

EI-1227

GISELA EVERITT (SPEAKING ABOUT FATHER)

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TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: CHARLES MITCHELL

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AGE 19

PAST RESIDENCES: GUATEMALA

LEVINE: Today is January 22nd, the year 2002, and I'm here in Auburndale, Florida, with Gisela Everitt, who is the daughter of Hugo Drega.

EVERITT: Druuuga.

LEVINE: Druga. Okay. Druga. And he was interned at Ellis Island in probably 1943 for a short period which came in the midst of a whole lot of a sequence of internments and repatriation, right?

EVERITT: Yeah at the end of the war we were repatriated again.

LEVINE: Okay. Well it's unusual for this interview to be in the collection because it is not a firsthand account, but Mr. Druga is deceased and his daughter Gisela knows a lot about his story, and it seems important to record it. So that's what we're doing today. Okay, would you just start at the beginning with your birth date and where you were born?

EVERITT: Okay, I was born in Guatemala on the new farm that my father started after he came back from the war on the 23rd of January, 1954.

LEVINE: Okay, so you were actually born after...oh well you were born after World War II, and after all of what we're going to be talking about happened.

EVERITT: Yeah, long time after.

LEVINE: Okay, maybe we should start with your saying how this...what you're about to talk about was passed onto you, and how your father spoke about it or didn't speak about it, or how you came to know about it.

EVERITT: If he spoke about it at all, he actually spoke about it very positively because there were quite a few things that he did during this internment that was so typical him. He was always an incredibly positive man. He never looked at things negatively, he always looked at it as a positive experience. He was in Guatemala a very successful farmer, on a farm that was way in the mountains. You could actually not even get there by car or anything; you had to take a mule. And you would be traveling on a mule for about five hours to get to his farm. It was very very remote. And-

LEVINE: How did he happen to go to Guatemala, do you know that part?

EVERITT: Yes, I do. He was a 19 year old boy in 1920 after the first World War. And there was no work in Germany. Germany was recovering from the first World War, and there was no future for him. So he had an uncle in Guatemala. My father's family have always been incredibly adventurous. They always flew the nest and went all over the place. And so we have family from Asia to Africa to Central America, Canada, United States – we have family everywhere. Because of this adventure spirit that they had. So this uncle of him said, "Come to Guatemala. There's plenty of opportunity here. So as a 19 year old boy he grabbed his bags and left.

LEVINE: And he went by himself?

EVERITT: He went by himself on a banana boat to Panama. And when he got to Panama he had earned himself – he earned himself his trip over there by working on the boat. Plus he made a little extra money and was able to buy a car I think or something. I don't know if they had cars already in those days already in 1920, I have no idea. Somehow he got from Panama to Guatemala by road, over the Pan-Americana, which is a street, a road, which runs all the way from Canada, I think, way into Chile. And he liked Costa Rica very very much; he almost stayed there. But he said, "No, I've got to go and look at Guatemala first and then make up my mind if I want to settle down in Costa Rica or Guatemala." But once he got to Guatemala, that was it. He was just so fascinated with the country. Although it had just gone through an earthquake and it was pretty destroyed. He just loved it.

LEVINE: What...Did he ever say what it was about it that struck him so...?

EVERITT: There was something about it that he absolutely adored. He loved Guatemala from day one. And I guess the fact that he was a young man and he had a little bit of family there. I think that made a huge difference. Choosing Costa Rica would have been totally on his own, and that's pretty tough, I think. Anyway, this uncle got him a job with a very wealthy German farmer there who was very pleased with my father's work, and decided to go to Germany a couple of months after my father started there and said, "Okay, I'm leaving you my farm, you're in charge of my farm. I'm going to Germany for a year." In those days you didn't go for three months, or a week. If you went, you went for a couple of months, or, like this gentleman, for a year.

LEVINE: Was there a German community-?

EVERITT: Huge. Huge German community in Guatemala. For what reason they all settled in Guatemala I don't know. I guess they just liked the country. But

there was a very very strong German community before the war, and after the war not so much anymore, though there were still quite a lot of Germans. But before the war, it was very large. In this little town of Coban, which wasn't even the capital city, they had a huge German club.

LEVINE: Spell the name of the town.

EVERITT: C-O-B-A-N. Apostrophe on the A. And there were a lot of Germans in that region, which is called Alta Vera Pass. Quite a nice area. And they had a German club there, and the members were in like the 500s or something. You know, for a small country like Guatemala it was quite a lot. And they all came from various farms. They all mostly were farmers or businessmen.

LEVINE: Had your father been on a farm in Germany?

EVERITT: No. But he always, always wanted to do either farming or engineering. That was his dream, to do that. He didn't learn either one of them in University. He taught himself from scratch, everything. He built bridges and everything, and how he did it I have no idea, because he just...built it. He never learned how to. So he worked for this gentleman and managed his farm so well and doubled the production of the crops-

LEVINE: What were they growing on the farm?

