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## **A note about transcriptions:**

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Interview with Mr. and Mrs. John Ehr, German immigrants, in Wilmington, Delaware, November 8, 1973, by Steven Schoenherr. Mr. Ehr's responses are designated by "A", Mrs. Ehr's by "B".

Q Probably the best way to begin is for you to tell me your full names and where you came from in Germany...where you were born in Germany. Mr. Ehr, would you like to start?

A Well, my name is John. My wife's name is--oh, well, she can tell you herself what her name is...her name is Adelle. And well, I'm originally from the eastern part of Germany and my wife is from the northern part of Germany. She comes from Bremen...I mean, the neighborhood of Bremen, you know. And I'm from the eastern part, what you call over here Upper Silesia.

Q Upper Silesia.

A Right. See, that is behind the River Oder.

Q What town were you born in?

A Well, we called it Kattowitz...that's upper Silesia.

Q When were you born?

A I borned in May 22nd in 1920. And I came up to the neighborhood she was from in 1938. And I met my wife in 1938 and married her in 1941. And of course it was during the war. And then after the war, my sister was here...she came over here when in 1935?

B 1935 she came over here and then we came over in 1952. We put in for our quota in 1948 already. But it took us four years 'til we got there to come over here, you know. So John came off the Polish quota and I came off the German quota.

Q Was Upper Silesia part of Poland?

A Well, see when I was born in 1920 it was Germany. But in 1922, what you call the Plebisite over here, this territory was given to Poland, see. So I grew up over there and then after 1922 it became Poland, see. But then in 1938 when I moved up there to the neighborhood where my wife was, see, and then of course the war came and during the war that territory was taken by Germany. You know, the Polish...

Q Was occupied by the German troops?

A Yeah...the German/Polish war...I mean, in 1939. And then of course in 1945 when the war was finished, Germany lost the war, and then this territory and more Poland got and that's how they said that I can come only over here to this country on Polish quota. That's why it took us so long to come over here, see.

Q Now, when you were born in 1920...did you have a large family?

A No, I was by myself 'til 1929...I only have a kid brother. He lives in the northern part of Germany now. My parents still live in...

Q Were they farmers?

A No, no...they live in the city Bremen...that's the northern part of Germany, you know.

Q That's where they live today?

A Right.

Q What about in 1920?

A Well in 1920 my father and mother they lived there where I was born in Upper Silesia, see.

Q What did they do for a living there?

A Oh, Pop was a machinist from trade.

Q Machinist?

A Right.

Q Was there a small factory there that made...

A Well, there was...he worked in a steel mill over there, see. And then of course during the years that that place closed up, that guy who owned it died and there was nobody to take over so they went bankrupt. So my father went quite a while without a job. And he got a job in 1935 or '36 he got a job and then in 1938 Mom, my kid brother and myself we moved to the northern part of Germany...from the eastern part where I come from.

Q Because your father got a job there...

A Right. Because he worked there, see.

Q What did he...do you remember the name of the place where he worked?

A Yeah, it was a big place Solex System today...Atlas Factory, you know...they made at that time...that place was known for those...what you call...for those screws for those...well they call it propeller for ships, you know. My father worked in that place as a draftsman, see, because he went to school and became draftsman after that. And that's the place he retired and he's still living....

Q Did you go to school in Bremen?

A No, I went to school where I was born, in Upper Silesia, in my

home town. I went to school over there. My kid brother started school over there, then a year or two, and then when we moved up there in 1938 he has to...he went out of school and went back to school over there in Bremen in the northern part of Germany in the school over there. I finished my eight years schooling over there in 1926 'til 1934.

Q Does that mean...I don't quite understand how the school system works in Germany. Did you go through high school?

A Well, we...

Q Did you become an apprentice?

A No no no. We have different school system over there like you people have over here, see. Because we have over there...I went what you call public school, see, because there was government supported that school because in fact...I just explained Father was very long without job, so I couldn't go to high school over there. Because if you go to high school over there, you have to pay yourself. I mean, parents had to pay for your education, see. And the only education that you can get in the old country without pay is public education, I mean, you know, regular education. And that of course I had to take, see.

Q So what did you do when you finished public school?

A Well, when I finished school in 1934 there were a lot of other people without a job and there were...I couldn't find anyplace where I could learn a skill like a draftsman or some other kind of skill, see. So all I had...the opportunity I had over there, I became laborer, see.

Q Did you work at different jobs?

A No, because see over there they have just laws like over here. You have to be 18 years old or 17 years old to get a job as a laborer. See, up to then you have to see how you make out, see, because your father have to take care of you, see. Because back home, your father...I mean it might be different now, but in the old days, in my time when I grew up, your father was responsible for you up to 21. See, whatever you did up to 21, your father was responsible for you. See, so Pop had to take care of us, see. So whatever job Father had, I mean if he...how I just explained to you, whatever he could find...a job, you know...and they needed somebody as a helper or something and he thought I can do it, so I had to go with Pop and help him, see. And that's the way it was.

Q Did you live with your parents?

A Oh yeah.

Q All during the thirties?

A Yeah. I lived with my father...with my parents 'til we got

married, in '41.

Q Did the war affect your life any?

A Well, my wife, she was home and I was in the war here...I was a soldier.

Q Were you drafted or did you enlist?

A No, no. I was drafted. I didn't volunteer. No, they got me.

Q You fought, then, in the war?

A I was in the army...I fought in the war. Yes...I was in the East.

Q On the Eastern Front?

A Yeah...for three years.

Q And then when the war was over, in '45...

A Well, I was fortunate, when the war was over, I wasn't taken PW...because when the war was over I was home...because I was home in the hospital.

Q So in '45 you were wounded?

A Yes. So when I was home I just stayed home.

B That was the end of the war, and you came home in February and in May the war was over.

A Right, '45 in May the war was over and I got wounded when, in February...

B In February, you came home in February...you came home in February and in May the war was over.

A I discharged myself.

Q Now were times pretty bad after the war?

A Well, of course time was bad and you...I mean there were...

B It was bad for a while, but then...about '48, that when...

A When the revaluation of the German money came, you know, when we changed from the old Reichsmark, what they call the old German money, to the German mark...what they call the Demark (sp?) see...the change came...

