

DP-9

MARGOT STARCK

BIRTH DATE: APRIL 2, 1909
INTERVIEW DATE: APRIL 5, 1989
RUNNING TIME: 1:00:00
INTERVIEWER: NANCY DALLETT
RECORDING ENGINEER: UNKNOWN
INTERVIEW LOCATION: SANTA ROSA, CA
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 1989
TRANSCRIPT RECONCEIVED BY: NANCY VEGA, 3/1995
TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: DAVID H. CASSELLS, 7/1995

GERMANY, 1920

AGE 11

SHIP: MANCHURIA

PORT:

RESIDENCE:

- **GERMANY: HERMSDORF, NEAR BERLIN**
- **USA:**

DALLETT: My name is Nancy Dallett and this morning I'm going to be speaking with Margot Starck. We're here in her home in Santa Rosa, California, and we're interviewing on April 5, 1989. We're beginning the interview at about

ten minutes past eleven. And Mrs. Starck came through Ellis Island in 1920 from Germany. Okay, let's start back at the beginning and could you tell me where you were born in Germany.

STARCK: Berlin.

DALLETT: And what year was that?

STARCK: 1909. April 2, 1909.

DALLETT: And do you have memories of your childhood in Berlin before you came to this country?

STARCK: Oh, yes. I was, well, my mother was, uh, in, uh, England most of the time and I was in foster homes. And in 1913 she, uh, took me from the last foster home to a children's home in Hermsdorf, by Berlin. And that was for, I think it was a private home where she had to pay room and board. But in 1914 World War One started and she could not come back into Germany. She could not send money into Germany for my keep. But she was given the choice of either staying in England under government protection. She was a nurse companion to an invalid lady at Cambridge, England. And so she had friends that had come to America, and so she decided to come to America and she settled in Milwaukee first. And then she met, uh, John Schiller, a widower, and they got married and moved to Chicago.

DALLETT: Take me back just a little bit. How was it that your mother had gone originally to England?

STARCK: To work. To get a job. And, uh, so she left me in these different homes. And I don't know why she kept moving me from, every time she came over

on a visit I'd end up in another foster home. And some of them I remember and others are just a vague impression of a scene or a person. But, uh...

DALLETT: Any memories that you can share with us about, about the foster home you do remember?

STARCK: Yes.

DALLETT: Just to get a flavor of your childhood there.

STARCK: You mean, of the foster home? Yeah. Well, they, well, the first one I remember was out in the country somewhere and it had a play area and lots of, I remember, lots of flowers and fruit trees. And they had a, it was fenced in and it was the only house in the area. There were no other children around. And I was the only one. So one day I went, I found the gate open and I strayed off. I decided to see the world. And so I walked across a little bridge over, either it was a, uh, drainage canal or, you know, a narrow waterway of some kind. And there was a bridge there, and I stood there and I looked down in the water and an eel came rushing by, you know. So when I took my hands off the, uh, railing, they were black. The railing had been painted, or it had some kind of a tar or something on because I was black. And I remember wiping them on my white pinafore and leaving my handprints on there. And then another incident was evidently a mouse had gotten into the house and it was hiding under a cabinet. And I was, when my foster mother saw the, uh, my dirty hands, and I had walked into something like a swamp, and so my shoes and everything were wet, and when I came back to the place, and that was a very unusual thing happened there. I was walking in what I thought was just grass, and there were flowers in the distance and I wanted to pick flowers and bring them to the foster mother and so all of a sudden

