

EI-1405

INGE ANGST

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RESIDENCES:

LEVINE: —of April, the year 2006. I'm here in Silver Spring, Maryland with Inge Angst, who came here with her husband and her two small children in July of 1951. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. If you would start, please, and say the name you were born with.

ANGST: Okay, my maiden name was Furchheimer—F-U-R-C-H-H-E-I-M-E-R.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And—and you—you're—actually, your first name is—is not Inge.

ANGST: My first name is now Kate. Used to be Käthe—K-umlaut A-T-H-E but I made it Kate in English. And most of my papers come—now come with Kate because they leave middle names out.

LEVINE: Ah.

ANGST: So—but my—my friends know me as Inge.

LEVINE: Inge, okay. And you—would you please give your birth date and where in Germany you were born?

ANGST: Okay. I was born on December 9, 1923 in Mannheim—M-A-N-N-H-E-I-M, Germany.

LEVINE: Okay.

ANGST: Mannheim is in the southern part of Germany where the Neckar flows into the Rhine.

LEVINE: Okay. And would you give your father's name?

ANGST: My father's name was Benno—B, as in boy—E-N-N, as in Nancy—O.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Is that a—is that a German name? I've never heard that one.

ANGST: It's made out of Benjamin.

LEVINE: Oh.

ANGST: So I have a grandson named Benjamin after my grandfather—my father.

LEVINE: Your father, uh-huh. And your mother and her maiden name?

ANGST: My mother's name was Caroline. Her maiden name was Strauss, like Levi Strauss or Johann Strauss. And my parents got married in December, 1919.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Now, were your parents—were your family on your mother's side and your father's side—were they living in that relatively—in relatively the same area in Germany for generations?

ANGST: Yes, definitely. Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Okay.

ANGST: We found the cemetery where my mother comes from is—it still exists also. Of course, they didn't leave all the stones standing. But I remember when I was a child that there was a gravestone from 1793 of one of the grandmothers.

LEVINE: Oh. Did you know your grandparents when you were growing up?

ANGST: I had one—my father's mother was still living, but she died when I was seven years old. And my mother's father was—died in 1934 when I was nine years old.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ANGST: I remember him very well because he visited with us and we—we spent lots of time there.

LEVINE: Do you—do you have any experiences with your grandfather or your grandmother that you—when you think of your early childhood, that come to mind?

ANGST: Yeah. My—my grandfather—we always waited for Sabbath to finish on Saturday evening when—the sun to go down and then say the prayers over the candles. There's a special—there's a special candle that is like a—make like a pigtail. And we would—he would sing the prayers over it. I remember that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. So—

ANGST: I remember his pipe.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. [chuckles] So were—would you say that your family was religious when you were growing up?

ANGST: That grandfather was religious, yes, but we didn't keep much because—I don't know why.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, okay.

ANGST: But my parents did go to synagogue on the holidays.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ANGST: And when we were children, we also went on Shabbas [PH] and—but very soon that wasn't possible anymore.

LEVINE: Was there a large Jewish community—

ANGST: In Mannheim, yes.

LEVINE: In—yes, uh-huh. Okay. And what—what was your life like up until you were nine, apparently? You were about nine in 1933 when—

ANGST: Well—

LEVINE: —things changed.

ANGST: We had the store and people looked up to us when—when we—I was real little. And—and we knew a lot of people. I mean, everybody knew us. We lived in a suburb of Mannheim so everybody knew us—which wasn't so good after the Nazis took over, because I had dark hair and my sister had red hair. So everybody knew the black and the red. So all we—we had to do is go for a walk with my cousin and everybody said we had a boyfriend.

LEVINE: Hmm, hmm. I see. Well, why don't you say something about your family store? What was that like and—

ANGST: My father started the store when he was only 20 years old. Actually, a cousin opened the store and my father bought it from him. And it was in the middle of town, across the street from Town Square. And we were selling furniture. We were selling paints. We were selling material, everything you could possibly need. And later, in 1938, they wanted to throw us out. After all these years, they suddenly told us we had to get out. And my father just moved everything to our house, which was next door, and opened the store the same day.

LEVINE: Oh.

ANGST: They didn't like that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay. Well, before the rise of Nazism, what was your life like? Was it—

ANGST: That I don't remember much.

LEVINE: Ah.

ANGST: You know, I was only 10 years old—

LEVINE: Yeah.

ANGST: —you know.

LEVINE: Right.

ANGST: And that I really don't remember much.