B And then it got better.

A Then it was better for everybody.

B Then you could buy things. In the between time, after the war was over, you could hardly buy anything...it was a very bad time. Just...you had your ration...you know. And it was just...we couldn't buy too much. But like I say, me and John, we got married '41 and we had a small apartment, and 1942, just before Christmas, our apartment, we were bombed out, you know, and our city Bremen was completely...half of the city in one night was just flat altogether. So...he was not home at that time. But I was there...and of course I got a furnished apartment...a little furnished room, because everything was down so you had to just move closer together...who were working in the city had to stay...the rest of them who did not work moved out...had to move out of the city...out in the country. But I was working at that time, and so I...

Q What were you doing?

B Well, you know, like...say, all the people need help, you know...like people who were sick...I helped out all the people who could not take care of themselves, and needed help.

Q Was your apartment damaged in the bombing attack?

B Yes, of course.

A It was burned out...completely burned out.

Q You lost everything then, huh?

B Yeah. I said it was...December 20th...'43.

Q December 20th?

B Just a couple of days before Christmas. I had already bought my Christmas tree, and everything...and so...

A Well, see, they had it this way. If you were working...I mean, everybody worked during the war who was able to work and had someplace to stay, they stayed in the city. But then in our case, I was on the front...she was by herself home...she had an apartment. And then when we lost our apartment...and my parents lost their apartment a year later during the air raid, see...if my father was retired, see, this way, if they would be retired, he would be relocated outside, let's say, from the city outside to the farmers, see, to the land...to the country. And they only kept people there who they have to keep in the city because they have to work, see. But all the rest of the people...even people who worked in the city, and there wasn't a possibility to squeeze them in someplace with somebody else, they moved them outside, see. But if it was possible to keep you in the city, they kept you in the city, see, because of course transportation during the war was bad--how we're getting it now over here, see. So mostly people went by bus or by bicycle if you were able to get what-you-call-them rubbers for your bicycle wheels, see.

But everything was scarce to get during the war...even after the war, because everybody had to make ends meet where you could do it see. Even after the war for quite a while they had food stamps in Germany...didn't we? 'Til they changed over from the old German money to the new money came...then the food stamps and things disappeared overnight, see. Then all of a sudden you could buy everything. Like today you couldn't buy hardly anything, but then you know, the old money changed to the new money tomorrow, all of a sudden, overnight, everything was there. When you went in town tomorrow or if you go to the shopping center, like tomorrow, you could buy everything. All of a sudden there was everything.

B And people didn't have no money, see.

A Because, I mean, the money was to nobody of value, see. Because everybody who was working...banks had money enough, see.

Q Where did you work after the war?

A Well, I was...before the war started, when I came from home where I was born, when I came to Bremen, first I had a job someplace else and then I was fortunate to get a job on the German railroad. And the German railroad was government-owned...and it is still government-owned today in Germany, see. So I worked over there and of course when the war was finished in '45...so how I say...I was able to work right away because my injury wasn't that bad, see...I was so on my feet that I could go back to work...I went back to the railroad, see. I didn't lost any years because the service year counted because how I just explained to you, that it's government-owned...

Q Um...because you were in the army, that of course kept your seniority...

A Keep my seniority...on the railroad...so I started with the railroad again, see. So I mean, I had no problem about a job because...

B Then we came here after that we came here.

A In '52 we came over here to this...

Q Now when did you first want to come to America?

B Oh, it was...I think it was about '48.

A '48 I think.

B '48-'49. We put in an application, you know. You have to go to the consul and apply for coming over here. And we put our name down and of course it took us such a long while, we just...there was so many numbers ahead of you, you know, who wanted to come to this country and so you just had to wait until your

number's up. So I don't know...I had a very high number, over 300 or something...

A We had 534 or 535...

B Something...so it took us a long while 'til we...

Q How did they select those numbers?

A Oh, they just...how you came and registered, you got your number.

B And then they put you on...you know, they put your number down and your name down, and of course your papers go on top of each other, and soon there's maybe ten or twelve can go, so then they take 'em as they come. So that's what happened with us. And at that time there was a lot of people from different countries all came. And they all came through Germany and then from Germany, Bremen, Bremerhaven, where we lived close by, that's where the ships usually go out, or Hamburg, and then they came on over here. But they all, before they came here, they all came to Bremen, didn't they?

A Well, it was like this, see, because I couldn't go...I could go on the German quota with my wife, but I don't know, for some kind of reason they put me and my wife on the Polish quota and...

B I think there was an opening and I think that's why he got that.

A And the immigration quota for each country--it still exists today--every year so--and--so much people from every country can come and immigrate over here, see, because my wife and I we came as regular immigrants. We had to pay our way. We even paid our...she had to pay \$10 tax and I had to pay \$10 tax before I even came to this country, see.

Q Was that for the papers...filling out the papers?

A No no. Just taxes. I mean, they charge you right away \$10 entry tax that you can enter the United States as an immigrant, see...

B My sister she had to put the papers that she...

A Well, she was the sponsor. Her sister was the sponsor.

B She put up a paper and sent the paper over that she was able to take care of us if something should go wrong, that some of us get sick, that she was responsible for us.

A I think for five years of something is this thing.

B For five years...so after five years, we've been five years, then we can make our citizens...you know.

A Because I think during the old law--I mean, somebody explained



it to me--you have to take out the first paper after two years and then the second paper then you make your citizenship paper. But I think the whole current went something like eight or ten years, you have to be that long in this country, see, without getting in trouble with the law, before they allow you as an immigrant to become a United States citizen, see. But then the law, I think, they cut it in half, from 10 to five years, see. So we could make our citizenship papers after five years we were over here. We didn't have to apply for the first paper first and for the second paper first, see.

Q You didn't have to do that.

A No. I think that they completely dropped this period, see, so we made our citizenship papers after five years, see. But how I just tried to say to you, it took us so long to come over here because they have to make room and give priority to those that you people call over here displaced persons, see...all these different nationalities who were in Germany, if they came from the Ukraine, if they came from all the different countries, see...they had to have priority over us immigrants. See, they came first.

B Because they had no homeland during the war...you know.

A See, so we have to wait...

B So it took us a long time til we got here. But finally at the end it got...it came too fast and they gave us the visa and we had to get away in--I don't know...