somebody called me and I turned around. And there was a man standing there and sort of just, kind of an indistinct person. He wore a hat. And he says, "Come." And I didn't know whether to go to him, and I don't know where he had come from because nobody was in that area. So finally he called me by name and then I thought, well, if he knew my name then maybe the foster mother had sent him to get me. So he, I walked back to him and he took me, and he took me back to the gate. So when I looked to see if he was going to come in, there was nobody there. And so I just couldn't understand it. But later I, when I learned about angels, I thought, well, it could have been my guardian angel because that was a swamp that I was walking into and, but anyway, I got into the house and she put me in this, I don't know if it were tin or some kind of a metal tub, you know, they're kind of an oval shape, high on one side, low on the other. And it was on top of the kitchen table and, so, um, she was waiting by the, uh, by the doorway with a broom. She was going to, waiting for the mouse to come from under the cabinet. And, uh, she had put a, uh, plate of butter there to attract the mouse. But then for some reason she had to leave the room, and then she said, "Call me when you see the mouse come out." So, the mouse did come out and I leaned over, you know, to make sure, to keep my eye on it, on the mouse, and evidently the tub was near the edge of the table and the tub and I fell down on the floor, so, and the mouse got away. So that's what I remember of that. And then I don't know how I got to some of the other homes. I mean, it's...

DALLETT: How often would your mother come back from England? How often would you see her?

STARCK: I really don't know. See, I was very young then and, but then another foster home, I remember very well. It's in Treptow, by Berlin.

DALLETT: Can you spell that?

STARCK: T-R-E-P-T-O-W. And that also was, it wasn't an isolated place but it, the house was in the middle of a nice garden and everything. And she had, her name was Robert, Mrs. Robert, and she had been a school friend of my mother's. And so, and she had a daughter Trudy, and a infant son, his name was Gerhardt. He wasn't walking yet. He was in the buggy. And so I stayed there. And one day Trudy and I were walking in the garden and she was pushing the baby carriage and we were both eating a roll with butter, a buttered roll, you know, almost like a French roll. But all of a sudden Trudy let go of the buggy and shoved it and it ran into a shrub. And, of course, Gerhardt started to cry and scream and so to shut him up she, what was left of her roll, she shoved into his mouth to stop him and he couldn't swallow it and he was gagging. And so I went in the house and told Tante Robert that something is wrong with Gerhardt, that he was choking. So she came out, and then of course she removed the roll and then she told Trudy she had to stay in the house. And, of course, Trudy didn't like that so she stuck her tongue out at me and went this way. And then as she walked by me she also turned her back on me and lifted her skirt as though to say, you know, uh... But then shortly after that I was in another foster home until like 1913 when she took me to this *Kinderheim*, children's home. It was, on one side of the road was the cloister where the nuns lived and I think it was also a hospital. I don't know. It is a hospital now. But, of course, a kind of a dirt road was, it looked what I would call maybe a two-level cottage and I think there were about ten or twelve children, all little ones, and I was very happy there. And then the, later in life, I became a chronic runaway. When I came to Chicago, after I met my mother, after seven years separation, that was my first time that I ran away. Not actually, I just, I was sent from the, it was a nice day and I was sent, we were playing in the forest and I was sent to the house to pick up

some refreshments, a snack. And that day it happened to be a bucket of cherries. And I don't know why, but all of a sudden I just put the bucket down on the stoop there and I took what I thought was my fair share and put it in my apron pocket and walked off into the, uh, garden that was reserved for the sisters. I call it in their prayer garden because when they wanted to be alone they would stroll there. And they had pathways and there were shrubs and flowers and lots of birds and statues of saints all along the way. But I didn't know any of the saints, except when I got to a statue of the Blessed Mother I was pretty tired so I went, climbed up on the little pedestal behind her and I guess it was one of these drowsy summer days, you know, and I fell asleep. And it was dark when the sisters found me and, but then, of course, one morning we woke up and we heard all kinds of peculiar sounds and horses going by. And cannons being pulled on wheels, you know. And the soldiers marching past. So then they told us that war had started. Of course, children don't know what war is. And they held soldiers in such reverence, practically, that we also thought, "Oh, there's nothing like a soldier." And so then, then the, after a while the, part of their cloister was made into a hospital for wounded soldiers came there. And either they were wounded or they had, were on a furlough to recover from nerves, I guess. And so they helped in picking cherries and then they'd come into our little recreation hall and somebody would play the piano and then the children would sing with them. And, let's see. Another incident I remember from that, we used to help in the garden. They had a cabbage patch. And, of course, there's always caterpillars there and so we were told to go and look for caterpillars on the cabbages, on the cabbages. Well, I didn't like to handle them. So when I found one I would call one of the other children and say, "Here's one." And she would take it to the sister and put it in a bucket and then she would say that Margot found this. And so I was given credit for it. And then I got a chocolate bar for that as a reward and I didn't even touch any of them. I

