

EI-1037

MARGARET E. SCHMIDT

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RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: —is March 10th, 1999. And I'm here in Hane [PH] City? Is that where I am?

SCHMIDT: No, you're Winter Haven right now.

LEVINE: Winter Haven.

SCHMIDT: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Winter Haven, Florida at the home of Margaret E. Schmidt. Mrs. Schmidt was interned at Ellis Island for about nine or ten months from around July 4th, 1942 into 1943. And Ruth Williams is Margaret Smith's sister and she has also been interviewed for this collection. So some of the dates, she would probably have.

SCHMIDT: Yes.

LEVINE: And—and they would be the same.

SCHMIDT: Yeah, she was—I think she was 16 at the time so—and I was not quite that old. So she probably knows the dates better than I do. Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah. Okay. And [clears throat] this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. And this is a really interesting story. So if we—if you would say again for the tape your birth date and where you were born.

SCHMIDT: I was born in Lorraine [PH], Ohio on October 22, 1930.

LEVINE: Okay. And what—as far as your early years, do—how long were you in Lorraine before the family went to Germany?

SCHMIDT: Well, we didn't live in Lorraine. See, my—my—my mother's husband passed away when I was about a little over a year old. I guess I must have been just about a year old. And not being legitimate, the whole family knew it so they just kicked my mother out of the—out of the farm. And she—she had my sister and me. So I guess she was going to go back home to Mom and Dad, my grandma and grandpa. And of course, you know, in those days, I guess my grandpa said, "You're not going to bring that bastard in the house." And so my mother put me up at—at a great aunt's house as a foster care. And I stayed there until I was—I guess I was five.

LEVINE: And what was your great aunt—w—did you have a great uncle too?

SCHMIDT: Yeah, yeah. They had—

LEVINE: What were their names?

SCHMIDT: Schultz.

LEVINE: Schultz.

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: And you do remember those—

SCHMIDT: Oh, oh—

LEVINE: —five years?

SCHMIDT: Well, I remember some. Some of it I'd rather forget.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SCHMIDT: But the Schultz's were—they were my mother's—she was my mother's aunt. And they lived in Cleveland and I stayed there, like I say, until—and I spoke only German because they were from Germany. And I spoke only German. So when—when my mother took me back—when she married Fred Hintz [PH], she took me back and I couldn't—they put me to school. And I couldn't speak English.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: So they took—they—they—they said, "Teach her English." And they put me in a Lutheran school and the teachers did speak German. But I did eventually learn English and go to an American school until I was eight years old.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: Then we were in Cleveland. She took me—she—we lived upstairs by my grandfather. He had a two-story house on—

LEVINE: Oh.

SCHMIDT: —on Elfin [PH] Avenue. And we lived upstairs. Of course, my sister was with my—with my mother all the time and my grandmother. And then when she married Fred Hintz, then they got me back. And—and that—we left from—from Cleveland.

LEVINE: I see.

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, how did your life change? Can you remember g—going back with your mother and your sister and—

SCHMIDT: Oh—

LEVINE: —a new father?

SCHMIDT: It was—it was—I—I got along pretty good with her for a while there and then she was pretty—my sister's a bossy gal. And she was top banana.

LEVINE: [chuckles] Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: And she was a spoiled little brat because she—she was born—she was breech birth and she had a cast on her—on her body for, I guess, quite a while. She had to be carried around and—and she was spoiled.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: And so she always got her own way and—and she would do things and then she would say, “If you tell anybody, I’m going to really give it to you.” And she did! [laughter]

LEVINE: And how about your new father? This is now—

SCHMIDT: Fred Hintz.

LEVINE: —Hintz.

SCHMIDT: Yeah, Fred Hintz.

LEVINE: Hintz.

SCHMIDT: Well, he—he—he—he—he’d—he never hurt—he—he—he was a—he was a—he was a decent man. He—he was a nice person.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: He—he never hit me or anything. He never—he—he—my mother wasn’t—shouldn’t have had any children. She just was not a good mother. She had no affection for her children or feeling for her children ever, even for my sister.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SCHMIDT: Ah—

LEVINE: Hmm.

SCHMIDT: But he—he never really hurt me.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. D—were you close with anybody, like your grand—were you—how about—

SCHMIDT: No.

LEVINE: —your grandparents?

SCHMIDT: No. I wasn’t close with them. Like I say, yeah, they sort of shunned me a little bit.

LEVINE: Right.

SCHMIDT: In—you know, those days, that's how it was, you know.

LEVINE: Right.

SCHMIDT: It's Mother's fault but they take it out on the kids a little bit.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SCHMIDT: And Mom did not like me. She—I was a thorn in her side. And she—she did mistreat me a little. [chuckles] She did.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: And—but that's in the past.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SCHMIDT: She—that's forgiven and forgotten.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, do—did—it sounds like everybody was very German [chuckles] in your—in your life.

SCHMIDT: Yeah, yeah. My grandmother didn't speak any—any English.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: In fact, she only would go to—to people in the stores that spoke German. That's all she would—

LEVINE: She was an immigrant?

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: Yeah, they were all immigrants. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: The Schultzes, I think they were the last ones to come in from Germany. They came—they—I don't know, because I think my grandmother and grandfather were here first. Yeah, and Tanta Anna [PH] was here first and then Tanta Lanchen [PH] came. Yeah. That was her name, Lanchen Schultz. And his name was Hans Schulz and they had a John Schultz as a son.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Can you say anything about the German community in Cleveland at—

SCHMIDT: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: —around that time?

SCHMIDT: Oh, yeah. Well, behind you there, there's a picture. My sister sent it. It's at German Central and it's taken in the '30s. And all the relatives are on that picture.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: My mother, my stepfather.

LEVINE: Oh, wow.

SCHMIDT: My grandmother. They're all on and that's the front of the German center, the dance hall.

LEVINE: What was that called? Do you remember?

SCHMIDT: The German center.

LEVINE: Just called German center.

SCHMIDT: On York Road in Cleveland, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: Yeah, there—there's my—see, that's my—my stepfather.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: No, wa—wait a minute. I—

LEVINE: You better face it [unclear].

SCHMIDT: Okay, yeah. Stepfather, my mother, grandmother.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SCHMIDT: I got a—the aunt is—and then my grandpa is back here someplace. I'm not—I think that's him back here. But I remember these people that used to work in the kitchen because I—when we get—got back from

Germany, I used to go there. And I used to help in the kitchen and cook and clean dishes and serve to get in for free and get my meals.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, what—what kinds of German traditions did—did the people who were—who were here—

SCHMIDT: Well—

LEVINE: —in Cleveland—what did they—

SCHMIDT: Well, we—we went to church on Christmas and to [unclear] Lutheran where I went to school. And not my grandpa. He wouldn't go to church. He says, "I can pray behind the church just as well and the Lord'll hear me." [chuckles] And I think sometimes he's right.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: We—he always played Santa Claus and he would come up with the—with the big bag of toys. And then we would have to say something. We'd have to learn something. "What did you—what did you learn?" And we had to say a—a—a little piece. You know, a little poem or something. I said, "[speaking in German]." That means, "Dear Santa Claus. Don't look at me real bad. I'm trying to be good. Put your—put your stick"—because he always had a big stick—"Put it away and I'm going to be a very good little girl." And then he would give you a present. [laughter] Oh!

LEVINE: So you were strictly a German speaker.

SCHMIDT: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Was it difficult when you—when you went to school?

SCHMIDT: Ah—

LEVINE: Could you—could recall tho—that early years that—

SCHMIDT: Well, no. It wasn't bad when I was in the Lutheran school because, like I said, the teacher spoke. But I did learn English then and I used to draw pictures for the kids, and they used to pay me a penny for a picture. And I used to buy candy. And I—I learned to speak English very well then. I—I—and then I went to—to—when we went to Germany, I was already in public school, Mill [PH] School. And I was—let me see. I was eight then but I was only in the third grade. I don't know if that's the proper grade.

LEVINE: Oh, seems about right.

SCHMIDT: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: So what would you make pictures of?

SCHMIDT: Oh, I would draw Fritzy Ritz [PH] and—and—and Blondie and—and—and things like that. The kids liked the funnies, you know, and—

LEVINE: Uh-huh. [chuckles]

SCHMIDT: Maggie and Jiggs and [laughter]—

LEVINE: So tell me how it was decided that the family would go to Germany.

SCHMIDT: Well, we were at the—like I say, we went to the German Club, my grandparents, the whole—the whole—aunts and uncles always went to the German Club. And like I said, Martin Kessler [PH] was there and—and they used to have—they used to have guys marching around like the SS and stuff. And—

LEVINE: At the German Club?

SCHMIDT: Oh, yeah. They had, like—they had the meetings there. There was a whole group of Nazis here in Cleveland. I mean, it was bad. But evidently, like I said, Martin Kessler, he was—he was getting Germans to go back, German born, and—because we—a lot of them didn't have work. And we—in fact, we, for—I think for one year, we were caretakers at the German Central taking care, cleaning the grounds and—and everything. We stayed there. We lived there.

LEVINE: Your mother and father and you and your sister?

SCHMIDT: Yeah, yeah. My sister and I.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: We—we slept behind the stage. There were two bedrooms back there. And we kept the place. And like I said, he would come and he tried to get these people to sign up because the German government wanted them back. My—my stepfather was a Schlosser [PH] and he worked here for Thompsons—Thompsons [unclear]. He built airplanes on the east side.

LEVINE: Wow.

SCHMIDT: And of course, they wanted him back in Germany to build planes over there because Hitler had big ideas. And he—they said, “We’ll pay your fare down.” They did. We got a house to live in—in Legebrook [PH]. He went to work at the Heinkel factory. We had—the house was furnished. Ev—every dish, every towel, everything, curtains—everything was there.

LEVINE: What was the extent of—of the pe—number of people that Martin Kessler got?

SCHMIDT: Well, I don’t know. When we got—we—when we left Cleveland, I don’t know how many were—John Schultz was with us. He was on the same boat. He went back too, my—my mother’s cousin, who I stayed with as—as a child. Th—that cousin—cousin went back. He had married American girl and they went back with us, and there were—there were quite a few others. Because I remember we were on the—we were on the train going to New York. And then we—after we hit New York, we were—we were—we were in a big room and—and they were getting everybody together. They were—and that was on the S.S. New York and there were a lot of them on the S.S. New York, a lot of poor people. They were all on third—third and fourth—

LEVINE: Class?

SCHMIDT: —class, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: And there were people there that were wealthy. There was a swimming pool and stuff but we didn’t—we weren’t allowed there because we were, you know, almost like steerage, you know. But there were—I guess there were wealthy people going to Europe to visit at that time too.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SCHMIDT: But most of us, we were, you know, in the poor section. But we had a good time.

LEVINE: Well, do you think of many of the ones who went back were—were Nazi sympathizers? I mean, is that wh—

SCHMIDT: Ah—

LEVINE: Mostly, they went for economic reasons.

SCHMIDT: I think that was it. I think mostly for economic reasons and maybe they had—if they had a chance to go back home, maybe to be with Mom and Dad or something.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: They took it. They took it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: You know, and they—they promised a lot. They did. They promised a lot. And I know my—my cousin, too—my mother's cousin, John Schultz, he had a good job too. He had a fine job and they had a nice place in Hopogarten [PH]. We went to visit him, my sister and I, when we were in Germany.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SCHMIDT: And he—he did—they did conscript him to the army. He was in the army for a little while. He was a deumetcher [PH], a—he took the—the Americans and made their language into German and so forth.

LEVINE: A translator?

SCHMIDT: That's it. That's it, yeah.

LEVINE: A translator, uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: Translator, yeah.

LEVINE: Wow.

SCHMIDT: That's what he did.

LEVINE: Yeah. Can you remember anything else about the voyage, going back?

SCHMIDT: Going back, yeah. There was—there were a lot of poor kids there and that was the first time I got a kiss.

LEVINE: On the boat?

SCHMIDT: From Eric, yeah.

LEVINE: [chuckles]

SCHMIDT: He—he was—they—they had six kids and they were all going back to Germany. And they were so poor. His hands were—they were so chapped. They were bleeding. And I would take his hands and I would wash them and I scrubbed them, and then I would put cream on them everyday, sometimes twice a day. But he had eyes for my sister, not for me. But he did give me a kiss. [laughter] But my sister was a beauty, let's face it.

LEVINE: Well, let—let me see. Now, this was 1939—

SCHMIDT: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: —in the spring.