A Four weeks...a month.

B Yes, because if we didn't make that, our visa would've been...

A See, they called us end of November and they said by December...

B No, we left on February 7th.

A Well, then it was January...or December it was. In the middle of December it was and they told us we have to be out of Germany, in the United States, by February, otherwise...

B It was a very short notice, I remember that. And we could hardly find a place on a boat, you know. And so there was...I don't know was there somebody who dropped out and we...

A Two people dropped out and we took their places, otherwise we never could make it.

B And so we came on the Homeland.

Q Was that the name of the ship?

B Yes. And at that time you could not get a, say, a cabin for two.

That was not the case. So you paid your whole amount--we paid our whole amount to come over on the boat, but I had to sleep with a ladies group and John slept with a men's group. So there was a cabin for, say two bunk beds and four bunk beds in a tiny little room, you know, how the little cabins are on the boat, you know, and that's where I slept and John slept all the way on the end with a couple of men. And I mean it was just because so many people were coming over here and so you could not...

A Well, you had no choice, because you know, see you need a passage so take it or leave it.

B You take what you get, you know. And other people I know, they came over, they even came over on American ship and they had to...some have to help and...

A Yeah, that was displaced persons...they had to do that.

Q Did you take any baggage with you...any belongings?

B Yes, all personal things, you know, what you have...

A They give you special permit you can take so much with you, free...what's overweight you pay for.

Q Can you remember how much your ticket cost?

A What was it--how many marks?

B 300-some. No! I mean in dollars...I think it was 1,600-some in marks.

Q 1600 marks?

B Yeah...or was it over 2,000? I don't really remember.

A It was quite a lot of money.

Q A lot of money then at that time.

B It was a lot of money at that time because we didn't have no money...because our money was all lost in '48 and in '52 we came over. So that was only a couple of years and we lost everything and I already had given up.

A Well, we start...we already start to buy furniture already, see.

B We had built ourselves a little small home...it was not any big...like a little small home here...put ourselves up and I had got myself pretty much settled there. And I thought that we wasn't gonna come here and then all of a sudden this happened, you know, we got a letter from the consul and he said that, you know, that our number was up and we should come and see him, and then all of a sudden, like I said, it went so fast we couldn't even get a place on the boat to come here, you know.

Q Did your sister help you with some money?

B No, we paid our own way. As long...we were able to sell our little place there and we had the money and so we sold everything we could sell. So this brought us the money together for the fare. And that's how we came over.

Q Now was the trip coming over very rough...difficult?

B No, we had the best weather.

A Yeah, we had nice weather.

B Oh, it was beautiful. I mean, the captain always kept saying he never had such good weather.

A No, he said he had to slow down because we were for quite a spell in Halifax because we came to Hoboken, New Jersey and then he waited a little bit in Halifax over there--they were unloading...I think they brought some Volkswagen with that ship where we came with--our Homeland--and some other goods...and then he says, "Well," he says, "I think," he says, "we better leave here," he says, and then he was moving real slow and a lot of people asked him, he says, well he don't want to come into the harbor because he has to pay...on a Sunday there's a special duty for the ships to pay, see.

B We could not get off anyway--we had to stay on board...

A You couldn't get off the boat anyway on Sundays, see, because we had to wait 'til Monday, 'til all the customs agents were there, see. I think the customs people didn't work even on Sunday. So we had to...they came very slow and in the morning, I think it was morning 5:00 or so, we went up on decks and what was it, the Hudson River, and came past the Statue of Liberty and then pulled into the harbor of Hoboken. See, we landed in Hoboken, New Jersey.

Q And you had to go through customs then?

A Oh yes.

Q Was that difficult?

A No.

B No. It didn't take long. They just examined what you had, you know.

A They weighed that baggage what you took along and all that stuff what they allow you to take with you, and household goods was unloaded. Of course you have to open everything.

B They open up your packages, yes. If you bring some presents, you pay duties on. And I mean...we didn't understand much

English then...

A We didn't understand much? We understood nothing.

B Nothing...but my sister was there to pick us up and...

A She explained everything what was going on.

B She explained all the things, so it was no problem.

Q You had trouble then with the language in the beginning.

A Oh yes. We went here to the old Wilmington High School on Delaware Avenue, you know, that high school they tore down? That's where we went twice a week for evening classes.

Q How long did you go to class there?

A We went there, what, for three-four years?

B Yeah. And then later on we took some citizen classes, you know.

A We made our citizenship classes in Warner School...in Warner High School.

Q So when you first came, where did you live, with your sister?

B Yes, we lived there for six months...from February 'til October.

Q Where did she live?

B At that time she lived in Bellefonte. That's...

A That's up here by Penny Hill. You familiar here?

Q I've never been in that area.

B And so and then we moved in the city. We lived on 300 West Fifth Street. It was an old French school, and they made that into apartment building, and we moved in there, and we lived there from 1952 until 1955, then we moved here. These sections were built then, so we picked a lot, and after the homes was built, then we moved in here. And we live here ever since... from 1955 'til...

A Yeah, December the 20th...

B Yes, just before Christmas.

A Just before Christmas, also.

B Time goes by so fast, you know. Did you ever been in Germany?

Q No, I haven't. Where did you work when you first came here?

A I was with a place....a printing place on 14th and Poplar Street, next to Howard High School, they call it Kaumagraph...that's a printing place. I was there for three or four years with them and then I went to some other place and from there I had a job with Delaware Power and Light. I was with Delaware Power and Light for over five years and I got sick...I had a couple of operations, and they laid me off in Delaware Power and Light. And then of course while I was laid off I went there in the place to visit who else was still there I used to know in that old time, when I was working there, you know. And there was a fellow there...he became a boss. See, I was out that place for nine years. And I was surprised when I came back there after nine years that so many changes had happened in that place. And he became a boss...

Q This was in the printing place?

A Right. Well, we're working back now in Kaumagraph, in the printing place.

Q And one of your former workers was now a boss?

