

EI 1254

ELEANOR STEINBACH BERGAMO

BIRTHDATE: MARCH 31, 1911

INTERVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 16, 2002

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 91

RUNNING TIME: 1:40:23

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: ROBERT BROSIUS

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:

GERMANY, 1929

AGE 18

SHIP: *COLUMBUS*

PORT: HAMBURG

RESIDENCE:

GERMANY: PFORZHEIM, BADEN-WURTTENBERG

LEVINE: Today is September the sixteenth, the year 2002. I'm here in Montville, New Jersey at the home of Eleanor Bergamo who came to this country in 1929 when she had just turned eighteen years of age. She came from Germany and passed through Ellis Island. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. And if you would start at the beginning for the tape saying your birth date and where in Germany you were born.

BERGAMO: I was born on the thirty-first of March, 1911 in Pforzheim, which is in Baden-Wurttemberg, Germany.

LEVINE: Ok. Now you had spelled Pforzheim for me.

BERGAMO: P-F-O-R-Z-H-E-I-M.

LEVINE: And what are you saying after you say Baden? What are those other words?

BERGAMO: Wurttemberg. It uh, it's two counties together, it's big – state-like.

LEVINE: Willenberg [ph]? Is that what you said?

BERGAMO: Wurttemberg.

LEVINE: Oh, Wurttemberg.

BERGAMO: Wurttemberg

LEVINE: Wurttemberg.

BERGAMO: Yeah, Wurttemberg. With “u” and two dots on top.

LEVINE: Oh ok.

BERGAMO: Wurttemberg. With two “t”s too. Ok?

LEVINE: Now did you live in Pforzheim up until you came to this country?

BERGAMO: Yes. I lived in Pforzheim with my family - my parents and I had - - we were five girls and two boys and I was educated Pforzheim. I had a good ground - - *Grundschule* education and it was what made me go – leave— my brother was here. He was an *ingenieur*. He was master tool and die maker and he had an assignment here for a year and a half. And times were very hard in Germany. We had inflation and the money was going

down by the hour – the value of it. And he was here making good money in his profession and he suggested instead of me continuing on in Germany I should I come here -- that I could make money as a baby nurse, which I had a course on too. And I could help the family. That was actually -- and -- even thought about my dowry if I get married. You know, save up money. Germans are saving people – we save money. [laughs] And then I of course I could help my pay my dad's way [ph?] too and that was a very important thing because times were terrible over there. They had lost the First World War.

LEVINE: Why don't you tell me what you personally remember about the First World War?

BERGAMO: It was – I know that the food was scarce and uh I know that uh times were dire times. No jobs like and uh – what else can I say? That made me decide I'm coming here. My brother was going to take care of me until I get myself a ho – a foothold. That's one thing and then the language. Our schools had French till then and then no money and English was in the higher education field available. So English I had to learn here from scratch. But I tried very hard. I read a lot – the newspapers, the German paper that had English in it. And so I keep abreast of the language and I was always awake to the fact, you know, you wanna be with it, you have to do something yourself, not depend on others. And that's what I did, you know.

LEVINE: Why don't you give me your father's name?

BERGAMO: My father's name was Karl Friedrich Steinbach born in 1980 –

LEVINE: 189-

BERGAMO: -- 1880. 1880. And my mother was born. And her name was Elise Steinbach nee Spielman. And she was born two years before -- 18 -- uh two years later 1882.

LEVINE: Ok and what did your father do for work?

BERGAMO: My father had a business -- tool and die -- he was a master tool and die maker and he worked -- had a shop and he employed people in terms that learned the trade. He was a master. And in Germany, you can only have a business when you have a master degree and open a business. And teach, you know, teach the others the trade. You had to be a master in it.

LEVINE: Oh interesting.

BERGAMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: So in other words at some point he did an apprenticeship and then he worked --

BERGAMO: Oh yes, yeah.

LEVINE: -- in a field and then he could open a business as a master.

BERGAMO: You had to be a skilled man and you had to have all the documents as a master mechanic like you know in tool and die maker and then you could open your own. And they owned small like [?] And you know people know you and know you're respectable and so on. He worked for another firm at first until he established himself.

LEVINE: Awesome.

BERGAMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now what did World War I do in terms of how it affected your father and his business?

BERGAMO: Yes, it did affect him. The men that he employed, that he had, had to go to war. In Kaiser – in Kaiser's War, you know, and my father had women to do some of the work. Yes, but – but they could handle. But we had these uh -- interns these – what do you call them?

LEVINE: Apprentices?

BERGAMO: Apprentices that had to learn how to file. They had to learn that mechanics that tool-making from scratch. They – that's why they did not put them in the war. They could – they could keep them. They had to finish the education. That's the way it was, the law. And no matter even rich people that had sons they had to learn something. It was the law. They had to go to business school or some – something. You could not just live on your money and you had to be something, learn something.

LEVINE: But during World War I the men were taken into the army –

BERGAMO: Yes.

LEVINE: -- so it was the women that were learning –

BERGAMO: Yes.

LEVINE: -- from your father. And how did his business go during the war?

BERGAMO: Well, it was hard uh, you know, business goes down. There's not many shops, not many –

LEVINE: Contracts?

BERGAMO: -- much to work – many things, you know. Of course in the tool-making establishment they have to have uh – things – even an eyeglass. I remember he made eyeglass cases. The ma – the making, you know, to make eyeglass cases, you know, they found things, and spoons. You know silverware? He had to make the beginnings, the mold I would call it maybe. I don't know. I was young and I remember he brought home these dies and they had go to engraving. It was steel. It was steel and that was -- had to be hardened in the fire too. He had the estab – establishment was a toolmaker (rustling of microphone).

LEVINE: He had a separate shop from where you lived?

BERGAMO: Yes he had a shop and he big presses-like [?] and machinery there and uh yeah and lathes, lathe -- L-A-T-H-E. That – I remember that as a child.

LEVINE: And how about your older brother? Did he learn from your father?

BERGAMO: He did, yeah. He did. He got his father to be his master. Then he went to another shop to work and he was here then too. And the other brother, he went into business school. But they have to learn something. That was the way, it was the law. All of us had to learn something. Except when you get married and of course you I guess you just be a house wife. [laughs] That's what I wanted to be, a mommy and a housewife.

LEVINE: That's what you wanted. [laughs] And how about growing up, was your family religious?

BERGAMO: Yes, we belong the Evangelical Free Church. They were and they were very active in in the church too. My father was really uh respectful – respected. He was also in the city council which is not a job, it's an honorable and he was in the grand jury too. It's something you pick people, you know, you don't pick just anybody.

LEVINE: So he had quite a status in town?

BERGAMO: Yes, yes. We were well known.

LEVINE: And would you say you were middle class?

BERGAMO: I would uh yeah maybe –

LEVINE: You were kind of in the middle?

BERGAMO: Yeah the middle class, upper middle class.

LEVINE: But during World War I did you suffer as far as food –

BERGAMO: Yes, yes we did. We got no milk and it was really, very hard. My mother had her last baby 1920 and the family got half a liter milk a day and she gave us the milk because she nursed. But it – it was very bad for her, she got tuberculosis after that. And she was gone; she was a couple of years away. We had to have help and my mother was in a sanatorium. She was four months in a sanatorium. And laying in the shade there outside all the time. And then she was in Switzerland. And in Isny, Allgäu– that's in Bavaria. And in another one Isny [?] and another one I forget the name right now but there was another thing because I was with her then. I - you know, she'd – one of us would go with her.

LEVINE: What kind of treatment did she get, do you know? They didn't know too much at that time.

BERGAMO: I just remember her lung – lung x-ray's – that she had a hole in her lung. But that healed, it capsuled [ph] up. You know? It – because of treatment. Because she was separate from us all. She was in a lung [ph] place where they had only these kind of patients. They were all day outside, all day.

LEVINE: Was the fresh air the only treatment? Or was there other treatment?