found them, but the other children took them. So then, oh, then I, when I was six years old they couldn't keep me. There was no school there. And so then I was, and because they didn't hear from my mother any more and weren't getting any money for my care. But I think it was mainly on account of no school there. So they transferred me to Berlin to the, to an orphanage there and then in 1920 the... (doorbell rings) (break in tape)

DALLETT: Okay. We were just interrupted by someone at the door, but we're back now. I think you were just up to the point where your mother, you were sent to...

STARCK: I was sent to this orphanage there.

DALLETT: Right.

STARCK: But then, in 1920, a woman came to the convent and she had authorization to bring me, to pick me up and bring me to the United States. This woman.

DALLETT: An authorization from your mother.

STARCK: She was not, she belonged, she was a member of the German American Welfare League in Chicago. And she happened to be coming to Germany. And so somehow my mother contacted her and had her make all the arrangements. Her name was Mrs. Goldberg. I don't know what her first name was, but she picked me up and she took me to the doctor, you know, to get a medical, and picked up my papers and took me to a store to buy me proper clothing, you know, instead of using, because I had no clothes of my own, they were all in the institutions, so.

DALLETT: Had you heard from your mother during the war?

STARCK: No, nothing.

DALLETT: Nothing from your mother.

STARCK: Never heard from her, it was seven years then. And so then anyway we, I remember the trip. That's in that "Voyage to America." (referring to an article she wrote)

DALLETT: How did you feel when this woman, Mrs. Goldberg came and told you you were going to be...

STARCK: Ooh, I, I was elated. All of a sudden, I'd never thought of my mother all those years. You know, it was like a case of out of sight, out of mind. Because, you know, because I never saw her and so her, she faded from memory. But then the minute I was told that I was going to meet her, then I, I had a, I pictured her as I remembered her distinctly. When I was about, I think it was about my third birthday, she took me to a circus in Berlin. And I remember, if I went to that place I could probably pick out almost the spot where our seats were. They were quite high and everything looked miniature down on the arena. And the only thing I remember about that circus is the bareback rider. A young girl standing on the horse and prancing around and I wanted to be a bareback rider. And then, after that I don't remember any of the other things or how we got to the *Bahnhof*, to the train station, and we were waiting for a train and then that's when I, it's after that when I remembered that first foster home.

DALLETT: Did you have any idea, well, you knew you would be reunited with your mother, did you know what America was, or...

STARCK: Oh, no. Nothing.

DALLETT: You were eleven years old.

STARCK: But, of course, everybody had, everything was by hearsay. They said the streets were paved with gold and all you had to do is wish for candy and open your mouth and it would drop in your mouth. And that there were Indians here and they would cut off your hair and make wigs out of them and all kinds of things like that. Then the, uh...

DALLETT: And where would you hear these stories? In school, in the orphanage?

STARCK: In the orphanage, yeah. All children my own age, some of them maybe a few years younger, and some of, a few older.

DALLETT: Did you know anyone from the orphanage or anyone who had gone, who had left and come to this country?

STARCK: No. And I remember that, oh, after, after the armistice was signed, then, of course, they had the Revolution in there and all the fighting between the Bolsheviks, and there was the embargo, food embargo and I know for about two weeks straight we had nothing but boiled pumpkin to eat. And soups, I mean, I don't remember. I never had milk. We never had eggs, meat or anything. And then I had a fainting, I remember I had a fainting spell and, that left me limping, so later it was decided that I was, had the rickets from undernourishment. And, so that also, when I got to Ellis Island my mother couldn't come there to meet us. And for a while I was the only one. I was by myself. I don't know how I got to Ellis Island from the ship.