EVERITT: Mostly coffee, cardamom. I think in this farm these two were the main products. And that year that this gentleman was in Germany, he doubled his crop. So my father got a huge bonus when this man came back. What was his name again? I don't know. I have it there somewhere. So with this bonus, my dad bought his first farm, which was very far out – as I said, you had to ride on a horse for five hours to get there. And he bought that piece of land and started to build up his own farm.

LEVINE: Also coffee?

EVERITT: Also coffee, yeah. Mainly coffee. And within a couple of years, my dad was very well settled and very wealthy for those terms, in those days. And he happened to have a German family as his neighbors – and when I say “neighbors” it’s like an hour’s, a day’s horse riding to get to them. So you can’t just pop in for lunch or something. And he became very friendly with them. And so my dad decided that...he was 30, in his early 30s by then, and he decided that it was time to go and find a wife. And I don’t know why the Germans thought that the only wife they could ever find was another German, but they just, that was their tradition, that was the thing they did. For what reason I still don’t understand. But anyway. And so he felt he was ready to go and look for a wife in Germany...and to see his family anyway. He had lost his mother in the meantime and his father. But he still had brothers and sisters over there. And so the neighbors said jokingly, “Hey, go and visit my mother-in-law, she’s got three available daughters.” And sent a parcel for his mother-in-law. So my father went off to Germany and went to deliver the parcel and met my mother. Within 3 months they were married.

LEVINE: So do you remember your father’s birth date?

EVERITT: Yes, he was born on the 3rd, I’m sorry, on the 6th of March, 1901.

LEVINE: Okay, so it was in the early thirties that he went then to Germany.

EVERITT: Yeah. He married my mom in 1936, in August 1936. And he was born in Hamburg. And his family came from that area, Hamburg and Bremen. Way up north. And my mother’s family came from Lubeck, which is also up north. And so they met and he brought her back to Guatemala.

LEVINE: Did she want to go?

EVERITT: My grandmother I think only allowed her to, you know, sort of okay this union because her eldest daughter was already there, and this was a neighbor. So my aunt was already living in Guatemala, and that's the only reason why I think she was okay with the idea that my mother could go, because she would have somebody there. But, you know, all of those unions must have been awfully hard. Imagine, she was only 19. She was a kid. And she marries this man she has known for three months...

LEVINE: Who is considerably older.

EVERITT: Much older. My mother lost her father very early in life, so I think there was a bit of a security in meeting and marrying an older gentleman.

LEVINE: What was your mother's name and maiden name?

EVERITT: My mother is Oda, O-D-A, Lutzow was her maiden name, L-U-T-Z-O-W. And she came from a very very wealthy family originally, but my grandfather sort of lost it all somehow. I don't know what he did, but he lost a lot of money. And a lot of her family are very disciplined people. They were all either officers in the marines or the air force or something like that. Very military-oriented family.

LEVINE: So did your mother like it once she got there, do you know?

EVERITT: I think she was...she was happy in a way, yeah, but I think she was disillusioned I would say. Because there she was in the middle of the jungle, couldn't even speak Spanish, my father was on the fields the whole day, and the people that she could relate to, that were close to her couldn't even speak Spanish themselves. They spoke the Indian language, Quechi, which she

didn't speak herself, not even Spanish, much less Quechi. So she was very lonely I think, she was thrown into a jungle, and that was it.

LEVINE: And isolated.

EVERITT: She was totally isolated. And she came from a family who had like musical soirees, where they would play music, they would get together, or they would have an evening of literature. And all these, she came from a very intellectual household. And this poor kid is taken to a piece of jungle and she's supposed to be happy there! I mean, I can't...I think she was very very lonely, incredibly lonely. And to be with her sister was a day's horse riding, so it wasn't as if she had her nearby either. But anyway, all these...that's generation was tough. And you had your destiny and you took it and you made something out of it, as simple as that. You didn't whine, and you didn't...not like us. We're all spoiled in comparison. So they had their first child about two years after they were married. And so I think that gave her a lot of happiness because not she had something or somebody, a little doll to play with. And then my other sister came something like a year later, 12 months later, my other sister was born. And then all this war thing started happening. I mean Natalie was born in the 40s, and then my father was taken away. This whole thing started happening slowly, actually, when the war broke out. They got wind of it even in the jungle of Guatemala. But they heard sort of very, they heard the news, they really didn't know what was going on out there. You've got to realize they were in the jungle, where you got news that were crackled, so much static in it that you could barely understand what they were saying. So they knew there was this guy Hitler out there somewhere doing something, and I guess some of them agreed with it, some of them didn't. My father was neither nor. He just wanted to stay neutral. He felt he had nothing to do with it. He didn't even know what was going on really.

LEVINE: Was he in communication with family members, do you know? Or your mother, was she?

