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WERNER ULRICH
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AGE: 1

LEVINE: Today is August the 3rd, the year 2006. I'm here in the Ellis Island Oral History Studio with Werner Ulrich, who was interned with his mother and father at Ellis Island from the fall of 1942 until February 1943, when the family was transferred to Crystal City, in Texas. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. If we could start at the beginning, if you'd give your birth date, and where you were born?

URLICH: September 26, 1941, born in New York Hospital, living on East Eighty-Fifth Street.

LEVINE: And that's part of Yorkville?

ULRICH: Yorkville.

LEVINE: And that was a very German area?

ULRICH: All German.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, okay. And how about, why don't we start with your mother? What was her name, and her maiden name?

ULRICH: Her name was Erna Schreiner, maiden name Schreiner.

LEVINE: Okay.

ULRICH: And she came over as a teenager, somewheres in the early thirties.

LEVINE: Okay, and do you know what part of Germany she was from?

ULRICH: She was from Fortsheim, which is east of Stuttgart.

LEVINE: Okay.

ULRICH: West of Stuttgart. I'm sorry, west of Stuttgart.

LEVINE: Okay, and so she came over as a teenager, with her family?

ULRICH: No, she came on her own. She left her family, got on a boat, and headed to the States, somehow.

LEVINE: Why don't you say something about her personality, her character? That's pretty gutsy for a teenage girl.

ULRICH: She's always been gutsy, all through her years. She did things that a normal person wouldn't take upon doing, you know. So she was very independent, and straightforward, and very strong.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. What kind of things would be, like, that she might do, that are like, you know, typical--?

ULRICH: Well for example, she was a hairdresser by trade.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ULRICH: And possibly in her fifties, she opened up a hairdressing store, on her own. She rented a store, prepared it for doing hairdressing for women, and ran the business by herself. And once in a while, or I would say, there was always one woman working with her, buy maybe, you know, different women at a time. Never at the same time—always one other person.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

ULRICH: So I mean, she took it upon herself to do things like that.

LEVINE: I see. And was the family always in the New York area?

ULRICH: Yes, yes, up until we were interned at Crystal City, Texas. After we were released, we came back to New York, and always lived here.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, okay. Okay, so let's see. So, how old were you when you were interned? Well, you were a year and--?

ULRICH: So I was born in September. We had Pearl Harbor December 7th. Germany declared war December 11th. United States declared war on Germany December 11th. There was a, J. Edgar Hoover had set statistics on rounding up people, and the FBI had to round up; I believe it was like six hundred people per month. And they had a quota to meet, and that's how we got into it.

LEVINE: Okay, now you mentioned earlier that your father was interned in April of '42?

ULRICH: I'm guessing that he came in on April of '42 to Ellis Island. So he was yanked out of our apartment, and sent to Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Did anyone—I'm sorry, I didn't ask you your father's name?

ULRICH: Werner Ulrich also.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And where in Germany was he from?

ULRICH: Dusseldorf.

LEVINE: And when did he come to this country?

ULRICH: He also came as a teenager, on his own, no family. So, and he moved to Newark, New Jersey, when he first got in.

LEVINE: Why was that?

ULRICH: I don't know, but he lived in Newark, New Jersey. And somehow, possibly working in Manhattan—I don't know, met my mother. And they married.

LEVINE: Hm. And why don't you say something about what kind of a temperament or a personality he had?

ULRICH: Well, he was a tough person to get along with. [Laughs]

LEVINE: Oh, okay! [Laughs]

ULRICH: Unfortunately, and this is that truth, that as years went by, after we were released from Crystal City, he turned towards alcohol. And, you know, that was a major problem.

LEVINE: Yeah. Okay. Did you ever hear anything about how it happened, and why he was one of the people rounded up?

ULRICH: Well, I'm guessing now that my mother and father both belonged to the German bund, which met in Yaphank.

LEVINE: It met in where?

ULRICH: Yaphank, New York.

LEVINE: Oh, I don't know that.

ULRICH: Oh, yeah, it was called the Siegfield Camp. And all it was was a German-American club. There was no, you know, it was not like a Nazi group or anything like that; it was just a club, as any nationality would have. And it's possible that that's where they met, and married. Because, I think that because they were part of this German-American bund, they were part of the round-up. I did hear that some people were part of the German-American bund, but were never rounded up, or if they were rounded up, were released. Why my mother and father were held, I don't know.

LEVINE: Mm-hm. Were there people in that group who did have Nazi affiliation, do you know?

ULRICH: As far as the history goes, there was only one person that I know of, and I would have to look back in time to see what his name was. But he was arrested, also.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Was it a large group?

ULRICH: Yes, it was a very large group. And they would meet on weekends, and they had bungalows, you know, sleeping arrangements. And it was a very big, I don't know how many acres, of a property. The camp, you know, it's all like a leisure camp, you know, like a family get-together type place.