A Right. This guy who used to be working man like I, see, and he was a boss now, see. So we kept talking and talking and he said, "What you doing now?" So I told him, I said, "Well," I said, "For right now I'm retired," you know, I was kidding him around. He said, "Oh, come on." He said, "That couldn't be," see, because when they used to know me over there, I was a very heavy-set guy, I was 220 pounds, see. And then of course during my sickness and that operation I had, I dropped from 220 to 150 when I came out of the hospital. And so I just said I was kidding him, and talking...and he said, "Look, you used to be a good slitter operator," --that is the paper cutter, you know. He says, "Are you interested?" He says, "We're looking for a good slitter operator," he says, "because that slitter we have over here," he says, you know, "we need a good man," see. I said, "That's O.K." I said, "As long as you give decent money," I say, "Well, let's see if I still know something about it," I said, because nine years is a long while. I mean, you know, if you didn't do that job for nine years, you have a slip there and a slip there, see. So I started there and I'm back with them what--next year in February I'll be back with them 10 years.

Q What wage did you start out...when you first started there in what--'52?

B No. He couldn't speak English then.

A Oh, over there when I started--'52 when I started there. What I made there? They paid a dollar and?

B I don't know. It was low...very low.

A \$1.35, wasn't it? Or was it higher than that?

B I have no idea.

A It was not much money. But I surely wish I could make that money again and I could buy that food what we bought then for that money.

Q It would probably buy you a lot more than what you could buy today.

A Oh, for \$5.00, when we went shopping, we bought for \$5.00, we couldn't carry it all.

B You could buy a lot of food...at that time it was cheap, you know.

A At that time the dollar was really a dollar. For \$5.00 you have groceries...she had two bags in her hands, I had two bags in there. Because see we were living on 300 West Fifth Street, right on top of the hill, and we went shopping always there was a supermarket on King Street, wasn't it?

B Um hmm. And we didn't have a car, so we had to walk.

A We walked, see.

B And so that was the closest by our place, you know. Then there was some farmers always on King Street, you know...came in on Friday. I think they still do.

A Farmers still come on King Street, yeah. I think so--I don't know.

Q Were there other Germans living around that area?

B No. The only place we met some Germans, when we went down Sixth Street there was that old German club then, at that time.

A Did you hear anything about that Saengerbund?

B The Saengerbund today, they are in Newark, now, but they...

Q Do you belong?

B Yeah. They had their clubhouse there, and it was just a short walk for us, of course. So Saturdays and Sundays we walked down there. We met a lot of people there and this way you could talk. But in a way it was nice that we had to stand on our own two feet, because you learn English faster if you're around people you have to speak the language, you learn faster. If you're around German people all the time, if you speak German, you don't learn it, see. This way you learn more. So this was very nice.

A Television helped a lot, too. At that time television was very educational, see.

B Um hmm. We learned a lot from television.

A Not that way like it is today. I mean, today you still once in a while have a good program, but at that time, let's say '52, it was 20 years back, you had more shows you could enjoy, you know...more movies, you know.

Q Do you remember some of the shows that you watched?

B Arthur Godfrey was on...and Kate Smith. She had beautiful programs on at that time.

A Kate Smith, Arthur Godfrey...

B And Arthur Godfrey we liked. I liked...he always had those...you know...those people on who had to sing, you remember?

A Yeah...there was "Name a Tune" and all that...

B Yes, and all these things. We enjoyed them. That was very nice.

A And then them old movies...I always enjoyed them old movies. Once in a while you catch them now on t.v., but you have to be sitting up too late, you know. The next morning when you have to go to work, you're tired.

Q Not knowing English right away, did that hurt you, or hinder you in your job any?

A Well, I mean...I don't know...she didn't work right away, but I had a handicap, you know. I mean, it is hard for me...I mean for myself it was hard to get the hang of it. If you had a fellow co-worker who tried to explain something to you and you don't know what the word means, what they're trying to tell you, see. So you had to watch him...you had to learn with your eyes, you know. I mean, you know...because you have to see, you have to use...I would say--I don't know whether it's right or not--you have to use your intelligence a little bit more to grab it, what you cannot make up with the language, you know what I mean? See, if that guy showed you something, how the job's supposed to be done, and he talks to you and you don't comprehend him, you have to watch him. See that's the only way you learn it, see. That's the way I picked it up, see. I mean, see, because up there, before I became a slitter operator that I am today, I was a pressman...what they call pressman, you know, that's...they were running hot ink over there and now they have different machines over there, they run even cold ink...they do on them...but that was they say, those transfers, you know. That's a printing place...at that time when I was there we did one color job and then we went over on two color jobs. Now they even do three and four color jobs over there. It's a steel die that dies...engraved

with a certain design and you have a steel blade under that die and you put paper stoppers on each side, and then you put your hot ink in there, see which you have to melt in an electric oven, you put that ink in there, and then you run it, see, and then you print on it, see. See that's what they call transfer print. And at that time you have to watch it, what the other guy is trying to explain you, you have to look what he was doing, so you could do it, see. And if the boss seen that you tried to do a good job and they was satisfied with your job, you got a nickel raise.

Q How about...did you have any trouble because you didn't know English right away?

B Well, no, not...I didn't have much trouble...no. I spent two years in...it was like a laundry service.. on a sewing machine so I didn't. I know my sewing machine and all they did was just bring them to me, the work I was supposed to do, and I know my work...and then after that I worked in a factory. First I was machine operator and after a while I was packer. And I know enough English then that I understood.

Q Which factory was this?

B That was in Edgemoor...Ludlow. It is a textile...it's a ~~jute~~ <sup>jute</sup> mill...they get the ~~jute~~ and then they finish it...you know, they finish that product into...something...I worked there for twelve years...until '66. But it was...I mean the machinery there...and they showed to me what you was supposed to do...and reading...I mean, there was not that much that you had to read. And I know enough English then...by that time...so I had no problems.

Q When did you get your first automobile?

A '56... '56 or '57?

B '56 I believe...or was it '57?

A '57...yeah, '57 we bought our first automobile. All the time when we were living in the city we walked or we took the bus. And then when we moved out here, that Newark bus, it went by on that road over there...it went through Newark...Faulkland Road.

B So that was very convenient...there was a stop here by our address...so it was nice there....

A That's why we picked that development, because it was convenient for us to come over here, see.

B But then later on they took the bus service away and everything went over here over the Kirkwood Highway...that way. So this way if you want a bus now, you have to go towards Kirkwood Highway.



