

EI-1365

ERIC STEIN

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**THE U.S.: WASHINGTON HEIGHTS, NEW YORK, SUBURB
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LEVINE: ...is January the 4th, the year 2005. I'm here in Tampa, Florida, with Mr. Eric Stein, who came here as a nine year old, nine and a half from Germany, April 23, 1939. That was the date you left?

STEIN: That was the date, yes.

LEVINE: You left, okay. And he came on the Europa, that was the name of the ship

STEIN: The ship

LEVINE: That left from Bremenhaven.

STEIN: From Bremenhaven, it was a (?), what is it, (?) Lloyd Line

LEVINE: Oh, okay.

STEIN: Which still exists today.

LEVINE: Good. Okay, this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I would like to start by your saying your birth date and where in Germany you were born.

STEIN: Okay. I was born on July 15, 1930, and in the city of Wiesbaden, Germany, which is now, of course, very often in the news because that's where the Rhinemain [ph], it's close to the Rhinemain [ph] airport, where they bring the wounded shoulders in, and, of course, when the, we had that conflict in Bosnia, that's where they also brought in wounded soldiers was in Wiesbaden.

LEVINE: And were you in Wiesbaden up until the time that you left

STEIN: That's correct. From the time I was born to 1939

LEVINE: Okay.

STEIN: I was in Wiesbaden.

LEVINE: And what was your father's name?

STEIN: My father's name was Julius.

LEVINE: Julius. And your mother?

STEIN: My mother was Hertha, H-E-R-T-H-A, who changed it to Hilda because nobody in America could pronounce it properly.

LEVINE: And what was your mother's maiden name?

STEIN: My mother's maiden name was Kessler.

LEVINE: Okay.

STEIN: Okay.

LEVINE: And did you have grandparents when you were growing up in Germany?

STEIN: Yes, on both sides. On both sides. My grandfather on my mother's side was a huge man, something like three hundred fifty, four hundred pounds. Very b, very big man. He looked something like he had a bowl like Curly from the Three Stooges. He was almost, that, that's kind of size.

LEVINE: And, and do you remember him as a personality at all?

STEIN: No, very vaguely. Very, very, very vaguely. Had not that much to do with my grandparents on my mother's side, more so with the relatives on my father's side. I had more contact with my grandparents on my father's side.

LEVINE: And what do you remember about them? When you think about them in, in your childhood with them? What are the things you remember most about them?

STEIN: Well, mostly that it was because of my grandfather that we had any kind of, my home was sort of a non, non-sectarian, we didn't practice much in the Jewish faith at all, and if it wasn't my grandfather, I would not even have known that I was really, truly Jewish. He would always take me to the temple, to synagogue on Saturdays. So

LEVINE: Was that a pleasant (?)

STEIN: Until, until it was impossible to do it because of the Nazi business. You know, they burned a lot of the temples, and also, you couldn't go with fear of your life.

LEVINE: Do, was that a pleasant time, were, were they pleasant times for you when you went to the synagogue with your grandfather or was it more of

STEIN: Was more of a duty.

LEVINE: Yeah.

STEIN: I wouldn't say it was that pleasant.

LEVINE: Yeah. Yeah. Right. Well, let's see. When you, so you went, must have gone to school.

STEIN: Yes, we, I went to public school in Germany in Wiesbaden, and I, oh, I guess it became almost impossible towards the last year or so to go to school because of the, you know, the, the business of having to wear a Jewish star, the yellow Jewish star, so everybody would know who you were. So, my memory is that I don't think there was that much schooling for me in the last six to eight months, I don't think there was much schooling in Germany for me.

LEVINE: Well, if we could talk first about life before the Nazis started escalating their, their activities. What was life like for you as a, as a, as a young boy and up until the time that the Nazis began their, their

STEIN: Well, I think I had a pretty normal youth. I played with all the people in the neigh, you know, there was no concern about what religion you were.

LEVINE: It was a mixed area. There were or what, were you in a Jewish area?

STEIN: No, no, we were not in a Jewish area, and we were in a non-Jewish kind of business because my grandfather, the one, the father of, on my mother's side, he sold horsemeat, which in, you know, in Germany was not uncommon, especially since the after World War One and, and so much so after World War Two as well that horsemeat was very commonly sold. So, and, and that would not be something any Jewish, you know, family would go into that kind of business nor with a, of course, buy horsemeat.

LEVINE: Was this the, the large grandfather that was (?)

STEIN: This was the large grandfather, yes.

LEVINE: So, when you say he was in that business, he was, he was selling it? Buying it and selling it? Or how, how

STEIN: No, he was a butcher.

LEVINE: Oh, he's a butcher.

STEIN: He, yes, he was a butcher. My parents, the only thing I do recall which later became another story is that my parents typically, like it was in Germany in those days, they had an arranged marriage between two butcher families, see because my grandfather on my father's side, they were all butchers too. So was some of my uncles. So they were all in the butcher business, and it was sort of an arranged marriage.

LEVINE: Was that typical to arrange a marriage on, on the basis of occupation of the parents?

STEIN: Oh, I would say

LEVINE: Or did they just happen to know each other because they

STEIN: Yes, it was more, I think, economic, economic circumstances. You know, you usually marry within your social class more, more so than anything else. So I think it was just a, a economic, an economic factor.

LEVINE: And, and so it was an arranged marriage.

STEIN: It was an arranged marriage, which proved to be pretty disastrous.

LEVINE: Oh.

STEIN: Especially when we came to America. I think in more modern times my parents would have never been together. My father died very young, so that kind of negated the need for my mother to seek a divorce.

LEVINE: I see.

STEIN: But it would have, it would have eventually come about because it just was not a, of good marriage at all.

LEVINE: Well, can you say anything about your mother and father, what their temperament was or their personality as a, especially as a, as a young kid growing up in, in Germany?

STEIN: Well, it became a, a sort of a, a problem for my father when I was born because my mother put all of her love and attention onto me, and I was her, I was her golden angel or whatever term I don't remember what she used. So my father was kind of jealous that my mother paid so much attention to me, and I remember she, she paid an awful lot of attention to me, and I was extremely docile. I pretty well, she never had to yell at me or punish me in any way. I list, I listened one hundred percent to my mother.