LEVINE: So people would go there, like, on the weekends, or on vacations?

ULRICH: Yeah, they'd spend weekends, instead of going to resorts.

LEVINE: Oh.

ULRICH: Well basically, that's all it was. It was similar, like, to a resort.

LEVINE: With bungalows?

ULRICH: With bungalows and all, for families and singles.

LEVINE: I see.

ULRICH: So, but it was—1941, it became a bad place. [Laughs]

LEVINE: Yeah, okay. So, did your mother or father ever talk about either your father's internment before your mother and you were brought into it?

ULRICH: That's the only thing that I could put together. I pieced it together, that he was interned here on Ellis Island in the spring, possibly April. And then I believe that my mother and I were brought in in the fall. I'm guessing.

LEVINE: The fall. And do you know if you and your mother, or your mother herself, visited him while he was here before she--?

ULRICH: It's quite possible. She must have. I would venture to say she did. And I would venture to say that being that I'm a baby, she's going to take me with her when she goes to visit.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ULRICH: But how we ended up, my mother and I, how we ended up being interned on Ellis Island, I don't know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ULRICH: But I do know that both my mother and father were stripped of their US citizenship. When were they stripped? I don't know. Was it while they were interned here on Ellis Island? I'm assuming that's quite possible. But they did have American citizenship, and they were stripped of their citizenship; that I know.

LEVINE: Do you know what year your mother came here?

ULRICH: I would say—she was born in 1910, so I would say maybe 1927. And of course, this is war-torn Germany. This is after World War One.

LEVINE: Right, and she was seventeen?

ULRICH: I would guess, venture to guess, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ULRICH: And my father was born in 1903, and he was also sixteen, seventeen, and eighteen—somewheres in there. But they were both teenagers for sure, and they both came alone, without a family.

LEVINE: And did your father come sooner than your mother?

ULRICH: No, it was around that same period of time.

LEVINE: Around that same period?

ULRICH: Right.

LEVINE: Okay. So they had been here quite a while?

ULRICH: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: And they had become American citizens?

ULRICH: Yes, they were American citizens, working, you know, respectable jobs.

LEVINE: What was your father doing?

ULRICH: I don't remember.

LEVINE: Okay.

ULRICH: But he was, you know, working on the books in a legitimate job, you know. It wasn't underground type of work.

LEVINE: Right.

ULRICH: It was legitimate work. My mother also worked. As a matter of fact, she worked, at that time, on Eighth Avenue and about Fiftieth Street, right near where old Madison Garden used to be.

LEVINE: Oh.

ULRICH: And I know that because when we came back to New York after the war, she went back to work for that same place. That's how I know.

LEVINE: Huh.

ULRICH: And so everything that both of them did were legitimate, above-board—

LEVINE: Occupations.

ULRICH: As far as incomes, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah. But now, what did she do with you when she was working? Did you, somebody mind you?

ULRICH: Oh, no, maybe—

LEVINE: Or she stopped when you—

ULRICH: Maybe she stopped working. I would assume she stopped working when I was born.

LEVINE: She stopped when you born, uh-huh.

ULRICH: But at least while she was single, she worked at this one hairdresser, beauty salon.

LEVINE: And so did she get her training to be a hairdresser in this country?

ULRICH: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, oh.

ULRICH: So she started out on the bottom, and worked her way up.

LEVINE: And what were their attitudes, each of them, your father and your mother, as far as being Americanized?

ULRICH: Oh, they were proud Americans, for sure.

LEVINE: Oh, they were?

ULRICH: For sure, they were proud Americans. I mean, they found a new home. After all, they left Germany following World War Two, when Germany was a shamble.

LEVINE: World War One?

ULRICH: Or, World War One, when Germany was a shamble.

LEVINE: Yeah, so they were happy?

ULRICH: Yeah.

LEVINE: And did they leave big families? Did anybody else in their family come here?

ULRICH: I know that—I'm trying to think back, quickly. I know that my grandfather, my father's father, was killed during World War One, in Russia.

LEVINE: Oh!

ULRICH: That I know. My mother's family, they were right on the German-French borderline, and I think she lost a lot of her brothers and sisters.

LEVINE: During World War One?

ULRICH: During World War One. I'm not positive. I know that her family was pretty well wiped out in World War Two. The town of Fortsheim is right on the French-German borderline, and my mother told me that after Germany had lost the war, the First World War, that the French would come in and strip the town of houses, kicked families out of houses, and disassemble the house, and move the house over to France, leaving families homeless. And you know, there was a lot of problems. So therefore, anybody who could get out, did.

LEVINE: Mm-hm.

ULRICH: And fortunately my mother and father were able to have the nerve to get up and go without any family support.

LEVINE: Now, do you think, on each side, they had been living in Germany for generations?

ULRICH: Oh, yeah, it's always been, yeah.

LEVINE: Mm-hm, okay. All right, well, and how about the Yorkville community? Do you know anything about—there were a lot of Germans there.