- A That's when we first need to buy a car, see. Otherwise I never would buy a car...I still would rather go by bus today.
- Q You still would rather go by bus.
- A Still I would communicate (sic) with the bus, you know.
- B I don't think you would.
- A Oh, why not? If you have it convenient like this, the bus stops, you go on there, you take the bus and you transfer for the one who goes up to Bellefonte, and you go up there, and then you come back the same way. That's no problem.
- B No...and now with all the cars, you know...I think that's... with all the pollution and everything.
- A But now the way it is, you have to have a car. Otherwise you're getting nowhere. And now you have a car and you're still getting nowhere, because I'm too lazy to go somewhere.
- B Too much traffic...John doesn't like to drive.
- A I like to drive, yes, but there's too much confusion for me, you know. Now, you get used to it, then it changes all of a sudden. So it's just like today, when I came home--I had to watch myself because lot of streets in the city...I mean, I know it, I read it in the paper...they changed from this direction...from south to north, now it goes from north to south...I almost went on the one-way street, if I didn't watch myself a little bit, see. I said, "No," I said, "I go the old way." That car knows it now. If I quit 3:00--I work from 7:00 to 3:00--I say, "Oh, let's go." So the car takes me home...just like a horse. Because I never change, see. A lot of people say, "Why you always go over Lovering Avenue, going all the way up to Greenhill Avenue?" I say, "Why? I know it--it's routine for me." Not much traffic lights. I mean there's only stop signs...I know it. And then the first traffic light I hit is on Pennsylvania Avenue and Greenhill... it's the first light I hit when I come from the city, see. So I say, "So there's no sweat," I say. And so if I would go a different way, the way sometimes people tell me, go this way and I go up Second Street, you know, I say, "No." I say, "Too many lights there."
- B Do you know Pastor Zimmerman?
- Q Well I've only talked with him once. He's a very nice man. He's been helpful.
- A He is that. Well, we met him when we came to this country in '52. We were living by his sister. He was in St. Mark's-- pastor of St. Mark's. And then he went where...to Maryland... Washington, D.C. somewhere there.
- B I think so. See, my sister, she had two children. He did both--

they both had confirmation by him. And then my niece Carol, she got married. He married her. And the boy...did both children get baptized or just one? I think it was one. Yeah...and then he moved away. He is very nice. We like him.

A He's a nice fellow, Pastor Zimmerman.

Q And you've belonged to the Zion Church since you came here?

B No, not right away. Since that church came up here, you know. See, first the Zion Lutheran was on Jackson Street...and 6th Street. So we didn't...

A I go to church with my wife.

B We didn't go...we went to church, yes. We went a lot of times to my sister's church, and then we went to that church, too, but we didn't become members. We became a member in 1962, Zion.

A See I became a Lutheran since I'm here in this country. From birth I'm Roman Catholic...see, I'm Catholic from birth, see. But then I married her...I got married in her church...in a Lutheran church in Germany. And so when I came over here to this country, then I said, "It's no sense that she goes to that church and I go to that church," you know. So I just go with her to that church. It's only one God, so what's the difference?

Q After the war, was that area occupied by the Russians?

A No, when, in Germany? No, in Bremen...see, the rest around was British-occupied. And Bremen...all the way up to the River Weser--it's just like the River Delaware over here--up to Bremerhaven...Bremerhaven is the port where all the troops and all the things came from the United States for the American army, which was stationed in south of Germany in Heidelberg, Wurzburg, and over there.

Q That's where the American zone was.

A Right. But this section on the River Weser, from the city Bremen up to Bremerhaven, that was United Army occupied...occupation.

Q All the Allied powers together?

A No, just the United States Army. Just the United States Army, that was then their restricted zone because when I was working after the war on the German railroad, I was working for the United States to keep them tracks in shape again because see, the ships up to 10,000 tons, they could come up all...the River Weser up like the ships going down your Chesapeake Bay all the way to Philadelphia on the Delaware River. That river is so deep, see, that ships of that tonnage can come up to Bremen, the city Bremen itself, see. And they were unloaded there, see,

whatever has...I mean, troops, mostly troops, and material like, oh, I would say, trucks, panzers and stuff like that...whatever the occupation troops needed, they were unloaded there and put on trains right away and they went from there on the tracks right away to south Germany. But the rest, most of the rest, what that port over there couldn't handle, they sent up the River Weser to us, see. And I had a special permit from the United States Army that I could go anytime because we had still after the war for quite a spell curfew...after certain hours you have to go home, see. So when they caught me outside, I had a special permit was signed from the military police so they didn't bother me, see, because then they know that I was working for the railroad for the United States Army. So I was allowed up to a certain time--I think it was not over midnight...I was not allowed over midnight outside...but close to midnight I could be still outside. But mostly cases they liked to see that people after 10:00 were in their homes, see, because we had a curfew there, I think it was after 10:00 'til 6:00 in the morning, see. And sometimes I had to leave earlier because I started to work 6:00, see, so I had to leave earlier than 6:00 with the bicycle from house to get on my job, see. So in case somebody stopped me on the way, if it was a German policeman or patrol in a jeep, you know, military police with German police, and I showed them that thing that I was on my way to work then they didn't bother me, see. But mostly there was a curfew you weren't allowed after midnight to 6:00 in the morning on the streets, see...that's why I know that our place, our city Bremen, was United States Army occupied and the rest is still what today is British occupied, see. And then after certain section there, I think, that that belongs to the American army, see the farther south you go on, see...that's still United States Army territory over there, see, except for different section, I think, down there--Stuttgart and that section, I think the French are there. But I'm not so familiar with that see, because I never traveled that way.

Q Do you ever miss things from Germany? Since you've come to the United States, is there anything that you miss especially?

A Miss?

Q Yeah, miss...that you wish that you had from the old country?

B We go and visit and...you know.

A We visit once in a while. I visit my parents, she visits her sister...

B You miss your relatives, you do, especially around the holidays. I mean...that's the only thing, you know. We know they're there, like his brother and his father and mother--my mother passed away '64, so we didn't have no chance to see her...saw her once... '58 we went there. And so if you have somebody living there, that's the only thing you miss. But then after you've been there for say three weeks, four weeks, I feel so good to come back. It always does...it seems like.