LEVINE: Would you say that described you as a nine year old when you came to this country

STEIN: Oh, definitely.

LEVINE: As that kind of a child?

STEIN: Yes, I was a very, I, I, yeah, I was very mama's boy, really, and, but I learned to, to be fairly independent in some ways because my mother never really interfered as much as I wanted more of a guidance. She pretty well let me loose to do whatever I wanted to do, and I, I remember her recount telling me one time that, of course, I couldn't get in the German Youth Movement because of being Jewish, but she told me about the time I went out with them parading and gathering silver foil for the, for the war effort. Yeah.

LEVINE: Now

STEIN: And she told me I shouldn't do something like that, you know.

LEVINE: Now, she, her family was Jewish as well?

STEIN: Half. That's one reason religion never was a big thing in our family. My grandfather, the big one I de, described on my mother's side, it, it was a second marriage, and she was not Jewish.

LEVINE: Oh and that was your mother's mother?

STEIN: She was Protestant. My mother's step-mother

LEVINE: Step-mother.

STEIN: Was Lutheran, and that was the only mixed. All of the rest of the uncles and, and, actually our, our extended families were always quite small because my grandfather on my father's side, they had only two sons. His brother, my uncle, only had one son who was a close cousin who came to America, and I was quite close to him in my early teens, and now my mother only had one sister. So our extended families were not very big.

LEVINE: And, and you were the only child in your family?

STEIN: No, I, I was the only child for the first three years. Then my sister was born.

LEVINE: I see. So that, so that when you were immigrated, there were two children in your family?

STEIN: Yes. My father came to America first, and he was able to come to America because his brother came to America several years before. His brother, my Uncle Alfred, saw the handwriting on the wall a long time ago, long before my family did, and unfortunately, my grandparents didn't think that things would get that bad, and so, as a consequence, the grandparents on my mother side died in a concentration camp, and my grandparents on my father's side, they were lucky. They were able to go to London and spend the entire World War Two in London and then came to America.

LEVINE: I see. Yeah. So let's see. Is there anything else you would say about life, maybe before Hitler came (?). Can you mention like any changes that started to take place in, in the life that you had been used to when things started to buildup?

STEIN: To buildup.

LEVINE: It's used

STEIN: Yeah, you

LEVINE: Do you want to have lunch now?

STEIN: Sure, we just stop for a few minutes?

LEVINE: We'll stop, and then we'll

STEIN: We'll continue on.

LEVINE: Take that up when we get back.

STEIN: Yes.

LEVINE: Okay, we're going to pause here for lunch.

STEIN: Oh.

LEVINE: Okay, we're resuming here, and we're, we're going to start by talking about the buildup before you left in April of 1939. What changes happened and

STEIN: Well, by that time, they, they really were rounding up Jewish people left and right and sometime mostly in the middle of the night and dragging them away, and things were getting very bad, and luckily, even before '39, and I would say close to late '37, early '38, my father saw the handwriting on the wall, and he left in the hope of, of being able to come to America to send for us

LEVINE: And

STEIN: Before it was too late. But my, for some reason I don't quite understand, my father was not able to come directly to America, and he had the misfortune of going to both Holland, Belgium, and France first, and every time he went, of course, he encountered the Nazis right behind him. So he left, he left about, I guess it must have been late '38 that he left, went to America, got into the country by his brother, my uncle, and shortly thereafter, he sent for us. And so we were able to get a, we were very lucky 'cause we heard of other people who tried to leave Germany, but they couldn't get into America because of the quota, the quota system, and lot of 'em, of course, didn't have relatives here that could vouch for them, so many people could not come into America like we did, like my aunt, my mother's sister, she and the family could not get into America They had to go to South America, and they spend their life in Venezuela.

LEVINE: Oh, oh. So did you have to sneak out or you were able

STEIN: Well, no, we were, we, I think we went the normal channel way. We finally got our papers, but we couldn't take anything with us, nothing of valuable, legally. We heard about other people like

my uncle who snuck silver and gold out so that they'd have something when they got to the new, new world, you know? My parents were kind of scared to do that, so we arrived pretty penniless in the United States, to say the least. Things were pretty bad too, don't forget, when we came in '39, America was in a height of a depression. So it was not an easy thing. Luckily my father was a skilled butcher, and he was able to get work.

LEVINE: Okay, do you remember going to Bremenhaven?

STEIN: Very vaguely, very vaguely. I just remember though my mother saying how close it came that we might have been caught and taken to one of those concentration camps, that it was so close that literally, almost literally, we went out the front door, the back door, and they came for us in the front door, so we got out just in time, and we were, of course, also fortunate that we got out in April of '39 because, just a few months later when Poland was attacked and that meant that France got in and England got into the war, it was impossible to cross by ship anymore across the Atlantic.

LEVINE: Right. And do you remember like Nazi Youth, was that an, were those organizations going on before you left that you were aware of or

STEIN: Oh yes, my mother one time had to stop me from, because I was, I was anything but Jewish looking. You know, I was almost Aryan. My hair was almost blonde, and I had green eyes, you know, and a very small nose. I, I, I did not fit the, I did not fit the profile of what a Jewish person was supposed to look like, and since we didn't practice anything in our household, there wasn't

anything Jewish about me in any way. So my mother once told me about how she had to stop me from marching with the German Youth, collecting silver foil, and, you know, she explained to me that I can't do something like that.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. Okay, well, do you remember anything about the passage on the Europa?

STEIN: Yes. That was kind of interesting because it took forever and ever. They were very slow, and of course, we were down in steerage in third class, so we were pretty far down on the lowest part of the ship, and we were all, the, the three of us, since I mentioned my father came to America first, there was the three of us all together in this little, this little room, and there was barely any room to move around, and I remember we got quite sick because you have to go through the, in April, go through the North Atlantic. It's very, very cold, very, very choppy, and so all I remember was that it was not a pleasant, and it seemed like it took forever. There was really not much to do on that ship for third class passengers, so it was not what you call a pleasant trip. It was a trip that, and of course, to say the least, I'm sure I must have been extremely nervous, not knowing what to expect going to a new country, not knowing the language, not knowing any of the customs, and things to say, to say the least, very nerve-wracking.