DALLETT: Was this woman Mrs. Goldberg still with you?

STARCK: Well, she said that she was getting off the ship to meet my mother some place and then they were going to come to Ellis Island to pick me up there, but I had to go through immigration. And so I was left alone in the cabin for quite a while and I know I felt very deserted and lonely and wondered whether my mother would come, whether she would like me and things like that. And then, and I couldn't see anything, I couldn't reach the porthole to look out and so there was nothing in the cabin and I had been warned not to wander through the ship. And then, I know, I must have fallen asleep and then all of a sudden I was in this big hall. I don't remember who took me and then I was, saw all these people there and children that, uh, close to their parents and a infants in their arms, and all waiting. And then, and I was getting very concerned. I was too timid to start talking to anybody because I figured they wouldn't understand me. I did try to talk to some woman and she just shrugged and closed her eyes and...

DALLETT: She spoke another language? She didn't speak German.

STARCK: No. And, uh, so then everybody was, we were all led into like a dining hall and I remember they served us a meal and it was, I think it was turkey and rice, or whatever. I mean, I just don't remember it. And then over the conversation I heard somebody say in German *Danksagungstag*, Thanksgiving Day. (doorbell rings) This will be the last... (break in tape)

DALLETT: Okay. You were talking about being in the dining hall and you heard someone speaking German, and they said...

STARCK: And so, *Danksagungstag*, that's Thanksgiving Day. And, actually, it wasn't

Thanksgiving Day because when I did get to Chicago they had it there. But it could have been early in the week, you know.

DALLETT: Right. So it was late in November some time that you said you arrived at Ellis Island.

STARCK: Yes, uh-huh.

DALLETT: Now, let me just take you back a little bit. You had mentioned that you found out that you had rickets after the war, and you mentioned that you had a medical examination in Berlin before you came here.

STARCK: Yeah.

DALLETT: Is that when you found out you had rickets?

STARCK: No. At, on Ellis Island, because my mother wasn't there to get me. They weren't going to allow me in. So then Mrs. Goldberg finally came and she had her husband with her. And they signed affidavits saying that they would be responsible for me until I got into my mother's hand. Because she had a son in the meantime, and Joey was about, let's see...
(longpause)

Oh, he must have been just about a year old, a little over a year. And she couldn't, she said she couldn't bring him with her and she didn't want to leave him with somebody else, so she couldn't come. And, of course, when I got into the, uh...

DALLETT: I'm sorry, I'm a little confused. Is this your mother who had a little boy, Joey? Yeah, oh, I see.

STARCK: Yeah, by my stepfather, see.

DALLETT: So that's why she stayed in Chicago, couldn't come. I see.

STARCK: So when I got into the interrogation room and saw Mrs. Goldberg and this man, then I started to cry. I figured that Mother decided she didn't want me and that I would be sent back to Germany. And, but then, so they told me why and they were very, very nice to me. I mean, that article in the, uh, tells the story. So, uh...

DALLETT: Now, did these authorities who were asking you questions, were you in the room alone with the authorities in this interrogation? Or Mrs. Goldberg was there.

STARCK: Yeah. I mean, I was in, it was just as if my mind was frozen, I mean, with anxiety and being alone in a strange land. Not knowing the language, not knowing whether my mother actually was going to come. And then what would happen to me? So, anyway, I had one incident, though, that maybe my mind wasn't functioning too well as an aftermath. But I had, at one time I pushed a plum stone up my nose. I was eating plums and, you know how kids, everything goes up their nose or in their mouth, and I didn't say anything when I couldn't, when it didn't come out. And then, evidently, it changed the shape of my nose because, or something must have been different about me, maybe my breathing or, because the sister asked me, what happened, what did you do. So I told her I couldn't get the plum stone out. So I was taken to a clinic.

DALLETT: I'm sorry. We need to...