BERGAMO: Yes. Fresh air and the other – the other kind the woods like -- that's in the Black Forest where I am born – yeah Black Forest they called that region. But that helped her a lot yet, yes.

LEVINE: So it was mainly the fresh air and –

BERGAMO: And good food.

LEVINE: And good food.

BERGAMO: She had to have good food, yes, and of course maybe occasion [?] too I guess. But she came – nobody thought she would survive. But my father took care of that, he was very fir – fo – firm in that. That she had to have that. The high air – *höhenluft* [high altitude air] they called that. And she was gone there I think four months and then she went to Isny in Allgäu in Bavaria that was also in such a place. And she was in Wengen in the Switz – in Switzerland. There was another one right now I don't remember the name, but it was – it's other one. And after they've discovered that the x-ray showed that the, the hole was capsuled up – I don't know if that's the word. It – it – it was there but it was a scar like a

scar around it, you know. The wound was probably there but no longer infectious or so.

And that the way it was. But food was very very scarce in the First World War and it make very little meat or anything. W – we felt it, but we had relatives in the country about to walk it was four hours because there was no train transportation. And they would sometimes bring us something over or get something too. And we had one in – one guy that learned the trade in my father's shop. He brought us eggs. And he lived in a – in a town near where they had farming. And he brought us sometimes food and stuff. And – that we need.

LEVINE: And how about your relatives? What did they have on their farm that they could bring to you?

BERGAMO: Well, they – they brought – well they brought potatoes and stuff like that and milk and in rut sack -- in a backpack, you know? In the cane [?]. That was a big trip to walk. Now they have buses and all that. It's – I could show you the map a little bit if you want to. But, anyway, we remember dire times and the politic too. And then we had special money, too. And of course France, England – it was – they were our enemies, even though the Kaiser and the English king they were related, they were cousins. And so was Nicholas of Russia, a cousin. They were all that House of Hohenzollern they were related. They were related to the English queen, you know they speak German, too. They speak – they know, yeah. And the Hapsburg is the – that's the Catholic Austrian dynasty, the Hapsburg. We were the Hohenzollern and Windsor, too. They took that name on – Windsor. They put it in -- Sachsen - Anhalt would have been their name I suppose. But like Queen Mary, the old Queen Mary she came from Germany one of them, one of them eules [ph].

LEVINE: So do you remember any of the attitudes or feelings around World War I?
I know you were not that old but –

BERGAMO: Well, we just learned in school they were our enemies and that they didn't mean good. And uh – [phone ringing in background] – that is there too, I let it ring [phone ringing].

LEVINE: Oh, you're going to let it ring, okay.

BERGAMO: I let it ring. We didn't – you see as a child you don't uh – question that much. We learned it in school there, all about the war. People think the Kaiser was a saber-rattling man, but what got us into the war – we were allied with Austria – Hungary. We were their partner. And when the Franz Josef of Sai – was assassinated in Sarajevo. That brought us into the war. We did not actually go – we were allied with them. And because they – they had – they – with Russia and all, you know. I don't know too much about this, I would have to – let you read how it started. But I know that – that we got pulled in because we were allies of Austria – Hungary. And then of course they could have backed out, I think it only was in the tube [?] but they did not respond. Bu the Germans they thought, "Oh we have to – we are – they're our friends we go to war we have to, we promised them." That's more or less the fact.

LEVINE: So how about life in your city of Pforzheim? What was it like? What do you remember about your childhood growing up there?

BERGAMO: I was only there until eighteen, but I know the hard times and the struggle. The religion – the religious life was very good. And uh, it was no – no attacks on people or anything like that, or openly animosity. It was not, no was not. We just had to – we lost the war and we had to go along with it and accept that. It was hard, it was hard.

LEVINE: But you personally don't remember fighting?

BERGAMO: No, no, not really. No, not really. I know more about when Hitler came up. When Hitler came, my – I noticed – I was in Germany in 1933. I was not married yet, I was engaged to Tommy. And uh, I noticed already that they having leanings towards the party with Hitler. That was something gone – going on. I went again in 1937 with my husband and then we could see and we were very impressed and I tell you how. Hitler gave work to all the young people; they didn't hang around anymore doing nothing, you know, causing trouble, ganging up and all that. They were all put to work. And that was a blessing. And they thought, "Oh, he is our savior. He saves the whole situation. He got jobs, he built streets, he built Audubon." That was – the people were at rest. They were calm and the party, we noticed – I tell you, you asked me about religion – we noticed the first sign was when on a Sunday morning, the children that should go to Sunday school or to the young peoples' meeting – church meeting – Hitler made this law they have to all congregate at some kind of sports place – you know some kind of where they have exercises – instead of being of church to training [inaudible]. And people like my fa – my parents didn't like that. Why aren't the kids at Sunday school – the boys mainly -- why aren't they in Sunday school? That was against us, they can do that some other time. That was the first inkling that we did not like go along with it. So I mean –

LEVINE: So, in other words, when you and your husband returned from Germany –

BERGAMO: We were impressed positive –

LEVINE: You were mostly impressed.

BERGAMO: I came home and my relatives – the Bergamos – I told them, ‘Well we have the man this Hitler. You watch out, he’s going to clean up and they - -- he’s going create work and he makes good for the country.’ The country is – it’s used to – they used to say the country belongs to the Jews. You see the Jews had high positions, they had business, they were better off than us, and then there was this voices ‘It is our country, it’s Germany, it’s to Germans’. We tolerate, we were good to them. That they were refined, these Jews that we dealt with. My father dealt with them, too. My people dealt with them. We bought precious stones, semi-precious stones some Stradleman [? Inaudible].

And he – my father was called to the Chamber of Commerce to answer why we dealing with them. And he said, “I’m yeah, this I have to tell you that.” He, he got to – there was always people that were listening, see if they hear something anti – anti-Hitler. And uh, we heard it in church, too. It was easy sitting all quietly, that showed, you know. They were kind of, kind of looking for those things. You know like the terrorists now, this movement – the jihad [?] – and so we got a little cautious. But my father was warned one time. One man, one of the men – the younger – said, “Herr Steinbach, watch out. Be careful.” In other words they were not sympathetic to some things. We were not sympathetic to *Heil Hitler*. My father signed his letters “Greetings” and they wanted you to sign “Heil Hitler”. Little things like that. And, and when you notice that you didn’t go along they uh – they would report that. And one day my father came – had a call, a call to the Chamber of Commerce.

Now they knew him, he was a personality well known. And they told him, “We hear that you are a not all going along with all this.” “Well,” he says, “I meant to [?], this going, this foolishness. I did those greetings and all that. And uh, yeah, we were dealing with, with – Dad was already in the jewelry business when he went in to that with my other brother – with my younger

brother. Um, you've bought in with some firm Edelman [ph] – I met the man too even. I was a chi – I was young, I mean I was. That must have been during the time when I was already engaged around that time. And he came to the house one time to deliver something maybe. And uh, he had, he dealt in precious and semi-precious stones so the jeweler, you know, like you see what I showed you. Turquoise and all and onyx. Stuff like that and the tools [?] that we needed to do our own. The sign jewelry. And so he said – my father said, "Yeah, oh I'm dealing already years and years, twenty years with them, and besides he's got family with six children." Yeah, just like I talk to you. He's got six, you don't, don't let him go or quit him for that reason. He dealt with us and we pleased with him, he's satisfied. He's good, he's honest. That was his answer. And then two days later they came and took my father. Yeah, two men, two FBI – not FBI – two S –

LEVINE: SS?

BERGAMO: SA. Two SA came and took him. And he was, he was not gone long – a few days only. He had to pick the dirt there on the Siegfried line. That's the Maginot Line – the Siegfried line. They put him there as it was a punishment like.

LEVINE: And was he told then that he could no longer deal with Jewish people?