LEVINE: Yeah. Were you, as a nine year old, aware of like why you needed to leave and what kind of, what was going, what was happening or not?

STEIN: I don't think so.

LEVINE: Yeah.

STEIN: I don't think I had the full meaning, and I, I really wasn't paying that much attention to what was going on with, with the other people. I just, it just didn't really dawn on me, the magnitude of how serious and how disgusting things were in Germany for the Jews.

LEVINE: Well, I guess you must have picked up, however, your mother's anxiety.

STEIN: Oh, oh, certainly, oh certainly. She was, she was quite sick mentally, more than anything else. Psychologically, I should say, that, what to expect, you know, we had to leave everything behind, we had a pretty nice middle-class kind of a life in Germany, so we had to leave everything behind, and I remember though, when we got off the ship, like so many people back in those days, we had our typical German outfits on, you know, the leder, the lederhosen with the (?) cap, and so we'd, we did look like we came off the banana boat, to say the least. And, so I would not say, I would, and, and my sister was so much younger than me, so she was only like six at the time, so I doubt whether she has, she had any memory of anything that was going on.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. Do you remember when the ship came into the New York Harbor? Do you remember the, the Statue?

STEIN: Yes, seeing the Statue, of course, was something I didn't quite comprehend the significance of the symbolism of it all until years later, when I was one of the few New Yorkers that actually visited

the Statue of Liberty more than, on more than one occasion. So yeah, it was quite impressive and very scary. We were all standing around, and I do remember the, looked like thousands and thousands of people on the ship and this huge big hall on Ellis Island, where we had to stand around, and it seemed like forever that, before we got processed, and the whole thing was nerve wracking to say the least, and of course, it's hard to get a nine year old and a six year old to be still for as much time as was required. It did, it did strike me though then, as it did later in life when I had a chance to go to Germany again on a ship, it did strike me as kind of i, ironic that if you paid enough and you were a first-class passenger, how much simpler it is to get on and off the boat and how things are very quickly arranged for you, as opposed to third-class passengers, where it took, I, I, I think we must have spent the entire day before we were able to get out and processed. Of course, we, I try to remember, but I think, didn't we have to go through some kind of a health screening

LEVINE: Probably, yeah.

STEIN: On Ellis Island and, I think, we ask all kinds of questions, and they had to have an interpreter there because we didn't speak one word of English. Not a word.

LEVINE: And what, do you remember meeting up with your father?

STEIN: Yes, it seemed to me that he met us down there. I'm trying to remember how in the wide world we got to, from the port, how we got to our residence which was in, in the United States, which was in a section of Manhattan, upper Manhattan, why, was

called Washington Heights, where we later found out that many German Jewish people, that's where they landed up living .

LEVINE: Did, did you, how come you went there, do you know? Did you, why you went to Washington Heights?

STEIN: The Heights, of all places. I guess for people coming, coming as immigrants, it's whatever, wherever the port gets you too, whether it's Boston or New York or some place in (?) or other pla, port, places, I guess, that's where you first land up. Then I guess for a lot of immigrants, like the Swedes have tended to go to Wisconsin and Minnesota, but the German Jewish people, I guess, decided to stay in, in, in New York City, yeah, where there were other German Jewish people.

LEVINE: Well, can you remember any of your first impressions in this country just in the first few days, weeks, even months, things that were different and (?)

STEIN: Oh, it was so different. Oh my gosh, it was so different. The, the traffic, the noises, the, it, it was just so overwhelming. These big tall apartments. I just, it, it was just mind boggling that everything could be so different, that the people dressed different, they acted different, and especially coming into New York where everything moved at a double speed as, and people speaking so fast and moving around so fast, that was something from, coming from, which was then a pretty good sized city in Germany, but, Wiesbaden, but nothing compared to what we encountered in New York. And the thing, of course, which was difficult to take was that all we could afford, because my father worked like sixty hours a week and made, I, I think he made all

of thirty-five or forty dollars in those days, the only thing we could afford was to be a sub-renter for someone who had, who rented an apartment, and we were sub-renting one of the rooms. And so here we were, all four of us, in this one room. Excuse me. One room, all four of us, and that was very hard living. Very hard living.

LEVINE: How long did that last?

STEIN: I would say probably a good year, practically, maybe a good year before we found our own apartment, not too many blocks away, 'cause in tho, in those days, you know, we had no, no, no car, we couldn't even think about a car. We only could ride on public transportation, and since we had nothing of our own, it was not too hard to move, and I think we had a, a partially furnished apartment that we moved into on 182nd Street that I re, still remembered, 182nd Street, and the thing which was, which I never forget is going to school without knowing one word of English. The school had arranged for two girls, I guess about my age, to escort me everyday to school, so I would find where the school was, and for the life of me, I can't figure out how I got anything out of school the first six months or maybe a year, but before you know it, you learn English or else. You know, it's not like some ethnic group these days, especially down here in Florida, that have a pretty nice that all the documents are in dual languages, and bilingual is taught in school. That, that, that kind of luxury didn't exist for anybody coming over, speaking another language. You learn English or else.

LEVINE: You remember what was very helpful to you in learning it?

STEIN: Movies, I think.

LEVINE: Oh.

STEIN: I think movies helped a lot. Went to a lot of movies, and I must have picked up something from these students in public school, and just as an aside, the one friend that I kept in contact with for years and years and years became a dentist, and that's an old public school friend that I kept in contact with up until just a few years ago, when I moved, when I moved out down here to Florida. I was still in contact with him when I lived in Chicago or outside of Chicago, I really should say.

LEVINE: So, so would you go to the movies together, you and your friend?