SCHMIDT: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And you were—

SCHMIDT: I think it took us about seven days to get—get to—to Germany.

LEVINE: I see.

SCHMIDT: We—we went to England, then Le Havre, France. Then we went up to Bremen and we went up to Hamburg. I guess they were taking [unclear] off of the boat or whatever.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: And then we got off in Hamburg.

LEVINE: So you were about eight.

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: You were eight—

SCHMIDT: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: —at this point. And then what was—what was it like? I mean, what struck you as—as different, new, once you got there?

SCHMIDT: When—when we got there and—and all those soldiers were standing there and this was the “Sieg heil, Hitler. Sieg heil,” it was a scary thing. I had—well, I had seen them marching around, playing at the German Center but I had never seen fanatics like this. This was—this was way out. And you know when we went to school in Germany—we had to go

to school—teacher beat me up, because he—they dro—she drove by and you were supposed to say, “Heil Hitler.” And I wasn’t going to say that.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: And she knew I was American. And when I got to school she told the principal about it and I got it.

LEVINE: Oh.

SCHMIDT: I got beaten for that. And after that, I said, “Heil Hitler.”

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Wow.

SCHMIDT: I didn’t forget. And when you went into a store, you had to stand in front of—when you walked into a store and closed the door, you lift your hand and said, “Heil Hitler.”

LEVINE: Hmm.

SCHMIDT: You better do that. You better do that. And I did it.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SCHMIDT: I mean—

LEVINE: How was your father? How about your mother and father? How did they adapt?

SCHMIDT: Well, they—they—right away, when we—when we visited my—we visited my—my father’s people in Prussia. And then we came back and we visited in—Tanta Marie [PH] in Berlin. And then we went to Legebrook where our house was supposed to be. And it wasn’t ready yet. And we stayed in a ledegenhein [PH], which was a place for single men that worked. And we had one room and the four of us were in the one room. And we shared a kitchen and b—toilet with—with everybody. But it was mostly empty because the men were all working. And I think we stayed there for—for maybe a month and a half or two months. And then the house was ready and we went—we went into our house. But right away, Mom c—wrote her mother and my grandmother here in Cleveland and said, “Ma, this is bad. It’s bad here. We’ve got to get back home.” And my father—my grandfather, he was—he was always listening to the German—Germany in that—on a short wave. And, “No, no. You stay there. It’s all right. You’re going to be all right.” You know, and they—they—but Mama—they wanted out right away.

This was not for them. They were Americans, too Americanized, because they were not going to be Nazis. No way.

LEVINE: And your father too?

SCHMIDT: The stepfather, yeah.

LEVINE: The stepfather?

SCHMIDT: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: Both of them. Both of them. They—they—they—they didn't—

LEVINE: Hmm.

SCHMIDT: It was just too much. It was just—it was just too fanatical. I mean, people had pictures of Hitler in their windows and, I mean, you didn't s—dare say anything, you know, or—nothing.

LEVINE: Did you see any anti-Semitism when you were over there?

SCHMIDT: Yeah. When we were in Berlin, we saw—we saw—ah, well, a lot of them had—had a "J" [unclear].

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: And some of them had stars. But what I—what I—what really bothered me is—is when they were walking on the sidewalk and somebody would just push them off the sidewalk. And they had to get in the street. They didn't—they weren't allowed in the walk. And these people were not—I'm not saying they were whole Jews, you know. They were maybe just partially Jews.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, hmm-uh.

SCHMIDT: But something like that, it's—it's bad.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SCHMIDT: Something like that is—is—I—I don't get it. I don't understand it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: I never will.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: And we used to go pick—of course, we were—we didn't have much food, you know, and we'd go in the woods. And we would pick mushrooms and blueberries. And we didn't know that at the time but we used to go to a place outside [unclear]. It was a—it was a prison camp. It's called Sachsenhausen [PH]. I didn't find that out until later what it was. And there was a big gate there, a high fence but—but there was woods there, you know, on both sides of the fence. And then there was a soldier coming around with a dog on the outside perimeter of the fence. And he chased us away. We weren't allowed to—we weren't allowed to be there. And we couldn't figure—we thought maybe because Heinkel [PH] factory had a big—was in the woods too and it had a big—big, high fence with—with that—that wire that's got them pricklers on it.

LEVINE: Right.

SCHMIDT: Yeah. And—and we thought maybe that was another factory. We didn't know. But I didn't find out till after—after we were back that that was a prison camp, the Sachsenhausen there.

LEVINE: Hmm, wow.

SCHMIDT: But see, the Ger—even the Germans—we went with a bunch of German kids to pick. You know, because everybody was hungry. And—and they didn't know what it was either.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: So a lot of Germans didn't know what was going on. You heard things but you didn't repeat things because it wasn't smart.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: And I don't—I don't think—I really—I really don't think a lot of Germans knew what was going on, because a lot of them were good people. Because if it wouldn't be for some of them Germans, I'd be dead. I would have been starving to death because they gave me food.

LEVINE: Hmm. You mean—

SCHMIDT: A lot of good people—

LEVINE: —during this period when your father was—

SCHMIDT: Yeah. Yeah, when we were over there. See—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: —when America, during the war, we—we were—we didn't get the food stamps the Germans got.

LEVINE: Oh.

SCHMIDT: They cut back our food stamps. And we had very little to eat. We had one slice of bread a day. Well, there were two slices of bread. You could eat it when you wanted. But Mama always saw to it that Dad had plenty to eat and I—Ruth used to go steal. She—I—I didn't have the guts to do that. But she'd go down and steal a piece of bread. She'd eat it and I could hear her chewing in bed, you know, and trying to swallow it down. I was so darn hungry. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Oh.

SCHMIDT: And years later, she says—I says, "You know, it used to kill me when you used to do that." She says, "Well, you should have said something. I would have give you a bite." And I says, "Sure." [laughter]

LEVINE: Well—

SCHMIDT: She was just as hungry as I was. [chuckles]

LEVINE: What about your father and the job that he was promised? And how did that all work out?

SCHMIDT: He got—he—he worked in the Heinkel factory. He—he worked in the Heinkel factory.

LEVINE: What was it a factory—oh, that was the aircraft.

SCHMIDT: Hein—the Heinkel factory where they built the Heinkel planes was on one side of the village in Legebrook. It was in the middle of the woods. And on top of the factory they had planted fir trees. So when the—when the—when the air raids—

LEVINE: Oh.

SCHMIDT: —would come, they could never find it. And—and what they would do then, there was a big empty cow field just, oh, maybe a half a mile away, they would build cardboard houses there. They would light them

and then all the planes—"We hit the Heinkel"—we had a radio. We used to hear them. And we used to turn it on. We could hear England. "They hit the Heinkel factory." They hit the cow field. That's what they did. They dropped everything in the field.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: And then when they got the—they got the planes—they got the fuselage built. The wings were built and they took a flat truck down the hill on—on this highway and they took them to the other side of the village. It was a big farm. It looked like a farm. But it was really the hanger where they put together the planes. And then they had potato fields in between there and—and—and that. And so they never found that either because there were big barns, and they thought it was a—was—was a big farm.

LEVINE: Wow.

SCHMIDT: And that's—that's what they—and they took the—the Messerschmitts [PH] that were supposed to be fighting, you know—when they did come, they'd—sometimes they'd put the Messerschmitts—they would put them, back them up right against the houses. So when they dropped the flares—you know, there's always a shadow when they dropped the flares, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SCHMIDT: And then the houses would shade the—the Messerschmitts so they could never see that there were planes there.

LEVINE: Messerschmitts are planes?

SCHMIDT: Yeah, they were—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: They were—they were fighter planes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: And—and sometimes they would—they would stop with—with—with the anti-aircraft. And then the Messerschmitts would—they would—if they would get a plane in—in the spotlight, then the—they would stop shooting. And then the Messerschmitt would go up and shoot down the plane.

LEVINE: Oh. And what was it like? Did your father talk about your—your stepfather—did he talk about what it was like working in that factory—

SCHMIDT: Well—

LEVINE: —at that time?

SCHMIDT: He—he was—I—he used to get a warm meal for n—they gave him a warm meal—

LEVINE: Oh.

SCHMIDT: —at noon. We had nothing like that. And my mother would give him the food, yet, what was meant for us. He would get supper yet. I didn't find this out till after either because one of the girls that we went to school with, she—she mentioned that the men got a warm meal in the factory. And I thought, 'My gosh. How could he eat that food at night, knowing that'—I mean, malnutrition. I mean, that was it. I mean, there was nothing left of me anymore. And, I mean, I was so darn weak. And how could he eat that food, you know, knowing that there wasn't enough for us. That—that's one I—I never got, quite.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: That one bothered me when I found out about that.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: That hurt.

LEVINE: Yeah. And how about the other groups that—that really suffered with the Nazis, like priests and—

SCHMIDT: Well, there were no—

LEVINE: —and homosexuals and—

SCHMIDT: They had—well, I didn't know anything about—

LEVINE: I mean other groups.

SCHMIDT: We didn't know anything about priests—I mean, homosexuals. But all the churches were closed down in the village. And we used to go—there were—there were three—three ladies. There were three sis—not two—two or three sisters. They used to live down the road on an empty

road. And we used to go there and we used to have—they used to re—
read the Bible.

LEVINE: These were nuns?

SCHMIDT: No.

LEVINE: No.

SCHMIDT: No.

LEVINE: No, they were three sisters. Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: Just ol—older women.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: And we used to go over there and—and we used to, you know, read the Bible and tell Bible stories and stuff. They were very nice ladies. But there was no church. None. There weren't any.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: Everything was shut down.

LEVINE: Wow, wow.

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: And do you remember, like, young kids being—being conscripted, I guess is the word—

SCHMIDT: Well—

LEVINE: —into the—

SCHMIDT: No. Well, the kids went to school and then after school they went to the—th—they all belonged to the Hitlerjunge [PH]. They—all the kids in school except me and my sister didn't belong either. But she had a girlfriend and, oh, my sister did a bad thing. She put on Waltraud's [PH] Hitlerjunge uniform. And she had her picture taken. And they—and I guess my mother or I don't know if Ruth sent it to my grandmother in— in America. This was before America was in the war. Well, anyway, I guess—I guess we got to Ellis Island. You know, the FBI, they—they went—

LEVINE: Oh.

SCHMIDT: —over to my grandpa's. And—and they had looked through every—and they found this picture of my sister. And then my sister, she—she graduated from school there and she had this—she—she was supposed to—she wasn't supposed to take her graduation diploma along because it had a big swastika on it. And I remember Mama telling her, "Throw it out. You know, we're going back to America. Throw it out." Well, you know, she earned it. She folded it up somehow and took it along. And they found that on Ellis Island. "Well, you said you weren't Nazis. Ahh!" Oh, my—my dad did a bad thing. On the boat coming back, on the Druttninghom [PH], he got involved with this—they used to play cards and stuff. And this guy had a couple watches. His name was Barr [PH]. I think it was William Barr. They did catch him. He was a spy. And he asked my dad to wear one of the watches because he didn't want to have all these watches, you know. And my—my father, "Oh, sure. I—I'll give it back to you." Well, they found out he was a spy and—and they—

LEVINE: They found—

SCHMIDT: —found the watch. And I guess the FBI—they checked everything. They took the shoes. They took every bit of clothing we had and ripped everything apart. Shoes, everything. And I guess they found something in the watch and, oh, they had my stepfather three days, three nights. They—they had him there questioning, questioning, questioning. But he didn't do anything, you know. It was this Barr. But they did catch him. He was a spy.

LEVINE: Had this happened on Ellis Island?

SCHMIDT: Ellis Island, yeah.

LEVINE: Wow.

SCHMIDT: They did arrest him, I'm—I'm sure. I don't know what they did with him.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: [telephone rings] Oh, excuse—

LEVINE: Okay, we're going to pause here. [tape off/on] We were talking about the ship.

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Coming or going?

SCHMIDT: Going to Germany—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: —the ship was the S.S. New York. And we were on the sea on—on Hitler's birthday. And they had a big party that—you know, there was—of course, like I said, there were a lot of sympathizers too and they had a big party. And I remember the ocean was like a mirror. It was the strangest thing. You could look down and see fish but there wasn't a ripple on the ocean. It was sort of scary, actually. [chuckles] And then coming back, we took—the American Consul in Portugal helped us get onto this Druttninghom. I believe it's a Swedish ship. I don't know how to spell it. Druttninghom.