LEVINE: Okay, why don't you say—I think you said earlier in 1933—about 1933—

ANGST: Right.

LEVINE: —things started to change. And tell what happened in your experience then.

ANGST: Well, like I said, it started right away. In March of '33 when they came to boycott the store, they had—not—SA in uniform—storm troopers in uniform, in brown uniforms watching the—standing in front of the store so nobody would come to buy—buy from us, obviously. And nobody did, of course. They would have been much too scared. And my mother just closed the store and that was—you know, that—that time.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And then did the store remain closed after that?

ANGST: No. We—we had the store until 1941.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh. Okay. Well, were there repercussions for—for—

ANGST: Well, people didn't dare—coming anymore. We had lots of people who had—who—who worked for the government and they didn't dare come in. We had lot of people who didn't dare come in during the day. They would come when it was dark. And so we—we lost a lot of customers right away.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ANGST: And it was very hard to keep having a store when your customers don't dare come in, you know.

LEVINE: What other changes occurred from that time on?

ANGST: It was hard in school.

LEVINE: What happened?

ANGST: And my sister and I remained the only Jewish kids in—in the school, was 500 kids. And we used to go to all the school occasions, like concerts and, you know, parties and things. And all of a sudden we couldn't participate anymore.

LEVINE: You were told that or you—

ANGST: Yes.

LEVINE: Oh.

ANGST: I remember the first time when it kind of became official right after that. I was going to sit down next to one of the girls in my class and she jumped up and she said, "I'm not going to sit next to a Jewish girl." And another girl sat next to me but that didn't help much. And her father went to the director of the school and that came out that I—we couldn't come anymore.

LEVINE: Hmm, hmm.

ANGST: Also, we—we stuck out. The others all came in BDM uniform, the girl uniforms—youth group uniforms, black skirts and white shirts and ties. And we had—we didn't have that so we stuck out and they didn't want that. So they just told us we couldn't come.

LEVINE: I see. What did you call that, the girls—

ANGST: BDM—Bund Deutscher Mädchen, the—hard to translate, the organization for German girls.

LEVINE: Hmm. Uh-hmm.

ANGST: They all—they had all very fancy, came up with very good names for everything. Sounded very harmless and it wasn't.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. What—how do you say it in German for what it was called?

ANGST: Bund Deutscher Mädchen.

LEVINE: Oh, okay. Yeah. So—so how—how did that affect you when you were—you know, stuck out and then you—and then you were told you couldn't come to school?

ANGST: It was hard. It was very difficult. Because we had no friends left. Thank God, I had a sister and my sister is 17 months younger than I. And she was only a year after me in school. And without that, I don't know what I would have done.

LEVINE: Hmm.

ANGST: I'm so grateful for it.

LEVINE: Yeah. And how about your mother and father? Did they experience anything else?

ANGST: They didn't know as much about it as we did because they didn't get out.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ANGST: You know, the people who came to the store, of course, were friends. And if they still came, they weren't Nazis. You know, so—

LEVINE: They were Nazis?

ANGST: They were not Nazis.

LEVINE: They were not—

ANGST: Yeah.

LEVINE: —Nazis if they came.

ANGST: So, you know, we noticed it more than they did, unfortunately, because they might have—it might have made them leave. But everybody who hears about the Nazi time and the Jewish during that time says, "Why didn't you leave?" Well, the people who did leave were the ones that had connections to foreign countries, like musicians or people who had factors in other countries and had money in other countries. My father was still paying the bills from the Depression. And he was very honest about it and he was still trying to pay it. And he didn't feel like just taking off.

LEVINE: Hmm, uh-hmm.

ANGST: He was much too honest for his own good. And he also trusted everybody. My parents were not travelers, also. You know.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-hmm.

ANGST: So we had a cousin in—he had a cousin in Switzerland, who, after the—Crystal—Crystal Night—I don't call it that—wrote to him, "Well, you better not come here because your girls wouldn't be able to do anything but maybe become—working in a household or become hair dressers." They didn't think that we would be able to learn anything in Switzerland. They were afraid we would need to be helped, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. So what did provoke your leaving?