EVERITT: Yeah, yeah, they were constantly. My mother was a great writer, and she was a lot in contact with her family, and they would be telling her that...you got to remember that mail took about three months to get to them. And this was all boats and stuff in those days. I think airplanes started during that time, or just before then. But mail still took, maybe from Germany to Guatemala City a certain amount, but then from Guatemala City to the jungle...I mean, it took forever to get mail and to really be informed about what was happening. And then this fear started, this rumor started, that Germans were being taken prisoners from Guatemala and nobody could really believe it, they thought no, this just a rumor and don't panic, blah blah blah. But then it started to get in closer, and the reins started getting tighter and tighter and tighter. Now it was somebody that they knew had been taken prisoner to Guatemala and they didn't know why. Guatemala hadn't declared the war to Germany. **Ubico** was the president in those days. And he was very pro-German. He appreciated them tremendously because the Germans had created an economical status to Guatemala. They were very hard working, very...they had taken pieces of land and transformed them into incredibly well-functioning farms. So he did not want to get rid of his Germans. He was happy with them being where they were. But like all the countries in Central America, the United States has got a huge stronghold on these countries. And the United States forced Guatemala to declare the war against Germany. And they did that only so that they could go in there and take those Germans as prisoners to be later exchanged as American prisoners. And that's where they went off from, Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Did your father talk about, or your mother, when he was seized? When he was taken?

EVERITT: Yes, my father was actually one of the last ones that was taken. He knew Ubico kind of personally. He had met him. And he was dreaming with the idea I guess that he had probably liked him and that's why he was being spared, so to say. But no such luck. He was taken exactly the same way as everybody else.

LEVINE: Which was?

EVERITT: My uncle, his neighbor, was taken a couple of months before.

LEVINE: And how was it done, do you...did he ever talk about that?

EVERITT: Yeah. What happened, the whole thing behind this whole lot is actually an economical...The bottom line of this whole thing is the U.S. needed people to exchange for American prisoners. So that was their advantage to take these people. And for Guatemala it was getting those farms back that were already working very nicely. And not only that, they froze – most of those Germans were very wealthy – and they froze all their accounts. And what happened to that money, nobody knows. But they obviously took it. So it was a very dirty thing that they did, but... They came in the middle of the night. My father had an inkling that it was getting rather hot around him because they had been taking people around him already that he knew. So he had organized for my mom, who was pregnant three months with my brother, and the two little girls that they had, to go and stay with some friends in the next town closest to the farm. They were also Germans, it was an elderly couple who had no children and who they were very friendly with. And my mother had sort of taken this lady and this gentleman as her substitute parents because she didn't have any. And...

LEVINE: Did your father ever mention that he thought about hiding or leaving or anything like that?

EVERITT: No, no. But he thought of standing of where he was standing, defending his property because he was not going to...he did not want to go. He hadn't done anything wrong. And his thinking was, "I worked so hard to get to this point, for what I have, it's just not fair." And because his farm was one of the most remote ones between all the farms, I think, that's why he was one of the last ones to be taken. Because he was so way out of anybody's way that it took that long to get to him.

LEVINE: And he was probably hoping that maybe they wouldn't.

EVERITT: He was hoping that he could be enough that they wouldn't remember him out there, you know? But he must have known that there was a certain amount of possibility because otherwise he wouldn't have organized for his wife and children to get away. They had organized actually for them to go there if he should be taken. The night they came to take him, my mother and the children were there on the farm, and my father was having malaria. He was actually very very ill with malaria and had very high fever and wasn't well at all. And six armed policemen or army guys with machineguns came to the house and took him. And it was raining, it was in the middle of the night, and they took this sick guy away. And my mother of course was beside herself with sadness because now she was left behind with two kids, pregnant with a third. She had brought all her dowry or what do you call it from Germany and they gave her 48 hours to grab her things that she could carry and get out of the farm. And of course all this beautiful furniture and crystal and all that stuff, she took the family silver and that kind of thing that she could carry with her. But other than that she had to leave everything behind.

LEVINE: And what did she do, go by mule or horse, or...?

EVERITT: Well the night day, after my father left, as I said, they gave her a mule and said, "Ride. Go, and take what you can take."

LEVINE: And then where did she go?

EVERITT: She went to this elderly couple who were very nice. They took her up. At least she had a roof over her head. They had a little supermarket, it was like a little supermarket in the first floor and the second floor was where they lived. And so my mother got a room there with her children and that's where she lived.

LEVINE: And she stayed there while everything happened to your father, where he was taken...

EVERITT: My father was taken from his farm over Coban, this town, to Guatemala City, where they were taken to a police station there and they were stripped naked completely and then they got kind of overalls, like striped...

LEVINE: Like a prisoner.

EVERITT: Like a prisoner! Yeah. Striped overalls. And my father just wanted to die. He was so sick. He had actually gotten worse. He was asking for them to give him something, and they wouldn't give him anything. He actually describes in one of the tapes that I have, he describes a situation of him almost dying and out of body experience sort of thing, one of those nights, where he was so ill that he actually thought he had died, but then he woke up again and he was still around. This is how he always laughed about everything because he thought it was so funny looking back at it.