ULRICH: It was a German—it was one hundred percent German community.

LEVINE: So were they being taken, do you know?

ULRICH: Yes.

LEVINE: Like, lots of families were having people taken?

ULRICH: Yes, a lot of families were rounded up. In Yorkville, in German communities in Queens, and New Jersey, Ohio. You know, lots of families were rounded up. And the reason for a quota was because when Germany declared war on the United States, German troops, German police had rounded up Americans working in Germany. So they were single men, single women, and families, working in Germany, who were all rounded up and thrown into

prison. And deals were made between the German government and the American government to do a trade of families and singles. And I believe it was like six hundred per month.

LEVINE: That were traded?

ULRICH: No, that were rounded up.

LEVINE: That were rounded up?

ULRICH: Right. Now, trading I don't know.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

ULRICH: But we were part of a trading, and we were waiting for a ship to take us out of United States, and into Germany. And so Christmas was definitely spent here, Christmas and New Year of 1942, was definitely here on Ellis Island, waiting for a ship to deport us.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, do you know if, like, your mother and father were asked, "Do you want to go to Germany?"

ULRICH: No, no, no, no. They were going to be deported.

LEVINE: They were just told?

ULRICH: So, maybe at that point is when they were stripped of their citizenship. But they were told that they were going to be deported, because they were civilian enemies—

LEVINE: Aliens.

ULRICH: Aliens. Civilian Alien Enemy of the United States. [Laughs]

LEVINE: Okay. So in other words, when you were here, your family was waiting for deportation?

ULRICH: Yes. That's why we were here.

LEVINE: But you didn't actually get deported?

ULRICH: No.

LEVINE: You went to Crystal City instead?

ULRICH: No. what happened was that—this is what my mother explained to me. what happened was the mothers who were interned all at the same time, all waiting for the ships to go back to Germany—the mothers got together, and rounded up all the natural born kids, the ones who were born in the United States, which makes them automatic—

LEVINE: Citizens.

ULRICH: --citizens of the United States. And all of the women—and there was no one particular leader, but all of the women rounded up the children, and brought them before the FBI, or the INS, whoever was here in power, and turned us over to the government agency, the FBI, or INS, and said that these are natural born American citizens, and cannot be deported. And they are to remain in the United States. And they are putting the children in care of the Federal government until after the war and the mothers come back, or until they turn eighteen and are released as adults.

LEVINE: Wow!

ULRICH: And that caused a lot of confusion here on Ellis Island, because the mothers refused to touch the kids, refused to take the kids on the ship.

LEVINE: Wow!

ULRICH: And so the government agencies were told that the kids were going to be placed in their care. And that's how we ended up in Crystal City, Texas. A decision was made not to—that mothers and fathers cannot be deported, leaving children behind. So in February, we were sent to Crystal City, Texas.

LEVINE: So in other words, your mother and father, as far as you know, preferred staying here--?

ULRICH: Yes.

LEVINE: --even in a camp?

ULRICH: Well, no, no. They said they were not going to take us. They knew they were going to be deported, but they were not going to take us.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ULRICH: They were not going to take us to Germany. The mothers would not take the kids to Germany. Because those mothers experienced Germany following the First World War, and so they were not going to endanger their children in Germany.

LEVINE: Wow. Did your mother ever talk about having to make such a—I mean, that's a pretty strong decision for a mother to make—

ULRICH: Right.

LEVINE: About a baby, you know.

ULRICH: Right, right. But that was their—that's where they took their stand. And from that, we ended up in Crystal City. When we got to Crystal City, my father was prisoner number 0-6-0-7, my mother was 0-6-0-8, and I was 0-6-0-9, as a civilian enemy of the state.

LEVINE: Wow. Wow! I bet you remember those numbers forever! [Laughs]

ULRICH: Yes, I clearly remember. They didn't tattoo it on me, though! [Laughs]

LEVINE: Well, let's just back up to more about Ellis Island. You were here for Christmas, you said?

ULRICH: Yes, but of course, I don't remember.

LEVINE: You have no memory of Ellis Island at all?

ULRICH: No, none whatsoever.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And did your mother and father ever say anything more about the conditions, the treatment, the Italians and Japanese, maybe, who were here at the same time?

ULRICH: I don't know if there were Japanese here. There may have been Italians.

LEVINE: Well, there were, but I don't know if they were when you were.

ULRICH: I don't know about Ellis Island. I know the Japanese were in Crystal City with us.

LEVINE: Yeah, they were here, too, yeah.

ULRICH: Yeah.

LEVINE: So is there any other Ellis Island aspect of—do you remember your father's attitude about being seized?

ULRICH: Very bitter. Very bitter, very, very, very bitter.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ULRICH: Very bitter.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ULRICH: No doubt about it. My mother was more flexible, but my father was very bitter about the whole thing.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

ULRICH: And unfortunately, I hate to add this, but that's what drove him, slowly, after the Crystal City, into alcohol.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah. He hadn't been a drinker before that?