ANGST: Ah, the war started in '39 and in 1940 the first deportation happened from Baden and the Pfalz, which included Mannheim. And by that time we had my father's sister and her son living in her house. That kind of helped—kept us back from leaving, because my aunt could not leave and my father didn't want to just drop her. And after they were de—deported, the time went so fast. This happened in October, 1940. On the fifth of March,

1941, the phone rang. And I don't know, because we were still asleep, my sister and I, but my father told the maid that she had—he had to go to the Gestapo. They had a question about his citizenship. Well, he went and never came home. And after that, my mother struggled to get a—you couldn't leave Germany. You couldn't just leave. You couldn't just take a train and leave. You had to have an exit visa. We did have a—a Swiss visa that would let us into Switzerland but we had to have an exit visa from Germany. And we couldn't get it. And one day they had us come to the police, the regular police. And they told us to leave our passport and to come back the next day. We thought we had lost our passport. But the next day we had an exit visa. And then we packed.

LEVINE: Do you know how you got it? I mean why you got it?

ANGST: We don't. We do not know.

LEVINE: You—it just happened.

ANGST: We—we do not know. We didn't—never—we never did know who to thank for it.

LEVINE: I see. But what do you think? Someone must have intervened.

ANGST: Mmm, uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ANGST: But we didn't—

LEVINE: Maybe someone who you knew and—

ANGST: We did not know.

LEVINE: Yeah. Why don't you say something about how you happened to have the Swiss visa?

ANGST: We didn't need a—we didn't need a visa in Switzerland. We had a Swiss passport.

LEVINE: Okay, Swiss passport.

ANGST: My grandfather was a Swiss citizen. And when you are a Swiss citizen, you never lose your citizenship. And—

LEVINE: So that your—so that your family had kept up with the—with the citizenship? With the passport?

ANGST: No, my father—well, we don't have to go into that.

LEVINE: Okay.

ANGST: I'd rather not.

LEVINE: Okay, okay.

ANGST: It's—it's no secret but you was never lose—my—we had nothing but a sheet of—something like a letter, "Heimatschein"—

LEVINE: Oh.

ANGST: —from Switzerland saying that we were Swiss citizens.

LEVINE: I see.

ANGST: And—but that they—that [name of a town] was our hometown, in Switzerland you're not just a citizen of the country. You're also a citizen of the canton [Kanton], which is like a state here, only smaller, and the city of the—of a particular town. And we had all that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ANGST: My grandfather.

LEVINE: I see, yeah. So you were saying how you happened to leave when you did. You—you got the visa.

ANGST: Then we got the visa. And my mother, being a very orderly person, she didn't want to just take off because we could—we knew we couldn't take any money with us. So she wanted to take some of our belongings with her. We got the visa in July and they told us we had to make a list of everything we wanted to take along, which she did very thoroughly. Every lipstick had to be written down, everything we took, what it was worth when you bought it and what it was worth in July, 1942. That took a while, a month. And then we—we got it approved and a man came. And he was very strict but he wasn't mean to us, thank God. And he looked at everything we were packing and okayed it. And we were packing with a Swiss—a company, and sealed it when we were through and took our hand luggage and took the train the next day to Switzerland. They took us off the train in Weil am Rhein, the town that is stationed before Basel. And we thought that was it. But suddenly, a gate opened up and we were in Switzerland. And I say that, I still get goose bumps. It was the 28th of

August, 1942 and the last people—Jewish people from Mannheim had been deported the beginning of August. But we were left alone.

LEVINE: Hmm.

ANGST: So.

LEVINE: Hmm.

ANGST: But didn't you want me to talk about Ellis Island?

LEVINE: Well, we're kind of going chronologically.

ANGST: Okay.

LEVINE: So you got to Switzerland.

ANGST: We got to Switzerland.

LEVINE: And this is now your mother, your sister—

ANGST: My mother, my sister and I.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ANGST: And of course, we didn't have our furniture yet. We—and here we were in Switzerland in Basel. And we—went first thing—you—at that time, the train didn't just go on this—through the Swiss station. There was no man's—no man's land in between the German station and the Swiss station. And we had to take a straight streetcar and we got to—into the—wanted the train to Zürich. We wanted to go to Zürich. Zürich is the biggest town of Switzerland, speaks German. And we had one telephone number of an uncle of a cousin of my father's by marriage. We were not exactly related. He could have just washed his hands of us. But when we sat in the train, a stranger came towards my mother and said, "Are you Mrs. Furchheimer?" And she said, "Yes," very hesitantly, thinking, 'Oh, my God. They are after us,' you know. And he said, "Ladies, thought you might not know but the [unclear] whether you have money or what, we would put you up for the night if you want to." So they put us up for the night, which really helped because we didn't know where to go. [chuckles] The next morning we took the train a—to Zürich and arrived late morning and called up—I forgot his name. And he was a very nice man. And he said, "I'm very busy at the moment." He was a businessman. And he said, "But I will come to the station. I'll find you. And just stay there and wait for us." That's all we could do too. And a couple of hours later he came and he had arranged for us to go to a