LEVINE: Okay.

SCHMIDT: There was the Kingshom, the Druttninghom, and there was another one. Oh, I don't know. One of them was from—from—from—from Japan, went from Japan. One of them got torpedoed, one of the boats that—they were exchange boats. What they did is they changed Germans into Germany. And then the ones that—the Americans that wanted to get out got out. And I think—I—I know my—my father—Cecil Ryder [PH]—Mama got in touch with him and he was instrumental in getting us out. He worked with—with—with the congress and stuff and got out and got us out of Ellis Island, got my sister and I out of Ellis Island before my parents.

LEVINE: Wow.

SCHMIDT: Because they were going to send them back again.

LEVINE: Wow. Now, so were you aware of people when you were at Ellis Island going back to Germany because they were sympathizers [unclear]?

SCHMIDT: No, not at that time. Not at that time. There wasn't anybody coming in. There were some coming in but they weren't—they were—they were from Japan. There were some—there was Mr. St. Martin [PH]. He was a—he was a teacher in Japan and they—they threw him out or whatever. Or he got out somehow because he was a—he was a—he was a Span—he was a Spaniard. And he—he lived for a while in—in New York. He worked for the YMCA there and I guess he worked there for a couple years be—quite a few years yet, because he used to write me letters and send me a dollar once in a while. He was my special friend on Ellis Island.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

LEVINE: He was—he was Spanish but he was in Japan—

SCHMIDT: Yeah, and he—

LEVINE: —and he was—

SCHMIDT: —teaching English in Japan.

LEVINE: I see. And he was brought back—

SCHMIDT: To—

LEVINE: —in exchange?

SCHMIDT: Somehow, yeah, because there were—Mr. Whiting, who was—who was an editor—he was a printer or something in a newspaper there. Or maybe he worked for the New York newspaper but he was in Japan. And he got sent back and his wife was an opera singer. And they had—I think they had two daughters who were maybe 20 or something like that. They were grown up. And they were also there. They let the—the wife and the two daughters—and they were also on Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SCHMIDT: So there were other people. And Giro Arakava [PH]—he was also—he was a Japanese but he was born American. And I think he worked for the FBI. And he was there on Ellis Island. Now, he might be alive yet, Giro, because he was working for the—I—I'm sure he was working for the FBI.

LEVINE: What was his name? Giro?

SCHMIDT: Giro Arakava. He was a handsome man.

LEVINE: Kava.

SCHMIDT: My sister probably could spell it for you and everything because she's great at that kind of stuff. [chuckles] She'll remember Giro.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, what do—what else do you remember about the Japanese who were at—on Ellis Island at the same time that you and your family were?

SCHMIDT: Th—those were the o—the only ones that I—were—were the Whitings and Giro. There were some that came and—some came in and were out right away. We never could figure that out. Some people did come and they were out right away.

LEVINE: They were often transferred, I think, to camps. Like—

SCHMIDT: No, I—I don't—

LEVINE: No?

SCHMIDT: No, I don't think so because I think they were just—somebody got them out or—or they—they could prove or something. And they—they didn't have a mess like we had with the German swastikas and—

LEVINE: Right.

SCHMIDT: You know? [chuckles]

LEVINE: Right, right. How did the—how did the Germans on Ellis Island—and do you remember any Italians on Ellis Island at that point?

SCHMIDT: No, no. I—there was a—one—one colored girl. I don't know where she came from. She w—she—she—she was dropped off there and she was all by herself. And she was about our age—my age. We sort of took her under our wing and played with her. And—and we—and that was the first—we—we had these huge showers. There were, like, eight or ten shower heads. And we—we used to go up early after supper. And we'd—we'd—we'd—we'd soap everything up and then we'd slide in the shower. [chuckles] And that was the first time I'd ever saw a colored person, you know, that they were colored all over. By golly! [laughs] But she was a sweet—but she didn't stay long either. Somebody came and picked her up. Oh, within two weeks, I guess, she was out of there too.

LEVINE: But she—was she being held for another reason or—

SCHMIDT: No, I don't know—I don't know how she got in there. She was—she was brought in. I don't know where she was from. I have no idea.

LEVINE: Huh.

SCHMIDT: I—I—I got—somehow, I got the impression that she was from South America someplace or some—but I don't know if that's—she did speak English but she didn't speak a good English.

LEVINE: I see.

SCHMIDT: Not as good as I did. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Well, how did the Japanese, as a group, get along with the Germans at Ellis Island? Do you remember?

SCHMIDT: Actually—oh, actually, the people that were pro-Nazi and—and against Nazi, we stayed—this is the hall. And on the left side, they were the bad guys. We didn't—we didn't associate with them. We didn't do nothing with them. We were on this side of the room. And that's where we stayed because there was a lot of friction, an awful lot of friction there. I mean, sometimes the—the ironing board was over there. We had to wash our clothes in the—in the washroom. And then we'd dry them and the ironing board was in the German section. And they used to "Bk—bk—bk—bk—can't use this. I'm using it now!" You know. Nasty, nasty.

LEVINE: Huh.

SCHMIDT: Huh-uh. And they'd get a lot of company and they'd get—oh, they'd get food, all kinds of food. They were getting—hmm, the food in Ellis Island was—was food.

LEVINE: Food—

SCHMIDT: It was—

LEVINE: —versus no food.

SCHMIDT: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah.

SCHMIDT: Yeah. But it—it was—it was not a good—it was—there was always antagonism there. Always. Always.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And how did the Japanese fit in with—

SCHMIDT: Oh, actually, they sort of stayed by themselves. They weren't there too terribly long. Giro—now, Giro was there—I don't know how long Giro—there. But he—he—he was friends with everybody. He was—I—some people said that he was there to pump—you know, to see if there was—like—like my father or something, because he was friends with everybody. And he talked to everybody. He talked to all the guys and the ladies.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: And he was a young man, very, very personable. And some people said, "Don't talk to him. He's an FBI man. He"—they—see, now, I don't know but this is what they said.

LEVINE: Rumor, yeah.

SCHMIDT: We—we didn't know. "But he's an FBI man and if you say something wrong, they're going to send you back," you know. "Oh, ho. Oh, ho." You know. But—

LEVINE: And could you say a little more about how you got out of Germany?

SCHMIDT: Well, like I said, Kessler got out early. But we couldn't get out because we didn't have our papers. The Germans took our papers from—from us. And we didn't have the papers. And I remember Dad going—going out of—out of town. He took the train, trying to get the papers back. And—because, see, we—when the American Consul was there, they went and had the American citizenship renewed all the time because we were trying to get out. We were working with the consul and trying to work through America and—and the relatives, whatever, to get us out of there again. And I remember going to Germany and going to the American Consul and going to Berlin by the Brun Bergator [PH]. It was on the other side, the—the consul was. And that was funny too. The Brun Bergator, they had—they had, like, a thick net and they had Christmas trees stuck in—in the net so you couldn't see the Brun Bergator from above. Because, you know, they bombed Berlin all the time. But they—you could—you looked up and you saw these Christmas trees standing on—it was like a really heavy rope and they had, like, a net and they had the—the tree sticking in there. It was the strangest thing. Well, anyway, they kept on working, you know, but we couldn't get—get out of there. The—Kessler got out but he came to visit us before he left. And that was in '41 when America was in the war then. And we couldn't get out. And—and then we tried to get the papers and we couldn't get the papers. And then I guess the consul left, I think, when we left, the American Consul. Because we were the last Americans to leave there, I think. And we were in—we were in the

Banhof [PH]—in the train station in—in Berlin. And we had heard about—about Jews. And we were sitting on the ground and we had soldiers with guns guarding us. And I heard the talk, you know. There was talk, you know. And now they could talk because we didn't know where we were going. And it was a little iffy. "Are we going to a concentration camp or are we going to get out of here?" You know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: It was—it was iffy. The train came. We got on the train. And it wasn't a cattle car and it wasn't anything so we figured we were all right. The soldiers stayed out.

LEVINE: They stayed on the platform?

SCHMIDT: Yeah, the—because there were a lot of soldiers guarding us. And I guess there—I—I don't know if any—I didn't see any in the train when we went. And then we went from Germany to France. We—I remember getting out in Paris. We walked around in Paris. And of course, it—Paris was still under German rule then, you know. It was still—

LEVINE: Right.

SCHMIDT: —occupied.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: And I remember going to the ba—I had to go to the bathroom so bad. And I was so surprised. I heard so much about Paris and here they had this wooden thing. And you could see underneath here.

LEVINE: Right.

SCHMIDT: And you walked in and that was the toilet. You had to stand there and you could—anybody outside could see what you were doing. You were covered, like, from the knees up. I thought, "Ooh, this is Paris? Forget it." [laughs]

LEVINE: Well, what did you overhear the soldiers say when you were—

SCHMIDT: Well, they didn't talk.

LEVINE: Oh, [unclear]?

SCHMIDT: No, they didn't talk about it. No, but I heard—people were afraid. They were—they were on edge. They—they didn't know exactly what was happening, especially when all them soldiers were walking there with their guns. They were scared a little, you know.

LEVINE: Now, these are the people who ended up going with you—

SCHMIDT: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: —on a ship back to—

SCHMIDT: Yeah. They all got—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: We—we were waiting for the train to pick us up. And then we went through France. We got back on the tr—train in Paris and we went to Spain. And there was the American Red Cross. They were there.

LEVINE: And what did they do?

SCHMIDT: Then we knew—we knew we were going back to America.

LEVINE: Oh, wow. So up until then—

SCHMIDT: They—doughnuts—doughnuts and coffee. And we—they put us on a beautiful train. Oh, my gosh! It was nice. And there was the dining car. And, oh, my sister's going to—she—I don't know if she told you what happened on the Spanish train.

LEVINE: Go ahead.

SCHMIDT: We were on the train and she—she—I guess her—and our stepfather had a little to-do because she was always with the boys. And he told her to mind her p's and q's. And—and I guess he hollered at her for something. And she was supposed to tell him that night that the sleeping arrangement had been changed, and my dad wasn't supposed to go into that compartment because they had put Mrs. Tagetoff [PH] and her daughter in there. She didn't tell him on purpose. So Mrs. Tagetoff was in bed. Ruth and I was in bed. My mother was in bed. My dad walks in. He takes off his clothes. He jumps in bed with Mrs. Tagetoff. [laughter] She didn't say a word. She was—she was a widow lady, I think, or—or she had been separated from her husband. She didn't say—and I guess he sort of touched her. This was not his wife. She was—she was a little on the plump side. Mama was so skinny. And, "Hoho! Hahh!" He jumped out of that bed. He grabbed

his pants and ran out—[laughs] out of the compartment. We have to laugh about that so—and he—finally, on Ellis Island they did find—he did find out who it was that he had jumped in bed with. They used to laugh about it. [laughs] Because she sat just the table next to us behind us, Mrs.—yeah, Mrs. Tagetoff sat there, yeah. So—

LEVINE: So—so your sister had told him that the—that the arrangements had been changed. And that’s why he did that?

SCHMIDT: No, she—she didn’t tell him the arrangement had been changed. He was supposed—he had been sleeping there in that compartment and—and she was supposed to say, “You can’t sleep there tonight.”

LEVINE: I see.

SCHMIDT: Because they but Mrs. Tagetoff in there. “Hoh! Hoh!” [laughs] And so he thought he was—well, go get in there and get into bed. “Oh, oh!” [laughs]

LEVINE: Oh, boy. So let’s see. Anything else about Ellis Island? Who else was there besides you and—and the other people who had come with you?

SCHMIDT: Yeah, there—there—well, li—well, there were—the Nazis were there. But coming to Ellis Island, we got off the boat. And like my—I—I heard my sister say “on a ferry.” We didn’t go on a ferry. They—they picked us up on a tugboat and took us on Ellis Island on a tugboat. And I thought that was the coolest thing. I had been on a tugboat! I was so proud of—“How come you don’t remember that?” [chuckles] Because I was—I was so interested in that tugboat ride. It was—it was dirty. It was sooty and that but—but we were all standing on the tugboat and—and they—

LEVINE: Wow.

SCHMIDT: —they took us there. And when we got there—now, I don’t know what happened to Ruth. They had a great big flag, swastikas in the middle of the hall. There was, like, a—there—there’s a—you know, there’s a—a—

LEVINE: Balcony?

