

EI-1255

MARGARET GERHARDT

BIRTHDATE: JANUARY 16, 1911

INTERVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 17, 2002

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 84

RUNNING TIME: 60:29

INTERVIEWER: PAUL SIGRIST

RECORDING ENGINEER: PAUL SIGRIST

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: ALICIA BONES

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:

CZECHOSLOVAKIA, 1913, 1924

AGE: 2, 13

SHIP: GEORGE WASHINGTON

PORT: ROTTERDAM, NETHERLANDS

RESIDENCES:

US: LATHAM, NY

US: BOSTON, MA

US: NEW YORK, NY

CZECHOSLOVAKIA: PÍSEK

CZECHOSLOVAKIA: MELIFSKOV (?)

LEVINE: Today is September the 17th, the year 2002. I'm here in Denville, New Jersey at the home of Margaret Gerhardt. Mrs. Gerhardt has a most unique story. She did spend four weeks at Ellis Island, and hence I am conducting this interview. But her story is not – she was actually detained there as a German enemy alien prior to the United States entering into World War II.

GERHARDT: No.

LEVINE: You were not detained by the U.S. government?

GERHARDT: No. I was transit.

LEVINE: You were in transit?

GERHARDT: To go to a neutral boat of Gripzung, from Norway – Sweden. Gripzung was a – they brought all the wounded soldiers and stuff, like to Germany or – just transit.

LEVINE: Okay. So you were there in transit waiting to go back to Germany.

GERHARDT: On the boat. Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay, well, we'll get the full story.

GERHARDT: Yeah. [laughs]

LEVINE: Okay. Anyway, I'm delighted to be here. I'm Janet Levine for the National Parks Service. If you would start at the beginning with your birth date, please?

GERHARDT: I was born in 19 – the 27th of March, 1920.

LEVINE: Okay. And you told me before, but for the tape – where in Germany were you born?

GERHARDT: Zwingenberg, Germany.

LEVINE: Could you spell that?

GERHARDT: Yeah. Z-W-I-G-E-N-B-E-R-G.

LEVINE: Okay. And it's near Frankfurt, you say.

GERHARDT: Yes. [not understood] Between Heidelberg and Frankfurt.

LEVINE: Okay. And Hessen is the name of the state.

GERHARDT: [superposed] Yes. Is the state.

LEVINE: Okay, great. And you lived there up until you left for the United States?

GERHARDT: Until I was eighteen years old. Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, just a little bit about your life prior to coming to this country. Your father's name?

GERHARDT: My – it was Johann Opa.

LEVINE: Johann? Opa. And your mother?

GERHARDT: My mother's name was Barbara.

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

GERHARDT: Jacob.

LEVINE: J --?

GERHARDT: Jacob. Yeah. Right.

LEVINE: Okay. Okay. And did you have sisters and brothers?

GERHARDT: I have one sister still alive in Germany. And one brother who's still alive.

LEVINE: Uh huh. So you – had you completed your schooling by the time you left?

GERHARDT: For – I was before four weeks, I had the chance to come here. So I left in five days.

LEVINE: Well, tell me what you knew about the United States prior to your coming. Did you want to come, and if so, why?

GERHARDT: I just – there was a lady, she came every year. And I always talked to her, I was young and she was, oh, in her fifties, you know. And she was always telling me – and I always said, well, someday, I'm going to go there.

LEVINE: What did she tell you that peaked your interest in the place?

GERHARDT: Well, the [not understood]. The people are living here, and you know, she was always telling – my dream was to come to America. Even when I was small. I read everything, you know, and so –

LEVINE: Were you – had you worked at all prior?

GERHARDT: No, I was in school.

LEVINE: You were in school right until...?

GERHARDT: Housekeeping school in Germany. For four years, I was. Four years done. Except the four weeks, you know. And I came home from school and I have to tell you – and I had our news town newspaper, there was everyday a story in there. And it was two o'clock in the afternoon when I came and had my mother make me something to eat. And I wanted to read that story. Oh, she said, the newspaper didn't come today. I said, why? You know. And buh, buh, buh, buh ,buh. All of a sudden, she brought the paper. And I was reading along the edge wandert was written there. They were looking [not understood] girl to take to the United States for her needlepoint [ph]. And hwen I saw the name, I said, well, that's the teacher from the next town. We know them. You know. I said, get dressed, get dressed. You know. She said, no, no, [not understood]. I said, we go, maybe she takes me. I mean, I went to that slide of finishing school, you know. So we went and she said, no, I'm too young. You know. Oh, and my back and I get back with the teacher and I said, oh, can't you talk to her? And so we said, well great. So the next day she called, she said, well, she's going to try. So that was on a Friday, and Wednesday she was going already. To be -- well