I'm doing here. I could be working five jobs. I wouldn't be able to do that because there's no credit and all that. So in that respect I think it's great. But I think for the more...for the finer things...the things that I grew up with, it's harder. Each little town, at least in Germany, has an opera. They have plays. Whereas here, you know you have to look for things. The only way where you can go to a good concert, or see some names, is New York. Now, who wants to go to New York? That's a long trip, you know, just to go to the opera. So this is why I don't like the States. Because of the cultural things. But you know, other people that haven't been brought up that way, it doesn't bother them. And also I think with the people that I work with, they have had a different education. I don't mean a work education, because you place your importance on different things. You have a more commercialized school, whereas we do it more with poetry and music. I don't know what is better. But with my colleagues, I cannot talk the way I would like to talk, because they all think I'm weird. It's not that I'm weird, it's just that I know different things. I don't mean to impress people when I say, oh this is so-and-so. Well, how do you know....You know, this is what I grew up with, and this is what I find hard.

Q Has there been any particular person in Delaware that's helped you or has impressed you that you've known...that you thought has helped you our a great deal, or has impressed you...

A Oh, I think people always help me.

Q No, I'm thinking of a particular person.

A Oh, yeah, I would say that.

Q Can you say who these people might be.

A People I work with, and a personal friend of mine, who has helped me. Also my mother-in-law has been very helpful to me.

Q She's living in Cleveland.

A She's living in Cleveland, yes.

Q What about the German-speaking community or the German community in Delaware.

A I think they are mostly concentrated in the Zion area, and I don't know too many people. There are two people at work--I don't work with them—but in the company, that are German. And you know, we don't get together. You know, we might meet in the hallway once in a while, but generally I'm not a great social person. I'm just not. And that has nothing to do with my nationality. I just don't associate with any-
body very closely.

Q  Well, I'm thinking of the fact, many immigrants you know, when they come to the United States, sometimes they do adjust very completely, and they adopt American customs. Others try to stick with people of their own nationality, and I was just wondering how you reacted to this when you came here to Delaware. If there's a strong attraction here to the German community for you...

A  No, not at all. No, I don't have too many very close friends, but they are not German. They would be all Americans.

Q  Um hmm. You don't belong to the German Club?

A  No.

Q  Well, I think you answered my questions very well. Do you have any other comments that you would like to make, any other observations?

END OF INTERVIEW