SCHMIDT: —balcony, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: And they had it hanging from the balcony, a big one. Well, we—we—we—we all got in there. I guess we had supper and that and—and I don't know what the heck was going on. But anyway, these young guys and some of the men, they saw that swastika there and, hey, we were Americans and we weren't going to put up with that crap. Now, I don't know what R—where Ruth went. Now, she might have gone upstairs to the—to the—to the—

LEVINE: Dorm?

SCHMIDT: —dorm—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: —with her girlfriend, Annalesa [PH]. Because she says she doesn't know anything about this. But I remember one of guys—in fact, two of them—they went up and they ripped that flag down. And then the German guys—and they—it was a heck of a melee and, of course, there were police guards. And somebody had to call the—the Coast Guard to come in. And my mother's grabbing me, pulling me up the steps to go to the—to the—because it was a real free for all. I mean, people were punching and—and, boy, it was—it was a real melee there. And so she dragged me up this—“Come, come, come!” I want to watch. I wanted to watch, you know. [chuckles] And we were on—on the balcony and I was trying to watch. She kept—my mother, “Come on! Come on!” [laughs]

LEVINE: Now, was this soon after you arrived?

SCHMIDT: Right, that same night.

LEVINE: Oh, wow. So that was, what?

SCHMIDT: We all got—

LEVINE: Spring, '39. No.

SCHMIDT: No, no.

LEVINE: No.

SCHMIDT: No, that was in—in—in '40—no, when we got there, now, I'm not sure what date it was '40—'42. It must have been in spring of '42 we got there.

LEVINE: Oh, wait a minute. Oh, wait a minute. You—you just g—you think maybe you got there around July 4th.

SCHMIDT: It—it might have been.

LEVINE: That's what you said before.

SCHMIDT: It—it might have been around that time.

LEVINE: So it might have been around then.

SCHMIDT: Because it was hot. It was hot.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, okay.

SCHMIDT: So it might have been July—well, I don't know but that was—oh, man, it was scary. It was scary. When—when they—when—they went up and took the flag down and then it started. Oh, my gosh! These guys were all there, you know, on that side, you know. And, oh! I guess they were told to move over because there were people coming in, exchange, although nobody left from there. I don't know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: Maybe they—I don't know why.

LEVINE: Did that happen again? I mean—

SCHMIDT: No, only—only—

LEVINE: Did the flag go—did the swastika go back up?

SCHMIDT: No. Oh, no. It never went back up again. It never went back up again.

LEVINE: Huh.

SCHMIDT: No. There—then there was a to-do in—one more time. I don't know. It was in the—in the—in the mess hall. I don't know why, because we were coming in and I don't know what had gone on. There—the men—the single men ate before the—before the—I don't know if they ate before or if they were there at the same time, because the families all sat together on one side. Now, maybe it was the single men. Maybe there had been something going on the night before or whatever in the—you know, where the—where the Americans would have to go—the men would go to sleep in the dormitories where the Germans were—they would separate the families. The women stayed in one

part. The women went into another part. So it—it—something might have happened there, because that day we came into eat and there were—there were Coast Guard men with rifles standing every so many feet apart along the side where the men were. So I don't know. There might—had—might have been another ruckus.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: Ah—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: To-do, because that was the only other time that I remember the Coast Guard being in the mess hall there.

LEVINE: Did you have any contact with Coast Guards at all—

SCHMIDT: No.

LEVINE: —while you were there?

SCHMIDT: No. Well, we—if you got sick, they took us down—down, I guess to the Coast Guard station where they had a nurse or somebody or a doctor to take a look at us. And when you were—you know, if you were—I—I was sick for—I don't know what the heck I had, fever or something.

LEVINE: Mmm.

SCHMIDT: And they took us down there.

LEVINE: Now, how about the Nazi sympathizers? Did they—did they do anything else, like march around or—

SCHMIDT: No, no. They didn't do anything. They were very quiet after that. I mean, they—they—they—like I say, we—we didn't have much to do with them. We very seldom even spoke to them. We just stayed to ourself and they stayed to themselves. Like I say, every once in a while a little confrontation would—but—but we—we didn't bother with them.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: We just didn't bother with them.

LEVINE: When you said that you—

SCHMIDT: Although there was not—there was one lady. She sat by us. Her name was Buba [PH] and—and she was—she was an internee. But she sat on the American side. So I—I think she was—she was not a German sympathizer. I think her name was Buba. She was a single lady, maybe in her 30s or so. And then there was a Russian one—woman there too. I don't—I don't remember her coming over on the boat but she was—she was—I don't know if she was interned there or what she was. Somebody had said she was of Russia royalty. She didn't speak to anybody. She would go up to the dormitory and she would—I remember watching her one night. She had gray hair and she would put all this cream on, and she would go like this and—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: —she would do this and this and this. And I was wa—'Oh, look at what's she's doing. I wonder why she's doing that.' You know. But she never would speak to anybody.

LEVINE: Well, maybe she couldn't speak English or Ger—

SCHMIDT: I—I don't know but I—I don't remember anybody ev—I don't know how long she was there or anything either. But I remember that about her. She—

LEVINE: She was never deported or anything that you know of?

SCHMIDT: I don't know if she got our or how—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: I—I just—after—I don't remember her then anymore.

LEVINE: Do you remember any hearings going on during the times you were there?

SCHMIDT: Yeah. Well, like I said, there were hearings. D—different people. The police would—somebody would come and the—the police would—you know, there was a man at the ga—gate. You know, at the door, a policeman, usually two of them. And then they would pick up who—who was—or they'd call. They'd call the name, "Fred Hintz, you're wanted." Then he'd have to come forward. And then somebody would take him to the interrogation room. And that's—and not only my father, but other people also.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: And a lot of—a lot of merchant marine men that were—that were torpedoed, they landed up on Ellis Island because they had lost their papers. And a lot—oh, there were some really nice fellows, I remember. What the heck—Eddie. Oh, oh! He was really nice. He used to do little favors for me. He used to give you a dime. [laughter]

LEVINE: And anything else about the merchant marines who were there when you were there?

SCHMIDT: They used to gamble. They gambled a lot. They—evidently, they must—they all had a lot of money. They—man, they used to—

LEVINE: Yeah.

SCHMIDT: A lot of money on the table. They gambled and they were in—they were in the same room with us.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: But they stayed in the back, toward the back. They didn't bother with the families.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, they were mostly—they were men.

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: There weren't any women, right?

SCHMIDT: They were all me—no, no. They were all men.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: And then there was a girl. She was from Australia. And I understand she—the—the sailors got her into this U-boat or something. They—she was a stowaway. And then they got torpedoed and she landed up there. And I guess she serviced the men. This is what my sister told me later on. I mean, I was just a kid. I didn't know anything about this kind of stuff.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SCHMIDT: And she was a pretty hot number. Well, you could get this information from Ruth. [laughs]

LEVINE: Wow!

SCHMIDT: Ooh!

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: And of course, some of the guys, I guess, were—were on the other side. I don't know if—because—well, I don't know if this is the truth. This is what Ruth told me, you know. I—I had no idea about anything like this.

LEVINE: Wow. And so she was held there for as long as you know.

SCHMIDT: Yeah, she was held for a little while. Yeah, she was a little Australian girl. Pretty girl. Teeny little thing. Yeah. And that's why she was there, because she had stowed away. Or the sailors stowed her away or whatever.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: I'm not sure if it was a boat or a U-boat but that's what I was told. It was torpedoed and she didn't have no papers and so that's where you ended up then.

LEVINE: Right. And you said that you—you made a painting?

SCHMIDT: Yeah, yeah. We had a school.

LEVINE: How did that happen?

SCHMIDT: Now, we had a school.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: Now, my sister, she was already—Germany, she was done with school and she was going to hochschule [PH] in what's called—

LEVINE: High school?

SCHMIDT: Well, she learned how to do—Ger—my sister can write German shorthand. She writes German beautifully and, see, I—I—not me. But she was already past the school age. And all the kids my age—let me see. There was Mariana Tagetoff and—and—and the Voksmude [PH], the two girls—the Voksmude girls, me, Felitse Tass [PH] from Bauvintz [PH]. Now, she was a little older than me. She—she was—her—her—her mother had married a count or something in Germany. And I don't know what happened but they got back. And they were from—from—from Hollywood. And Felitse Tass lived next door to Shirley Temple.

And she said Shirley Temple was a terrible brat. [laughter] She don't like Shirley Temple at all. And Felitse Tass was in a—in a—I guess she was in a—in a convent school in—in Switzerland. And her mother was in Germany. And I guess her mother got out somehow, got her and then s—they—they came to Ellis Island too. They were on the same ship as we were, because I remember on the boat we were—you know, were together.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: And Felitse Tass, yeah. And we—then there were a couple of boys. I don't know their names. You know, I don't remember their names. They're—one was about my age. One was a little older. Ruth said they had a—they were from Cleveland. They had an—a automobile dealership in Cleveland. I tried to get in touch with—but they had sold it so I couldn't get in touch with them. But Ruth remembers their names.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SCHMIDT: And they—they were—they were in the school. And they had a schoolroom in the men's section upstairs. And they used to pick us up. The social worker would pick us up. She was a social worker from New York. She was the one that gave us clothes and everything. And she would take us up and she would take us all in a line. And we would follow. We'd go—we'd go to the men's section. And then we'd take an elevator up. And we were—and then there was a regular schoolroom with desk and—and had a chalk. And—and she would—she would teach us to read and she would make us write and give us arithmetic problems. She was—oh, she was the nicest lady. And then she thought we should have bri—you know, because Felitse Tass was also a good artist. And she thought we should have a little bit of—

LEVINE: [unclear].

SCHMIDT: —our—our—so this man came in and he taught all the kids. But Felitse Tass and I were the best. So he sort of—he sort of helped us a little more than the oth—and I actually painted with oil. He gave me a board—or—or she did. I don't know. But—but he—you know, he—he gave us lessons and talked. And he'd show—oh, he showed us his paintings and, oh, they were bea—actually took us—the teacher actually took us into the men's dormitory where he had his—he had it—or his dayroom, or whatev—and he had huge paintings he was working on there. Oh, and they were just beautiful! And I can't remember the man's name.

LEVINE: But he was being interned and he was an artist?

SCHMIDT: Yeah, he was there. He was there, yeah. And he—he painted a picture of—of—of the knight in—in his armor kneeling down before the Holy Cross or something. And he had the sword. And it was the most beautiful thing and the light was coming d—oh, it was a huge painting! It was huge.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SCHMIDT: Oh, it was a beautiful—I ever wonder what happened to that painting. He—h—oh, it was just—that—that settled it for me. I was going to be an artist.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: [chuckles]

LEVINE: Wow. Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: And I paint.

LEVINE: Yeah?

SCHMIDT: I paint. I sell my work. Little tiny ones. Miniatures. [laughs]

LEVINE: Oh, good. Well, now, when you say you were on the men's dormitory, were you—have you been to Ellis Island? Have you been back?

SCHMIDT: No, I haven't been back.

LEVINE: You know where the great hall is and the balconies—

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: —around it?

SCHMIDT: Yeah, we went out that door, out of that front door. Then we turned right.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: And I don't remember how far. There was some steps going up, I remember. And then we went into another door.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: I haven't been back. I—I—that part, I don't remember too well. But I know there was—there was a—there was a school. There was a regular room with desks and—and a board. It wasn't very big but there was a—a schoolroom up there.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: Why it was up there, I don't know, because when—when the other ones came in and out, they just went in and out all the time. Unless they did that specially for us. I don't know. Maybe this—this social worker had it done. I don't know, because she had such a big heart, this lady.

LEVINE: Was th—was there a kitchen in that building? Do you recall?

SCHMIDT: I—no, the kitchen was the main kitchen that—that—where everybody ate. That's where the kitchen was. Now, I don't know if they ate in two shifts or what. We—we were always on one side and then the other side there was mostly men. Now, I don't know if we all ate together. Or how many men were there, I don't know. But there were—like I said, that one time, the—the—the Coast Guard was standing in the mess hall on the—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: Where the men were.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Would—would you eat at the same time as the Japanese—

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: —internees?

SCHMIDT: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SCHMIDT: Yeah. We all ate together. We all had our meals to—and the one time they served us a herring. It was salt herring but they didn't take it and soak it. And it was stiff with salt and nobody could eat it. And they took the herrings and they put it in the water pitchers with head first and all the tails were hanging out. And every—everybody did. All the tails were hanging out of water pitchers. [chuckles] They had—they had some nice food there. Some of it was—the soft-boiled eggs, we used to take them in—take them into the—into the lady's washroom. And the water was so terribly hot. We used to be able to put them under the hot water and cook them a little bit yet.