- A Well, you're spoiled already, you know. You miss the cooking...
- B Yes, you're spoiled.
- Q What is it you like about America most, do you think? Is it the conveniences, or...
- B Well, you have a lot of good things, here, you know. I must say I never found anybody so friendly like the American people are. I noticed that right from the beginning when we came. There was a lot of people asked us into their homes, and I always said nobody's as friendly as the American people.
- A Well, very helpful, you know, and neighborly.
- B If you're over on the other side, if you go back home or wherever you are, they are not as friendly than these people here. Nobody knows it if you're not around, but I must say I found out and so does John that people here are friendly...very friendly. And they help you wherever they can, and that's the most important thing.
- A Well, people over there, if they don't know you, they don't invite you right away in their homes...let's say this way, to be sincere...I mean, you know. See, over there if you...if they know you, let's say maybe a little bit longer, then yes. I mean, it might have changed now, but I don't know. But this is what everybody notices right away when they come, that American people are very friendly and very very helpful right away.
- B Yes. And here, if you go into another city and you're lost, there's always somebody who helps you. If you go to Germany, if we go to Germany, and we don't know our way around anymore because it has been changed so much and we're completely don't know our way around, but if you're lost, you're lost. That's it. Then you just find somebody, you know...like we were one time...just for instance this one time we were lost in our own city where we lived for so many years, and it was...streets were all changed, all different names, we didn't know where we were, and a police stopped us and he asked us, "Do you know where you're going?" And we said, "No." But he wasn't helping us any either.
- Q He didn't help you?
- B He wasn't helping us any either. If he would have just said, "Why look, you go down here and turn left, and then you go..."
- A Well, I tell you...look...I mean, it was my impression--it still is--over here policemen, they're very friendly. If you're lost, they ask you where you want to go. And he says, well look, you're too far this way or you're far that way, you turn there and then you turn there, and you go there, and then you're there.

But over there, like my wife just told you, they think--he was interested if I was drunk, see...because I was lost. So but then when I told him that I want to go there and there, see, he didn't said to me, "Mister, you're way off, turn around, go this way and then you come over there, and then you might see this and this and then you turn..."--no dice.

B But of course it has all changed, like I said before. But friendly...I mean, we noticed that.

A I mean, let's say it this way, it was, with the things over there...they had a different attitude to strangers over there, too. But I don't know, maybe...I mean, everything changes. The years changes, generation changes...

B I mean, everything is old fashioned...and such a hurry. They have no speed limit, you know. They have speed limits in the city maybe a little bit, but there they're just going so fast. If you go down in the country, there's no speed limit whatsoever...you'd better get out of the way, they run you right over. I mean, we're not used to driving like that. Not here. We drive 20-25 in the school...you know, where you slow down to 20 or even 15, but you go on the turnpike you go 60 or 55 or maybe 65, that's the limit, or 70. But there you just keep on going, you know.

A We don't go 70 here hardly. Over there at certain times, during the rush hour, what the Germans say, during the rush hour if you go under 50, you're blocking traffic. They push you over....you have to go over 50...you have to go with the traffic, they tell you.

B That's it. I mean, this has changed. And they have so many cars!

Q When was the last time you were over there?

A Couple of years ago...two years ago. Two years ago, because last year...no, last year.

B Last year...no, we didn't go last year.

A Yeah! Last year we went, because this year we had visitors.

B Yes, that's right, last year.

A Don't mix me up.

B That's right. John's mother was very ill and they sent us a letter for us to come and we went in September. And this year we had visitors of Germany over here.

A My kid brother's two girls were here.

B One was 19 and the other one was 16. They enjoyed it here. They

liked it.

A They liked it here.

Q Did they want to stay?

A Well that one liked to stay, the youngest one, yeah, but the oldest one, she like to stay too, I had that feeling too. She wanted to stay but she...but they have to go to further their education some more, see.

Q Couldn't they finish their school over here?

A Well, I don't mean it that way, see. See, the oldest one, the 19 year old, she went to Berlin.... (First side of tape ran out.)

B ...so she enjoyed that very much. And the smallest one, the 16 year old one, she wants to be a supervisor in the kindergarten, so she is very good around children and she likes to do that. So she just finished her high school, and so her training was starting right after she went back...after she went back to Germany. But I think they both enjoyed it here.

Q What did they like best about America?

A Oh, they enjoyed everything...food...

B We took 'em...food...and the beach...the beaches, oh they liked that so much.

A I had a hard time to get 'em out of the water.

B They liked the beaches so much...we took 'em a couple of times, to Wildwood...oh, they liked Wildwood so much. And we took 'em to Washington also. But that day it was such a hot day. See, they're not used to this hot weather. They have it hot over there too, but not quite as hot. Their days are nice and warm, but then in the evening it cools down, and that's the difference. But here it was hot all the time. We had the air condition, but you know, that's about it, you know. Through the day you just...

A And they were complaining. I said to them, "Girls," I said, "what you complaining about?" I said, "You're just lucky," I say, "you caught a couple of weeks while you're here," I said, "we have it under 100." I say, "You should be here," I say, "when we have 100." They say, "It really can get that hot?" And they were just away a week and then we had that heat spell, you remember, this year? I said to myself, man on man, they really missed a good one.

B They missed some. But besides that they liked it.

A They really could tell us something about if they had gone home. How nice and warm it is over here. Well, I was fortunate,

because I had, just the time they came, I had my vacation scheduled that way, you know. So we spent some time with them and...we had only what, one day or a couple days bad weather while the girls were here.

B Yeah, it was not bad at all. They had beautiful weather.

A Only one rainy day we had here, that's all.

Q Did they watch television or go to any of the movies while they were here?

B They watched television, but not very much. There was movies from...what was this, Jerry Lewis.

A Jerry Lewis...they liked Jerry Lewis.

B Oh, they liked him so much.

Q Did they know English?

B Oh, yes.

A You learn it over there in high school.

Q What were your first impressions when you first came to Delaware, to Wilmington and to this area...

B Well, New York I didn't like.

Q You didn't like it?

B No. It just was too dirty.

A Well, we didn't come into New York. We came into Hoboken. You couldn't see nothing...