END OF SIDE ONE
BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

DALLETT: This is the beginning of side two of interview number 383 [DP-009] with Margot Starck. And you were just in the middle of your story about having the plum stone.

STARCK: Oh, yeah. Okay, I was taken to the clinic there and the doctor came at me with the, like a piece, a pliers, you know, and he was snapping them, and he got closer and closer to me and I got more frightened and we were eye to eye and then, nothing. Then I woke up in a crib, so. And then, for some reason, at one point there, a nurse had me by my head like this against the wall, and she banged my head against the wall. I don't know why, but then I heard her say, "Now, if you..." I started to cry, and she said, "Stop that crying, otherwise you'll get some more." I don't know what I had done. I mean, I figured maybe I wet my bed or something and, uh, she, uh, and then I don't even remember how long I stayed there, but all of a sudden I was back in the children's room.

DALLETT: How about the treatment at Ellis Island? Do you remember having a medical examination there?

STARCK: I don't remember exactly. I remember somebody took me there and I don't know what, like I say, my mind was a blank most of the time. I looked at things, but they didn't register. I think I was just frightened by being lost in a strange country.

DALLETT: So there was some doubt as to whether, since your mother wasn't there to meet you, and since you had rickets...

STARCK: And I limped, see.

DALLETT: And you had your limp.

STARCK: I limped, so...

DALLETT: And the fear was that you would not be let into this country.

STARCK: I think they, at one time they thought I was tubercular. But maybe they took X-rays, I don't know, and found I wasn't. But I got this from hearsay, see, most of it.

DALLETT: Do you remember how long you spent on Ellis Island?

STARCK: I don't know whether I, I don't think I spent a night there. I really don't. I...

DALLETT: You were through in a day, you know.

STARCK: I, I mean, I never, and Mother and I never got close enough to, for me to ask questions. It never dawned on me that I might want to know something, you know.

DALLETT: Right.

STARCK: I mean, we never discussed anything and she was completely wrapped up in Joey. You know, German parents are very, their sons are everything. But, uh, I don't know. Maybe it's, uh, in fact, uh, when I was taking, when I got to Chicago and I saw the woman who was supposed to be my mother, I told her, I says, "No, you're not." She said, "Why?" I says, "My mother

had blonde hair." And this woman's hair was dark, almost black. But then she, she told me that I must have been remembering some, maybe some of her friends who we visited. Maybe a blonde woman that I liked particularly, see. And it wasn't the Frau Robert, Mrs. Robert, because she had red hair. But, uh...

DALLETT: So your memory of this woman that you went to the circus with was a blonde haired woman?

STARCK: A blonde, yeah. And, uh, and more or less light, light complexioned. But in Chicago the woman had, well, she explained it that she had been in the sun all summer, and she told me that I would lose my pallor once I got out in the sun. And, but she told me different things like she felt my nose and she said, "Where did you get that bump?" And I told her. Then she said, "See, if I weren't your mother I wouldn't have known that your nose is a different shape now." And then, oh, something else. Oh, then, then she said, "No, if I weren't your mother would I have known where you were? Or, would I have been willing to pay to have you brought over," and so, being I was very immature for my age, for one thing. You know, in a protective life in the children's home and then in the orphanage, you don't learn much about life. And they believed in the maxim children should be seen not heard. We were not, we had too many periods of silence and not enough opportunity for communicating. Everything was down, set, and dry, you know. So...

DALLETT: So that must have been very difficult for you when you first arrived in Chicago and had to get used to this woman who was your mother.

STARCK: Yeah. Oh, we got along okay for about two years and then different incidents came up. Like being punished for when Joey hurt himself, and I

was blamed for it. I should have kept better track of him. And I told her, I once said, I said, "You only sent for me so Joey would have somebody to take care of him." And I said, "You don't, you don't love me, you just love Joey." So there were a lot of problems like that. And I kept running away and I was a ward of the juvenile court until I was eighteen. And the, Judge Bartolmy was the judge then in the Chicago Juvenile Court, and she didn't want to put me in an institution because she said I've spent too much time in institutions already. And so, uh, but finally when I kept running away and they found new foster homes for me. She said, "Well, the best thing is to put you in the Good Shepard Home, the St. Ann's Class for Dependent Children." And I learned typing and shorthand and comptometry.