LEVINE: Oh.

SCHMIDT: And we did all our laundry, of course, in the bathrooms there in the washroom, you know. But sometimes, like when we had chow mein, oh, that was so good. And then Mama would say—some people didn't eat. And then she says [whispers], "Go—get—collect it." Then we—we'd have a little more. Not that they didn't give us enough but—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: Like, Mom and Dad would want a little more, maybe, or—they had potato salad always on—I think it was Saturdays they had potato salad. And for a while there we didn't have a good breakfast. And then the—I think they—the lady—the social worker or somebody made a special table for the kids. And we got cereal and muffins and stuff. Nobody else got that. We got special food for breakfast.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: That was nice. Yeah.

LEVINE: And was there anything else for the children that you recall? Any special things?

SCHMIDT: No, it was a little tough because the—the ping-pong tables, the teenagers took over. So there wasn't anything for us there. We played soccer down in—in—by the grass—grassy place there. There was a fence built where there was a men's side there where they could go out. And then we had also a grassy place there. And then there—of course, there was the—the fence. And then there was a post for the—there was a—a—a Coast Guard man up on a—one of those towers, you know. He—there was always one there.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: And we used to play outside. And then we used to collect cards and—and, you know, when they—we—we'd get a deck of cards. Be all kinds of cards. And us kids used to play war. And then—what'd—they—the social worker brought in a Monopoly game. But then again, the teenagers got that and they sort of monopolized that. We didn't have too many games. We sort of just goofed around, you know. Sometimes, if the table wasn't—was empty, we—you'd try to play ping-pong and—and most of the time we just went out and played and fantasized and played pirates and got up on the picnic tables. There was our ship and, "Here comes another ship," and [laughs]—

LEVINE: Uh-huh. [chuckles]

SCHMIDT: Stuff like that, you know. Like kids do.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SCHMIDT: Fantasize. But Mr. St. Martin, he was always with the children. He loved the children. And he—and he took a special liking to me. I don't know why. Because I used to get these terrible migraine headaches. Oh, I used to get terrible headaches. And he—he would—he would tell me, "Now, Margaret." He says, "I want you to lay down on the picnic bench here." He says, "And I want you to lay your head back so it's hanging down back as far as you can." And it helped a little bit, you know.

LEVINE: Now, who was Mr. St. Martin?

SCHMIDT: He—he was—he—he was the teacher that was teaching in Japan. Jose Maria [PH] St. Martin was his name. And like I said, he got out and he was—he got out before us. And he was—he—he was in—I think there was a William Sloane [PH], or something like, YMCA in New York. And that's where he had a job there. He had a job there. And he stayed there till he was quite old, I guess, till he died.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SCHMIDT: And he used to keep the correspondence with me. Yeah, he used to send me a dollar every once in a while.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B]

[BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A]

LEVINE: So how do you think back on it now, that period?

SCHMIDT: It was an experience. It was a—was an experience. The whole thing was—Germany was hell. I mean, it was hunger. It was cold. I had no shoes. My—my—like I said, my sister was a little spoiled. Of course, she was bigger than I and—and Ma—my—my grandmother sent green coffee from Brazil and we got it in Germany. And she—my mother would brown it. And then she would go—and she would go on the black market. And she—she got a pair of leather boots with lamb's wool inside for herself and my sister. And my sister had a warm coat. Well, then I got—finally, I—I—I got a pretty—pretty warm coat from somebody. I don't know. But I had no—no shoes. My feet were

frozen. They were black. I had black toes. [chuckles] I thought I was going to lose my toes for a while. The food situation was bad. I was undernourished. Ruth was a little—and—and the people used to feel sorry for me. Like, I'd come from—from school and this one lady, she lived there. She was a—she was fr—Austria. Her husband was in the Vermarcht [PH]. He was a soldier. And—and she would hand me an egg. And she'd say, "Take that home and—and cook it and eat it." And she would give me an egg every once in a while. And then when I would—my mother would send me out. They—we had coupons and they had a truck coming and—and the bread was on the truck. And she would give me the coupons. And I would put them in my apron. She said, "See if you can keep one coupon behind," because it was so cold and I was so skinny. And I didn't have any warm clothes. And I had to stand out there in the freezing—stand in line for the—and I was sh—shivering and shaking. And then every t—sometimes, he wouldn't look at the coupon too close, you know. And then he would give me the loaf of bread and I would run in, "Mama, look. I saved." Well, then—then she would send me to the—to the town. And I would buy hard rolls or some—well, I would buy something, maybe—maybe half a loaf of bread. And the lady in the store felt so sorry for me. She gave me a hard roll for me. And I took it home and I didn't get it.

LEVINE: Mmm. We've got a [gap in tape].

SCHMIDT: And when I—when I got the—the hard roll, the next time I went down there and I got the hard roll, I ate it on the way home. I didn't [chuckles]—I wasn't going to take it home. It was going to be mine. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Right. And—and is that how you—you say you lied.

SCHMIDT: Oh, I lied. Yes, I did. I lied. I went—we had to buy a—I went to buy a bread and there was this lady in this—in the village. She had a small store and I bought a loaf of bread from her. And there were pieces of—of coal in the bottom of the bread. I guess, you know, a—a lot of the—a lot of—they—they—when they baked the bread, they put the coals in the oven to heat up the oven. And then they—they swept it out and put the bread in to bake. Well, evidently, they didn't sweep it out good enough and some of the—the rev—the coal, I guess, got on the bottom of the bread. And I got it home and we cut it and you—you ate and it crunched. And it—and she says, "Where did you buy this bread?" And I didn't want to tell her that I bought it from the lady in—in the—this lady had that small store in the village, because she was always good to me. So I told them, "I bought it over there." So she says, "Come on." I had to get on the bike with my mother and we went down there. And she—"I—well, I bought this bread here. And look. You can't eat it. It's got

the coals in there.” And this—and the man took one look and he says, “This isn’t my bread. I didn’t bake this bread.” And my mother looked at me. She knew I never told a lie. She looked at me. She grabbed me. She took me out. “Where’d you get the bread?” And I told her. I said—“Why did you lie to me?” I says, “Mom, I didn’t want to tell you because that lady is so good to me always.” [laughs]

LEVINE: So did she march you back to that lady?

SCHMIDT: No.

LEVINE: No, she—

SCHMIDT: We did go back to that lady and she did give us some new bread. But I didn’t want to get her in trouble because my mother was so mad! [laughs] She had a terrible temper.

LEVINE: Wow. [chuckles]

SCHMIDT: If she didn’t get her cigarettes and her drinks, you know. [laughter]

LEVINE: What was the social life like for your mother and father at that point in time when you were there?

SCHMIDT: In—on Ellis Island?

LEVINE: No.

SCHMIDT: Oh.

LEVINE: I was thinking—

SCHMIDT: In Germany?

LEVINE: —first in Germany.

SCHMIDT: There was no social life. There were a few—there were a few Americans there were in the village that had the same—

LEVINE: Somebody’s coming.

SCHMIDT: —same deal as—as [knocking sound]—could you turn it off?

LEVINE: I’ll stop. [tape off/on] Okay, we’re starting up after a visit from a friend. [laughter] Let me just—I think we sort of said this. But when you look back at Ellis Island now, do you think it had any impact on you after

that? Or maybe we should think of the whole thing, the going to Germany, the c—the coming back, being on Ellis Island for nine or ten months. W—

SCHMIDT: Ellis Island was not a bad experience. Germany was bad. I mean, it was terrible. But—but coming back, actually, I—Ellis Island didn't bother me that much. We used to make shows. We had shows. We—I—I used to make little things and they didn't—little, crazy little things and sell them for a penny or two pennies, you know, and—

LEVINE: Like what kind of things?

SCHMIDT: Oh, the Japanese lady, she showed me—no, no. It was Mr. St. Martin. He showed me how to fold paper and make a cat. And I made some of those and I did a little bit of crocheting. The I—like I said, the—the lady that was our—our social worker, she was so good to me. She—you know, she'd see that I would get thread or she—you know, anything I wanted, she would get—get for me, you know. And so I could make things and that. She was real good. I would—

LEVINE: Was she—do you remember what agency she represented?

SCHMIDT: I don't know. I don't know. She was—s—like I said, she worked there. She—she was a little lady. She had dark hair. She was thin. And she—you know what she did? She got me—she gave me a Shirley Temple doll in—in a suitcase. In a suitcase. And this Shirley Temple doll had a white fur coat and a hat and a muff and dresses in the suitcase and shoes and roller-skates. And I played with that on Ellis Island. I was so proud and some—some of the girls were a little envious. I don't know why she gave it to me because she had a lot of toys. And she gave toys to the kids. But she gave me this beautiful doll. And I didn't realize what it was worth. You know, we got back to Germany and I was living in Cleveland and I was moving away from home. I gave it to the little girl across the street without realizing that it was a real collector's item. Now, I think, my gosh, that was something else. She had beautiful hair.

LEVINE: You mean, you gave it away when you left Cleveland?

SCHMIDT: Yeah, well, when we got back to Cleveland, we lived on the same street with my grandmother. And we had boarders for a while, you know, roomers. And—and then when we moved away from there to—moved to—we—we moved to Madison—Madison Avenue. My sister was already married. And we moved away and—and I was already a teenager. And I wasn't—I just looked at it and thought about the doll and thought about Ellis Island. And when—there was a little girl across

the street and she didn't have much toys or anything, so I gave it to her. And I think to myself, 'Man, if I would have kept it, it would be worth a fortune now.' [chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. So do you remember when you actually got released from Ellis Island?

SCHMIDT: Yeah, I remember when we got released. Mom says we were going to go—we were going to get out. They would have to stay. And we were—a—a social worker came and picked us up. And we went to a—a—a travel—travel—it's a place where they—people stay when they travel. They don't have money. They had it in New York.

LEVINE: Traveler's Aid?

SCHMIDT: Yeah, that's it. A lady from Traveler's Aid came and she picked us up. And we went to New York City.

LEVINE: Now, who left and who stayed?

SCHMIDT: M—my sister and I. We—they picked us up. We—we had train fare and everything was paid for. And she—this Traveler's Aid was going to see that we got onto the New York—was it the Nickel Plate [PH] or New York Central? I mean not sure anymore. I think it was the New York Central Train. New York Central. I think that was the name of—

LEVINE: Grand Central Station, did you go, or Penn Sta—

SCHMIDT: I—I don't remember what sta—my sister might remember better. And we—we stayed at this Traveler's Aid place overnight.

LEVINE: And what was that like?

SCHMIDT: Oh, it was—it was cool. And then, oh, we had—we—we got out, I guess, in the morning. In the afternoon, my sister, being braver than I, she says, "Come on. Let's go walk in the street and see what it's like." You know, and we walked into a store and, well, little mom and pop store nearby. And I went like this, "Heil"—and my sister banged me one. She says, "What's the matter with you?" Well, I was just so used to doing that—saying, "Heil Hitler" when I'd go in the store, I lifted my arm and was saying heil. And she gave me one. Boy! Did she get—"You don't do that over here! Don't talk German!" [laughs] She—my sister fought for me. She really—over in Germany, she fought for me.

LEVINE: In what—in what kind of instances?

SCHMIDT: Oh, they—they picked on me. A boy threw a piece of ice at me. Because we—you know, they didn't like us. Let's face it. We were Americans. They didn't like us very much. And he threw a piece of ice and it hit me here and I started bleeding. And boy, did she beat the bejabbers out of that kid. Holy mackerel! And then another time we had to work in the fields to pick up potatoes. And—and we had to glean the fields, you know. And I—I was picking potatoes and this one kid was picking on me. And there's another time she just took off her shoe and she beat the heck out of him. [laughter] She—now, she's just a little thing and I—I grew so tall. But she always said nobody could hit me but her. [laughter] That was her privilege. Only she could hit me.

LEVINE: Who—did you go around with no shoes, like in winter and everything?

SCHMIDT: I had—I had—I had a pair of rubber boots and I wrapped—I wrapped cloth around it. And then we were—we were sent up to Prussia because the bombing raids got so bad. And the food situation was so bad. We didn't have nothing to eat. We were sent up to Prussia. There was lots of food there. The count was very good to the people there. He had a couple villages and he—he was very good to his people. And we went to school up there for one year. Well, I—

LEVINE: You mean you lived up there?