BERGAMO: No, well maybe they did, I wouldn't know that. But we – everybody – they had signs on the window "*Kauf nicht bei den Juden*" – Do not buy by the Jews. Now we always bought – my mother bought my sister's stowly pole [?], linens and all, from Mr. Sickman [ph]. We were friends with these people. They know us from us coming in. And you know, Mr. Sickman, and shoe Showel [ph], Mr. Showel. We got all our shoes from him; he was a nice man – Jewish people. They knew – we played with their kids in the

park. That's the relationship we had. They were all refined and educated German Jews. They were not the east type that you get from Poland, you know, you get from *Galizien* [Galicia] and the Yugoslavia. It's an entirely different German – a different Jew. Very different. And of course you didn't know what went on, but you don't know about – you wanted to hear about Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Well, all of this is also of interest.

BERGAMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Definitely. Well is there anything else about your early life? How about your grandparents?

BERGAMO: Yes I had grandparents. My grandfather had a bunch of business. He had thirty five jewelers employed. He made gold earrings mostly. Yes, he had that. Spielman his name was. Like my mother. And my father's parents, they died when he was eight years old. He – the mother died in a twin birth, his mother. And he was the oldest of four children with uh – what do you call them – step – what do you call children without parents?

LEVINE: Oh, orphan?

BERGAMO: Orphans, yeah. And the uncles and the relatives took each of the four children in and they had – the father – he was my grandfather. My grandfather Stein – Steinbach, he was employed by the government preparing the fields when they made exercises for the army. He was something with the government. He had something to say, preparing the exercise. Th – they were told that the regiment is coming and they doing this and that. And that was near their hometown, they had the fields for that special reason.

LEVINE: Now were both sides of your family from this general area for several generations?

BERGAMO: Yes, yes, yes. Maybe the Spielman's had somewhere small – I'm not sure. I thought [?] Hungary, we heard that they said some forebears there, but it was never established really. We had one – um one Steinbach – Irvine von [ph] Steinbach – he was with the monastery in Strasbourg. That's Strasbourg of Muenster – monastery. He was one of the clount –

LEVINE: Monks?

BERGAMO: No, architect. His name is there on the façade – Irvine von Steinbach. That's as much as we know. You see, because the bombing destroyed our records that's why even – I cannot – have not much of my own for that reason. That was all, that in minu – minutes my city was destroyed. 35,000 people in one shot, like you know, bomb. That was very terrible event and terrible times. That was shortly before the war was over. Six weeks before the war was over. That was England bunda – eradicated my hometown completely.

LEVINE: And what about your family?

BERGAMO: My family – my – I tell you it's like God's miracle. My – we had a lovely place and my mother had broken her hip on Christmas – New Year's night and coming home from the service like its midnight service and fell and broke her hip. And she right away said that has some meaning, that has some meaning. She kind of felt that something, that has His hand in it. And they go to the hospital; she was at the other end of the city. And my

mother always visited her in the afternoon – talked to the patients, played with them, a little bit something, visited Mother.

And that day, he had a customer, he couldn't go and he went in the evening. And because on the way to the hospital the bombing took place. And we had people in the house – twenty eight people that lived and some that had to come to us to seek shelter because New Year – at Christmas they had bombing too. And some of the church people wanted to know if they could stay with my family and they were all killed. And I had two sisters and they were told by father the day before, "Take the samples" – the jewelry samples – "and the get them to the countryside where our relatives are. So at least we have our stock – our samples – so in case something happens we have something to build up. You gotta have the samples, you cannot – they were all our own design and all, you know. You couldn't otherwise start again. And it so happened after the war was over we did get calls from different customers. "Are you manufacturing again?" and my father would answer and say, "Well if you supply the material and the stones – we have no access to that now – we will use our samples". You see?

LEVINE: So your sisters were saved because they went with the samples?

BERGAMO: They had take – they were underway and when they came back with the bicycle – and when they came back it was an ocean of flame and fire. They escaped that all and even and my father too. Otherwise they would have been with the other twenty eight. After then they picked up these twenty eight people that had taken refuge in the house not only by us but the other families too. It was a – an awful thing and we just tell that God had His hand in it. He di – he sure did.

LEVINE: Well, how would you describe yourself growing up? Growing up till the time you left. What kind of a girl were you?

BERGAMO: Well, I – growing – I had a happy childhood. We were kept, you know, behaving. Student too. We were good students and we – nobody had anything against us. We were respected in the community. Now of course we came to this country after Ellis Island and my brother – I got a job. And you know who I worked for? I worked at that banking house, Rothschild. They had a place on 5th Avenue, East Side. And I got a job by the cook was German and I didn't know English and I had to learn. And she had two girls – this one girl and me to assist because they had a lot of help. They had household help and a chauffeur and they had a two – a nanny for Felicia [Felicia Schiff Warburg Sarnoff who married] Felicia married Franklin Roosevelt [Jr.] later on. [laughs] And, and Walter, Walter Rothschild, he became president of Abraham and Straus. He was nine years younger than I and he would knock on my door and say, "Eleanor, will you play with me?" You know they played cricket and that was in White Plains, that I'm talking. Because we were first employed in the city, but then the summer came they moved to their estate in White Plains. And I had it really good there. And due to this – this cook I learned English that way. And then I was always inclined to a 'How do you spell that? How do you' you know, I knew it was important. And I liked it here and I felt that it was really good, you know. And I could help people [?], that was my aim. And then I met a good man, too.

LEVINE: Well let's just backtrack. You mention why you left. Do you remember getting ready to leave? What was that like?

BERGAMO: Yeah, it didn't take long. My brother said, "[not understood] go on get Stuttgart Immigration Office. Get a number." And we did. And our maid -- that we had – she did too. She said oh might as well too. She had a

sister here, Sophie, in Pennsylvania. I might as well too, it was too bad there. You couldn't get much money. My parents couldn't pay her much either, but she was a Christian that helped. A true Christian that helped yourself, you know. Like a Sumerian [?], you know. And so she – all of a sudden we waited at – just a few [?] – we thought it's gonna take a couple of years at least. And all sudden there comes some Stuttgart Immigration that you have been accepted. You can go anytime. So the Columbus was brand new. This was the maiden voyage. And my father said, "Well, don't go third class. We go second class. That's more our way." And we board in second class and it took ten days. And we were very seasick too. It was rough. [laughs] We were not used to that. But we had a nice trip, it was good.

LEVINE: Was there anything on that voyage that you recall now after all that time?

BERGAMO: Well, nothing except they had – I was in a new world, with dancing and all that. [laughs] Which –

LEVINE: You hadn't been dancing?

BERGAMO: No, no I hadn't been to a dance. It's not like today, you know. Everything was kept orderly and nice. It was a wonderful treat. And coming into Ellis Island, of course, we were apprehensive and I was sure my brother would be there. Actually he said he would be there. But it took a good few hours. And the help was nice; they were very distance – distant. You could see we did not belong. All of the sudden I hear my name. "Steinbach?". And then I raise my hand like in school and here I am and then I saw my brother. And we – it was a wonderful, yeah. His friend was him. He was an engraver, steel engraver – the friend you know.

LEVINE: What was your brother's name?

BERGAMO: Walter Steinbach. Walter, yeah.

LEVINE: So did you have an interpreter while you were being processed at Ellis Island?

BERGAMO: Yeah. Yes, there was somebody there that – there wasn't much questioning. They saw my documents and, you know, I was not a problem.

LEVINE: Did you get examined physically?

BERGAMO: Yes, I had to have that [?] And I had to be eva – inoculated or vaccinated – that was all the law.

LEVINE: So that was done before you left?

BERGAMO: That was done in Germany, yeah. We had to do that. And then they brought us and they questioned us too. And then my brother could just go off with me. It was very simple. He took me home. He lived at – he lived somewhere else but he brought me to a German family, a couple, that he knew. They had friends and they took me -- put me up until I could get going. And amazingly I got the job. I got it through the newspaper. *Langen* [ph] They had this German paper. This is 168 years old, its German paper. It was very popular –

LEVINE: And you've been getting it –

BERGAMO: -- for all the Germans. I have been getting it yeah.