ULRICH: No, no. Because I'm sure that they were, you know, limited on how much alcohol was in the camp. So, I'm sure he didn't drink in the camp.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ULRICH: Unless there was beer once in a while.

LEVINE: Yeah. So is there anything that—well, you never talked a lot? Apparently, your mother told you some things?

ULRICH: Right. Well the thing is is that as a child, when we came back from Texas, it was always drummed into me never to speak a word about it, that I'm never, ever to open my mouth as to what happened, and where we were.

LEVINE: And did they say why you shouldn't?

ULRICH: No, it was just, that was, you know, like a family demand, that I'm never, ever to speak about Crystal City. And so I kept it inside myself until the early nineties, when my son found out about it. And so then I had to open up and tell everybody in the family. So I, you know, I kept it all to myself.

LEVINE: What do you think about that, that demand, that family demand?

ULRICH: Well, you know, I mean, that's the way it was. I mean, it was something that, I suppose it was something to be ashamed of, maybe, that they were rounded up as criminals.

LEVINE: Did they ever speak of it, that you ever heard, when you became old enough to hear things?

ULRICH: My mother tried to tell me things, you know, but I just automatically turned a deaf ear, which I'm really sorry today, you know. I mean, I do remember some of the things, but like I said, I kept a cold shoulder to the whole thing, you know, because it was always drummed into me, never, ever. There was a girl in my school, in my class, who was also at Crystal City, and we were not allowed to talk to each other.

LEVINE: Wow!

ULRICH: So this way, everything would be kept a secret.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ULRICH: Here in New York, I'm talking about, classroom in New York.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, what do you think—what effect do you think it had on you, the fact that you had this horrible, shameful secret locked up in you for all those years?

ULRICH: Alcohol didn't do anything! [Laughs]

LEVINE: [Laughs]

ULRICH: I didn't turn to alcohol! [Laughs] No, it's just something that I kept—

LEVINE: Yeah, but do you think it had ramifications, the fact that you, you know, were living with this?

ULRICH: Well, it made me a quiet person, you know.

LEVINE: Oh, yeah.

ULRICH: But not ashamed.

LEVINE: In other words, you're saying you wouldn't, like, talk a lot about yourself?

ULRICH: No, no, so then I just kept—I let somebody else do the talking, but I never shared.

LEVINE: Yeah. So when you finally told your wife in the nineties, how did she respond?

ULRICH: Her mouth fell! [Laughs] She didn't believe me!

LEVINE: Is she also German?

ULRICH: No, she's Italian descent.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ULRICH: But my son found out in the New York Library on Fifth Avenue and Forty-Second Street? He was doing a family tree study, and all of a sudden it all came out, you know, like people—he found names of people who were rounded up. And he made—it was on the, what do they call that in the library, when they put things on--?

LEVINE: Microfiche?

ULRICH: Microfiche. Micro—

LEVINE: Fiche?

ULRICH: Fiche?

LEVINE: I think that's how they—

ULRICH: And so he printed it, and he brought it home, rattled. He was shaking like a leaf, asking me, "What is this all about?" And so then I had to tell him, and I had to tell my wife?

LEVINE: And did they take it, I mean, did they think it was shameful, too?

ULRICH: No. They, at first, of course, it was hard to explain to them. It took a while, you know, to get it all out. But then my son and I, the one, Richard, who found the information, then he and I—at that point in time, the internet was already out. And so we sat at the computer, and feeding the computer with like, searches, on Crystal City, German-American bund, you know, all these things, looking for words. And we ended up finding a section, a site, that was written by—and I can't think of his name. But he's the very founder of this German-American group, egroup, in Yahoo.

LEVINE: Oh, mm-hm.

ULRICH: And so then, I contacted him through email. And he was very, very, very cautious. And so he asked me what my sister's name was. And my sister's name ended with an E, Gudrune, right, which ended with an E. But when we were kids, she dropped the E, so I spelled it without the E. And then he called me a liar, because he didn't trust anybody!

LEVINE: He as also in the camps?

ULRICH: He was also in the camps.

LEVINE: This was Art Somebody?

ULRICH: Art—

LEVINE: Yeah, I can't think of his last name. I know who you mean.

ULRICH: Art, Art, you know. But he was a major in the Air Force, and he rounded up all kinds of information, all to do with the camp. But he was a lot older—he's a lot older than I am.

LEVINE: Jacobs, Art Jacobs.

ULRICH: Art Jacobs, right, right. And then at some point, well, he was in charge of the egroup. He created the egroup, the Yahoo group. And by the time that he formed this group, he already had five to ten people who were in the camp with him. And so he made us, he offered us become members of the group, so I was one of the first two or three or four people who signed up with his group, which I can show you for you to get onto the internet.

LEVINE: And what is this group? I mean, what do you do?