Pension, which is a boarding house. It was all nice and well. The only thing, that was the 28th of the month and on the 31st of August the first bill arrived. And we had no money. And—but the owner of the place was nice enough to take as collateral the things we had with us. Like, we had table clothes and bed sheets and things like that that my mother carefully—she was very smart lady and she had packed that separately, like hand luggage, not to be in this big stuff. We didn't know whether we'd ever see that.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ANGST: And so he accepted that until we made a little bit of money. And the third day in Switzerland I was at my first job. I was taking care of little kids.

LEVINE: Oh.

ANGST: I would not have trusted me, had I been the mother but [laughter] that lady was just glad somebody would bother with their little kids. They were just three months old, and one two years, and one a year older. And they taught me my first Swiss German because I didn't have to worry about my pronunciation, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ANGST: And they were real little brats but I stayed with them for about two weeks and then my mother found me a job as a seamstress in haute couture. I had never worked as a seamstress but we had taken lessons in somebody's home. The lady who was a seamstress when we couldn't do anything else anymore in Germany, because there were no schools for us anymore, and it helped me, just having a job and—to bring in a little bit of money home for my mother.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So then—

ANGST: And my sisters then take—took care of the little kids for a couple of weeks. And then my mother found her a job in an office and she become—became an apprentice in an office, which was very helpful for her.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ANGST: They here had their own store. I mean, you know.

LEVINE: Hmm. So in other words, you were staying in a hotel or—or—

ANGST: No, we—

LEVINE: A Pension, right.

ANGST: In a—in a Pension.

LEVINE: Pension.

ANGST: And—

LEVINE: And then you—you both started working and—

ANGST: Yeah. And also, our furniture arrived real soon and we [chuckles] needed to find an apartment. And my mother went to the officials and she said she needed an apartment in Zürich and the guy was a Nazi. In Switzerland! And he said, “We don’t have any open apartments here in Zurich.” And a man heard that from behind and he said, “Mrs. Furchheimer, come to the side.” And he told her, “You don’t need to live in Zürich. You go up to the [unclear],” which was a suburb. And it’s very nice up there. You have—it was—it was an apartment with balconies all around. We had three balconies, living on the first floor but above the ground, above the garage. And we could move with the sun around the house. And when our furniture came, of course, you know, we—we put it in there. And then we lived off of the apartment, because Mama rented out two rooms and we lived in the remaining rooms. And we had enough furniture for all that.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And did you keep your jobs then too or you—

ANGST: Yes, I—I was sewing for a year in haute couture. You know what haute couture means. You know, real fancy clothes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ANGST: She—I—my boss got real good prices but we didn’t get paid—

LEVINE: You didn’t get—

ANGST: —much at all. I was working for very little. And when she called me in the third day and she said, “Well, you know the lady you work for—the girl you work for says she has to show you everything.” She said, “Yeah, but I learn very fast.” And she—and she kept me. I mean, she was paying me, like, 15 cents an hour, you know. She could keep me. And I did hems and shoulder pads and things like that.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So then you and your sister and your mother stayed living there. And when did you leave and under what circumstances?

ANGST: My—my sister left—we arrived in '42. My sister left in April, '47. I went with her to Paris. We stayed for about a—a week in Paris. That was fun. Right after the war in Paris was still a—nothing was fixed yet. You know, it was right after the war.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ANGST: And—but we still enjoyed French food, which we didn't know how to order. And we—we went sightseeing. It was a lot of fun.

LEVINE: Hmm.

ANGST: And Marga left through Holland and arrived here in April, '47 and she got married right away to the man she met in Switzerland, a Viennese. And I had my children in '48 and Gaby was born in January, '48. No, Sylvia was born in January, '48 and Gabriella was born in November, 1950.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Why don't you say how you met your husband?