STEIN: I don't know, no, I didn't go to movies with him. I went to a, I found, I, the interesting thing is I've always been very economically oriented since we had no, almost nothing, and I found many, many ways when I was very, very young, a young teenager, of how to make a few dollars like the neighborhood groc, the neighborhood produce store, I would deliver, I would deliver things. There was a sign maker. I would deliver signs. Then I found a, one of those old-fashioned, tiny little round carousels that would, that was on, located on a flatbed truck, and this man would go to different neighborhoods, and people would pay five cents for one of those rides, which was just go around and around and around, and I somehow talked to him. And when I was probably thirteen, fourteen maybe tops, I would turn, I would turn that thing, so I always found a ways of making (?) a few dollars when I was a youngster.

LEVINE: And, and that's what you would spend it on, going to the movies?

STEIN: Going to the movies, and oh yes, I thought to mention, another way I found I got, you know, movies was only ten cents, believe it or not, and when the tax, the first luxury tax came in, you need eleven cents, and I always seem to have, be short of a penny, so I was always had to borrow pennies from people, which I still do these days when I go to store, and I, something is four, I need four pennies, and I only have three. I don't want to be going around carrying so many pennies with me or, so I go around borrowing pennies from people. So anyway, I found a, a lady who had some kind of a friend who wanted to get rid of the boy in the afternoon, after school, and so she paid me and for the boy to go to a movie, so for a while there, I must have gone to a movie almost every because we had, on one street, on 181st Street in New York, we had five movie houses within a , within two square blocks.

LEVINE: Oh.

STEIN: Within two block, five movie, and one of 'em played a different movie everyday, double feature, even sometimes triple features for, for ten cents, and you could, you know, stay in that movie house forever.

LEVINE: Wow. Well, I guess movies must have been really popular at that point. I mean,

STEIN: Well, there were lot of 'em, of course that was the days when studios were cranking them out left and right, and of course they

were borrowed time, I got to the movies in the forties, they had lot of revivals of movies made back in the thirties.

LEVINE: So during the war years, you were going to the movies a lot, and that, that's when they used to have the news, right, about the war?

STEIN: Yeah, they had a lot of newsreels, which were, of course, a week, almost a week old, but (laughs) they showed, excuse me just a minute (coughs), by the time they showed 'em in the newsreels in the, in the movie houses, they were about a week old already.

LEVINE: Yeah.

STEIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

STEIN: And then in New York, they had, of course this came about when I was a little older, but in New York, they had a magazine called Q [ph, maybe Cue?], and you could tell movies playing all over the city, and you could go to all kinds of movie, movies and especially down on the old 42nd Street, there were like eight movie houses, four on each side between 7th Avenue and 8th Avenue in New York, there were like eight movie houses, and they were showing movies all the time. And there was one near Radio City Music Hall, which held nothing but newsreels, so you could go and buy a ticket just to see newsreels for an hour, an hour and a half, and so yeah, during those years, but I also found myself, I always, I always liked dancing and was self-

taught, more, I did take some lessons I think, but mostly self-taught, so I landed up, when I was a teenager, got permission from my high school, so I could go to rehearsals, and I, I was in three different Broadway shows when I was sixteen, seventeen years old.

LEVINE: You were dancing in them?

STEIN: I was a chorus boy, yeah.

LEVINE: Oh.

STEIN: So that was an interesting experience. My first taste of it was a negative one. Of all things my mother took me to a audition for one of the kids in the play called "Life with Father," which calls for, they're all redheads 'cause the father was redhead, and I didn't have red hair. But why my mother thought I could do that, probably I still, at that time, I had a German accent. I, I, I doubt whether it went away that fast, so of course, I didn't get the part 'cause I, I had no idea about auditions or, or being an actor or anything like that. But a chorus boy became easy for me, so that was a nice experience when I was very young.

LEVINE: Yeah, it sounds like your mother encouraged it because, I mean, if she would take you to, for an audition

STEIN: Yeah, she thought, well, I had a very boyish look up until I was about twenty-two or twenty-three, I still had rosy cheeks, and I looked very, very young for my age, and she thought I should try that out. That might be something I could do.

LEVINE: Yeah. You mentioned, do you think the immigration experience had, had an impact on your mother and father? In other words, coming to this country where everything was different, did it, did it make certain stresses on the marriage that wouldn't have been there in the old country?

STEIN: Absolutely, and as time grew on, my mother became more and more independent and not rely completely. Matter of fact, they, they came a time where she went in business for herself. She became a waitress almost from the get go, when we came over. She was doing waitressing, and then working in summer resort hotels in the Catskill Mountains as a waitress, and eventually developed her own catering business, and so I'm sure her income was more than my father's, and had my father not died, I'd, very early in life, my father was only like fifty-one or fifty-two when he died, I'm sure my mother and father would not have stayed together because it was not what you call a, a happy, it was not a happy home.

LEVINE: Well now, do you think your mother would have gone into business for herself had she stayed in Germany or do you think that was partly (?)

STEIN: I don't think so because that just wasn't the thing for women to do, although it was not uncommon when I went back to Germany as a soldier and then again as a civilian few years after, it was not uncommon for men to own the shops, but for women to do the work, you know? Like in, in the Orient, where the, the, the females are the pearl divers, the men sit on the beaches and collect the pearls and then handle the business end of it. So,

now I doubt whether she would have been, oh, she would have been independent thinking in Germany, it just wasn't done.

LEVINE: Yeah.

STEIN: You know, 'cause they always talk about the woman place being in the home.

LEVINE: Home. Well, how about you? So what did, how long did you stay in school then if you had all these little jobs that you did and earned

STEIN: Oh.

LEVINE: Money right along, and then

STEIN: Oh, no, no, I stayed, I finished public school and then went to high school, and I picked something that doesn't exist anymore today. I picked a commercial high school, and if you want to talk about integration, way back in the 40s, my high school was completely integrated. I was just looking through my yearbook the other day, and there were just as many blacks in that school as there were whites because this was a commercial high school where kids all over the, all over New York City came because they wanted a commercial diploma, you know, bookkeeping and secretarial and that type of thing, and I, I could have not, I did go onto college, but only because in those days, they were not as strict. I came into college after all the G.I.s came out of the service and used their G.I. Bill, so I, I came in on the, on, in that wave, and the requirements for subjects were not as severe as they are today because, with a commercial diploma, you cannot

today get into any university because you don't have the math and you don't have languages that is often required, so, but I was very fortunate because I did very well. I came in seventh in my graduation class and number one in the accounting, as an accountant.