LEVINE: Yeah.

EVERITT: And then he stayed there for a couple of days. My mother managed to leave the kids with this couple and went after him.

LEVINE: To Guatemala City?

EVERITT: To Guatemala City to bring him a few things, you know, clothing, and things that she thought he might need. And she also brought some penicillin. And she was a nurse, she was a trained nurse. So she, once she got to talk to him and they allowed her to see him, she was able to inject him some penicillin to get better. And then he was shipped to one of the harbors in Guatemala and was put on a ship.

LEVINE: Was he in Guatemala City for any length of time?

EVERITT: 10 days or something. And then they were put on this boat. But they were put in the hull of the boat, where they didn't see the sunshine at all. It was like in total darkness inside the belly of that boat.

LEVINE: About how many people, do you have any idea?

EVERITT: No, but there were quite a few. He says that they were crammed. And they weren't bed or anything there. They just slept wherever they found a little piece of...of...of...

LEVINE: Floor.

EVERITT: ...floor. But what he found...My father was an intensely private person. Personal things like doing your necessities and stuff like that, that was done privately. And he was forced – they all were forced – that to him was the most indignant piece of the entire thing. I mean, when he used to tell me the story, that was the only probably where he felt like crying or mad, you know?

“They made us do everything in a bucket in the middle of everybody!” That really killed him. He didn’t like that. One guy died during that trip which I don’t know how long it took, but it went from Guatemala Porta Varios in Guatemala, which is on the Pacific Coast, through the Panama Canal, and then up into Texas, into the Gulf of Mexico into Texas. And...actually I got it somewhere, the name of it, but I can’t remember right now...and it must have taken them about 3 weeks I would assume, they were in that hull. And he said the stench was just unbearable of all these men sweating, not showering, not nothing. After about a week they were allowed to go on deck once. They had a hole, or like an entrance where the steps were they got bread and butter, or bread and food and water thrown at them, he used those words, I remember, he said he felt like a dog.

LEVINE: And they were all men?

EVERITT: They were all men. They was one lady on the boat and she was upstairs. And she was up there with the rest of the crew.

LEVINE: But she was a prisoner.

EVERITT: She was...well her husband had been taken earlier, and she decided she wanted to go wherever her husband was and asked them to take her. And so they got taken to Texas, and he was in Crystal River for quite a while. He never ever said he was – besides that boat trip which was very dehumanizing or degrading for him – he never ever said the Americans treated him badly. Not at all. He said as a matter of fact, they treated them too well, because when he finally got to the concentration camp in Texas, he met some of his neighbors that had been there already a year or something, and they were so fat, because they had been fed so much and so good and there was no exercise – unusual for a farmer, I mean these farmers were fit, lean, and healthy because they did a lot of exercise. And now they were suddenly in a

camp where there was no exercise and all they could do was play cards and eat all day long. So he described my uncle – I’ll never forget it – he described my uncle who was a very tall man, as a “big white piece of dough.” Because he never saw the sunshine and he had gotten so fat that he was like a big bloated white thing.

LEVINE: Did your father describe what life was like in Crystal City?

EVERITT: He said it was boring because they weren’t doing anything. Looking at the fence around them made him terribly upset because that’s what made him realize that he couldn’t go anywhere, that he was captured.

LEVINE: Did they organize any kind of things...?

EVERITT: Nothing.

LEVINE: And how about, were there Italians and Japanese there too that he recalled?

EVERITT: No, no. He only recalls Germans being there. He was so bored after awhile – he’s a very active, he was a very creative man – he went to the guy that managed that place and asked him for some seeds. He said, “Look, you guys are not eating enough fresh vegetables here. The prisoners are looking all ill. Give me a piece of land and give me some seeds. I want to grow something and I’ll save you money by growing the vegetables right here.” And that’s what he started in Crystal City. He got a piece of land and started growing vegetables. But that at least gave him...that’s the way my father was, he was an incredibly positive person. He didn’t sit there and wallow in his bad luck, he just decided to do something. And whenever I feel like wallowing, I always think of him, and I think how can I be like that? I can’t afford to when I have a father like that.

LEVINE: Was he writing to your mother while he was in the camp do you know?

EVERITT: Yeah. She started a very interesting diary from basically the first day that he left. And we can read that diary luckily because she wrote already the...you know there's an old German writing where they wrote differently. And I can't read that. So that's the diaries that my father had. And unfortunately not even I can read them. But my mother's we can read-

LEVINE: Because it's in more modern German?

EVERITT: It's modern...the typestyle, like that one. But the old German typestyle was different, and I can't read it. And I don't think any of my brothers and sisters can either. But we're hoping that we can find somebody one day that knows how to do that.

LEVINE: How about your mother's diary? Was she recording what he wrote to her as well what was happening with her and her children?