SCHMIDT: Yeah, we—we went up there for a little while and—and we got food and we—I—we put a little weight on. I had wooden shoes and I had rags wrapped around my feet. And it was very cold because it was up close to the Russian border.

LEVINE: Border.

SCHMIDT: And, you know, up there past—up—up past Poland, you know.

LEVINE: So you went up but your father was still—and mother were still down—

SCHMIDT: They—the—yeah, they were down there. We were up there. We visited my grand—my—my—my father's mother. And there was Tanta—Tanta Emma was there. She had—she had six kids. She was in the village yet. And the count was there. He had a beautiful castle and we got a ride on—on the sled and—and my—my uncle, before he was—he was in the army. He—he used to take care of the count's—what—their—their wagons that—didn't they have—

LEVINE: Carriages?

SCHMIDT: Carriages, yeah, with the crest on them. He used to polish it, took care of the horses. My aunt worked in the kitchen and also did the laundry. And everybody in the village worked. And the—and you could go. The—he had a lot of cows and, like, my—my grandmother was a widow lady. And she had been a widow for many years. And she had six children. And the count took ca—gave her a place to live, saw that all the children went to school and went to—into—into learning something.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: Sent them to be a—a—

LEVINE: Some kind of apprentice or—

SCHMIDT: Yeah, apprentice. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: And then, like, if she needed bread or not—milk—if she needed milk or butter, we would—we walked to the dairy—to the dairy at—at—at that castle. You could ask for a pound of butter. They would give you a pound of butter. They would give you a container of milk. You know, you brought your container of milk.

LEVINE: Well, that must have been heaven for you after being so hungry.

SCHMIDT: It was. It was. There only problem was, there was no—there was no running water or anything where we lived. And we had to carry the water from the pump into the house and carry all the water out. But he was good to his—he gave them a place to live. Some of them—they—they had a plot. They could have a garden. They had a—they had a barn. You could have a cow of your own, a pig, chickens. My grandmother had chickens. Oh, and you know what she told me one day? She says, “Margaret.” She says, “Go on out and leave the chickens out, the ones that laid the eggs. The ones that didn’t lay the eggs, they’ve got to stay until they lay the eggs. And I says, “Huh?” She says, “Let the chickens out that already laid the eggs and bring the eggs in the house, and the other chickens, leave.” I says, “Oma [PH], h—how do I know h—how to—which chicken laid the eggs?” She says, “Well, you’ve got to catch each chicken and then you put your finger up the anus. And if it’s hard, that one didn’t lay an egg. That one stays in. If there’s nothing there, that one can go out.” [laughs] And I did it. And I didn’t know; my sister wasn’t going to do that. [laughs] She was supposed to have that job. That turned to be my job. [laughs] But he was good to his—when—when—even, they had big shots, like Goering would go hunting. He would come visit the count and he would go

hunting in the woods. He had many, many woods, many acres and acres of woods. And they would shoot wild—wild—

LEVINE: [unclear]?

SCHMIDT: —pig and—and deer. And they would take what they wanted. And then they would butcher and put it out on a—on a table in the village. And anybody that—the—the people could come and take—

LEVINE: Wow.

SCHMIDT: Could come and take meat.

LEVINE: So the count was—was a—was a sympathizer.

SCHMIDT: Well, I guess you could call him a sympathizer. I mean, h—if he wasn't, he would have been clkkk!

LEVINE: Right.

SCHMIDT: You know?

LEVINE: Right.

SCHMIDT: Because we had a—we had a farmer in our village. And he had—he had two horses and he had a farm. And—and he needed his horses and—and the—the Nazis came and they wanted his horses. And he—and he made a fuss. He says, "If you take the horses, you want me to raise this many crops? I can't. Without my horses, I can't raise the crops." And he made a bit of a fuss and he was gone. He was gone. The horses were gone and the farmer was gone.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SCHMIDT: So, I mean, you just didn't—you just didn't do nothing. You didn't talk back. You—you didn't—you do what you were told.

LEVINE: Do you think that period in your life really—I mean, it's so extreme—

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: —you know, to have lived through it.

SCHMIDT: I think my problem is I have feelings for everybody. I—I am very, very softhearted. If I see something going wrong or somebody hurting, I got

to stop. I got to stop and I got to help. And I think—I think that was a good thing that happened to me.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: I think it made me more feeling, more—more cognizant of other people's feelings and what they have and have not got.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: I really feel that way.

LEVINE: Yeah. Did you feel you were in prison when you were at Ellis Island?

SCHMIDT: Yeah, in a way it was like prison because they would come—we would be in bed and the matrons would come and shine lights. And they would count. They have these little clickers and they would count who was in the beds.

LEVINE: Oh.

SCHMIDT: And as we went out to eat we were clicked—you know, they clicked and counted everybody as they passed them single file. And then when you came back from eating, they would count again, click, click, click, click. But in the afternoon they would come with a wagon and there was milk and candy and fruit. But of course, you had to have money. But the milk, you could get a—a—I would say about eight ounces of milk free. They would give it to the children.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Yeah. And you mentioned when the tape was off about a—was it a countess?

SCHMIDT: Yeah, Countess De Shizenruf [PH] was her name. I don't know too much about her. Ruth was very close with her. So Ruth will be able to tell you about her because I believe she—Ruth went to New York a couple times. And I believe she did get in touch with—with—with the countess at one time shortly after—well, like I say, Ruth was 16, 17, 18 I think at that time—18, 19. I think she got married at 18, my sister, and her husband was in the Army and—and I—she had chances to go to New York and stuff and she did.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: And she did get in touch with some—and in fact, I think she—she wrote some of the people. I think she—she was in touch with the Voksmudes. She was the woman that had the two girls. And I think

she—she got in touch with her. I—I was still writing to a girl that I went to school with over in Germany. But I—and I wanted to—I—I wanted to—to let her know that I didn't appreciate her. Because she was an American. Her name was Eunice Rench [PH]. And she was also one of the—oh, you had asked about our—our—our life in the village there.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SCHMIDT: There were—there were approximately 10—10 families that were Americans in that same village that worked in the factory. And they all had their houses furnished, like us.

LEVINE: They had gone over with you?

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: Well, I don't know if they came with us but they were all in the village. And Eunice was one of the girls that I went to school with. She was about the same age as I. We were in the same grade in school, although she was a—they were pretty Nazi-ish. And one day, I had said something in school about—about being glad I wasn't a German, that I was a—an American, an American citizen. And the kids all picked up on it and they beat the heck out of me. They followed me and in the—I had to go across a field and they—they—and Eunice was there. She was an American. We were good friends. And I says, "Eu"—you know, after I came back, I says, "Eunice, why didn't you help me?" "Oh, I don't remember that." And I thought, 'Wh—what a nice memory, that you don't remember that your friend got beaten up.' And then I ra—I was a fast runner. I outran them all. [laughs] I got—

LEVINE: Oh, that's good.

SCHMIDT: I got home and my mother said, "You don't have to go to school no more." I was beaten up that bad. My sister was already—she wasn't home. She was at the—at the other school, at the high school, or the hochschule in [unclear]. She was learning, you know. But my mama says, "You don't have to go to school no more," because they beat the heck out of me. Then I didn't go to school no more.

LEVINE: Wow.

SCHMIDT: But the—the food situation was bad. The food situation was very bad, although we weren't—in Prussia, we got back and I put a little weight on, by gollies, because there was good food there, sausage and meat

and—and—and we went to vis—we went to eat at my aunt's house just down the road a little bit. And she had six kids and there wasn't enough plates. And so two kids would eat off of a plate, you know. And then, you know, it was always a fight. "That's my piece of meat! That's my"—

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Do—is there anything you can think of to say about human nature? Anything, like, given that extreme kind of a situation, how people were, compared with, you know, how people are normally?

SCHMIDT: Well, I—I remember getting on a bus in—it was Germany. And we were going to go to Ranyenborg [PH] and I forget for what we went there for. But we were on a bus and, like I said, I was very—I don't know if it was o—if we were on the way to Berlin or what the heck it was, where we were going. But I was so thin. I—like I said, I was malnutrition. And I was supposed to get on the bus and—and this—they—they pushed me aside, you know, and I fell. And they had—everybody was for themselves—for themselves. And—and my mother would—we would get notification. Somebody would say, "They're—they're selling apples down at that farm over there. All you got to do is get—get in line." So my mother would send me. And sometimes I would be gone eight hours, maybe more.

LEVINE: Wow.

SCHMIDT: No—nothing to eat. Nothing to drink, standing in the cold. Then I would get a—but they would keep pushing me back, you know. And finally, the one lady, she saw that I had been there for so long and they kept pushing me aside. And I guess I was sort—I was afraid to say anything.

LEVINE: Right.

SCHMIDT: And—and the lady says, "Come here!" And she gave me the apples and I paid her and I got home. But it was like that. Everybody was for themselves, you know.

LEVINE: Do you think your mother sent you because you were—

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: —the most—

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: —impoverished looking one of the lot? [chuckles]

SCHMIDT: Yeah, I—she did.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: She did. She did.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SCHMIDT: Hey, that was a good idea. It was a good idea—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: —because I was—I was n—I mean, I was so skinny, like, my knees were big round things, you know, and—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: And I looked horrible. [chuckles] I really d—I [unclear]—my teeth were loose. All my teeth were—were—were loose. And then my mother—I don't know how she got it. Oh, I know. My stepfather mentioned it at—at the factory. And so they gave—they gave me vitamins. He brought vitamins from the factory. And they also—they also said I was allowed to have a cup of milk a day. But I didn't get the milk; my dad got the milk. But anyway, I—the vitamins seemed to help me and—and—and I got better, a little better.

LEVINE: So they must have had vitamins to give out—

SCHMIDT: I—

LEVINE: —to the workers.

SCHMIDT: I gu—well, I guess maybe they did because—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: —then when I got those vitamins, I was better. I was much better.

LEVINE: Yeah. Wow.

SCHMIDT: I was in poor health at that time.

LEVINE: Yeah, I would imagine.

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, how about heroes in your life, either—either people you actually knew—

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: —or—or people you knew about that—that somehow you—you looked up to and maybe they made some impression on you as far as your life?

SCHMIDT: The count made a big impression of me.

LEVINE: And h—and how so?

SCHMIDT: Christmas time, he made a party for all the children in—in the village. And he opened up the great room. There was a big fire and there was a big stuffed bear. And he had long tables. And on—on—he had a paper plate and he had nuts and a couple candies and one orange. Everybody got an orange and—and—and a—and a—a—a—so you could make yourself a pair of socks. A hank, a hank of wool.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: We all knew how to knit, and so that you could knit a pair of socks for yourself.

LEVINE: Wow.

SCHMIDT: Everybody got that. And then he knew about us, from—maybe from the—that's—that—the count's village had a church and had a pastor and we used to go to church. And maybe the pastor had said something to the count because when we were there, we were there with all the other children in the village. And he called us up, my sister and I. And he spoke English to us. And we got to meet the count and the countess and the contessa, the young contessa. And then after that, in the village, when they would go riding by, we would wave and they would wave back to—at us. And we spoke and they asked us where we came from in America and this and that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: And h—he was definitely not a Nazi.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: But he did what he had to do because he had to do it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: I—I don't know. It was in Finkenstein [PH]. The castles all burned down. The Russians burned it and used—

LEVINE: Oh.

SCHMIDT: But I—I think—I think I've even got pictures of it yet in the—in the cup—cupboard there.

LEVINE: And it was a Lutheran church that he had?

SCHMIDT: Yes, it was a Lutheran church.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Wow.

SCHMIDT: Yeah, my sister was confirmed in that church. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And how about your satisfactions? What—what would you say in your life has given you much satisfaction?