LEVINE: Wow.

STEIN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you know why you chose commercial and why you, you

STEIN: They just seemed like a natural thing because of my, you know, my parents business, because of their business, and I just sort of fell into it without really thinking through what do I really, truly feel strong about, but I was so influenced by one of my high school teachers

LEVINE: Oh.

STEIN: That I decided I wanted to go on and get my bachelor's degree and become a, also a commercial, teaching commercial subjects.

LEVINE: What was it about that high school teacher that, that, that struck you so?

STEIN: What was it? He was just very attentive. He was interested. He was challenging, which was difficult when you're teaching accounting, which is pretty, you know, cut and dry

LEVINE: Right.

STEIN: Kind of subject, but he somehow made it very interesting, and the fact that I did so well in it, I guess, encouraged me to continue on. And

LEVINE: Was he encouraging to you personally?

STEIN: Yeah, he did. He was very, he was extremely encouraging, and so what I did was, after high school, I went to a private university where a lot of the students would go to City College of New York, which was very low or free tuition. I went to a pretty expensive, you know, university, New York University, and it doesn't sound like it today, but at that time, twenty-five dollars for one cour

LEVINE: Right.

STEIN: One credit was an awful, awful lot of money, especially for us that didn't have that much, so

LEVINE: Well, talk about going into, was it the army you went into?

STEIN: Yes.

LEVINE: How did that come about?

STEIN: (coughs)

LEVINE: You must have graduated from your commercial high school.

STEIN: I mag, yes, I did that in, let's see, '48. (coughs) Excuse me. In '48, and then I went on to college and finished in about three or so years, but in the meantime, I kept getting draft notices because I had just missed W-W-Two. If I had been just a couple of years older, I probably would have been drafted towards the tail end of the Second World War, so I kept getting deferments because of college education, and so I started on my mas, I also started on my Master's degree, but before I did that, I was able to get a high school teaching job in Minneapolis, Minnesota, but that turned out to be a pretty big disaster because I was like twenty-one, and some of my students were seventeen, eighteen, so, and I had the vocational education students, which, which was like, you know, one step from continuing for students who quit school and then come back and take some night courses or something. So this vocational ed was pretty much the dumping ground for the ones that were never going to go on to college and just we're going to train to, to do something after high school education. So that was pretty much of a disas, a disaster, and it was during that time that I also attended University of Minnesota and took some more graduate work, but then my deferments sort of ran out, and from, from there, I was drafted into the service in 1953. And, and by then I, no, by then I got my Master's. I had gone back to NYU during the summer, took some more courses, so I got my Master's then, and then my deferments ran out because I had my Master's degree. They didn't give it for going onto post-graduate

LEVINE: Oh.

STEIN: Work. So, I was drafted and went to Fort Dix, like lot of (?) people did 'cause I maintained a New York residence address

'cause my parents, and so I was drafted like, I was living in New York, so then I went into the Army, and I trained. They sent me to a camp in Pennsylvania, which was dubbed Little, it was during the Korean Conflict, and it was dubbed Little Korea because the terrain was a lot like it, and also my number was pretty well up to be a infantry soldier because I not only had the normal eight-week basic training, I had an advanced eight-week infantry training, so sixteen-week training meant that I was surely going to be ticketed to go to Korea. But as fate would have it, as fate would have it, I was one of maybe ten percent of the training unit that, of that camp at that time that was sent to Europe instead of to Korea, which was a very fortune thing 'cause we were still in the Korean conflict in '54, that was still going on. So luckily I went to Europe on a ship, which turned out to be the same ship that I came over on when we migrated from Germany in '39, except but now, it was a troop ship, and they changed the name, and

LEVINE: Do you remember the name when it was a troop ship?

STEIN: No, I, I

LEVINE: I might be able to find that out for you.

STEIN: I, I, I don't know what that name is anymore.

LEVINE: Did you recognize it?

STEIN: But then I landed, then I landed up again in Bremenhaven.

LEVINE: Did you recognize that that was the same ship when you, when you were ta, actually on it?

STEIN: I, I think I, I might have found that out when, when I was scouting around. It, it had some familiarity. Had the same number of stacks and number of other things that looked familiar, so I think I checked it out and also I finagled my way to become a chaplain's assistant, which was a pretty knocked up job to have on a troop ship, where there's absolutely nothing to do, and it takes fore, it took like twelve days to go from New York to Bremenhaven. So and there's nothing to do on that ship, except regurgitate your food

LEVINE: Oh.

STEIN: Which is all over the ship, usually. So when I, when I got to Germany, in the wisdom of the Army, you land up in Bremenhaven, but then they put you on a, on a troop train, and they put you clear through Germany all the way down to the most southern point in (?), and that's where they assign you, (?) is, is in the coal region of Germany, and that's where they assign you to some place in Europe. And I, in half joking fashion, asked the Simon guy, the, the sergeant if it was all possible if I could be sent some place near Wiesbaden, where I was born, and lo and behold, he was kind enough to send me to (?), which became (?) headquarters for all of Germany, for all of Europe, I should say. At that time, we, France was still part of the NATO alliance, and so I landed up being in a place where you had captains, majors, colonels galore all over the place, and I don't know what, I, I don't know why I was the only one from the entire ship that was actually stationed there. Later on, it turned out though because

of my German background and luckily the, the Germans had arranged that I was able to prove that my grandparents, who were put in the concentration camp, they lost a lot of money. So the Germans had little reparation to, to give, give back some of the money, but at that time, Germany had a closed system, where you couldn't take the money out of Germany. They were not yet economically sound that you could convert that money into anything else. So I got a few dollars, and I was able to spend that, but I had to spend it in Germany, which came in very handy because in those days, twenty-one dollars a month for a private didn't go very far, not even in Germany, so that came in very, very handy.