DALLETT: What was the third?

STARCK: Comptometer.

DALLETT: What's that?

STARCK: It's like an adding machine without a tape. It's a comptometer, calculator.

DALLETT: Okay.

STARCK: I think they're out of date now. They have too many electronic things taking their place.

DALLETT: What about the language? How did you learn English? Were you put in school when you first went to Chicago, or...

STARCK: Yes. But I went to a Catholic school and there was, we lived in an entirely German neighborhood. The Near North side. In fact, it was so German

that one store had a sign, "We also speak English here." And, uh, so, uh...

DALLETT: Was your mother very involved in the, in the German leagues and the *Vereins* [organization] and was she involved in the German community?

STARCK: No, no. She just, uh, she took on jobs, like my stepfather was a fur tanner. He worked in the fur business. And it was piecework. And during the winter work was plenty and he made good money in the winter. But in the summer there was hardly any in that line of work. So she went to work as, sometimes as, just day-by-day housework or cook. And she was an excellent cook, because over there, in Germany, she went to the home economics school where they learn everything, housekeeping and cooking and, uh, she never taught me to cook or anything. And she crocheted and knit. She never taught me any of those things.

DALLETT: Was that on purpose? Was there some reason for her not to?

STARCK: I don't know, unless she, I don't know. Every time I wanted to watch her cook she'd say, "Oh, go watch Joey," or, "There's some dusting to do." You know, I never spent time in the kitchen.

DALLETT: And was her cooking a particularly German style or not?

STARCK: She did, yeah, but everything was very tasty. I mean, she knew how to bake, you know. The kitchen always, Saturdays the kitchen always smelled of fresh baked cake and donuts, home made donuts. But I don't know. I think we were just separated too long and, but, uh, we didn't, uh, get on. So, uh...

DALLETT: So it must have been very difficult to find you're part of a family with a

stepfather who you were just introduced to and a mother and now you have a younger brother.

STARCK: Well, there was a, uh, a stepsister, Edna. She was fifteen. And when she was, when she was sixteen she quit school and she worked. And then she, you know, in those days girls would read the personal column in the paper, "man looking for a wife," and she found a husband that way. She, he was in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, a dairy farmer. She went there to meet him and I guess she decided she liked the man. So she came home, packed her things and went off and got married. So, but, uh, she played the piano and Joey was given violin lessons. I don't know whether he ever kept up with it or not.

DALLETT: Was the man that your mother married, was he German, too?

STARCK: Yeah, he was from Bavaria. But they spoke German at home most of the time. She spoke Polish fluently, too. She was born in Warsaw, Poland. I think it was called Posen at that time. And my father, I never knew him. He was Czechoslovakian, or Bohemian. It was Bohemia then.

DALLETT: What language did you speak in the home, the new home with your mother and your stepfather and Joey?

STARCK: Well, German in the beginning but as soon as I, uh, learned, went to public school and I picked up the language real quick then, then I just spoke English.

DALLETT: So the public school that you went to was mostly, was it in a German community?

STARCK: Well, it was in the area, but they didn't speak German. And I happened to have teachers that, when we had to write compositions, invariably mine were put on the hall board because I'd always get a very good grade in them. So some of the kids in the class would ask me to write a composition for them, and the teacher told me, she says, "You wrote that for them, this child, didn't you?" I said, "Yes." "Don't you know that's cheating?" I didn't know. I was doing them a favor. And...

DALLETT: So you liked to write?