SCHMIDT: My life wasn't—wasn't—ah, my—my mother was a—was a—was a drunk. She was an alcoholic and she wasn't—she used to tie me up and beat the heck out of me. Even—even when I was working, I was at home. I was—I was—she made me quit school and I had to go to work. And I'd go to work and I was black and blue. And my boss—he says, "I've got a room up in the attic, Margaret. You can't stay there." And I wanted to leave. My sister was married. And so I told my sister and I started packing up my stuff. I was going to leave home. And my sis—my mother called my sister and my sister comes over. "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. You can't leave home. If you leave home, you'll be a fallen woman. No man will want you because you left your home," and this and that. And so I didn't leave. I tried to tell them, "Mom's an alcoholic. She got whiskey all over the place. She beats the heck out of me." You know. "No, no. She's not." Then when I left and got married—I met my husband and I was looking for a husband. I really was.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: And I married him. I met him when I was 18 and I married him when I was—just had turned 19. My mother signed for me and then—then they found out. My dad found out. He—he closed his eyes to it. He didn't believe she was an al—she was drinking in Germany. The—the guy that used to come and clean, the shornstein feger [PH], he'd come and clean the—the chimneys. He dresses in a top hat and that. And she used to give him coffee and stuff, and he used to bring her whiskey and cigarettes. And she was drinking then already.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: Because she always had something in the house.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: That was hard for her, I think, because she couldn't always feed us and sometimes—we had cabbage. We had frozen potatoes that not even a pig should eat. And we—we had cabbage that had—had—had—

LEVINE: Frozen on the vine or frozen—

SCHMIDT: No, no. It had maggots. Not—no, what do they call them? These great big, green things that crawl on cabbage. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Yeah.

SCHMIDT: And she—I guess she couldn't see so good. And she cooked it and my sister and I were eating and we seen these things, trying to pull them out of the soup and put them on the side of the soup plate, you know, so we didn't have to eat the—caterpillars.

LEVINE: Ca—oh, yeah.

SCHMIDT: Cooked caterpillars.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SCHMIDT: And then I remember we had—we had a little bit of cheese there and were—these worms were in the cheese. And we're out there poking the worms out of the cheese. [laughs] You—you got that cheese and little wiggle in there. [laughs] The stuff we ate!

LEVINE: Yeah.

SCHMIDT: The potatoes, though, were—they were frozen potatoes. You'd bring them in. They turned to mush and they stunk. Oh, gosh!

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: But there was times we didn't have. We had a little farina cooked in water and that was it, or lentils or—and I still can't look at lentils.
[chuckles]

LEVINE: Yeah.

SCHMIDT: But it was hard for her and I think that made her worse of an alcoholic, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah.

SCHMIDT: Was hard on her, I'm sure. And then what she—you know, the little bit of food, she figured she had to give it to—oh, my gosh. There's ants on this table. Red ones—

LEVINE: [unclear] tracking [unclear].

SCHMIDT: Oh, yeah. Got to get this out of here. Yeah, I've got to wash that table off. Those little things, they come—oops.

LEVINE: Oops.

SCHMIDT: I'm going to [chuckles]—

LEVINE: Oh, wait. We're going to stop here for a—

SCHMIDT: There was some green leaves on that brook. And I used to eat a lot of them and they were sour. And I didn't know what they were till I got to this country and I—I talked about it and somebody said it was sorrel.

LEVINE: Oh.

SCHMIDT: And it—they're—they're leaves and, hey, pffft, stopped the hunger. We used to go to sleep and we used to drink a lot of water.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SCHMIDT: So you wouldn't—and when the bombing raids, we—we—they wouldn't let us in—in—into—in the shelters, the—you know, because they had a nice—they had shelters, bomb shelters for the Germans. But we had a hole in the back yard. And we used to go there. Sometimes it was full of water and it was cold, and hungry. The—the waves used to come. We could tell—we could tell when the planes were coming. We could

tell the Russian motors. We could tell the English motors. We could tell the American motors. You could tell the different planes, where they were coming from, the direction. The—the motors sound different. I was so good, I could tell—I didn't have to see a plane. I could tell a Messerschmitt, [unclear]. I could tell a Heinkel, Junke [PH]. [chuckles] I could tell you the number of the Junke.

LEVINE: Wow.

SCHMIDT: [coughs]

LEVINE: How long would you have to stay in the hole in the back yard?

SCHMIDT: Till—till we got—well, sometimes we would get out and—and we would we would watch—watch—see, we were always afraid that they would catch—catch the—the planes in—in the lights. When they did that, then they would shoot them and then you could see the—the parachutes come down. And I don't know if they shot them or what they did, you know. You could see the—the—the pilots and whatever was in the plane. And then they—sometimes, they would—one time, I was—I guess one of the planes was flying over and—and dropping a bomb or something. And a aircraft—one of those things hit the bomb and—and hit—and then the plane—it was just dropping the bomb, I guess, or whatever happened, because the whole plane exploded.

LEVINE: Wow.

SCHMIDT: And going to school the next day was not a nice thing.

[END OF TAPE 2, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE B]

SCHMIDT: And one time a plane crashed into the school and there was blood all the way down the wall. Oh, it was—it was terrible. And then they closed the school down so there was—for a while there, there was—there was no school. Then they cleaned it up and then there was school again, but with only—like, we'd go to school six in the morning. And then we'd have school, like, for two hours only because it was too cold. It was—

LEVINE: Hmm.

SCHMIDT: The kids in—the kids in school didn't have too much to do with me. My only friend was Eunice.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: She was good—she was a good artist too.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SCHMIDT: But I d—I—I didn't have anything to do with any of the other kids.

LEVINE: Because they were standoffish from you.

SCHMIDT: Yeah, yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: How about your mother and father? Do you think they thought they made a mistake?

SCHMIDT: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Mmm.

SCHMIDT: Definitely. I don't know what was in their mind. Me, as a grownup and having—I had the seven children. I've got five living now. And for me to think—to take my children. I mean, when you look at the way things were then, I mean, there were rumbles of war. There were—they were thinking that there was going to be a war. Why would you pack up your children and go there? I don't care if you were born there or not. It was so foolish. So foolish. Well, they got a free ride. Okay, they got a free ride over there. You know, maybe they thought they could come back. But my grandma and grandpa weren't going to help. "You stay there." And I remember Johnny Schultz was with us, with my—where I was at the foster home there. He was—he went with us. He was on the same boat and everything. And then during the war—well, we had heard that—that his mother and father were coming back. And I remember waiting for them. I was waiting in the bus. I was waiting and that Sunday, I kept on going back to the bus stop, back to the bus stop. And then I used to sit there in the field and wait. And I waited and waited and waited. I thought they were going to come. I—I wasn't happy with my mother and I was hoping that maybe I could live with them again, you know. But could you turn it off for a minute? I want to tell you something. [tape turned off/on]

LEVINE: You left Ellis Island and you got back to Cleveland.

SCHMIDT: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: What was life like then? I—well, you said you weren't—

SCHMIDT: Well, I was—

LEVINE: —[unclear] mother but—

SCHMIDT: Yeah, we—we—we lived—we were staying with my grandmother. We slept—my sister and I, we slept in the dining room on a little—little couch, a little—little thing there. And I went to school. My sister finished high school. She finished with her class.

LEVINE: Wow.

SCHMIDT: And my mother said, “If you can fin—graduate with your class,” when she was—before we went to Germany. She still had her girlfriends when we got back. And she did because they gave her credit for all that German she knew. She took a test and she passed. And—and she got credit for it and she graduated with her class. That was good. I had to still go to school. And I went to school and then, of course, I tried to always be like my sister. My sister was beautiful. “You are ugly. You are clumsy. You are stupid. You are dumb.” I didn’t know I was dyslexic and I turned the numbers and stuff around. But I didn’t—they didn’t know that. When they gave me my—my possible learning rate test, they said I was a little above an imbecile of 75. You know, so they put me in this low group with all the low, slow learners. And I was determined. I—my sister was bright. I worked my way up to the first group. And then when we moved and my sister got married and we moved to—into Cleveland on Madison Avenue, I went to West High School. And I was very good in art. And I was the top of my class. I was in Honor Society. I was the president of—of the class. And I had to quit school. The teachers came. The principal came, “Mrs. Hintz, you don’t want to take Margaret out of school. She can get a scholarship.” This and th—“No, she’s got to quit.” We owed money. We owed the mon—we owed money from our passage from—from—we stayed in Lisbon for a while. I don’t know how—I don’t remember how long. It must have been at least a week or two weeks in a hotel. And it was wonderful. We all got—got sick because of the food. You know, we weren’t used to—Mama was awful sick too—getting all that good food, you know. And we had to pay it back. And I think they owed over \$3,000. Of course, I had to quit school and I had to go to work to, you know, help, you know, pay the government back, which we did pay them all back. But they—“No, no. She has to quit school and—and go to—go to work.” So I went to work then and then, like I said, she was in really bad shape. I used to—I was 16 years old. I had hair down to my knees and I twisted it around my head. She would put the wedding ring on me, her wedding rings. And she would make me go to the liquor store and buy liquor for her. And they sold it to me. I looked that old. You know, I—I was a tall girl and I had this hair twisted around

like no—you know, young girls weren't wearing their hair like that. I mean, I looked like an old lady. What—and I had—I had no clothes of my own. I was wearing my mother's clothes. [laughs]

LEVINE: Wow. What was it—what was the German community like after you came back in Cleveland?

SCHMIDT: The German Central, when war started with—in '41, they—they—somebody came in and they—they broke every window and—and they trashed the whole place. And then there were a few people that still went there. My grandfather—he—he built—oh, and by the way, there's something in the German Central they're going to find one day. When my—my grandfather built these great big pillars out front that says German Central. And inside, they're hollow. And he took all that German, the swastikas and all this crap, and he shoved in there and closed it up. [chuckles] And they're in there. So one day, somebody's going to knock that down and they're going to find all this German paraphernalia in there. [laughs] But they had—they had—they had done a really bad job on it. And then I used to go down there. Like I said, my sister was already married. I—on Sundays, I would take a bus and I'd have to walk. I'd take a bus to Crial [PH] Hospital on York Road. And then I used to have to walk about two miles to get to the German Central. And then I would work in the kitchen. I would do potatoes. I would help cook. I would wash dishes. I would serve and I got in free that way. And then they had a dance in the afternoon and then I could stay for the dance, because by that time, I was, you know—I was a teenager. I was 14, 15 and they had a youth group and we had—and sometimes the—the boys had cars. And they would pick me up and we would go to the meetings and stuff. And of course, we always were on stage, my sister and I. We always sang German songs together in—how do you say that? Sh—parts, you know. She was alto. I was soprano.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: We still sing some when we get together.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: And we were always on stage doing that because we were the only kids that could speak fluent German. And it was—it was—it was sort of nice. Yeah.

LEVINE: How do you feel about your German side and your American side? How do you reconcile—

SCHMIDT: I am also a writer. And a writer is also Irish, Scotch, and English.

LEVINE: [chuckles] There you go.

SCHMIDT: And I think I've got a little bit more of them in me than I do the German part.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: I speak German very well and I—I've never been back. My sister's been back many times. I—I've never been back. My children have been there. Let's see. My daughter was there. The two older sons was there. Kathy and Rob, the two younger ones, haven't been there. My older son says, "Mom, you've got to go to Bavaria." You know.

LEVINE: Ah, great.

SCHMIDT: I—maybe one day I will. I don't know. But a—I lost—

LEVINE: We're say—we're saying your German side and your—

SCHMIDT: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: But you have other—

SCHMIDT: Yeah. But—

LEVINE: —sides to you.

SCHMIDT: Yeah, yeah. I find now that I have other sides—

LEVINE: Right, right.

SCHMIDT: —to me. Because when I see anything Irish and Scotch, these two—I'm not m—much for the English. We were over at Liverpool for—we would stop in the boat there and I didn't care for that part of it, England, at all. But I—I'm just so fascinated with—with—with—with Scotland and Ireland. I really am. I'd love to go there. I really would love to go there. Germany, aah. I would—I don't want to go to the village I lived in. I don't want to see none of that. I could go down to Bavaria where I've never been.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: I would like to go to Switzerland but I don't want to—I don't want to go back where I was.

LEVINE: What—what section?

SCHMIDT: I've got too many bad memories—

LEVINE: Yeah.

SCHMIDT: —of Berlin up there. It was all the Russian zone when the Russians came in, because some of the girls, they got raped in the village when the Russians came in. And some were hiding. Some hid in the woods and it was bad when they came into, you know—that—war is hell. Let's face it.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: Men get to be animals. They forget that they got sisters at home and, you know, that's war—war, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: Ah—

LEVINE: So you were say—what w—were you expected to marry a German man? Was that [unclear]—

SCHMIDT: No, no.

LEVINE: No?

SCHMIDT: My husband was—his parents were Saxons. They—they lived in Transylvania. They—they immigrated from Transylvania. They were not on Ellis Island. They were—before Ellis Island opened, they were at some other kind of place, some kind of garden.

LEVINE: Cas—Castle Garden.

SCHMIDT: That's it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: That's where they came in.