ULRICH: Just everyone who was in Crystal City.

LEVINE: So in other words--?

ULRICH: Sharing—

LEVINE: Your stories?

ULRICH: Sharing past experiences, right. And then, what's her name?

LEVINE: Karen Eagle.

ULRICH: Karen, she's now taken over from Artie Jacobs.

LEVINE: I see, uh-huh. So how do you feel about being part of, like, this group?

ULRICH: Oh, good! Yeah, good, good, because I'm not ashamed of what happened. You know, what happened, happened!

LEVINE: Good! [Laughs] Yeah, right. I mean, it didn't have to do with you, really.

ULRICH: No, of course not, no. But just being labeled a German, or German descent, was enough to be imprisoned, which is happening right now, anyway, so—

LEVINE: Right, right. Did you encounter any prejudice for being a German afterwards?

ULRICH: No, no, never, never.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah.

ULRICH: I think the Japanese suffered more, as far as discrimination. But they had yellow skin and slanty eyes, so—

LEVINE: Right.

ULRICH: --you know, they're outside of the European realm, so therefore looked down upon.

LEVINE: Right. How about the Italians? Did you have any contact--?

ULRICH: No.

LEVINE: --as German internees, with Italian--?

ULRICH: No, no.

LEVINE: No?

ULRICH: No, I didn't know it until Artie Jacobs brought it out.

LEVINE: Okay, so when--you were a baby here, and does your mother ever tell you any of your baby activities—?

ULRICH: No.

LEVINE: --here at Ellis Island?

ULRICH: No, but she did say that kids were playing, you know, that kids played together. But she never talked that much about Ellis Island. I didn't know that much about Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Karen mentioned to me that you learned to walk on Ellis Island?

ULRICH: Yeah, that's a guess, you know, because of the time period, the time that we were interned here. So that that's probably around the time when was learning how to walk. So I can honestly say I learned how to walk here in Ellis Island! [Laughs] Awaiting deportation!

LEVINE: And so in Crystal City, how long were you there?

ULRICH: ‘Til 1947.

LEVINE: So you were from February ’43, ‘til ’47?

ULRICH: ‘Til ’47, July of ’47.

LEVINE: And do you have memories of that?

ULRICH: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I think before we start with that, Kevin’s going to switch the tape around.

ULRICH: Okay.

LEVINE: And we’ll keep going.

END OF SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

LEVINE: Okay, we were talking about the fact that you spent from February ’43 to July ’47—

ULRICH: Right.

LEVINE: --at Crystal City, Texas, camp.

ULRICH: Right.

LEVINE: So you must have memories of that?

ULRICH: Yes, yes. Good memories, too.

LEVINE: Really?

ULRICH: Yes, it was unusual things, but it was good memories. There was nothing, you know, there was nothing horrifying. It was fine.

LEVINE: You weren’t mistreated?

ULRICH: No, never. Never.

LEVINE: And did you live in a little house with your mother and father?

ULRICH: A little bungalow, yes. We all lived in bungalows. Families lived in bungalows, and men lived in, like, barracks.

LEVINE: Huh. And that's where your sister was born?

ULRICH: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: And did your father work at the camp?

ULRICH: All men worked, but I don't know as doing what. I honestly don't know.

LEVINE: And your mother—was she taking care of you, or did she have to work, too?

ULRICH: She also worked. I remember that the Army sent in parachutes, used parachutes, and all the women used the parachutes to sew up clothes. They made clothes out of parachutes. So I know, I remember going to the building where they were doing sewings, and shipments coming in of parachutes, and then the women cutting them, and running them through sewing machines.

LEVINE: So you would wear things made out of parachute cloth?

ULRICH: Yeah! [Laughs]

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And did you—you went to school there?

ULRICH: Yes. I did kindergarten and first grade in the camp.

LEVINE: Yeah. And were you mixed with Italian?

ULRICH: No, it was all German.

LEVINE: All German?

ULRICH: And everybody—

LEVINE: No Japanese, either?

ULRICH: No. there was a German school, and then there was the Japanese school. And I don't know anything about Italians. Now, Jacobs says that there were Italians, but I don't know anything about it—no experience there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So, did you play with Japanese children?

ULRICH: No.

LEVINE: You had nothing to do with each other?

ULRICH: There was a definite segregation. Now, the teenagers, I learned that teenagers played against—as teenagers, the Germans played against the Japanese.

LEVINE: Teams? Uh-huh.

ULRICH: Different sports, between the two schools. But I'd never been in contact with the Japanese.

LEVINE: Yeah. Now, can you say anything about your mother? I mean, you were a child, and you probably had a good time?

ULRICH: Yeah.

LEVINE: But how about your mother and father, and their friends? Were they—what was their attitude, or their--?

ULRICH: Very good. I mean, it was—I, as a child, you know, I saw nothing, really, but there was no—there's no bad memories. I'm not saying that they're all good memories, I'm just saying there was a little confusion there, now and then, you know. But I don't recall any, you know, bad experience. And people were always good to me, adults, you know.