LEVINE: So you stayed in Germany?

STEIN: Yes, I stayed in Germany, but for only, only unfortunately for a short time because I was collecting this money and also because of my German background, I couldn't get the kind of super clearance, which was higher than top secret, which was needed 'cause I was assigned to G-2, which was intelligence unit, I couldn't, couldn't get that kind of clearance. So they shipped me down to France, but in the meantime, I had met a young lady in my hometown of Wiesbaden and went dancing with her in the same place that I remember my mother talking about, where she and my father used to go dancing. That place still existed, and of course, I went back to my old neighborhood, and what was very strange, to say the least, I didn't know these people, they all knew my grandfather, who was very well-known, and all the people that went back to that neighborhood where my mother told me they had the shop and where we lived and so forth, and I went back and not one single male fought the Americans.

Everyone claimed they all fought on the Russian front, none of 'em ever claimed to have ever, you know, they didn't want to admit to it, and what was strange is they wouldn't give me the time of day when, you know, when we were in, living there 'cause we were Jewish, and now they, you know, they almost kissed your rears, so to speak, to try to get something because they knew that I was a soldier, and, you know, they were so hard up for everything American, cigarettes, coffee, you know, they were hurting for just about an, anything, so they all sort of try to butter me up and get something from me. Fortunately, I met a young lady, and, who later, much, much later, became my first wife, and I didn't, in, in her wisdom, I did not bring her over as a soldier. She came over on her own after I got out of the service, and she bought a roundtrip ticket just in case things didn't work out between us 'cause she never wanted me to have the feeling that she only wanted a free trip the, to the States, so she bought only a one-way, she had bought a roundtrip ticket, and later we sent for her son that she kept with her, with, with her gran, with her parents, or actually her mother because the father had died during World War Two.

LEVINE: And so what was your first wife's name?

STEIN: Marlies, M-A-R-L-I-E-S, a typical German name.

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

STEIN: Maiden name, what was her maiden name? Now you're hitting me with a question that, oh, Qu, Quiske, Q, I never heard of a name like that, Q-U-I-S-K-E, and I always thought how neat it

would be to combine both of our names and become Quiske-Stein.

LEVINE: That would be nice. (laughs)

STEIN: Yes.

LEVINE: So did you have children?

STEIN: Yes, she had one son from her previous boyfriend and that we brought over to the States many years later, and she brought me a daughter after we were married three, three years, she brought me a daughter.

LEVINE: And her name?

STEIN: Her name became Gabriella Juliet, named after my father, who was Julius, so Juliet was the close, but I always liked Gabriella, I always liked that name, and so, unfortunately she died quite young of a massive heart attack. She was only in her thirties and left me with these two children, and coincidentally, I received the good news of being appointed a Fulbright, getting a Fulbright scholarship. Fulbright, Senator Fulbright, created a program whereby he tried to exchange cult, cultural exchange by sending American professors to teach over in Germany.

LEVINE: Well, now when you got out of the army, is that when you finished your Ph.D. work?

STEIN: Some of it, yes, yes. No, I don't get a Ph.D. I got post-graduate work, and then I received a, and I, it was just an honorary

doctorate degree, but I did have almost my coursework completed, but I never wrote a thesis.

LEVINE: Oh.

STEIN: I didn't do it, a thesis and did final orals, so I never got an official

LEVINE: I see.

STEIN: Ph.D. It would have been an, an EDD anyway

LEVINE: I see.

STEIN: A doctor of education because most of my work was in pedagog, pedagogy.

LEVINE: So, but you got the Fulbright scholarship?

STEIN: I got the Fulbright scholarship to teach, of all places, how ironic things can be sometimes, you know where Hitler and that band of, of outlaws, you know, they all started in Munich. That's where they first had these meetings and started the or, the Nazi organization. Anyway, of all places, I came to teach at the University of Munich, and here's is the Jewish boy, you know, going back, of all places, to Munich, and that's where I met my lovely second wife.

LEVINE: And her name?

STEIN: Is Crystal. Yes.

LEVINE: Maiden name?

STEIN: Her maiden name is Sonnth, right? Sonnth?

MRS. STEIN: Sonnth.

LEVINE: Sonnth. S-O-N-N-T-H, it's

MRS. STEIN: That's my mother's maiden name.

STEIN: Mother's maiden name. Oh, her maiden

MRS. STEIN: My name, maiden name

STEIN: Is, is

MRS. STEIN: Is Grabow.

STEIN: Is Grabow.

MRS. STEIN: Spelled G-R-A-B-O-W.

STEIN: W. There's a

LEVINE: G-R-A-B-O-W?

STEIN: Yes, anybody who's a pipe smoker would know that name.

LEVINE: Oh.

STEIN: It's a famous pipe company.

LEVINE: Okay, we're at the end of this tape, so what I'm going to do is put in another tape, and then we'll, we'll conclude.

STEIN: We'll conclude it, okay.

LEVINE: Okay? Okay. This is the end of tape one, and I'm speaking with Eric Stein. Right.

LEVINE: Okay, we're beginning here with tape two, speaking with Eric Stein. Okay, so when you finished being in Munich on, on the Fulbright scholarship, then you came back to this country.

STEIN: Right.

LEVINE: (?)

STEIN: But I also had a chance to speak to a lot of business people, and I was, one of them was quite impressed with my background, so I had a chance to go back. I had a chance to go back to Germany, even, I did some of the work for that company while I was over there, and then they sent for me to go back to Germany to continue on, and I did some more consulting work for them. Basically, it was to help their sales people be more motivated to do their jobs, and

LEVINE: So, did you, did your knowledge of German come in handy (?)

STEIN: Oh, ye, yes.

LEVINE: Yeah.

STEIN: I spent an enormous amount of time, I started to say it was unfortunate that my first wife died before I was able to actually take, take that Fulbright scholarship, but, but we had worked on it before she had died was to translate all my notes into German.