LEVINE: Ever since.

BERGAMO: And – and of course I saw it in the paper. Even in the New York Times they had ads: ‘Maid Wanted’, ‘Housekeeper Wanted – German’, ‘Cook Wanted – German’, ‘Nurse Wanted – German’. They wanted German people.

LEVINE: Why did they want German people?

BERGAMO: Because they were very good housekeepers. Clean, system. They had a system. We were taught that in school. We had to have a system.

LEVINE: Oh in school you were –

BERGAMO: Absolutely. Absolutely. I remember you dropped something on the ground – on the cement, glass or something – it was taught, you would know it that you would have to move it away that nobody would get hurt. It was – that’s how we were brought up.

LEVINE: When you say you were taught that, was that in grade school or when you were older?

BERGAMO: No, no. I learned it earlier on. It’s an obstacle there, you move it. It’s in your sight, you move it away, put it in the [not understood]. So you know, it’s – it’s the system they have in Germany – it’s different today.

LEVINE: Can you say anything else about the schools and what they instilled in the German students?

BERGAMO: Our report card started, ‘‘*Fleiss und aufmerksamkeit* ‘‘ - no ‘‘*Betragen*’’ means behavior. That’s the first – behavior. ‘‘*Fleiss und aufmerksamkeit*’’ – are you alert, do you listen, and are you ambitious. That’s the second. The third is religion. Believe it or not you had religion than came *Deutsch*,

German. Then came *Geschichte*, history. Then came uh – singing – uh *harmonie* – you had to harmonize, singing. There was another one – *Geographie*, geography, you know? And th – this was *und* music too. This was singing in German exercise. Those were the – and that's our report card. Then had the whatever you were good in. I was always good in – in German and *Literatur* and *Orthographie* that's the spelling, means spelling. And so uh, that was good for me.

LEVINE: And how about behavior?

BERGAMO: Behavior good. It always it said "*Gut*", *gut, gut*, yeah. We had not that kind of chance to be problem makers. We could not sit around wherever you please; you had to be on your bench. That they wouldn't do that and then you – when the teacher entered the room you had to get up. There was a prayer too. There was a prayer. One of the children had to say the prayer. "With God to begin, with God to end, that is the best way to live". Something like that. I remember that in German. And uh, we had to, when th – the teacher want to know something – question us, we had to put the thing up. You had to raise the thing and we had to get up for the answer. And you couldn't do any foolish stuff, you know. It was very good.

LEVINE: In what ways would you say that training has stuck with you in your later life?

BERGAMO: Well, you get used to it. You have a system. Even with my children I had a system. I know they have to take a nap then it's not because I want go someplace. No, you just have to take a nap, you know. It's systematic and behavior too. You – if you're not good. But what you know when I was a child we had to stand in the corner for a while and then we would ask can we come out when we were bad. And I – I remember when I was a teenager on a Saturday sometime poor people would come to the door –

they would ask either for money or food. And we had one guy that came occasionally, maybe once a month, on Saturday. And my mother would say [laughs], "It must be the customer" when the bell rang. And my – our maid would go to the door and it was him. And she's give him [?].

And when I remember very well to this day, I misbehaved – something I did, something I forgot now what it is, maybe I lied or something that they caught me – they made me eat in the kitchen. That was the biggest punishment because when our help came out in the kitchen to fill up the potato dish and the vegetable – get some more, you know – she gave me such a dirty look "serves you right [laughs] you have to eat in the kitchen". Now the – the customer – when he would come and I – and I would be that I had to sit there with him. That was very shameful you know. Very embarrassing. But that was the punishment we got, that we had to eat in the kitchen. We couldn't be [not understood] with the family.

LEVINE: And what you say your temperament was like? What kind of little girl were you?

BERGAMO: I was wide awake and alert. And – in everything. Music and all. I sang for the wounded soldiers with the age of three and a half. That was even, I think, in the papers. It was like this. The first wounded came in November, 1914. The war started '14 and I was born '11 and I was three and half years old. And my Uncle Karl, he was gassed in the war, and he came to Pforzheim in that *lazarett* hospital. It was an oper – opera house where they had – where they performed, what do you call that? – the stage. And they had put a ladder with another stage they could perform in sort of – it was not – sort of make shift – so the laying down soldiers, wounded, could see. You lay in your bed and you see them and otherwise it -- they wouldn't get that. And that was uh – that was uh – a newspaper call anybody that wants to perform something or you can visit

your relatives – the wounded ones – anybody that you knew, they were laid out there. There was not many, there was not many, it was early in the war. Early on, they were hit -- hurt in the French there, *Vogesen* [Vosges] they called that part – *Flandern* [Flanders] around there.

And my own recall was in there and my father said at the table, “Listen this afternoon we’re going to visit *Onkel* Karl in the *lazarett*” in the *saalhue* they called that place. And uh – we go on and visit and our help was with us, my mother, and Papa and we – they took me. And uh, I was a good singer, I was very much in music, you know. And I knew all the verses, too, from Sunday school. And then uh – people went up there and made some kind of declama – something – something to offer – a story or told a story or somebody had a violin and played. And my father says to me, “You go up and sing God is Love.” God is Love, it has a number of verses, too. You go up there and I was – I was not taken back, you know, it was like that. It was my nature. I was very ahead [?] [laughs]. And I went up there and I sang it and they clapped and you wouldn’t believe it. I have an iron cross from one of the soldiers – I can show it to you. I still have it, yeah. That he gave me. I had to go to the different bits, you know, they were all clapping and they made a big to-do about that. A little kid like me, I can’t imagine. Singing and I had a good voice too – penetrating, you know. [laughs] And uh – then I passed all the bits and you know what they had? They had cookies and candies and – because the visitor brought – visitors brought them candies, cookies, and stuff. And sure. And they gave me and our maid kept it. We had a yellow bag – kind of a square – like – I remember the yellowish color. And the men put in – they had cookies, chocolates, and one of the soldiers gave me his Iron Cross. Yeah I have a this.

LEVINE: And you brought that with you when you came here?

BERGAMO: Yeah, I still have it, yeah. Do you want to see it?

LEVINE: I'll see it when we get finished and we're unhooked.

BERGAMO: And so thi – this is what I had there. And it even came in the paper after that they [laughs] had a happy get to together with – with these wounded soldiers. My onkel Karl, well he was gassed you know he – somehow. He – oh he had that all his life. I remember how he used to breath [breathes heavily] heavy, like you know. And they brought 'em there and gave 'em oxygen or whatever they did. I was too young to know that, you know, three and a half. But –

LEVINE: Well when you came to this country in the very beginning, those first few days and weeks that you were here, do you remember things that were new to you? Do you remember some first impressions of things in this country?

BERGAMO: Well they took me in the subway and the newspaper flew all through the train. These leafs. I remember and I thought isn't there anybody there that pick it up? And put it together? And – and you know th – the wind – the noise. That was the one impression in how everything went so smooth and matter of fact and people were nice. I could never feel any animosity. They were helpful and uh – it was a little different than now of course, but the people were nice. And we did not feel any uh – because we were from Germany, only after the Hitler war. We had to be fingerprinted. I had to go to New York to [not understood]. I was expecting my second child, I had to go to New York and let them know about who I am. And then when I told them they wanted to know what church or so and I told them the Baptist Church.

That kind of detail, that was good. I belonged to the Baptist Church of Germans and Swiss – A German church. And it must of had a very

name, you know, because then that – that was – that was it. That was ok. But I had already applied for citizen papers, that time. That was in 1942. And uh – they held – I couldn't get them papers yet. They – it took five years, you know. But I had to – applied and my first paper – receipt probably – and they stopped all that for the time being. But they also didn't allow you to leave the town. You could not go to New York, anyplace. You had to say, but I did too. [laughs].