LEVINE: Right. I mean, I was wondering, like, whether the adults were really railing against being there, at the time?

ULRICH: No, no, I don't think so. I think everybody accepted the facts, and just rode it out.

LEVINE: Mm-hm. And would you say that the decision not to, the stand that the women took at Ellis Island, that they felt that going to Crystal City, was--?

ULRICH: It was an accomplishment.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ULRICH: Yeah! It kept us from going to Germany.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ULRICH: So, you know, the end justifies the means.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. So, your father never spoke about it?

ULRICH: No, never.

LEVINE: No.

ULRICH: Never. And my mother never spoke about it, either. You know, it was, like I said, it was drummed into me never to speak about it, right? And it wasn't until maybe after I was out of the Army, when I came home from the Army, that my mother would open up and talk about it.

LEVINE: Mm.

ULRICH: And one thing that I remember is that my mother always taught me that—she used to say to me, [German] "Mitke gangen, mitke frangen, mitke hangen," gone with, caught with, hung with. So she always told me to be very, very careful of who I'm with, at all times. And that all comes from the bundt, you know, etcetera.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. Do you think your mother became more at peace with the facts of it?

ULRICH: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. She was—to her, I think, it was just past experience, and the history of the world. That's all I think she took—

LEVINE: Oh, so she took it out of the personal realm?

ULRICH: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ULRICH: Yeah. There was no—why my father became an alcoholic, I have no idea. I think he had a lot of bitter feelings, but of course, he never told me.

LEVINE: Hm, hm.

ULRICH: And you know, it's funny, because when we were released—now, we were released in 1947. The reason we were released in '47—the war was over in '45. So now, as of 1945, Germans become good people, [laughs] right? But we were still interned 'til 1947.

LEVINE: [Laughs] Yeah.

ULRICH: And from what I pieced together is that the INS or the FBI came into the camp to round up families to be shipped to Germany. Artie Jacobs' family was shipped to Germany. My mother refused to go. My mother refused to take me or my sister. Now my sister's here, right? And there again, she took a strong stand that she'll go to Germany, but she's not taking her kids, right? Artie Jacobs and a lot of other people were shipped back to Germany. They were sent from Crystal City to Galveston sea town, sea ports, put on a ship that they called the Good Ship Lollipop—because there was a lot of kids on that ship, right? And then, when they got to Germany, they were imprisoned. So they spent the rest of the war in prison.

LEVINE: What year was this?

ULRICH: '45, '44. It was just before the troops got into Germany.

LEVINE: Was this a trade arrangement?

ULRICH: It was a trade arrangement.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ULRICH: So in retaliation, the Federal government kept us there until 1947. and there was a group of us, there was a group of families—

LEVINE: Who all said no?

ULRICH: Who all said no to the kids, about the kids going, you know, with them.

LEVINE: And because they wouldn't allow the kids, again, they kept the parents?

ULRICH: Again, because we were natural born American citizens.

LEVINE: Right.

ULRICH: My mother and father were not citizens. They could be deported, right? Jacobs' family decided to go, right? So there would be no retaliation against them. And they ended up going back to Germany, and Artie ended up in prison, in his own cell! A child! He was in his early teens by then, and he was in prison, in Germany, his so-called homeland.

LEVINE: Was the arrangement that people could come back after the war?

ULRICH: That I don't know. That you'd have to Artie.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah.

ULRICH: I met two women, sisters, when we had our reunion?

LEVINE: Yeah.

ULRICH: I have pictures of them when they were children, right? So, they were shipped back to Germany. Their father and mother were thrown right into prison, but they were, like, three, four, five years old, and they were put in with their grandmothers, or grandmother.

LEVINE: In her home, in Germany?

ULRICH: In her home. So when they arrived in Germany, the mother and father were immediately thrown into prison, and the two girls ended up at one of the grandmothers' house. So the parents were never free.

LEVINE: So all of the parents who took the stand that yours did, they got to stay?

ULRICH: Yes.

LEVINE: With their children?

ULRICH: Right.

LEVINE: Because I guess the government didn't know what to do with the children, right? [Laughs] The mother—

ULRICH: Well, the mothers said, 'til they return, or the kids turn eighteen, whichever comes first. That was the demand. And the irony is that we were—because we would not take part in shipping back to Germany, we were held 'til 1947, right? Then, when we were release in 1947, we were sent to Houston, Texas, and the Federal government got my father a job at Rice Hotel, in the downtown section of Houston. So the government put him to work—he had a job—and helped him find a place to live. We lived on a farm way outside of Houston, and he went to work in Rice Hotel.

LEVINE: And that was because they had retaliated by the two years--?

ULRICH: I have no idea why, but the Federal government did it. You know, they held us, and then got him a job, and a place to live.

LEVINE: And how long did you then stay in Texas?