LEVINE: Oh.

STEIN: But with lack of practice, my students told me over there that reading it doesn't quite come off, I should just be ex, more extemporaneous. They put it very diplomatically, I must say, so yes, my German came in extremely handy because I was able to conduct much of my lessons in, in German, just extemporaneously, but I was worried because I didn't think I, my German was strong enough, particularly for a university level to be able to do it without my notes, but it turned out there's no problem because, luckily in marketing and management, many of the terms in English are used over there in their books as well. So that was a very good experience, and what was most fascinating was to see the huge change in Germany, you know? Remember I was there in '53, '53, and the country was still to, almost totally devastated. There were cities, there were, I went to Cologne, which was in the British sector when I was a, a, a soldier, and that was, it was completely destroyed, completely destroyed. There's this very famous church in Cologne, and everything around it was totally destroyed, except the, the church just had some missing shingles, some stained glass, and other than that, the church was pretty much intact. Things were so bad that, at that time, I had to stay in a place called the Bunker Hotel, which was a hotel created underground.

LEVINE: Wow.

STEIN: Yeah because it's, you know, the, there was nothing standing, so I, I stayed at a, quite a primitive place at the time, so it was quite an eye-opener in '68 and '69, when I was over there, to see the monumental changes, how Germany has totally recovered. And you have to, I asked myself a question, "Who won the war?" You know, because don't forget, we poured an awful lot of money into rebuilding Germany, so it wouldn't be World War, the aftermath of World War One all over again, which gave rise, of course, to the Nazi movement. So this time but of course it was a divided Germany in '68, '69.

LEVINE: Right.

STEIN: Okay.

LEVINE: Okay, well, when you look back on your life, what, what makes you feel very satisfied, very proud of having done?

STEIN: Oh, basically I am so thankful that I had an opportunity to come to America, an opportunity that, in one respect, that my mother left me to my own devices to do what I want to do, to be able to realize and to live a pretty good life in America, which I don't think I would have ever had, had the situation not been what it was in Germany. I, I could imagine myself, if I was in Germany and that whole thing didn't happen, that I'd grow up being a, a, an, also a butcher, having my own shops and maybe developing a chain of butcher shops or something, but that wouldn't have been a satisfying life at all. I've, I've, I was able to really find my calling as a teacher, to have all the, to have a pretty easy life, to

say the least. I really never had to work, I had to work to achieve, but I never had to work really hard. I mean, I never, I'd work with my head, not with my hands, and I was able to achieve a pretty good lifestyle, a nice middle-class lifestyle. I was able to do an heck of a lot of traveling, you know, having so much time teaching off, there's no other profession that affords you so much time. If I only had more money to take even more advantage, but I did an awful lot of traveling, I've been halfway around the world, I've seen virtually every, been to almost every country in Western Europe, I've been all over the Caribbean, Caribbean, mostly during my Christmas, during Christmas vacations, and so basically I've been able to achieve. I've gotten some notoriety from my accomplishments with, with my professional activities, and I, I often try to give back something to the community. I've tried to become, because I have the time and the inclination, I've tried to become quite active in community affairs. I've been on several boards, including the American Red Cross in Chicago, I was on their board. I've been on several other boards of directors. I give a lot of free training to not-for-profit organizations, and down here, now living in Florida for the past fifteen or so years since I've been retired, I have done a lot of charity work, particularly for organizations that feed the homeless and provide shelter for the homeless and, just this Christmas, I helped distribute food to the homeless people, and also I did some, some free teaching to, here to our, in local jail population the people that were just ready to, to go out and serve their time, I helped them, showed them how to get a job when they get out. So, and I did some freelance wo, work. I developed a training manual for the American Red Cross down here in the Tampa chapter, and that has become now a model for training new people to coming into the Red Cross. That, that, that manual

has become sort of the model now that's being used to help with the, with the orientation, an all-day orientation program for people who volunteer for the Red Cross.

LEVINE: Oh. Quite a list of accomplishments, my goodness. Do you think having come here as a nine year old and under the circumstances in which your family came, do you think that impacted your personality or what you did or how you did it or your, sort of, approach to life? Do you think it had an effect?

STEIN: I think it gave me the opportunities that I could take advantage of, which I might not otherwise have had. Fortunately or unfortunately, whichever way you look at it, since I was so young, all that horrible business in Germany didn't really hit me as hard as, let's say if I was a little older and I might have realized what was going on, only years, years later, you know, with movies and books and exposes did, do I realize of the horror that I could have been a part of.

LEVINE: Yeah.

STEIN: And so I am so grateful and so lucky that I didn't have to become part of that holocaust, although I guess I could be considered part of that holocaust generation.

LEVINE: Yeah. I guess. Yeah. Well, when you think, do you think of yourself as German in any way? I mean

STEIN: You know I did, except during World War Two. I kept that kind of a, I told everybody I was Austrian, you know? You, you just, you just didn't want to, of course people kept calling me "kraut"

LEVINE: Here, you mean when they

STEIN: Yeah, they called me "kraut" and all other kinds of names. So, at that time, I kept that back, but then for many, many years as I was growing up, I was kind of proud of what the German, you know, my mother never forgave them. Until her dying day, she never forgave them for what happened. I was more forgiving, and I felt kind of proud being a German again, so I considered myself a German-American.

LEVINE: Well, what, what was the proud part? Proud in culture? Is that

STEIN: Yes, yeah, when you look at the achievements of the Germans not only, you know, in music and, and the arts and all that, but you look at what Germany is able been to do, what they were able to do, becoming a world force in a few short years, they totally rebuilt the country. And the, the Germans do have certain characteristics that are very admirable. They are exacting, they do want to persevere, they stick to things, they're very exacting, and I guess I, I've, I still feel, we still, you know, by the fact that I married two German ladies means that I wanted to keep up with the language, and I also wanted to, we also still buy a lot of German type products.

LEVINE: Oh really?

STEIN: Yes.