LEVINE: That's the end of Manhattan.

SCHMIDT: Yeah, that's where they came in. They didn't wor—now, my—my—all my people, like, Mutti, Vater, [PH]—my mother, my stepfather, they all

came through Ellis Island. John Schultz, Tanta Lanchen [PH] where I lived, Tan—yeah, they all came through—through Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Were they ever—was there ever comment in the family about, I mean, their having come through here as immigrants to the so-called Promised Land, and then having part of their family interned there? Did—

SCHMIDT: No, I—I don't think so. E—even—I don't think we felt bad, even with the—with the FBI. I mean, it was right. It was right. They had to be careful.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: I mean, there—they put us there for a good reason. And—and the reason was good. They had to find out if we were spies or—or, you know, whatever we were, you know. And—and that's true. They had to do that and they're—I don't fi—I don't find anything wrong with that. In fact, I think the [unclear] that was very smart. Because a lot of those guys that were locked up deserved to be locked up there—were there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: Really.

LEVINE: Were the—were the two reasons—were the—were the sole reasons what you said before about your sister had the diploma with the swastika on it? And what—it was the watch?

SCHMIDT: The watch. And then, of course, they—they found the picture of my sister in the Hitlerjunge—

LEVINE: Right.

SCHMIDT: —costume. And of course, it had a swastika on the arm. She had sent a picture to my grandmother.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And what about the fact that your father was working in the—in the airplane factory?

SCHMIDT: Well, I think—I think what they knew—if he hadn't worked in the factory, being Americans, I prob—we probably would have been put away. We were watched. We were watched. I mean, we did have a radio. We did—we did listen to England and that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: And we—we did it on the—on the QT, you know. We had—we had people watching us. We had to—we had to go to the police and—like, if you're on parole, you had to go there all the—

LEVINE: Oh.

SCHMIDT: —time, you know.

LEVINE: You had to do that afterwards?

SCHMIDT: Ah—

LEVINE: Or—

SCHMIDT: During the war, after America was in the war, yeah. They watched us very closely. And then things got bad in the street, you know. Like I say, I had been in the—in the air raid shelter before America was in the war. But then after the—America was in the war, it—no more. No more.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So you got out of Ellis Island when the war was still going on.

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: When you were back in Cleveland.

SCHMIDT: Yeah, uh-huh.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: Uh-huh. Yeah, I was back in Mill School, the same school I had left. And I remember they—the invasion of France. I remember that. They—they put me in the fourth grade. I was—how old was I? Twelve years old and they put me in the fourth grade. I only stayed there for about two weeks. Then they put me in the fifth grade and I was in the fifth grade for maybe six months. Then they put me in the sixth grade and I didn't—I wasn't in the sixth grade a whole year. And then I was in—in—into—into junior high. I went to the Lincoln High School. They had seventh, eighth—seventh to twelfth. And then I just—I did finish the seventh grade but I—then we moved and then I never finished the eighth grade.

LEVINE: And then how did you meet your husband?

SCHMIDT: I met him at the German Central. He—he had—his parents were from Transylvania. Like I—that was Roma—there is such a place. It's in the—

LEVINE: Yes.

SCHMIDT: —high heights of Romania. And his people were there and they had been there for centuries. And—and he was—he had—he had two—he had a brother and a sister. And I—I met him at the German Central. I had—was dating another boy and they were—the—the jukebox was playing music and he asked me to dance. And this guy was gambling that I had come with. And he was drinking beer. And I danced with my husband all night. He says, “Can I take you home?” I says, “I can't have you take me home.” I had seen him before. And I says, “I came with Carl and it wouldn't be right for me to go home with you.” So he—he says, “I'm going to be at the Slovenian Hall on”—I don't know, some place—“on the east side this Saturday if you can make it. I'd sure like to see you again, you know.” And I didn't know where he lived. And then it turned out he just lived down the street from me a little bit. And he had a—he took another girl home that night and he took me home. I went to the Slovenian Hall and I—and I knew some people from the German Central were there. And we danced and he danced with me quite a bit. And then he—then he took a—he took a—we called her Eleven. Her name was Evelyn. [chuckles] He took her home and he kissed her goodnight because it took him an awful long time to get back into the car, because I know he had been seeing her. [coughs] Then he took me home and when he found out I just lived down the street a little bit [chuckles] from him, not more than a half a mile, that—then we went out. Then we started going out and—and my mother didn't like him because he was 13 years older than I was. But I wanted to get married so bad, I—and he was a good man. He was a good, kind man to me. He was. He was a little overbearing. He was a German. What do you want? You know, [chuckles] he was the boss. But we got married and had all those kids and my life was good. I had a good life after that. I really did. We didn't fight. We—we had—we had a nice life, a very nice life. My life was—was crap until I got married.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SCHMIDT: And then I had a very, very pleasant life.

LEVINE: And what was your husband's first name?

SCHMIDT: Robert.

LEVINE: Robert.

SCHMIDT: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And you had seven children.

SCHMIDT: Yeah, that—that's him sitting there. He was already pretty ill there. He couldn't walk very good. There—there by the brick, he's sitting there. There's a—there's a man sitting by a brick building there.

LEVINE: Oh, I see.

SCHMIDT: There he is.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Oh, yeah. He has a nice smile.

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah. So—so then you had children and—and how is this time in your life?

SCHMIDT: Well, it's been bad. After Steve—I left Steve and I—I bought this place. There wasn't a stick of furniture. There was nothing here. And I didn't have much money. And I went to second hand places and bought things and I furnished it and—

LEVINE: Oh, it looks lovely.

SCHMIDT: I got a nice place. My son's painting.

LEVINE: Oh.

SCHMIDT: My husband was a carver of wood. I taught him how to carve. And he got so good.

LEVINE: Wow.

SCHMIDT: There's another one in—in the other room. There's another painting over here that my other son did. The s—the second—the second son. This is the oldest son painting. And this one over here is—is—actually, they're triplets. One—the one died at birth. And—

LEVINE: Oh.

SCHMIDT: —they're—and this is the—the younger one. That's the older one.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: Yeah. Tha—those two on the end.

LEVINE: I see.

SCHMIDT: [unclear], yeah.

LEVINE: So they came by you—your artistic talents got passed on.

SCHMIDT: Yeah, and they—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: —went to the Cleveland Institute of Art and they're both—both—John does artwork and Tom did artwork. He had quite a bit of paintings in—in—Mexico in—in galleries. John—the parks bought one of his paintings. He did the—he—there's a competition for the—for the parks.

LEVINE: Oh, yes.

SCHMIDT: And they bought one of his paintings.

LEVINE: Wonderful.

SCHMIDT: I—I got—I got the picture of that painting that the parks bought of him.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SCHMIDT: They bought his pic—picture that he painted.

LEVINE: Oh, well. You'll have to tell him that your—your story is in the archive at the Ellis Island National Monument.

SCHMIDT: [chuckles] I wanted to—my—my—I think my sister has, when they were selling those squares, you know.

LEVINE: You mean a name on the Wall of Honor?

SCHMIDT: Yeah. I wanted to have that so bad but I just couldn't afford it. I wanted it so bad.

LEVINE: They opened it again.

SCHMIDT: Did they really?

LEVINE: And they're—and they're selling them now again—

SCHMIDT: How much are they char—

LEVINE: They're a hundred dollars.

SCHMIDT: Yeah, that's how much it was at first.

LEVINE: Yeah, right.

SCHMIDT: Yeah. And hey, if you're living on Social Security, my lousy rent's here 250. [chuckles] I can't make it, the little bit of Social Security I got. That's why it's good for me to have met Gil, you know, and then we can—we can put our money together, live comfortably. I don't have to—I—I hate to scrape like that and have to ask the kids for money sometimes, you know. It just—

LEVINE: Yeah.

SCHMIDT: It's just not nice.

LEVINE: Right. Well, it looks as though you have a—a happy future in [unclear].

SCHMIDT: I have. I have. I have. And I'm going to—I'm going to join some things in the church and I'm—and the good Lord put me here to help other people. And I—and I want to help children. I want to help children that are hurt, that are hurt bad sexually—

LEVINE: Abused.

SCHMIDT: Abused.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: I know what they need because I never had a hug from my mother. Never had a kiss or "dear." Nothing, ever, ever. And I overcompensated with my children. And this is what these little kids need. And as soon as I get settled, I—I'm—I'm going to do that. I'm going to do that.

LEVINE: Well, that's wonderful.

SCHMIDT: I'm going to do that. I'm going to be Granny to a lot of kids. [chuckles]

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Oh, that's wonderful. Well, maybe this is a beautiful place to end.

SCHMIDT: I think so.

LEVINE: That's—that's very lovely and I—

SCHMIDT: Everything has led me to Lake Wales [PH]. Really.

LEVINE: Say again, because I'm not sure it was on the tape.

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: H—how the lake—why Lake Wales—

SCHMIDT: Yeah.

LEVINE: —was so central to you?

SCHMIDT: For—for—I—I can't—I didn't even want to come down to Florida. I came down with Steve because his son moved down here and he was crazy about his son. He was drinking too much. I knew that. But he had it under control and then he started—his son moved back to—to Cle—to—

LEVINE: Lorraine?

SCHMIDT: No. He—

LEVINE: Oh.

SCHMIDT: —moved back—back to Ohio.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: And Steve started drinking like crazy and he got abusive and then I had to leave. And I bought this place and then I met—I met this—this gentleman from Lake—first of all, I went to Breeze Hill and I was going to buy a place because I couldn't st—I can't afford to live here. And I went to Breeze Hill and I thought if I could buy a place there and own my own land, I don't have to pay \$250 a month. And I looked at a place but the lady wanted too much money. I couldn't afford it. So I—that was that. Then I met a man that lived in Breeze Hill. And he had just lost his wife and I was helping him. He was also a diabetic and I was helping him try to get his self situated and clean out some of the stuff in

his place. And he had a father that's 94 years old. Well, anyway, Les got sick. And he called me and he says, "Take—I—I'm not feeling good. Can you come over?" I went down. I took him to the doctor. The doctors put him in the emergency. I put him in the emergency. They put him in the hospital. And within—that this was just right after Christmas. And he passed away. He had a 70th birthday in the hospital. It was in January. And he died.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SCHMIDT: So I was left—and I promised him I would take care of his cat and his dad in—in that—there I am, in Breeze Hill. And I met Gil, who lives next door to Les' father.

LEVINE: Oh.

SCHMIDT: And that's how I met Gil, because he was sitting there talking to Les' father, and Les took it so bad because he had already lost one son. He lost his wife not too long ago and lost this other son. And h—he needs somebody to—he gets disoriented. He passes out if he doesn't get his medication. So we have to get his medication in the morning and in the evening. And I have to see that he takes it with his meals. And that's how I met Gil.

LEVINE: And what's Gil's last name?

SCHMIDT: Gil Holland.

LEVINE: Holland.

SCHMIDT: Yeah, and—and everything kept on leading me—I—I—I went to Lake Wales to s—see this—this—they had some kind of Summer Fest there and they had artists and everything. And I met this lady and she says—and—and I says, "Well, I do painting." She says, "Could I see your work?" So I took it down and she says, "Oh, my gosh!" They put it in the museum. There I was in Lake Wales again. And I says, "You know, I had a relative. He was a minister." I says, "My grandmother died here." I—you know, there was—and—and my father—my real father, Cecil Ryder—he was in Lake Wales with his last wife. And they had an—they had an automobile accident. She got killed. He was visiting his—his father in Lake Wales. Everything pulled me to Lake Wales and Breeze Hill. And I was supposed to meet Gil there. And the Lord has something for me to do there.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SCHMIDT: And I'm taking care of Les' father now and—and I cook and do the things I do best.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SCHMIDT: [laughs]

LEVINE: Oh, that's wonderful. Well—

SCHMIDT: And I'm happy. I'm happy. Finally, I'm happy. I'm not lonely anymore. And he's not lonely anymore. And we don't have to cry anymore.

LEVINE: Oh, okay.

SCHMIDT: Yeah, that's it.

LEVINE: Well, thank you very much—

SCHMIDT: Thank you.

LEVINE: —for a lovely interview.

SCHMIDT: I'm sorry I'm so long winded. [laughs]

LEVINE: Oh, please. Everything's been very, very interesting. I thank you. I've been speaking with Margaret Schmidt. And we're here in Winter Haven, Florida. It's—it's October—October—March 10th, 1999. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm signing off.

[END OF INTERVIEW]