ANGST: Oh, I was—my sister and I were for a few days vacation in Lausanne in Geneva. And I got a letter from my girlfriend, who said that she met an old friend again, and I should meet him because she liked him a lot. So when I came back, she made an appointment with him that we should get together. And we met in a hotel like it—that in Switzerland at the time. They had music, life music. I guess it was maybe piano or something. I don't remember that. But we danced. And you could dance with strangers or anything, you know. So Katja didn't dance and she had Walter dance with me, which was kind of funny because Walter never liked to dance. But that's how we met.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ANGST: And then—it's a long story, but Katja knew a guy who had this little cottage in the woods. And she had us come there because it looked—it sounded so romantic, you know. We met—we came there and there was a wasp nest on the ceiling. So she had me call Walter to get rid of the wasps, which he was so brave to do. There wasn't a single wasp in the nest. [laughter] I thought he was just great. When you're young you get—

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

LEVINE: —the way you were and—

ANGST: Yes.

LEVINE: —how you learned of it and how [unclear].

ANGST: Yes. Of course, for—for us, the war was over the eighth of May, 1945. We were—were not at all worried that America was still in the war. And we celebrated and we got together with some friends, my sister and her boyfriend, Kurt and Walter and I and some other friends. And we went out in the countryside. That I remember. But nothing else.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ANGST: We were very happy.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. And did you know about the camps before and do you remember when—

ANGST: We knew about camps from the very beginning because, you know, some people came home in the beginning from camp. And they told us how nasty the SS are to—to them. And some people didn't make it home from the—from camp in '38 after Crystall night. But—and my father had been in Dachau in November, '38 but came back after a month.

LEVINE: Hmm.

ANGST: So when he was in camp a second time we had to hope that he would come back again and, of course, he didn't.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ANGST: But I—I can't tell, honestly, what we knew about millions of people getting—being killed. I cannot say whether we knew that or not. People were just disappearing. I found out more about it than I want to know.

LEVINE: Hmm. I—I didn't realize that people were coming back in the beginning.

ANGST: Well, in the—in the beginning, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ANGST: It was, like, scaring people.

LEVINE: Oh.

ANGST: You know. And then they would—were let go. But in '38, of course, they took all the Jews off the street that they could find after this guy in Paris had been killed by, they said, a Polish Jew. And that time, most of the people came back home except for the ones that didn't make it.

LEVINE: Hmm.

ANGST: I need to drink something.

LEVINE: Okay.

ANGST: You too?

LEVINE: Okay. Okay, we're going to pause here. [tape off/on]

ANGST: —about Switzerland—I mean, Ellis Island here.

LEVINE: Oh, well, why don't we just say, you—you left—you—you—we—where we stopped off is you went to Paris and your sister was leaving—

ANGST: Right.

LEVINE: —for—for this country. And then you went back to Switzerland.

ANGST: And then we had children, yeah.

LEVINE: And—and you married and had children. Or you were already—

ANGST: No, I was already—

LEVINE: Already married.

ANGST: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And you had—and you—you were living with—was your mother nearby then?

ANGST: My mother lived nearby.

LEVINE: Yes.

ANGST: Yes.

LEVINE: Okay. So at some point—how was it that you and your husband decided that you would come to this country? What—what provoked the decision?

ANGST: Is this on?

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ANGST: Yeah. Okay. Well, we had lived through World War II. And when the war in Korea started we didn't think it could be confined like it was. So we were afraid it might spread all over the world. And here, my sister was in America and I was in Europe and I didn't—did not want to be separated from my—my only sister. And Walter was nice enough to come with me. He had no choice.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

ANGST: But he ever let me forget it. And that's when we took off on the Isle de France. And we stayed two nights in Paris and left the—the kids in the room, went sight-seeing. I can't believe it. If my kids did that today, I would think they're terrible. And—

LEVINE: And then you went to La Havre? Is that where you—

ANGST: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ANGST: You took the train to La Havre and we took—took the ship and—

LEVINE: And the ship's name? Oh, the Isle de France.

ANGST: Isle de France.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ANGST: And she was a beautiful ship. They called her, you know, the grand dame. And, which she was. She had this beautiful dining room in first class, which I did get to see at four o'clock in the morning because they were French and they were not too strict. And my husband had a key that happened to fit in all the key—the keyholes. It had a square hole that opened all the doors. And we had—in tourist class we had one steward who did everything. He—he was the library and he was the films and all the entertainment he—we had. But we didn't need much because we had never eaten so good, even in tourist class. And our steward was an older man and he was very good to my baby and baby—my baby was very patient. I had no time to spoil her before we left, of course, and Gaby was very patient. And he would just look in on her and she was asleep or playing. And Sylvia was allowed to go to the kindergarten, which was not

exactly good for her because they were all speaking French and she didn't understand a word they were talking about. So she felt rather lost.