LEVINE: What, what kind of German ways do you continue with? Like, what kind of

STEIN: The food, the music, the language, and we are planning to go back one more, one, probably the last time. We have, we have some friends over there. Both of our families are gone. They're all dead now, and so, we don't go back for that anymore. But I do want to go back one last time and, you know, it's, it's comfortable when you're, speak the language, and when you can relate to the culture, it's quite comfortable, and I'm sure from all the interviews you are having, you're not going to find too many German Jewish people that feel that way because when you get, when they're older, I don't think they ever want to go back. You know, they want to forget.

LEVINE: Right. As you said, you weren't so aware of the horror of it at the time.

STEIN: At the time, no.

LEVINE: Right.

STEIN: No. I didn't quite understand either why we had to leave. I don't think I, I, I developed that, that close relationship with friends that it, you know, that I was crying all the, that I was crying all the way to the United States on the ship, leaving my friends behind. I don't think there was any of that, of that, so I didn't feel any kind of kindred feelings

LEVINE: Yeah.

STEIN: At the time.

LEVINE: Did you have friends who were German, who were not Jewish, who you, who stopped being friends with you before you left Germany?

STEIN: That I don't remember, but I, it wouldn't surprise me if that was the case.

LEVINE: And when you got to this country, did you encounter much Ger, anti-German sentiments?

STEIN: Yes. Very much so. 'Cause don't forget 19, after 1939, two years later, we got into the war, and the Germany now became our enemy, and yes, very much so. They called me a (?), and I, it was hard to explain to them that being Jewish makes a hell of a difference than, than being a, a German Aryan, you know? And, but people didn't see that, the kids didn't, I don't know about adults, but kids certainly didn't see that difference.

LEVINE: Right.

STEIN: And of course, there is, as you know, there is a, there was a strong, it may still exist, a strong anti-Semitism existing in this country, so being German and being Jewish did not sit well at all, and yes, we did encounter some of that. I, I tried, maybe that's one reason I probably picked up English pretty fast, learned, lost my accent, maybe just to hide the fact that, you know, I was German, so I would say up until, until the 50s, I don't think I felt German at all. I felt like I was an American. But then I took back on the, but then I developed an affinity for Germans and German lifestyle, food, and so forth, and I think then I consider myself German-American. But I found out, once I got over there, that

was more of a dream. I found myself being an American and not a German, okay. The Germans could sense immediately that I have totally changed, and I'd become highly Americanized, so I was not as German anymore as I thought I was, you know, going over.

LEVINE: I suppose here you can be German-American because you're more German than, than a lot of people.

STEIN: Yes.

LEVINE: Over there, you're less German..

STEIN: Yes.

LEVINE: And you are American.

STEIN: Much less, yes, and they would consider me an American. They could tell that I, that maybe I learned German in school, not that I, they can tell it's not fluent anymore.

LEVINE: Yeah, I see.

STEIN: Because I, at last, since we live in Florida, we don't hardly ever have any practice in German at all. We used to speak it a lot, my, my wife and I, but since we live in Florida, we hardly ever, you know, occasionally a German word will creep in, but basically we're, we're now Americans.

LEVINE: Okay, well, I think maybe we've covered everything. Is there anything else that you would like to say before we close the interview?

STEIN: Well, just that I hope anybody else who has a chance to come to America will take full advantage and appreciate what a great country this is and take full advantage of the opportunities to, actually to realize your dream and there's very little that could stand in, in your way to realize your dream except your own personal foibles and your own limitations. But I am very grateful to be an American, and by the way, I had an opportunity to become a naturalized citizen through my parents because, when you are here under twelve, I believe it is, when you come to the States under twelve, I don't know if the law is the same today, but in my day, you become what is called a derivative citizenship. You automatically become a citizen through your parents.

LEVINE: So your parents became citizens?

STEIN: Yes, they both became citizens.

LEVINE: And

STEIN: And I became, I, I got my own papers, but at the time, I was told I didn't really need them, that you become an automatic citizen through your parents.

LEVINE: I see, but when you served in the army, I imagine you would have become a citizen then

STEIN: Anyway, yeah, yes, I would have.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, just one last question, just a point of clarification. When did you go to Chicago or area and how long did you stay there?

STEIN: Oh, okay. Well, I, I traveled quite a bit United States. I had jobs in Pennsylvania, I had jobs in Michigan, and not all teaching, either. You know, I done a lot, a lot of different things as a personnel director or credit manager. I helped broaden a summer stock theatre group, a whole bunch of different things. I was a camp counselor. I worked a lot of summer camps. I've done an awful lot of different things. But my main change came in 1958 or '59, I don't remember exact now. I got a job teaching for the city colleges of Chicago, and I had an aunt, a distant aunt, not a direct aunt, who lived there, and she helped make arrangements, so I took my family from Pennsylvania, where I was teaching in a little college in (?), Pennsylvania, and got this job in Chicago and (?) accept for a very short time. Most of the time I lived in a suburb of Chicago, rather than, I just taught in Chicago and then lived in one of the suburbs, and I lived there all the way from '59 all the way through nineteen eighty, eighty-five, eight-six.

LEVINE: And then you came down here?

STEIN: Then we came down here.

LEVINE: Okay.

STEIN: In, well, we came down here in '88.

LEVINE: Alright. Well, you mentioned you're looking forward to another trip to Germany. Is there anything else you're looking forward to at this point?

STEIN: A healthy, a healthy life, not too many ailments, and a chance to do a little more traveling. I've seen lots of Florida and looking forward to hopefully maybe a golden anniversary, if God willing, I can make it that far 'cause we're celebrating our thirty-sixth, coming up pretty soon, so it's only fourteen more. By that time, I will be seventy-four, I'll be eighty-eight. Sounds pretty far away, but that's would be, that would be quite an accomplishment if we can have our golden anniversary together.

LEVINE: Oh, that's very nice. Well, that's a nice place to stop. I want to thank you very much

STEIN: Well, I thank you for the opportunity.

LEVINE: For letting me interview. I've been speaking with Eric Stein. It's February 4, the year 2005.

STEIN: No, it's January.

LEVINE: I mean, January 4, 2005, and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service signing off.