ULRICH: For, I think, one year. Well, I did my second grade, from September to June, was definitely in—

LEVINE: Texas.

ULRICH: --Houston, Texas. We lived on a farm, and then we moved down into the suburbs of Houston. And then in the spring of whatever year, when I was in the second grade—

LEVINE: ’48, maybe? ’47, ’48?

ULRICH: ’48, let’s say? Right. Then my father, on his own, went back to New York to get a job, and then sent for me and my sister, and my mother. And we ended up back in New York.

LEVINE: In Yorkville?

ULRICH: No. The first place we moved to was Forest Hills. And what job he had, I don’t know. But then he got a job as a superintendent of a building in Jamaica, Queens, so we moved from Forest Hills to Jamaica. Then—

LEVINE: Were these German communities that you moved to?

ULRICH: No, no. Forest Hills was not.

LEVINE: And Jamaica was not.

ULRICH: Jamaica was not. So we lived in that building for a good number of years. Then we moved into Manhattan because he became a manager of a building in Tudor City, Forty-Second Street and First Avenue.

LEVINE: Yeah, [laughs] I used to live there, uh-huh.

ULRICH: Okay.

LEVINE: Yeah, so did your mother and father continue their association with, like, a German club, after that?

ULRICH: No, no, no! We never, ever belonged to anything else after that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ULRICH: My parents put me into Lutheran parochial school.

LEVINE: Were you Lutherans?

ULRICH: Yes. And then when, no matter where we lived, I always went to the same Lutheran school in Queens, Woodhaven Boulevard, Rego Park. So from the third grade ‘til I graduated from grammar school, I was always going to

the same school, with bus service, or I'd have to take the subway, whichever.

LEVINE: Did you remain a Lutheran? I mean, a practicing one?

ULRICH: Until—my wife is Catholic, and I stopped participating in the Lutheran Church a long, long time ago, before I went into the Army.

LEVINE: What about the Army? When did you go in the Army?

ULRICH: In '59, at eighteen. I turned eighteen in September 26th, and I joined the Army October 1st.

LEVINE: How did you feel about joining the American military?

ULRICH: Good! I beat the draft, by enlisting! [Laughs]

LEVINE: [Laughs] And did you go overseas?

ULRICH: Yes, they sent me to Italy.

LEVINE: Oh!

ULRICH: In defiance, they—when they gave me my orders, there were two old-timers, sergeants or whatever, handing out the orders. And so, when, with my name, Werner Ulrich, and these guys having been through World War Two, I'm assuming, right? They gave me my orders to Italy, and asked me if I wanted to challenge it. I says, "No, why should I challenge it? I don't care!" [Laughs] I'm doing my time, you know! But the draft at the time was twenty-two. At twenty-two you get drafted, uprooted, so I figured the heck with it, I'll go in now, and get mine over with.

LEVINE: And what kind of an experience, looking back on it, was your military experience?

ULRICH: Oh, good! It was all good, you know. It made a man out of me.

LEVINE: Yeah?

ULRICH: Oh, yeah. I didn't—you know, I learned not to defy the system anymore! [Laughs]

LEVINE: [Laughs] Is that a man? And how about the whole thing about the internment? I mean, thinking about it now, now that you've got it out in the world, and you--?

ULRICH: Yeah, yeah. Well, I wished I had learned more about it, you know. I mean, a guy like Artie Jacobs, you know, helped me learn from it, from his experience.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ULRICH: And so then I was able to—whatever he brought out, I was able to connect with what we had done, you know. So, I wish I had known more, and listened to my mother more.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, having been to, like, reunions, and now you're in association with other people who were interned--?

ULRICH: Yeah.

LEVINE: --can you say anything about, like, sort of overall, the effect?

ULRICH: Oh, it was very good, very good. The people who I've met, we were children together, not remembering any of each other. Meeting them today, and some are open about it, and some are clammed up about it, too, so they were all—we were all raised to keep our mouth shut, right? So, like I said, I met two women who were sisters; one lives in California, the other one lives in Arizona, right? We don't remember each other, but we were there at the same time. But they were, the two girls are the ones that went back to Germany.

LEVINE: Oh, you went back?

ULRICH: They went back. They were shipped back, by the government.

LEVINE: Oh, they were shipped back, yeah.

ULRICH: That was from that.

LEVINE: And as a group, do these children who were also with you at the time—do they want to go back and visit Germany? How do they feel about Germany at this time?

ULRICH: Well they, like I—well, maybe now they would go; I don't know, you know. Everybody enjoyed visiting Crystal City, you know. Everybody—we all laughed about it, you know. There was one fellow I met through the internet, and the joke was: here are two men who met one another over the internet! [Laughs] But, you know, that became a big family joke, with his family and ours, you know, that we had met through the internet.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ULRICH: He lives in Florida, south of Miami. And we, he and I—it's ironic that he and I, I think he was there 'til 1947. He didn't go back to Germany; he wasn't shipped back. He was also Lutheran, and I went to, when I was of high school age, after I graduated grammar school, I went to Concordia Lutheran High School, Prep School, in Westchester, and he was a junior at the college level. So we were the same months in the same school.