STARCK: Yeah, and I remember the one that, one of the compositions, you had to pretend you are something that you're not, you know? So I pretended I was a penny in the, uh, in a boy's pocket. You know, amid whatever little kids have, I made it up, maybe a frog, at that time, you know. And, uh, then how I fell out of his pocket and rolled down the street. I forgot exactly what it was. But evidently I got a very good mark on that, so, and that was put out on the hall. And then they encouraged me to read. Now, while I was learning to speak the language, I read books by Alexander Dumas and E. Phillips Oppenheimer, and The Mysteries and Miseries of Paris by Eugene Sou. When I joined the WAAC, in 1943, that was WAAC, I went to a library in Fort Iowa and I happened to come across that book, The Mysteries and Miseries of Paris, so I thought, oh, well, I'll read it again. And when I started I just said, "I actually liked that?" You know, it's so old fashioned and a different, uh, type of style they had. They put their thoughts in, have you ever read any of those?

DALLETT: No, no.

STARCK: Oh.

DALLETT: Like stream of consciousness, what you think as you go along?

STARCK: Or they'll be talking to the reader, "Now, just let me tell you this," you know.

DALLETT: They stepped back from the story, right.

STARCK: So, but, I mean, I learned the English. If I couldn't, if I didn't understand the word exactly, I could tell, kind of guess by the context. Or I'd go to the dictionary and if that wasn't clear then I think we had a German, English/German dictionary, so. I have this dictionary here. It has French, Italian and German in it. And, but now when I write the journals at junior college, if I can't think of a word, but, I can think of one close enough to it, I'll look that word up and eventually you'll find the exact word.

DALLETT: You mentioned before that you joined the WAAC in 1943.

STARCK: WAAC. Well, I enlisted in San Diego in 1943 and they had asked where you would like to go. Would you prefer going to Fort Des Moines, Iowa, or would you go to, oh, some place in Georgia, camp something in Georgia. And I wanted to go to Georgia. I'd never been in the south. So they gave me Fort Des Moines, Iowa. And we got there in the middle of winter. And basic training was okay. Then I went to, oh, administrative class. They took us from the camp. We stayed at the hotel. I think it was the Des Moines Hotel. It was right in the middle of town. And the WAAC had taken over the whole hotel. And, uh, the, uh...

DALLETT: So by that time you were a citizen of this country.

STARCK: Oh, yes. I became a citizen in 1933.

DALLETT: In 1933.

STARCK: And I've made it a point to vote at every election unless I, you know, was out of the town and couldn't.

STARCK: So did you have, was there any sense of divided loyalties, or how did you feel when the second World War broke out? You had been in this country for so many years.

STARCK: I was so Americanized that, because I was young when I left Germany and, uh, so I didn't have a chance to be indoctrinated in the Hitler youth movement and things, that's before his time. So, but I've, see, when I was in Chicago and, you're too young to know that, Bill Thompson was mayor of Chicago and they had all these, uh, oh, gangsters. And I, I wanted to, I wanted to run for mayor. I mean, I didn't want him to win and, so, but I'm, I think I'm a much more loyal American than a lot of people that are born here.

DALLETT: Can you think about what some of the things were that happened to you that sort of Americanized you, or talk about that process a little bit. How did it happen?

STARCK: Well, I just, I don't know.

DALLETT: Were things very different? I mean, was it a very difficult adjustment for you to make, or not?

STARCK: Uh-uh.

DALLETT: No.

STARCK: No. When I first finished my course at the convent school in Chicago I applied for a job at, in the Hearst paper and the, and I got the job the very first day. And I've never been out of work, except when I, oh, uh, in, uh, I'd come, I'd got the job and then after two years I got the wanderlust and I wanted to come to Hollywood and work in a studio in the, as a scenario writer. And so, uh, I came there and I think I was interviewed by Anita Loos. I'm not quite sure if that was the one, but I was told that I didn't look my age, for one thing. I was twenty then but I dressed more like a, like a schoolgirl, and I never wore makeup or anything, and ,uh, so, uh, she told me that they only need experienced writers. I should try a small studio where they might take a beginner. But she said there's an opening in the payroll department. Would you like that? Well, I was so naive that, because I hadn't had experience in it, I didn't know how to bluff my way. And after that every job I had was bookkeeping. I got in on the Hollywood Citizen News and worked there. That's when the, I stayed there about two years and I got homesick for Chicago. Or just, maybe I just, uh, maybe it's a reflection of my childhood when I was taken from one home to another, that kind of seemed to have been ingrown in me.