LEVINE: You did?

BERGAMO: I did. [inaudible] when somebody went to New York I went along.

LEVINE: Now did you have other friends, German people, who were imprisoned? Who were taken custody?

BERGAMO: Yes, yes. In the place I lived in West New York – West New York? Union City. Not Bergen, I think it was. There was a woman uh – she had a – she had a big mouth about the Jews. We were not – because we were among Jews that were fine, fine people, you know. Gee whiz, we – we – they were friends of ours. She had turned the radio on, WHOM – and that had the German music. And uh – this Jewish neighbor used to shou – hallo [sic] "Turn off that radio." You know she was – she shouldn't have had it that loud. She wouldn't have had that answer. You know I kept – I kept mum. That's one thing I did. I tried not to made a mess. No how. But she didn't and she – this woman would yell "Shut off" and then she would hollo [sic] "Shut your mouth" or "Shut up you Jew" something. And you know one day I hear a big commotion in the hall, two FBI came. They took her. She was in uh – yeah I think it was Ellis Island. My little Freddy, my Freddy was five years old or something like that. Uh now's he's a dentist. [laughs] Do you believe it? And uh – she called – she wrote me and I wrote to her too and that led – that mail was all checked.

LEVINE: Where was she sent?

BERGAMO: She was in Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Ellis Island.

BERGAMO: She was capt – captured. Good [?] and turned in. Her husband was free. He was lived in the house, but she – he went there every weekend to visit. And then she suggested, “Why don’t you come and visit too”. And I attempted to do that and it was such a startle to get there. You know, you had to go in the ferry. I didn’t – my memory se – I’m ninety-one years old, please. [laughs] And uh, I did it and my Freddy was so patient. He – you didn’t hear him say “Mommy I’m thirsty” or “Mommy I’m hungry” or – he went all along. He was just brought up like that. I was brought up like that. And so we went to Ellis Island. And uh – the man at the desk wanted to see my credentials. Well I says, “I’m Eleanor Bergamo”. And “Yeah, but you have anything? You have any – along [?]. You cannot go in there.” And he wouldn’t let me in. He would not let me in. “She can’t have visitors.” She was – she was an agitator. She was not for peace like you and I. You know, we don’t want to rock the boat. I don’t think you or we do. [laughs]

Nevertheless, uh, she was in there and I had send her food. As in I brought it in my rucksack. I had some chicken and other stuff – roots and I brought candies and so, you know, I send her too sometimes through the mail. And I wrote always to her. And I mentioned him and he wanted to know, “How – what’s your relationship to her?” And I told him the story I just told you. She lived in that house there and we were Germans and so on and so on. And uh – so I – he said – I said I write to her, I wrote to her. Oh yeah? And he went into his uh – papers there and he get a letter of

mine. And he read what I had said to her. And what I said to her was, "Everything in the tone of God sometimes lets things happen like that and we have to learn a lesson", you know. Not uh – "oh that's – you do good girl. They shouldn't have done that".

I had no critical remark in that at all. "Oh that's you?" he said. "Alright you can go." My letter and my Christian principles, you have to take it. You – you did the wrong things, you said the wrong things and that's why you're in there. You were an agitator. You were complaining and you had – knocking the government, you know? I heard once a woman says something about in this country – but there's I don't like in this country. There's things you don't like in this country, right? We're human beings, but I'm not going to voice that. I – I just accept it. It's – if that's the way I like it well the way they like it. Period. She – this woman, I heard her say, "Oh, in this country you – look at how they do." This other person said, "Why don't you go home?" But in my heart, yes, that's the right answer. Go home. You don't like it? Go home. I would feel that way too, yeah.

LEVINE: Was she offered to go back to Germany? This woman that you were corresponding with?

BERGAMO: She could've gone back, I guess, after they were relea – after this war was over. She could've gone back I think, but I stopped my friendship with her.

LEVINE: Oh, why was that?

BERGAMO: We did. Why? They were not my kind of people. First of all they had no sense of religion and so they did well – it just – it just wanted to be friends for social reasons. But we just did not feel alike, you know. And then she moved away, she moved somewheres [sic] else. You see, it's also like that. When people think they better than everybody else. Her father was

a big shot man in Germany. He was in a city – he was a city *baurat* [chief architect]. A big – had a title. And she thought she could just, you know, who am. You know what I am, that's what I am. I say that too. I think Pop-eye said that too. [laughs] But I uh – I quit their friendship. Somehow we did not see alike. And then she was not – my life was circled around the people in the church and friends and relatives and uh – she had a different lifestyle. It was not my way.

LEVINE: So tell me. You came here and got the first position through the newspaper.

BERGAMO: Yes.

LEVINE: Then you went to White Plains?

BERGAMO: I was there a few months, yes. They had an estate and they had horses that played polo. Their sons, the war boys. They were the German Jews. They were from Frankfurt. Very fine my – the Misses, oh child, she interviewed me – I didn't know English – she interviewed me in German. In bed – she was in bed. And I was led in her bedroom and she wanted to know what I can do and what did I have kind of school and what kind of family. Very human. Very nice. Very nice. And uh Carol, the oldest one, she married a minister. A protestant minister –Efler [ph]. You know I followed that – that episode [?]. But that littler Walter – the president of Abraham and Strauss. Everyday knock at the door, "You gonna play with me?" Because the girls all had a two hour rest and I coulda had it too. But I was young and this was new stuff, you know. [laughs] And I wanted to – I wanted to live it up, too, with the kids even. I was young enough, you know. So th – I had it good. I can only say good. This country is great.

LEVINE: Did you feel as though you were part of that family when you worked there?

BERGAMO: No, no with the help.

LEVINE: You were part of the help.

BERGAMO: And I do this role with the help, too. I had to set the table for them and do things there. Help with the cook, wash the pots, and all the stuff like that.

LEVINE: How did it feel? I mean when you were in Germany it was an embarrassment to be sent to the kitchen and then you were in the kitchen, how did that feel?

BERGAMO: I did at home my kitchen, too. With the maid. We did all – everything as a family whatever had to be done. But I did not feel any social difference at all. I mean, you're brought up that way. That we do what needs to be done. But when it comes that I was a maid here, I know it would be a downgrading a little, somewhat. But I had to make money. I had to live, pay my fair, give Walter my ships passa – pasha –

LEVINE: Passage.

BERGAMO: Passage money. It was one hundred and two dollars, I remember that. And uh – I – he took me place. I was off. I was off and I was stuck in [inaudible]. And they had town car with the chauffer. Andre sat in the front and I sat with him. And Mr. Rothschild sat in the back, sealed up like. But they were all down to earth, nice people. Very nice people. Even the ba – boy – the brothers, Mrs. Rothschild's brothers. The three brothers Walhberg [ph]. They played – they had like a chamber music, they -- on TV I saw them once – the Walhbergs yeah, playing violin and

cello. And even they – when we were down from the station coming home from New York from the station to go up. If they were on the way up with their roadster car, you know, they would stop, “Can we give you a lift?”. That’s the kind of nice people they were. Very wonderful.

LEVINE: Okay well we’re going to pause for a minute while I change the tape. And then we’ll continue.

BERGAMO: You mean I sai – all this?

LEVINE: Yeah, an hour, one whole hour.

Pause in Tape

LEVINE: Ok, we’re continuing here with tape two and I’m speaking with Eleanor Bergamo.

BERGAMO: Eleanoria [ph].

LEVINE: Eleanor.

BERGAMO: Let’s see. You came here, you worked, and then how did you meet your husband?