LEVINE: In the same place?

ULRICH: The same years in the same school, not knowing one another, and yet we were children together.

LEVINE: Wow.

ULRICH: That was the irony, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. Do you think these reunions are healing, in some way?

ULRICH: Oh yeah, definitely! I mean, it's happy. You know, it's not something dismal, some bad experiences that we have to overcome—it's nothing like that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ULRICH: It's a laughter, and everybody is having fun. At least that's the impression that I have gotten.

LEVINE: Even people—well I guess your father's generation are pretty much gone.

ULRICH: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: But I would think that that wouldn't be the case with them, that they would—that they were more hurt by it.

ULRICH: The parents were definitely hurt.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ULRICH: Definitely. There is a woman who lives in New Jersey—there again, I'd have to look at the list of names to remember—very nice lady, good bit, a few years, older than me. She was like a student nurse in the hospital at the camp, and took part when my sister was born. She distinctly remembers when my sister was born, because she was part of the birth itself.

LEVINE: Was she a German internee?

ULRICH: Yeah, yeah, her parents. But she was—I don't know how old she is, but she was a teenager when my sister was born.

LEVINE: Wow. How about your sister? Does she have any effects, ramifications, of having been in Crystal City?

ULRICH: No, no, because she was born there, you know. She was born in—I think she was born in '45, so she has no memory whatsoever.

LEVINE: And it didn't have an effect on here, that you know of?

ULRICH: No, none whatsoever.

LEVINE: Yeah.

ULRICH: But then again, she never talked about it. Her and I never even talked about it!

LEVINE: Wow! Do you now?

ULRICH: That's—no. No. She lives in California now, so she's got her own life, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

ULRICH: But you know, she's kept her distance from the whole thing. Because to her, she's an outsider. You know what I'm saying? She has no memory of it, so she sets herself outside of what happened. And she does not want to discuss it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah. Okay, well is there anything else you can think of, relevant to the whole experience?

ULRICH: It's—we lived in a bungalow, the backyard facing the fence, the barbwire fence, soldiers walking by periodically with their rifle, right? And I would go up to the fence, try to talk to them, but they wouldn't talk to me, because they didn't understand. See, at the time—

LEVINE: You were speaking German?

ULRICH: Yeah, I was speaking German, and they didn't understand, so there was no communication. The funny part is that I never understood what those houses were above the barbwire fence, the huts. And those were machine gun nests! Can you imagine--machine gun nests! [Laughs] In a camp full of children, mothers and fathers!

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. So did your mother and father speak German to you?

ULRICH: Always.

LEVINE: Always?

ULRICH: Yes. That was another thing with them, was that I had to speak German at home. And you know, now I had to learn English, right. And then, but I was not allowed to speak English at home; I had to speak German at home to keep the tradition, right? And it was very, very difficult, right? Until my sister went to school. When she finally went to grammar school, the kids—my mother and father gave in, and we were allowed to speak English at home. So by now, I forgot German all together.

LEVINE: Were there things that they—what do I want to say? Old world, German, attitudes, or were there any aspects of being German that they instilled in you, that they later let up on, when your sister came along?

ULRICH: No.

LEVINE: In other words, as time went by?

ULRICH: Yeah, no, I don't remember anything like that.

LEVINE: Did they keep any other—besides the language, did they keep other German, like, cooking, or any other aspects of German life?

ULRICH: Oh, yeah. My mother always cooked. My mother cooked a lot of German foods, you know. But then she also made spaghetti [laughs], you know, so it wasn't—and we were not involved in any German group after, which is understandable. I remember going to some German restaurants as a child, going to the—when we lived in Manhattan, we would go up to Yorkville. When we lived on Forty-Second Street and Second Avenue, we would go up to Eighty-Sixth Street, to a movie, for dinner. I used to go up on a Saturday morning to Fifty-Third Street and Third Avenue, I think, to go to the movies there, the RKO whatever. But we did go to German restaurants while living in Manhattan. If we were not living in Manhattan, then we were not going to Yorkville.

LEVINE: So in other words, once you got out of Crystal City, you really didn't—you were not in German communities after that?

ULRICH: Right, right, never.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

ULRICH: Never.

LEVINE: Do you think that was by design?

ULRICH: I think that that was their way of, you know, coping.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh, yeah, yeah.

ULRICH: Not that they were ashamed of being German. It's just that they didn't bother with it anymore.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah. Okay, well, I thank you very much—

ULRICH: You're welcome.

LEVINE: --for your interview. And we'll have this—I'm going to show you where it will end up, in our listening room. And I've been speaking with Werner Ulrich, who was interned here at Ellis Island. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm signing off.

END OF INTERVIEW