DALLETT: Right. A pattern, yeah. And how is it that you came to where we are now, Santa Rosa?

STARCK: Well, well, after I left the WAAC, I enlisted in San Diego. Okay, I got out after six months when they made it a direct part of the army. They took the one A out, it became the Women's Army Corps. And we had to make out new enlistment papers. And so I wouldn't make them out because they had told me because of my knowledge of German I would probably go to OCS and be trained and be used as an interpreter, and that. But, and

there was not any work to do. I mean, they had no placements for a lot of people and so you'd sit around in the, uh, in your quarters and read, or, and there were jobs going begging in civilian life, so I, I wouldn't re-enlist. And I had never been to San Francisco, so I had my travel, bus schedule, uh, arranged so I would go by way of San Francisco, and then down to San Diego. Well, I had a friend that worked for a company that had a branch in San Diego where I had worked. And we both ended up in Flagstaff, Arizona at some time on the, uh, construction of igloos in Belmont. That's right out of Flagstaff. They were building these, um, ammunition dumps, anti-aircraft, uh, things. And so when I got to San Francisco I called her at the company and she told me how to get to her office and then we'd go and have dinner together. So we went out on the town that night. And I had made, I stayed at the, I think it was the Manx Hotel in San Francisco. And we had such a good time that, they had a, at one of the nightclubs they had a horse and buggy that would drive you home if you were, instead of calling a cab you could go in a horse and carriage. So I went to the hotel in that, a carriage. So the next morning I called the National Cash Register Company and asked him what jobs were available. And so they had me come down to the office, and they handed me a list of jobs available. And so I got a job, the first one I went out, went for an interview.

DALLETT: Let me just ask you one thing, just to be clear about it. What was the WAAC? What did that stand for?

STARCK: Women's Army Auxiliary Corps.

DALLETT: Oh, it was auxiliary, okay. And that A was dropped after the war, was that right?

STARCK: Right. Then it became the Women's Army Corps. Uh-huh.

DALLETT: It was at that point when there were enough civilian jobs going that you decided not to stay with?

STARCK: That's right. I think I have a picture.

DALLETT: We're just about to run out of tape on this, so let me just ask you. There's one thing I didn't ask you before and that's whether you had any memories of the voyage, the boat to this country.

STARCK: Yes. I remember the cabin, and I remember that the, uh, the ship docked at Vigo, Spain to take on passengers and supplies and that, uh...

STARCK: Do you remember the name of the boat, by any chance?

STARCK: The Manchuria. And, uh, then, uh, of course, the food, I was so amazed by the different diet I was getting after having almost the barest essentials, mostly soups and rye bread and pumpkin, boiled pumpkin. And so the meals were terrific.

DALLETT: Do you remember what they were like? Which foods you first had?

STARCK: I only remember one breakfast that they served, well, grapefruit. And I found that a little bit sour, so I put a lot of sugar on it. But they served a white fish that was very, very good. But I don't remember any of the other meals.

DALLETT: How long did the crossing take?

STARCK: I don't know. Probably a week. I mean they didn't have the real fast voyage, no.

DALLETT: But you were in a cabin?

STARCK: Yeah, we had a stateroom. I think I slept on the upper bunk and it was very comfortable. No, I don't know whether I dressed myself. I don't recall any of those things. I don't know if that's unusual or people don't remember the ordinary happenings. I learned the expression, "You're crazy." I know the boys, so I asked the boys what does it mean, they said, "I love you." And so every time I met somebody on deck I'd say, "You're crazy." And then I'd wonder why they looked very dour at me, and somebody shook their fist at me. And so when I said it to a priest he asked, "Who taught you to say that?" I said, "Oh, some of the boys." (end of tape)

END OF THE INTERVIEW?