EVERITT: Yes. She was basically using that diary as if it was him. She was him everything that was happening, her feelings, what went on around her, and so on. He was no so fortunate to communicate with her. I think there was a major breakdown...communication breakdown between him and her because he didn't have the opportunity to send her mail or connect to her.

(END SIDE A)

(BEGIN SIDE B)

LEVINE: ...because it wasn't do you think, or it was probably screened for sure.

EVERITT: I don't think it was allowed. Yeah, and once he got to Germany he was able to communicate with her again. It was a strange situation which I still don't

understand to this day. He was basically a prisoner-of-war because he had been exchanged for American prisoners now that he got to Germany.

LEVINE: Wait before you skip, how long did he stay in Crystal City roughly, do you know?

EVERITT: About 8 months, I think.

LEVINE: And then where was he taken from there?

EVERITT: They were put on a train and were taken to Ellis Island.

LEVINE: And again, were there a lot of people that he was going with?

EVERITT: Loads.

LEVINE: And that were at Ellis Island when he was there?

EVERITT: Lots, lots. Because the people that all gathered at Ellis Island were not only the people from Crystal City. They were the Japanese, the Italians, the Germans from Costa Rica, from Honduras, from El Salvador – that's what they did when they went on that boat that left Guatemala with him. They went along all the Latin American countries, collecting more prisoners of these other countries.

LEVINE: You mentioned earlier he wasn't at Ellis Island for very long.

EVERITT: No.

LEVINE: And then, tell what was asked of him and his response to that.

EVERITT: Well, the one thing that they all seemed to have, and that he expressed very clearly was this not knowing what was going on. Nobody was telling them why they were being taken there, what was going to happen next. Nobody knew anything. So there was a collective fear in the group, because they didn't know whether they were going to be executed now, or were they going to be sent home, which is what everybody wanted. What was the story? Until shortly before – hours before – then of course there were rumors, there were rumors everywhere, which is typical for a crowd of people that have fear that rumors come up. And the rumor was that they were being put on a boat to Germany.

LEVINE: And was he asked at Ellis Island about going back?

EVERITT: Yeah. No, he wasn't asked. He was told to sign a paper that said he wanted to go to Germany.

LEVINE: And he was told to sign it.

EVERITT: He was told to sign it. And he said, "I'm not signing that because I don't want to go to Germany. I want to go back to my wife." And they said, "Well, you either go and sign this paper, or we'll tie you up and take you anyway." So he had no choice really, you know? And the other people seemed to be more passive than he was. They just simply signed and that was it. And the rumor again was that they were put on that ship and were going to be guided into heavy submarine area and the Americans weren't going to kill them, but that they were put on a boat so that some submarine would bombard them and be killed that way. But then my father kept on saying, "But I don't understand why they would've taken us prisoners then. For what? Just to be put on a ship..."

LEVINE: For someone else to kill them.

EVERITT: "...that might be killed along the way, maybe we don't get killed, what is the point of the whole thing?" He just knew there was something else.

LEVINE: Did he ever say anything about...was he receiving news of the war? Were they aware of what was happening in Europe?

EVERITT: Only in rumors. Nobody ever heard a radio themselves. The people, the guards, that used to patrol around the camp used to give them bits of information. But it was all I think from what I heard from my dad was a lot of confusion, a lot of **721?** what do you call it? Not knowing what is actually going on.

LEVINE: Can you think of anything else your father ever said about Ellis Island? About the physical site, or about treatment there, or about anything else regarding Ellis Island?

EVERITT: The treatment he got throughout the whole entire time he described as very nice, very friendly – not violent. When they got to Ellis Island to him it was pretty clear that they were going to be shipped somewhere.

LEVINE: Did he ever talk about the other prisoners, the people who were being held prisoner? What the mentality was, what the attitudes were, what the way they acted?

EVERITT: They were so depressed by that time. I mean, he had experienced...I think they were just simply, "I give up. I don't know what's going on. Nobody tells me." And I think they were just totally and utterly...Because I remember asking him, "Dad, did you meet a lot of people while you were there?" And he said, "No you didn't. And you didn't want to either." They isolated themselves a lot, unless they knew each other. And even then they

didn't dare say anything because they didn't trust anybody. There was suddenly this thing that because of...they didn't know what was going on. You didn't trust anybody in case you said something that would put you in a pickle. And you didn't even trust your friends whom you had known for years. So they spoke very little and they said very little. There was a humongous doubt hanging around – What's happening to us? What is going to happen to us? And when they were on that boat once they left Ellis Island – what was the name of that boat? But it had a German name, I think. It had a German name.

LEVINE: Was it the Gripsholm? I don't know why that one...

EVERITT: Gripsholm, yeah that's it, that rings a bell. Gripsholm. Yeah, you're right. They were put on that boat. My father couldn't put two and two together. A German boat, supposedly being torpedoed by a German submarine. Didn't make sense to him. But they all sang German songs in that boat in the hope that the submarine would hear them and realize they were German so please don't shoot us. And that's how desperate they were. And then they got to... where did they get to? They got not to Germany, they got to another country. Holland? Belgium? Somewhere.