B Yeah, but I didn't care too much for it because it was a little dirty looking. But Wilmington was pretty nice. First the heat bothered us some, too. But we got used to that. But I thought it was very...we liked it.

Q Did you get used to the food?

A Well, first you have to adjust to everything.

B We'd buy the things and we'd cook the way we know.

A I mean, you have to change your eating habits, you have to change your cooking habits, because see what you used to eat, you cannot eat because of the climate over here. Because you have to go with the weather too. Because you used to eat when you were over there...it probably wouldn't agree over here, see. I mean, it would throw you off with your health. So you have to compensate, see.

Q Did you get sick or anything, right at the beginning, over eating the food here?

B No...no.

Q Nothing really serious.

A No because see we were fortunate...how I say...we had too much changes to make, because when we came over here we came to her sister, and they were eating the same...I mean they were eating there way they used to eat here, you know. But then of course once in a while...then we came over here, we went right away with it, you know what I mean, see. Our changeover was not of a sudden. If we had gone for ourselves, let's say, if we had come to a country where the language is the same, let's say this way, and you come and you'd eat the same way like you eat at home, I mean home where you come from. And you have nobody who can say this or that to you, then you may have maybe difficulties with your digestion system or stuff like that. But over here, you went right away...you know...in the same middle, you know. What they were eatin' we were eatin', and so you didn't felt it right away. I mean, maybe once in a while you... I mean, I didn't eat as much over here what I usually was eatin' back home...on account of the weather.

B Well, at first we ate more when we came. We were used to more food, you know, more...but then you...gradually you eat less. I don't know if it's the climate, or what it is.

A It's the climate that does it. See, when we came over here in '52 we had that hot spell right away, too, in '52, because I can remember--when was it--in July, June and July when it was so hot and warm. It hit 101, 102, see. I mean, I notice it since I'm here it never getting that hot anymore, how it used to get when we came over here in '52, see. Because very seldom you have...I mean, just like this year. Well this year we really had a heat spell. I mean, you know, where you can say you had 100 and maybe 101. But that time in '52 when we came over here, I mean...

B I think, John, you noticed it more because you wasn't used to it.

A Yeah, well but you still can recall every time 100 and 101, 102...you have it very seldom that hot of a year, see....And you getting used to it, to the climate, too. See, if you go over there, you're cold. People look at you if you're running around in a sweater like that. They think, "What's the matter with him?"--people sitting there in short-sleeve shirts and sweating and you're sitting there with a jacket on, because where you come from, see. Well, I mean, you don't want to catch a cold over there and come over with it over here. Then you have problems over here to adjust to it again. My father always laughs when I come over there to visit. The first thing he said to me, he said, "You brought your sweater along?" I said, "You bet your sweet tooth," I said, "I brought my sweater along."



Q What does he think about America?

A Well, he was here...he was here. Pop was twice here, once for three weeks alone, and then he came with Mom and visited us what, for three months.

B Four-and-a-half months.

A Four-and-a-half months...and we had our silver anniversary...they were here.

B Oh they both liked it.

Q They liked it over here?

A Oh yes.

B If he could have got his pension over here, then he would have come...if John's other brother would have come, you know. I guess he would have come right away.

A Well, I don't think so...well, it's meant a lot too with my kid brother because that's the apple of his eye anyhow, but still if the pension would be little bit different, just a little bit different, that money must be a little bit closer to our...I mean that time, you know...he probably had...but I hardly doubt it...he had made up his mind to come over here, you know. Because he liked it here, oh yes. Mom too. And so my kid brother over there, he has what, four kids now...no, five.

Q Do you think that it was the hard times after the war that made a lot of people want to come to the United States from Germany?

A Well...not that I know...I think the trend to come into this country is more now to come over here than that time, see.

B To visit, you mean.

A No, he means to immigrate. I notice it that way, because the only way I notice it is when you went to the American consul and you were always asking how far did my quota progress, you know...did I pretty soon have a chance to be called in, you know for physical or for some kind of interview, see. Because once in a while they called you in for interview or for some such thing. But at that time, I mean, you know, everybody was doing that things...I mean...and if you have your work to do then you probably would say, I mean, once in a while when you hear that somebody says, "Well, they probably figured to come over here," see.

B I guess maybe Ruth wouldn't have come...if my sister wouldn't have lived **here**...I guess we would never had the idea, wouldn't we?

A No, because her sister, Ruth...but we had in mind if we want

to stay over there or if we wouldn't like to come over here, see.

B So that she have some close relatives with her, because she was here all these years by herself. And so then of course she start writing...she said, "Well, wouldn't somebody like to come over and live here?" And then of course after, when she start writing this, then we had lost everything and we had to start anyway from the bottom up, so and then we decided...we didn't have no children at that time, and we said, "Well, let's go and see." And we like it, you know and so that's when we came over.

A Everybody was surprised...I mean, not about her to come over here because they know that her sister was here, but about me, you know. Pop always said, "Are you sure?"

B So and then we came and so we've been here and...

Q What is your sister's name?

B Hulsten.

Q Where does she live?

B She lives in Lynnfield.

A She moved see from Bellefonte to Lynnfield.

Q Do you think she would mind if I talked to her about her experiences?

B Oh, I don't think she would...I don't know...she's been here a long time.

A She came over here in '53 I think...wasn't it? No, in '35.

B I believe she came...I don't know exactly.

A Well, you should know because in '35 I was still back home.

B I think it was '35 because at that time, when she came over, she had to get married on the boat. See when she came over she was a young girl and she met this fellow, he was a German fellow...

Q On the boat?

B No, they met over in Germany. He was visiting in Germany and at that time he was with Ruth and they met...and of course they started writing each other and he said, "Well, wouldn't you like to come to America?" And so...and that's why...I guess maybe that's why he went to Germany, to find himself a wife or so...you know how is the life. And so they wrote for about a half a year and then she came here and of course she had to get married on the boat.