LEVINE: This was your older one. That was your—

ANGST: Yeah.

LEVINE: —three-and-a-half-year-old.

ANGST: My husband was very happy because his French was excellent and he was very happy to use it. And my school French came in handy too.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ANGST: I didn't know I could make myself understood at all but it helped a little bit. Sylvia was three and a half. Gaby—Gaby was eight months old when we came to this country. The trip on the ship took six days and I will never forget seeing New—New York coming in. And my heart sank into my toes because we didn't know what we were going to do. But we thought my husband would have a job. Well, little did we know that we had to make a stop before we'd ever come here. We had befriended a steward which—which helped after we arrived in New York. During the passport control, the physician who checked my chest x-ray by mistake threw it into the wastepaper basket. He, therefore, looked at Walter's a second time. He had been checked by an old doctor before and he detected a spot on his lungs that he didn't like. They had a TB scare at the moment. Therefore, they decided to send us to Ellis Island. Marga and my cousin, Liesel—Marga is my sister—waited on the pier for hours, didn't know where we were. They finally stopped a steward. Well, after everybody had left, they saw a steward kind of looking for somebody because we had told the man that—that had helped us on board ship. And he told them that he had seen us in a separate room and something must not be quite right. And he—he went back and found out that we were not going to be released. And Marga said that she was allowed to take care of our luggage and the hand luggage we took with us, because I wondered today what did I do for diapers and things like that for little babies, you know. So we did get to say hello to Marga and my cousin, Liesel. And Marga the next day brought us throwaway diapers. They had just started then, you know, luckily. We had arrived in New York harbor in the morning. And of the 900 and 30-some passengers, about eight or nine of us were kept. We were four of them. The other one was a man from—a young man from Israel who they thought had too many relatives here. And they thought he was never going to leave; he was going to stay with the relatives. And the others had a student visa and it was a family, and they didn't think they was—were going to leave. They were going to—think they were going to stay with a student visa, which, of course, happens all the time. Then us.

By the time we arrived in Ellis Island it was 11 p. m. with two little ones. It—I was so lucky that Gaby was—had been found out to be allergic to milk. Therefore, I had a big bag full of canned formula. You could do that in Switzerland at the time. It had carrots and everything in it, sugar, eggs, whatever, in the formula. And I had a week's supply with me. And for that day, I had prepared a supply of bottles, not knowing how much I needed. It was very small. It also was very good that my baby was very patient. As a matter of fact, Gaby later said, "Mom, you always talk about Sylvia. Didn't I ever do anything bad?" [chuckles] She's cute. They took the camera away from us, which was—we were very sad about because we loved to take pictures and it was our pride and joy—joy. We had bought it in a pawnshop. Also, at this next day, people from displaced persons arrived. And there was one lady who was terribly upset because her child—her young girl—little girl had died. And they had done nothing to help the child. You know, they—they just paid no attention to her worries. They thought she was just excited and didn't pay any attention that she—her baby needed help.

LEVINE: This was at Ellis Island?

ANGST: That—that was before they came to Ellis Island. I don't know how they [unclear], on the ship, I guess. We were divided, my husband in a hall with about 60 men, bed on bed. They had to get out of their beds the front—the foot end. And he was next to a very dirty bed. We were with about 30 women and children. Also from displaced person camp came. The following morning we were ordered to prepare for a trip to New York—to a New York hospital for a new chest x-ray. We had already gone through that. We had shown them our chest x-rays in Switzerland and they had been okayed by the consulate. But they didn't pay any attention to that. And we were to go without our children. I was frantic to leave my children with all these strange people. And Sylvia couldn't even talk with anybody. But I fast explained to one of the Yiddish-speaking women about feeding my baby, and off we went with the guards to New York in a station wagon heavily guarded as if we were criminals. I was so mad. It taught me one thing, to be incarcerated makes one very angry. At the hospital while we were waiting, a female—one of our female guards passed by me and I put my foot out, trying to trip her to make her fall. She apologized and I felt terrible. But it makes me—you mad at everybody who can walk around while you cannot. We had an—at Ellis Island, we—on the second floor we did have a little kitchen for all of us. I used it to make the formula for Gaby. All—all day long we sat on benches around long tables. When you, say, see pictures of Ellis Island today, you always see benches the other way around the narrow part of—of the hall. That's not the way we had it. These people usually sat there just to be checked out. That checking out was done onboard ship. You know, we were kept there to be kept there. We met—met many different people. Everyone