LEVINE: I met him in a German family. My uh – I used to visit this German family. I met them somehow and my husband was working with the man there together. In a – in a neon shop. They made neon lights and advertising – he wasn’t the advertising. And one time – and they – then he was invited to dinner and he saw the wife and kids so well behaved and nice and orderly. And he said, “Emil, do you know a nice German girl for me?” That’s what he said to him. And he said, “Yeah, well wait a min – well may be.” And he asked his wife, “Hey if that Eleanor comes sometime, let

her meet Tom. And that's we go – got to meet. And he came then one time. He took me home in his car, he had an old green Chry – Chrysler. [laughs] That was big – a big deal, you know. And uh – I used so little English and he used to laugh the way I spoke. [laughs] Used to make fun of me, you know. But I – he said, "I call you again sometime." And I understood that, a little bit I did. And then he uh – he did call then one time and said, "Listen, I'm going – my brother in law has a place in the seashore. Would you like to come along for the ride?" And I said, "Yeah, sure". And we went there and I – that's where I had my first soft shell crepe sandwich. I was always afraid of these. And he said – convinced me, "Oh it's good, it's good. Taste it." And I did and I overcome that feeling. And it was thirty five cents. [laughs] And then a sundae, a ice cream soda was twenty five cents. And I just thought – and things like that make me – this is some country. And everything was just – I liked every – I even have a picture of Jimmy Walker the – Pres –

LEVINE: The Mayor?

BERGAMO: My brother took it in the car in New York on Fifth Avenue. He took a picture of Jimmy Walk – he was the mayor you know.

LEVINE: Yes.

BERGAMO: Anyway, then as I used to belong to the young people in church – Evangelical Church and they had a lot of nice boys, these German boys. And they were all – we were all mixed up and – and you know, when I compared my husband with them, I – I knew he was the man that I would marry.

LEVINE: What was it?

BERGAMO: It was not a religion or anything, he was just different. He was just different. Respectable and quiet and withdrawn and – he was just different. He was uh – not go get. You know, not that type. He sat back and it was a slow ongoing relationship. And then he took me to the movies which I don't understand, hardly. The Last of the Mohicans they played. The only thing I -- I remember was that the girl's name was Cora. That's all I remem – I knew. That was the girl. But I didn't know much about what goes on because we couldn't talk there. And it was too hard to back and forth, you know, to explain. He realized that it was – I was handicapped, really handicapped.

LEVINE: So how did you come to learn English?

BERGAMO: I read newspaper. Being with people. Asking question, listen to the radio. That and because you – I always said, "how do you spell that?", you know. And learned it. Learned little by little and – and if you have good – well good in German then you grasp it better too you know. Because of the Anglo-Saxon language is English part of it too. I – it was important for me to be at peace and help my family and my husband felt the same way. And they did. When they had nothing to eat, my husband gave me all the money that I needed to feed them and help them. He was yeah – he was very good and kind. I lost him. He was only sixty two. He had leukemia. And it was very fast. But I was married twenty nine years exactly. But I have a son who's a dentist and my daughter is married to an [inaudible] doctor. He's an orthodontist. And they all doing ok, I guess yeah. I see them occasionally. As I go along.

LEVINE: Was your husband from an immigrant family?

BERGAMO: They were American. Well they immigrated – the parents – and they became Americans. Maybe they did, I'm not even sure. They were not that strict that time. You know, that you make sure you – you're citizen.

LEVINE: But he was born here?

BERGAMO: My husband was – my husband was born her.

LEVINE: And then did you become a citizen?

BERGAMO: Yeah, sure. When the war was over I came – I got my papers. No question about that. Yes, I have citizen papers. I have all those papers. If I did not have the time to get all those things together I could've shown you more, you know. I would've liked to – it was too short a time for me to – to dig up everything. If you want to I mean – you – you live in New York?

LEVINE: Yes. Well I'll tell you, we keep a file on everyone who we've interviewed, if they have any photographs or any written material that you would want to have at Ellis Island in case a researcher was interested in your interview and then they have additional information – anything like that you can send to me at anytime and I will put it in that file for you.

BERGAMO: Yeah, but it's not going to be in a paper in or anything?

LEVINE: No, but you never know how somebody's going to use it. Somebody could use it for a documentary or use it for a newspaper article or use it for a book or anything.

BERGAMO: Yeah, yeah, sure.

LEVINE: Ok, so you've married, you have children, you became a citizen –

BERGAMO: Oh yeah.

LEVINE: -- and when you think about your German --

BERGAMO: Background?

LEVINE: --background and your American experiences, how do you weigh the two, being German and being American?

BERGAMO: Well I never would go back. That's one thing.

LEVINE: Why is that?

BERGAMO: It's more freedom here, they don't much ever criticize every little thing you make – motion you make. That was not the case in Germany. They had you, you know, they would say, "Oh look at that, it just tastes so bad". They would be quicker to make a remark about you. And not so much here at all. Here you can go and come and do. I was once in the bus here in those times. And my – my friend, my Swiss friend was with me. And we were talking German, of course, she's German too – German speaking – on the bus. And somebody yelled, "Shut up! Speak English". And I said, "We are Swiss." I didn't say I am the German. I thought not to rock the boat. But I felt that the bus driver should have stopped and get up said, "Just a minute. We happen to be in America. Whatever your mother tongue is and between you and you're not causing trouble." I would not – I don't want that to happen. I don't like this to happen. I would uh – criticize that. I mean, such a thing. That was the one time. But I tell you another nice thing. Mrs. Hemowitz was my neighbor. I mean my children were all teenagers. And throughout the war her boy

was in Germany – a soldier. And she used to say to me, “Bergamo” – she never said Misses – “Bergamo, my Eddie, now he’s in Gera [ph]. I hope he comes home. And they fightin’ all the time.” That was early in 1945. And she was so scared. And I was scared too. I hadn’t from my people in a long time. I didn’t know till much later that I knew whether they were alive. And then the war was over. Wouldn’t you – would you believe it? She yelled out of the window, “Bergamo, the war is over.” And when I sent packages at first, it was her that brought me a pound of coffee and a bricks [ph] [inaudible]. Put in the package for your mother. That is something I noticed. There – there it is. That’s America. That’s America. She – she – that was not important that the other one side, but our relationship with each other and that’s what makes a country. The peace in the family can bring peace in the country, too – in the surroundings.

So that’s one thing that I can say. I had always – I knew Jew – Jewish people. We were friendly with each other. We never even talk about that because it was not that crazy, you know. It was – tell you that – how that Hitler ever got these secret places, most of the Germans didn’t know it. They didn’t know they had those ovens and all that. It was taught Austria, in the east, all these, what do they call those towns where they –

LEVINE: You mean Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen –

BERGAMO: Auschwitz, yeah. We had no faint idea of that. No faint idea. We wouldn’t even want to go there to see anything like that. It’s just really, very bitter to us. We are being judged, we are being – people judge you mostly and things like that. They bring that. And the media, comes now too and brings these stories. And the same token, the same time. The German paper is reporting about early, early years here. With the blacks, the slave – the slaves – there was Germans there that helped Lincoln. There was a General Franz Sigel. They have big people – generals. They

were fighting on the American side and the – the wall – the Bürgerkrieg they call it –

LEVINE: You mean the Civil War.

BERGAMO: Civil War, yes. There is – they write articles about it. I was really surprised. We had eleven regiments. Eleven German regiments. That's what I read from here. And this big man General von Steuben, you know, Steuben? And people like that, that was somebody. In Ca – in Pennsylvania you find a lot of German names: Rittenhaus, Wis -- Wistau, Drexel. They all Ger – they were all Germans you know. And uh, it's really something but you see that's forgotten. In the – in the Civil War, the Germans were very helpful toward Washington and Lincoln. Especially with the – freeing the slaves. That they had a big role there, too. Franz Sigel is one of the big men. He came from Rei – neighborhood too. Reidenhaur [ph] neighborhood where I am born, yeah. And there's some others, too. But Steuben, Baron von Steuben, I don't know where he – but he was a big – my grandson is in West Point, now. It's the third year. And I tell him these things, you know.

LEVINE: Well it sounds as though you're proud of your German heritage.