- A Well, at that time the law was you have to get married on the boat to come into the country, see.
- B So...and I hadn't seen her since that time when she came over. She never was visiting...her first visit after she came here was in 1954, wasn't it?
- A Well, we were here already, yeah.
- B Yeah, we were here...after we came...and then she went visiting. And well that was 35...45...was almost 10 years. Or no, it was more than that...20 years...35, 45, 55. 19 years when she was the first visit. She was here a long time. And my brother-in-law what, he came when he was 15. He was a boy. So he's been here a long time.
- Q Why did he come over?
- A His uncle brought him over, wasn't it?
- Q He had an uncle here, then.
- B Yes...so we all came for relatives.
- Q Following their relation, huh?
- B Yes.
- Q The kind of letters that your sister wrote back to you, did she describe America to you?
- A Well at that time...no, because...
- B Well, she sent a lot of pictures...and so forth.
- A Well, if she sent pictures, she sent pictures of the family, that's all.
- B Yes, her family and so forth. And she wrote that they had everything, that they had a nice car, and she said, "We just have a car," and she sent pictures. I mean we could see they were happy and well-dressed and looked like they had a nice life. I mean she always told us that, that everything was very nice.
- A So I'm the only black sheep around here who has no relatives here...who just hopped like a sparrow after everybody.
- Q If you had to do it over again, would you do it?
- A Oh yeah, I wouldn't regret it...I mean I never regretted it. I always said to my wife when her sister wrote if we want to come over, I said, "Well, it's up to you," I said, "it's not up to me." I say, "If you want to go," I say, "I go with you--I have nothing to lose."
- B You were the pusher.

A See?

Q He was the pusher, huh?

B Yes, he was the pusher.

A I say, "We have nothing to lose." I say, "What do I have to lose?"

B I was scared. I was afraid.

A Well, women always scared, women never can make up their mind.

B I have a lot of sisters over there in Germany.

A That was what's holding her back.

B And we've been inviting them so often, you know, and say, "You want to come over and visit us? We got room to put you up for a month or so." Not one came. But his relatives came...his father and mother came. Pop came first all by himself, then Mom and Pop came. Now those two girls came, now his brother is thinking about it, coming to visit us. So I mean, those are more...more do the things...they think, "Oh, I'm going to!" But my sisters, they seem like they're afraid. They don't want to go on a plane because they're afraid of going on a plane.

A They're a little bit older, too, your sisters. See my kid brother is a little bit younger...my kid brother is nine years younger than I am, see. And that has a lot to do too, with age, you know. And her sisters they are close to the sixties.

B I think the most important what they're afraid of is the flight and the long trip, that's what they're afraid of. Because if you live in Germany and you say America, oh, boy, across the ocean, that's such a long way. "I don't know if I ever make it back." And that's the only thing they worry about...not to come here and visit us. I think that's not...it's the trip, it's the long trip. And if they only realized that it's only a few hours...it's no distance. I always said at that time, I said, "I'll never go on a plane." But when my mother was sick, '58, and I said, "Oh, I want to go there so bad and I don't care about it. I'm going even if I have to take the plane...I'm going to take the plane." And we went there by plane. And I liked it. I thought, "Oh, my goodness." I said, "There's no better travel than going on a plane."

A At that time we went on the plane and they had those...you know, they still had those engines on the plane with those...

B Propellers...yes, they were not super constellations, but they were just a regular planes, you know.

A Well, they were super constellations, but they were not jets,

see, because at that time it took us from Kennedy Airport up to Hamburg, it took us over 16 hours flight. And today you fly over there what, in eight hours. They cut it in half with them jets.

B So, I mean...and it was a beautiful flight there. It was no time, and I said to John, I said, "That's the only way to travel." And it's really nice and we've been traveling ever since only by plane and every flight we had was very nice.

A Well if it was go from here to Kennedy Airport we could travel non-stop to Frankfurt. See, but it's closer for us going to Philadelphia International and we fly over Boston and then to Frankfurt and from Frankfurt we had to catch another plane that goes from Frankfurt to Bremen, see. So I mean...which at that time...we stopped once too, didn't we? We stopped once in Gander and then we flew through from Gander...

B Newfoundland we stopped once, didn't we?

A Or somewhere...and then we flew to Hamburg. But it's a much different travel today by jet than at that time by the propeller planes, you know.

B You hear the motors for a day or two, you know, the vibration of this noise. That's the only thing. But I mean besides that the flight was so quiet, you know...it was nice. I enjoyed it. When I came over on the boat, the ocean was so quiet, but when we hit the North Sea, the North Sea was so rough and I got sick right the first evening and I was sick all the way to the day before we came to Halifax...to Canada. I didn't enjoy the boat trip, not a bit, because I was sick all the time and I had to lay down in my cabin with this other lady in there...we was laying...practically all of them. Yes, we were all sick, all together, except one girl--she was a little bit younger. The first thing she did in the morning, she went to the bathroom, she got her shower, she dressed, and we didn't see her 'til late in the evening. Just came there to sleep, that's all she did. She was never there.

A Well, that's what I did.

B You were the same way...you were never around. He had the best time. But I didn't.

A I enjoyed the trip...I ate two meals--I ate her meal and my meal. Well, we paid for it. Somebody might just enjoy it.

B Might as well eat it, huh.

A See...all I brought her was apple and toast. That's what she was living on.

Q Well when did you become citizens then?

- A When did I made my citizenship papers? What was it? In 19--
- B I think it was '60 or '61.
- A Who, me?
- B Yeah, I think it was '60 or '61, I believe it was.
- A Something like this, I think.
- B I'm not quite sure, but we didn't have our citizens on our first trip back home. We didn't have it.
- A '58...no, we didn't have it in '58.
- B Because we were on our German passport.
- A Yeah, on our old passport we went.
- B Yeah, and then after that, we came back and we had to go to school and then we made citizenship.
- Q Have you voted in the elections?
- A Yeah. Because see, it was like this. We put in both for our citizenship papers and the papers came back, but some kind of... I don't know how it was done, I got notification before her. I made first...
- B He made before Christmas and I was the following year.
- A Right...and she did the following year.
- Q A whole year's difference?
- B No, it was right after Christmas. January or February...
- A Right after, because I could not understand...January or February--something like that. Two or three months apart. Somebody made a mistake somewhere. So I had to go by myself and then she had to go.
- Q Well, that's all the questions I have. You've been very helpful. Do you have any other comments to add about any of your experiences in America...anything unusual happen to you while you've been here?
- A No...there's nothing to say....

END OF INTERVIEW.