LEVINE: Where the Gripsholm, Holland I would think, it's a Holland line.

EVERITT: Holland, I think it was Holland. They got to Holland, and then they said, "So now what? What do we do here?" He didn't want to fight. He wanted to go home. But they said, "No you can't go home, you're a prisoner of war now." So he was a German in his own country, couldn't go away, couldn't do anything else. It was such a weird situation. My father said it was so... "All I wanted was to go home." But at that point they hadn't, they didn't know that they had been exchanged for American prisoners. They didn't know that

until much later they figured that out. And that that was the reason they got captured in the first place.

LEVINE: And so they were in a camp in Germany?

EVERITT: In Germany. But they were set free free pretty soon after that. They were never really in a camp in Germany. They were just thrown into the country. "Okay. Here you are. Now off you go" sort of thing. And then he went to the authorities and said, "But I want to go home now. How do I do that?" And they said, "No you can't go home, you're a prisoner of war." So he went to my mother-in-law, and there were a whole bunch of women there that had either lost their husbands or their husbands were at war. And so there was quite a lot of elderly females there. So he decided, "Okay, well if I can't go anywhere, and if I can't fight, I can't do anything, I might as well take care of these ladies." And that's what he did. He spent two years in Germany during the war gathering food for them: he would work on farms, and in exchange instead of payment he would get food and feed these ladies from that. There also wasn't much of a possibility to get over to...back to Guatemala. There was war everywhere. And there weren't regular scheduled flights!!!

LEVINE: Right, right, right!

EVERITT: Or boats to Guatemala, you know? It was a total. So that's what he did, basically.

LEVINE: Was there an effort, did he ever say if there was an effort to recruit him into the Germany army?

EVERITT: Mm mm. Not at all. And I don't think he would've wanted to fight either because he never went to the army. He left Germany as a young man before he had to go or would have gone, I don't know.

LEVINE: So in the meantime, I guess there wasn't really mail either going across...

EVERITT: Very sporadic. Very sporadic mail. And then he got wind that the best way for him to get to Guatemala was certainly not from Germany but from France, or from any other country. So my mom had an uncle at the Sorbonne in Paris, and he sort of let him know via bush telegraph that he would put him up or hide him or whatever. And he tried to go by foot from Germany to Paris three times – three times he was captured and thrown back into Germany again. And he never succeeded. He was walking at night and sleeping during the day, but he got found three times. And by then, by the third time that he tried, the war was over. And then he was free to go, which he did.

LEVINE: Did he ever talk about when he realized the war was over and that period?

EVERITT: No.

LEVINE: Yeah.

EVERITT: It wasn't a big...he never mentioned that a lot, actually, that there was a big hurrah about the war being over or anything, or that there was ding dong date, an hour the war was over sort of thing, it was suddenly, "Oh, the war is over." And it was a very depressive time in Germany. I should imagine. They had lost the war, their country was in shreds. And all he wanted was to set up his ladies, as he used to call it, that they're okay. And then all he wanted was to go home again.

LEVINE: And so how did he do that?

EVERITT: He eventually managed to get to this uncle in the Sorbonne and he organized a flight for him to go to Guatemala.

LEVINE: Did...

EVERITT: Over New York. It was a flight that went from Paris to New York. And then New York I don't know where else after that. But somehow he got back to Guatemala.

LEVINE: Did he or your mother ever speak about his return then? That reunion, when he came back?

EVERITT: It was weird. Yeah, they spoke about it. My mother was so glad and grateful that he was alive. But it did produce a huge wedge in their relationship.

LEVINE: In what sense?

EVERITT: In that they grew apart completely. I don't know humanly how to describe that, but I can imagine it personally. I mean, you don't see your husband for five years, you've got to make ends meet by yourself with three little kids by then. It must've been very difficult.

LEVINE: She must have become more independent. And perhaps it changed him, the experience, do you think the experience changed your father in some ways?

EVERITT: I don't know. I didn't know him before then, so I wouldn't know how... I just know that he never spoke much about the war, and if he did, he did in a positive way. He tried to focus only on the funny things that happened. And

he looked at it with humor wherever he could. But I think yeah, the older he got, the more...little bit of bitterness started coming through, you know?

LEVINE: Did your mother ever talk about that he had changed as a result or what actually changed?

EVERITT: He just threw himself into work, I think that was his way of overcoming. And he saw everything as a challenge. "Darn it, you took away everything from me. I'm going to show you that I can rebuild it again. And that was his attitude. And he did that, he threw himself into work. The one thing he told me which was actually pretty shocking to me because I never knew about it, but my mother tried to commit suicide shortly after he was taken to the United States. She had her baby, and she had her baby boy, which she was very very happy about. And then she writes in her diary there about her happiness of having this little boy that reminded her so much of her husband. And yet when this little boy was only about three months old, she tried to commit suicide by taking an overdose of sleeping pills. And that was never spoken about in the family, it was never ever mentioned. I'm the one that's probably the closest to my mom. And my mom told me a lot of things, personal things...she never ever mentioned that, never.