BERGAMO: I am because I read what the Germans did and you see the Germans they were very much for *ton verein*. They used to have singing societies. And these people made the soldiers. That's where the soldiers came in. From the singing society in Milwaukee, in St Louis, and in Cleveland, Ohio that's – the – it's the German *ton verein*. They clubs like – German clubs and they were brought up good amount of help.

LEVINE: Were you a member of a German club?

BERGAMO: No, I just for the church. I was busy. I was the organist for a while there. It was more – you see my husband comes from a Catholic – the Italians were Catholic. Although my in-laws never made any issue of it, that I was not. And he went along with me because I raised the children. And he went with me. He did – we didn't see no difference because we have one bible. And whatever they extras they have we did not even discuss that.

LEVINE: Was there any problem for you marrying someone who wasn't German?

BERGAMO: Well my parents did. My parents said, "What? You want to marry an Italian? A Catholic?". You know – you see, that's narrow – narrow-mindedness of people. I said, "Yeah, but Tom is gonna – comes from a family that they like me all and they – I like them the way they do things." And this is America, is so free. We don't criticize because this one goes to confession and this one doesn't. We don't do that and I could see that with my in-laws. They weren't narrow-minded at all. In fact they took me in and they loved me and I got along nice with them. There was no – absolutely I never heard them criticize or say anything. But my people in Germany, they were the ones that objected. Why – you got to the young people's group there with the other Germans why don't you – don't you – isn't there some nice girl, what about this Odie? They would uh [laughs] – they would question that. And I said, "No, when I – when you see him, I come, I bring him and then you see." And then the whole relatives, all of them, even the kids in the country, "Onkel Tommy, oh Onkel Tommy". [laughs] They were all for him because he was kind. He – push the carriage, the baby carriage – that was unique, a man pushing a baby carriage. But he did because it went uphill. He says, "Come on" to my sister "let me do it, it's too hard." They ride – he won it right away down [?].

LEVINE: So then they liked him.

BERGAMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Well did you notice any differences in an Italian family – which your in-laws were – compared with German? What were the differences?

BERGAMO: Yeah, there was – well the Italian people [sighs] they're very warm. The Germans are more stiff. They're more reserved, yeah. Although where I come from there are different type Germans: you see there is Prussians, there is Hessens – Hessians, there is Schwabians – I belong to the Schwabians. That means the Allemanen – that's a certain type people. And so are the Swiss, Allemanen. Also Germany are this type of people – Allemannr. They are more warm. Like we get along nice with the Italians – better than with the North Germans. We don't get so well with them. Th – they very stiff and more they're more Nordic, Scandinavian. They have a different lifestyle, too. And they are very correct and to the law, yeah. We – We have leeway. We get along. We get along with the Swiss, too. Th – they our kind of people too. And of course the Italians, they – I had no problem at all. No problem, no.

LEVINE: What would you say has brought you a lot of satisfaction in the course of your life?

BERGAMO: First of all I – I had the freedom of my religion – that's one thing, that nobody criticized that. And uh – it's the regular church. The Protestant and Catholic. But are more freer – evangelical. It's more – It's more a Billy Graham style. More that style, yeah. And uh – that's the one thing. They were not so rigid in churching you know, here. And then you can get things – people are helpful, food is good. And uh – they are – the social system and they have a lot to offer here with school and all that. You're not – you can choose better here. You have better possibilities. More freedom. And you feel smart. You get a head here. If you work and if

you're smart this is the country to be. In Germany, you have to have money and so many – what do you call that? – through some many offices before you get ahead. Credentials. So many credentials, you got to show before you are somebody. That – that's the one thing.

LEVINE: How about the World Trade Center bombing? Can you say anything about that? You having lived through World War I and two.

BERGAMO: Yes. It is absolutely – they have no words for that. I have no words for that. How they can do a thing like that – to people – to children. In Germany, too, they thought it was horrible. They've been through the war, they know what it is like. But they say, that's the way we had it, too. They will say that. We had it – we went through that. Lost everything. My people lost everything. And uh – it's a shocking – of course it's shocking, but they're more shocked about the Arab – thing. And I remember as a child, when my parents or people talked about politics, my father used to say, "*Yah, da ist das Islam.*" He would mention Islam and as if that's a dread. A threat. You know T-H-R – . And I found that as a young person that he saw the Catholic world with our world in corresponding. We have – of course there is many different churches: Mormo – Mormons and Adventist [ph] people – that all works in with us.

LEVINE: But all Christian.

BERGAMO: But the Islam, that was different. And I could see that at my father's – would say, "Yah, but just wait until the Islam gets going." And *deichinger* [ph] is right. He's absolutely – he was right. He's gone and long time. But that's what he said. And I have that in my head yet that he mentioned that Islam. And we see it now. And I will cope with that. Imagine what Bush has on his hands. Can you imagine that? And my mother used to say, "*Was dich nicht brent --*" – What doesn't burn you, don't blow on. You

know what I'm saying? When you aflame, you blow on it, it spreads. And my mother used to say, "*Was die nicht brent--*" – What don't burn you, don't blow on it. And I see – I can think that Bush feels that way – maybe. You know? He's there confronted with something. He probably thinks, "Wait, let's see what's happening." And it's good he does. It's good. Imagine if he starts something like that. It's gonna be some big calamity. I just wish that that Saddam Hussein would come to senses with his – what he's said. His expressions, what he would do. It's fearful. Don't you think?

LEVINE: I do yes. How about anything else about Ellis Island. Is there anything you remember about the physical place – where things were? You were there a matter of hours.

BERGAMO: Yeah.

LEVINE: Is that right?

BERGAMO: Yeah, a few hours. Everything was orderly. And the men – the people were nice. They were stern. They did not joke or anything like we sometimes joke. You know, make a remark, kid – kid a little. That was not done then. It was all down to Earth. Business. Doing this. Questioning and putting in the book and that's it. You're finished. Some were detain – detained some people. It was either for health reasons or they didn't have the credentials. Some were detained, I remember that. When this one woman, my friend Hilda, got – she came in 1934. She didn't come through Ellis Island. They pa – they went right to her – her pack [?] and the East and the Hudson. You know on – on 80th Street or around there where they had their ships land. And they couldn't come in because the river – the Hudson was frozen. So that they could not come in, however, they had to get help to crush the ice. Because there was four

people on the board, on the *Hamburg*. And they were bi – bicycle – bicycle troop. And they had to perform that night in Madison Square Garden. Imagine. They had to for that – for those four people. They called them *Killian und Vogel*. V—V—O—G—E—L. Killian und Vogel. They came with that troop, I remember that, see. And that was in 1934.

LEVINE: Now is this friend of yours.

BERGAMO: She's living. She's in Teaneck.

LEVINE: Well maybe it will be interesting to interview her. That's quite an interesting story, too.

BERGAMO: Yeah, it is, yeah. Yeah it would be. She had a hard life here. She had a hard childhood. She had a very hard – not a family like ours, you know, she didn't. But she made her way here wonderful. Financially better than me. She married a man, a Ferguson in Hobok – Hoboken. He was the bus – the boss in the factory there. In a furniture factory. He was a furniture maker. Cabinet maker that made furniture. He has all furniture from – that he made. And she went – she married him and she was better off financially than I 'cause he had that job. My husband didn't have – he was the shop store, too, but it was – on Route 1-9, they had this – Oh, you see when you're old you forget these names – advertising in the reclarmy [ph] in advertising. Signs. Neon signs. That's what he did. Sheet metal work and all that. He worked from sixteen years for that firm. Got Garland, the name was.

But Hilda got – I don't know whether you would – If it would be interesting or not to – I just know that. She had such a hard childhood. Sometimes, you know, in Germany when they had no electric like now, we had it. My father early on got the gas – got both that. That was a private thing to do.