was there for all kinds of reasons. Defended a Jewish family from Paris who taught us the ropes. They had been there a couple of days. You know, you learn very fast. We did—we did not even understand our own name in Eng—in English pronunciation. I suddenly became Kate Angst, where I had been Inge Angst in Switzerland. One day, while the—one day, we had company. My—my family came every day, my cousins and my sister. And while I had company, my family—Walter was take—trying to take Sylvia to the bathroom. Well, in Switzerland, bathrooms were still for men and women. You just closed the door to where you were going to go.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ANGST: So Walter went to the ladies room, since Sylvia was a girl. But that wasn't done here. And when—when he came out of the stall, one of the guards was there and she almost killed him with her umbrella. [coughs] The family visited every day and Marga went to the Swiss Consulate in New York. And one of the consuls came with her. Thank God, my sister was a pretty girl. And they got to go to the offices, which, of course, we had no way of doing. We had—we couldn't talk to anybody. I was allowed one telephone call, if I knew the telephone number. Here, I came from Switzerland; I was supposed to know the telephone number. I had one telephone number to a cousin of my father's, whose wife happened to be American and I could talk to. I don't know what we talked about. But I went every time. She's now a hundred years old and every time I see Esther, we—I tell her that. And my sister got this Swiss assistant consul or something to come with her. And he—he got us a room so we didn't have to be in this hall anymore. And we got a little room with a crib for Sylvia. We had—Gaby had come in a little straw—Italian straw basket. And she was still in there. And thank God she was slow and she could not stand or sit up. Today, you couldn't do that anymore. And when we got the room, my Sylvia took off her clothes and jumped into the crib. I can still see her. She was so happy. And I started my time in these United States by a British sailor stealing an egg a day from the kitchen for my baby. He had missed his ship and volunteered for kitchen duties to have more to eat. So I stay—I started as a thief. The only person who had her own room was a lady of the night from New York, who was—who was—who was to be deported because they didn't like her profession. But they were in no hurry. You can imagine why. They visited her. [chuckles] Food was not really bad. It was Army food, I'm sure, only we were not used to it after coming off the Isle de France.

LEVINE: Hmm. Was it very crowded at Ellis Island when you were there?

ANGST: That hall was very full but I really don't know how many more people were there, because we didn't get to visit anybody else, of course. You had

no—you couldn't go outside and, oh, I forgot my page. The ladies who were supposed to clean never did this at all. They smoked cigarettes. The place was filthy. We did not clean either, as we hoped to be gone the next day. We didn't want to clean for—for somebody else. But it took a whole week for that chest x-ray to be okayed. We had company. My father's cousin was with us, Julius Furchheimer. And all of a sudden he said, "They're calling your name." He'd heard it but we didn't. Sure enough, we were told to be ready to leave. We were getting rid of fast as we got into the—the place. I forgot two little things. There were always long lines for the dining hall. And they enjoyed having us wait in line instead of letting us all get in, because it made them feel powerful. You know, the guards. They let us stand in long lines without doing anything. And so we found out that there was a—a kosher kitchen and we said we were kosher. So we got to eat in a smaller place and the food was better too. And I wanted to say that there were a lot of Chinese detainees who were considered dangerous for communism or something. I don't remember. But they were the nicest people there and the cleanest people there.

LEVINE: Hmm.

ANGST: I don't know how in the world they kept themselves so clean.

LEVINE: Hmm, hmm.

ANGST: That's about it, all I could think of.

LEVINE: Yeah. Oh, well, that's great. That's a wonderful—so in other words, did you have personal encounters with any of the guards or the security staff or—you mentioned the bathroom.

ANGST: Yeah, my—my sister said that when she came visiting once there was kind of like a division between prisoners and visitors, that you couldn't just walk through. And Sylvia saw her aunt. She had just met her, you know. Didn't know her before. But she was very happy that her aunt was coming. She always brought something. And she was running out to greet her and the guard yanked her back. And my sister said to him, "You're worse than the Gestapo." She remembers that very well.

LEVINE: Hmm.

ANGST: Because they were so nasty.

LEVINE: Hmm, hmm. So it sounds like it was dirty and the guards were [chuckles] nasty and—

ANGST: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Yeah. And—and you weren't—

ANGST: Oh, and many people—many families were divided worse than we because, when they did find TB on somebody, that person had to go to the hospital there.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ANGST: And they couldn't see each other at all. So they only—I don't know how in the world they kept track of the—one husband was there with his child alone and his wife was in the hospital. He didn't know what to do with the child. He had never taken care of the child. [unclear] taking care.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. Well, that was quite an introduction to the country, huh?