LEVINE: And how did you find that out?

EVERITT: My father told me.

LEVINE: Father told me. Only about 1 ½ years ago. Why he told me, I have no idea. But he told me and my sister and I remember my sister and I looking at each other. But again he didn't say suicide. He said, "Oh your mother suddenly turned crazy in her head and took too many pills." That was his way of saying it. And then my sister and I sort of looked at each other and said, "What? Suicide?" And he couldn't say the word, and he didn't want to say

the word either. And you know how they saved her? They put a garden hose down her stomach. Can you imagine that? She was unconscious when they found her. They put a garden hose, and ordinary garden hose down her throat because there was no doctor, there was nothing nearby. And they suctioned her stomach out.

LEVINE: Oh my gosh.

EVERITT: But that's what saved her. Otherwise she wouldn't have made it. She was supposed to come down for dinner, and she didn't show up. They used to always after the day, they used to shower, change into nice smart clothing, and then they used to gather for dinner. It was always very traditional, very fine and everything. And she never managed to appear, and so they went to her room and my little brother was crying and crying and crying, but there was no sound. So she must've just taken them, but she was already fast asleep. So I think if they wouldn't have gone into her bedroom, she probably would've succeeded. Thank God she didn't. Otherwise I wouldn't be here today.

LEVINE: Of course she could have flipped out, too, with the stress of everything.

EVERITT: I think it was too much for her to handle. She's a very very sensitive woman, and I think she just felt overwhelmed with what was happening. I can just imagine that the sense of desperation, of "Why is this happening? What have I done?" They must have felt "This is so unfair."

LEVINE: Do you think this has had an impact on you? I know you came afterward, but just growing up with this knowledge of that whole circumstance?

EVERITT: No. Because it was never referred as a negative thing. I think my dad did very well in doing that. He would tell us, for example, about his little

vegetable garden in the concentration camp. He didn't tell us about the people that died during that year, out of sadness a lot of them. He would just often say, "I believe in a broken heart. Because I saw people dying from a broken heart." They probably had a heart attack, you know? But maybe a heart attack is a broken heart in some way, in some instances.

LEVINE: In some sense, sure.

EVERITT: And that's all he would say, about the sadness, the atmosphere of sadness that there must have been, there must have been. But all he would tell about was his little vegetable patch and how much joy he had out of that.

LEVINE: But also just being in Germany during the war was difficult.

EVERITT: It was terrible because he did not want to be there. I think what really really gave him a major blow was in Ellis Island when he begged them not to send him over to Germany, saying, "I don't want to go there. I don't belong there. I want to go to my family." And that he didn't have a choice really. That was the only time where he probably spoke about the Americans a little bit negatively. That they didn't give him that choice. He was upset about that because he didn't do anything wrong.

LEVINE: Was he aware of the concentration camps in Germany when he was there, do you know? Did he ever say anything about that?

EVERITT: No. He was unaware of it. He knew that there was something happening to the Jewish community. But what was exactly happening to them very few people knew. The man on the street did not know of the atrocities that were happening there. And I guess those who knew didn't dare do anything about it. I think this whole country lived in a tremendous amount of fear. What this

creature did was a psychological fear. He had everybody under either intense admiration or intense fear. Either one of the two. And...

LEVINE: Well how about your father then? He went back to Guatemala and he built up his farm again...

EVERITT: He started all over again the same way he started the first time, working as a laborer in a farm, working himself up to a manager on a huge farm which was later divided into all the little farms that are there now.

LEVINE: Because he had lost his farm? Had he...?

EVERITT: Yeah, they'd taken in away. He tried...My mother, when they had taken him, she tried to get the farm back by putting the farm on my sisters' names because they were Guatemalans, they weren't German anymore. So they put the farm as an inheritance onto their names but it was just, they couldn't do anything.

LEVINE: So what happened? Did Guatemalans take over the farm as their own? Is that what they did?

EVERITT: Yeah, yeah, yeah. The farms were given away to the Indians in Guatemala, and the money...well, he had about \$150,000 in the bank – he never saw that money. And he had a coffee crop that he had already delivered which was worth again, about \$100,000. And that in today's terms is a huge amount of money. He never saw that ever, not a cent. Nothing. He doesn't know what happened to it. A few of the Germans for some reason managed to get their farms back. How they did that we don't know. It was always a mystery for my father because no one would talk about it, so we don't know how they did it. But we didn't get anything back, nothing at all. My dad had to work himself up. I remember my childhood as a very poor one. We were poor.