When the houses had only gas. And they used to have in the toilet a box where to put a money in – a quarter – and then the light would go on again. You see, that that – it was a way of pay – payment. And sometimes she said to me, “We sat in the dark, and Papa came home” and their mother was somewhere gallivanting [ph] – she was not right somehow, I don’t know. She doesn’t talk much about that. And then the children – four children, they were then in the dark waiting for the father to come home and he would put that in and they would – he would get something together to eat. And so she had a hard life. Very hard, yeah. But she came here and she had it good. Made – she had it made here.

LEVINE: Is there anything else that you can think of about this country or about your life here or anything you’d like to say? How coming here, perhaps, as an eighteen year old, do you think that influenced you?

BERGAMO: I immediately became more American minded. I did, yeah. Because there, everything was tight and constrained. It was not the freedom that we have here. That you could go as you please and get a job. And you lose a job and you get another job. And – And the people were not critical of what you doing and that’s the one thing. I mean, this country – there’s no country like this. That’s what I can say. I went – we had our good times with the church people mostly. With outings and going here and there. [laughs] Yeah, it was good. Subways and all that.

LEVINE: And you said your son’s name is Freddy?

BERGAMO: Frederick, yeah. Frederick Bergamo, yeah.

LEVINE: And your daughter?

BERGAMO: Her name is Kuen. K-U-E-N. Is Bill yeah. They both financially in good shape, yeah. And Doris has this boy that's in West Point. He was home yesterday and they got stripes. He's in th – he's a sergeant now. And 'cause they very proud and naturally, but he had – the training was terrible. It was very bad. Oh yeah, you know they – they had to – I saw it on the – on the film. [laughs] I have no balance at all with my spine, pinched nerve there. But they walked – they walk on a plank of wood like this over a lake like. And some fell down in it. And they have a couple of girls there and they had to march home from Buckner. They had to march home, but not -- running like. You know, like that. Not just walking. I says, "How long does it take you?". It was ten miles I think. And I figured that with kilometer that it would take four hours. "Oma – Oma we" – Oma, that's Grandma -- "It took us two and half hour." But they were running like.

LEVINE: Jogging kind of.

BERGAMO: Yeah, sorta like jogging. Slowly, but all in one. And some of the girls, two girls were there. I think one of them gave out. She had to really stop a little bit you know. Things like that. They were outside, too, training in the – the weather there like today. It – Not cold, although I mean cold – not wind though – but they were in the water, laying there with their – in their uniform overnight in the tent. In a – in a, yeah, a tent. And it rained and it wasn't as good that rain came down. And the [?], they were also in the wet. And it's amazing that he didn't catch a cold. And so they – that's what they have to go through. Terrible, uh, training.

LEVINE: So do you feel proud of him?

BERGAMO: I feel happy – Yes, I am. I always tell him, "You know Andrew, you pray if you can't do it. Say 'Lord, help me.'" You know, like I tell him he will help

you. [while laughing] Encouraging him – Encouraging him. And so he – he's made – got it made. I mean he's doing good. He's got eight boys now to train. He's training eight cadets. And then he – he comes home. At least he's only an hour and fifty minutes away. And he – when he gets a ride, "Mom, I'm coming home I get a ride." And she ways, "Stay, I'm coming home in a couple of weeks anyway." "Oh I'm gonna come home." I says, "Listen Doris, be happy he wants to come home. Many don't want to come home. They are out all the time. And he's coming home." Then of course, you have to bring him back. "Oh, Daddy -- I know Daddy will take me." I went to the ride already, too – too. Very – very cautious there. You cannot go in unless you have credentials. It's very well protected, everything.

LEVINE: So tell me what you're looking forward in this time in your life?

BERGAMO: Well, I— I'm so old now I think one of these days I'm gonna pass out. You know what I'm doing? I have a lot things, old documents to go over. Old stuff that I got to get rid of: old greeting cards that you save from grandchildren or this one and that one, that they engagement, that the wedding. I have to really get rid of things like that. Then there's stuff people give you. Materials that you really never used. And so on. And this what I – and then I look forward when I think the Good Lord will take me. One of these days, I just hope I can walk yet and I'm not a bother to anybody. I don't want to go in a ho – home. My Freddy tells me, "Mom, you're not going in a home." Well if I had to go there now I wouldn't like it either. My Is – my daughter-in-law wouldn't like it either I'm sure. You know the young people have to be in their own world. They have a – the son that got married now. Oh no, he's not married. He got engaged. He's in uh – he graduated from – in North Carolina, what is now? I forget the name of the college. No – I don't – the minute – you see that's what happens, you know. In North Carolina, yeah, he is graduated there. He

lives now, he got a job [?]. He says, "Oma, I feel blessed I got a job right away in – in uh (not Charleston, the other one there) in Charlotte in a consulting ag – medical consulting place. And he's working there since right after graduation. And he has a girlfriend. He – they – I think he wants to marry next year. He's twenty-three, was twenty-three. And that's how it goes. And he's gonna stay there and maybe it's for the best. They have a daughter, Elizabeth. She's in New York in a Catholic – she had a scholarship, I think. She may be a teacher or something eventually. And of course my daughter Doris. She has that little girl, Alexandra. She's fifteen. She's yet in a fantasy world, you know. The boys who looks cool or who don't look cool. [laughs] One of those things, yeah.

LEVINE: Alright well I think –

BERGAMO: Well I – what else did you --?

LEVINE: I think that's it unless there's anything you want to say before we close.

BERGAMO: You would have to suggest to me what you want to hear yet.

LEVINE: No I think you've –

BERGAMO: I have wonderful friends. Family is wonderful, but it's better to have friends.

LEVINE: Ok.

BERGAMO: Believe me. Better to have friends because they need you and we need them. The family, well, they're there for you. That's true. But it's not so good to be always hanging on to them. I said to my daughter Doris, "You know, I need milk and I need cream." "Cream!?! You still have a bottle of cream." So what if I have another one. Why should she even say? So I

need two! You know what I mean? And then they question, “Oh, didn’t you just do that?” or “Haven’t you just done that?”. You know?

LEVINE: Where friends let you go and do what you want.

BERGAMO: Whatever you do is ok, you know, but of course the reason is because she has to come and get me for that. Or, get it for me or stop by and pick me up because I don’t drive now. I’m in the point where I – my spine – I have a pinched nerve and I have not the feeling in my feet that I should have for the pedal. And I will not, unless I am sure, because I miss my car now. Just to go to store or to go to here or there, friends you know. Now I’m not – I don’t dare do that.

LEVINE: When did you stop driving?

BERGAMO: Well it’s about five weeks ago when I discovered th the – I had x-rays taken. And it showed in five spots that I have a pinched nerve in the spine and I been going to the chiropractor.

LEVINE: Ok well I think we’re going to close here. I want to thank you for a wonderful interview. Most interesting. I’m very happy I came to visit you and get this interview. And now it’ll be at Ellis Island. Ok so I’m going to cl—

BERGAMO: If – If I tell my friends that. Only they hear it they will say, “Mom, why didn’t say this, why didn’t you say that?”. Well you know, that is the way it is. I cannot think of everything.

LEVINE: Nobody thinks of everything but you certainly have given a good picture and a flavor and the person you are comes through. And that’s wonderful.

BERGAMO: I live alone here and it's mine. This is mine. And I'm – I make the best of it. And get along with everybody. There's all kinds of people here. But I keep to myself. Friends is good, but watch with the neighbors, too. And too much. But I tell you this is a good paper there. This is – they are very good Americans. I mean, they write interesting things. Informative. Stuff you don't read in the newspapers. They have that much.

LEVINE: And this is called the New Yorker Statz Zeitung.

BERGAMO: Die New Yorker Staats Zeitung. Yeah, it's very wonderful. They bring articles from people, too. The life experiences and it's very – it's social, too.

LEVINE: And it keeps you connected with your German roots and attitude.

BERGAMO: It does, yeah.

LEVINE: Ok well I have been speak –

END OF INTERVIEW