ANGST: Yeah. And I always said—everybody told us, "Oh, they'll be so nice to you once you're out of here." And they were. As soon as we arrived in Washington—and we got a letter from our senator welcome—welcoming us already, [chuckles] you know, hoping to get a vote.

LEVINE: [chuckles] Okay. So when you were released you took a train, I guess, to Washington.

ANGST: When we were released, we took the ferry into New York and Walter stayed with one cousin, and I stayed with the one that I was with but—that visited us that day. He had a wife and a daughter, a little girl. And I—we—Sylvia and the kids stayed with me at their house. They had enough room and the other one didn't have any children. He kept Walter. And the next morning we took off for Washington where we already had an apartment. And my sister had loaned us a couch that we could sleep on. And a few weeks later this—this bookcase and the crib that Walter had made and this buffet came. This thing is—we had since we were married, since '45.

LEVINE: Wow.

ANGST: Was the first thing we bought. I can never get rid of that.

LEVINE: No, no. So what—what—those first few weeks and months when had you were in this country, was there any things about being here that struck you?

ANGST: Yeah. Oh, gosh. Everything's different than what you expect, you know. First of all, we thought Walter had a job. And since he was doing office work in Switzerland and his English was not very good—I had learned English in school, which didn't make me speak, of course, but at least I could write fairly well. And I had taken English dictation in Switzerland. But Walter had only had a few months of private lessons, when he found out that we were coming here, in English. But Walter is very good in language—was very good in languages. He spoke French and he could make himself understood in Italian. He just faked it if he didn't know it. And it was in no time at all he learned English. But he couldn't do office work coming here. So he fell back to—he had cabinet making in—when he was a young man. And so he was supposed to have a job as a cabinetmaker when he came there [several words unclear]. And so he had a few jobs the first year, you know, and became a member of the carpenter's union until they didn't have any work. And he figured, "That doesn't make any sense to pay union fees when they don't give me work." And you were supposed to be fined if you worked for a company that was not a member of—you know, that didn't hire union workers. They said, "You didn't give me a job. Forget about it." And all the [several words unclear] old antique house, a very good antique shop in town on Ninth and Pennsylvania Avenue across the street from the Archives.

LEVINE: Hmm.

ANGST: And that was very nice. You could take the bus at the time. It was nice. You haven't had Subway for long. And streetcars and we got a car pretty soon but, of course, you couldn't park. And of course, there was a little—the children, I didn't think I should work. You know, not at that time. Today, they're—my grandson's wife is going to work. The baby was three months old. And—

LEVINE: What—what would you say you—had brought you satisfaction that you—that you have accomplished or that you feel good about that you've done?

ANGST: Oh, my husband would tell—tell you that he didn't like anything here. But that wasn't so. You know, he liked it too. He—he would have never had the opportunity to work for the Smithsonian Institution. And he liked that very much. And—

LEVINE: And he was doing restorations and writing about it, is that it?

ANGST: Right.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ANGST: And they also let him translate sometimes when they needed a translator.
And—

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B]

[BEGIN TAPE 2, SIDE A]

ANGST: I worked for Sears Roebuck for 17 years.

LEVINE: Oh.

ANGST: They didn't pay too much but I enjoyed it a whole lot because I had a lot of nice friends. We were—we were one big family.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

ANGST: And a lot of people worked for Sears Roebuck, you know, but I just told my attorney and he said, "Oh, I worked for Sears too at one time." And I said, "Who didn't?" [laughter] You know.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. So was there a time when you ever thought you would like to go back?

ANGST: I loved to go back and—for visiting, for vacations but it's so expensive. And I was going to show you the passports for the family when we came back the first time.

LEVINE: Okay. But we're actually at the very end of this tape.

ANGST: Okay.

LEVINE: So is there anything you'd like to say in closing?

ANGST: Oh, boy. Yeah, I still love Switzerland and I'm very grateful for Switzerland for—for saving—saving our lives. And—but I'm glad we came to America because people are so nice here and the opportunities here are better than in Switzerland. In Switzerland, if you don't start with money you do not have much opportunity to do much.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I think we'll end here. Thank you very much—

ANGST: Thank you.

LEVINE: —for a wonderful interview. And I'm speaking with Inge Angst. Janet Levine for the National Park Service signing off.

EI-1405/ANGST

[END OF INTERVIEW]