When I say, I had a plastic doll made in China and that was it, that was my toy. And my brother had a plastic soccer ball, and that was it. We didn't have bicycles, we didn't have fancy clothing, and this is from a family that, I mean my sisters used to be dressed in Swiss pique, and this second lot that came along, my brother and I, we were dressed in barely anything. But they started all over again and made it again. I admire my dad. It's incredible this stamina of not being stomped down and broken. It was quite amazing.

LEVINE: And how about your mother? How did she hold up with the repercussions of everything?

EVERITT: You know, my mother again had this mentality: "Well this is my bundle, I make the best out of it." And they both sank themselves into work. My father would have...I'm convinced my father would have never gotten to where he was a couple of years after they started if it wasn't for my mother's tenacity next to him. His success and all that, sure, it's a lot because of a what he did, but it's a heck of a lot because of what she did. She held the whole thing together. And I admire her as a woman, really. I think the marriage at the end of the day...there was a rift there. And she stuck to it because of us. She always used to say to me – of course half-jokingly because she doesn't want to harm my dad either, and he hadn't done anything wrong with her – but she used to say, "If it wasn't for the war, we probably would have been divorced." She always used to say that. So that just shows me that they weren't, at least she wasn't that happy. She was always a sad woman in a way. She had a certain sadness about her. She has lost her mind now. She is happy. She's a kid. She's happy in a way that makes us happy because I'd rather have her happy like that than unhappy as she was. After I left Guatemala 20 years ago, I was very close to her, and we used to do a lot of things together. And she trusted me. And she told me a lot of things. And after I left, got married and left to South Africa, I think she was very very

upset, very sad. But she never said so to me, never. She just used to say I miss you, but not like gosh, I really really miss you.

LEVINE: Well it certainly took its toll on her, the whole thing too.

EVERITT: Oh yeah. She suffered. Maybe not as much because she wasn't where the bombs were flying, like my dad would tell this story of visiting this family one afternoon. And he was going to organize or do something for them or get them some food or something. This was a distant relative of my mother or of him or something. And he said he was going to organize them for food or something. And he goes there the next morning and the whole building is not there anymore. Including the whole entire family that was in it that he knew, that he had visited the night before. That's scary. That's hard to witness all these things directly. But again, his mission was to keep these women alive. He always made himself a mission. He always made himself a thing to carry on for. And when he was in Texas it was his little vegetables. When he was in Germany it was his ladies.

LEVINE: Is there anything else...well, just briefly, what happened then? Your father built up the farm, and then did he leave Guatemala at some point?

EVERITT: No.

LEVINE: Oh he died in Guatemala...

EVERITT: He died in Guatemala in June last year.

LEVINE: And he lived to be you said 100...

EVERITT: 100 years and three months to be exact. He was tired, you know? His body was tired. He was very strong mentally. Totally clear, totally totally clear. But his body was tired.

LEVINE: Well, we have a few minutes left. Is there anything else that we maybe haven't covered about the whole experience or repercussions from it or anything that you can think of just now?

EVERITT: The direct repercussion for me was that we were very poor. I had a very very poor childhood. And way into my teenagehood we were very poor. And even as a grownup my parents were never sort of people that...my father in particular was so saving. He never used to...You mustn't eat too much because there's no need for it. Your body doesn't need it. It was always like saving saving, and he didn't mind leading a very very plain and simple simple life. Material things meant nothing to him. He didn't need anything.

LEVINE: And how about the German community? Did a lot of the Germans go back to Guatemala? Was there...

EVERITT: Some of them went back, yeah. I would say the ones that had a lot of material...or money at stake went back. And a lot of them as I said got their farms back. I went to school with most of them because there's a German school and Austrian School and Swiss School in Guatemala and of course all the German people send their children to the German school. We were brought up bilingual. He had to speak German to our parents if we wanted something; otherwise we wouldn't get it. And I didn't like the language. I thought it was awfully rough. But it was great in that when I was sent to Germany when I was 12 years old, 13 years old, I had heard German my whole life, and it was very easy for me to learn it.

LEVINE: And why were you sent there at that time?

EVERITT: Because the education in Germany... You know Germans always think everything in their country is the best that there is, so they thought I should go to a German school and finish there and do my matricul... what do you call it? Your high school? High school there...

LEVINE: Oh so you did that?

EVERITT: Yeah, I lived in Germany for seven years, finished high school, and studied to be a sports and gymnastics teacher.

LEVINE: Oh. So are there any attitudes or values that you think you've learned from your mother or father? That you-

EVERITT: Tenacity. You don't give up. Ever. You don't give up ever, and my father's motto was always, You don't get anything for nothing; you work hard for it. It's the only way... He never believed in winning money or... I mean, if you just mention the word lotto for example, he would think that those people who had bought a ticket were insane. You don't get money from anywhere, you don't get anything from anywhere. You work hard for it and that's it.

LEVINE: Well, I think that's a perfect place to end. I want to thank you for a wonderful interview.

EVERITT: Thank you very much.

LEVINE: And I've been talking with Gisela Everitt, whose father was taken as a so-called "enemy alien" during World War II and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm signing off.