EI-1438
PAUL HUSGEN
BIRTHDATE: MAY 1, 1939
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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.
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TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: EVAN TAPARATA

GERMANY, 1949
AGE: 10

SHIP:
PORT: HAMBURG
RESIDENCES:
* INDONESIA: BATAVIA (NOW JAKARTA)
* INDIA:
* GERMANY: PRUTTING
* THE US: BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS AND TAMPA, FLORIDA

LEVINE: Okay, today is November 21st, the year 2006. I'm here in Tampa, Florida, yeah, Tampa, Florida, and I'm with Paul Husgen, who came here at ten years old in October 1949 from Germany. He came here through Ellis Island with his mother and father at that time. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. Okay, if you'd say for the tape your birth date and where you were born?

HUSGEN: May 1st, 1939, I was born in Indonesia at the time called, a town called Batavia, now known as Jakarta.

LEVINE: Could you spell those, please?

HUSGEN: Batavia, B-A-T-I-V-I-A [sic], Jakarta, I'm guessing, J-A-K-A-R-T-A.

LEVINE: Okay. And how long did you live there?

HUSGEN: In Indonesia, I lived there for the first five years of my life. My parents happened to be living there and the Japanese came and put us into a camp at that point.

LEVINE: Now your parents were German?

HUSGEN: My father was German and my mother is Dutch. She's still living and she's ninety-eight years old.

LEVINE: Ok, and why were you in Indonesia? Why was the family there?

HUSGEN: The war clouds were brewing in Europe in the early to mid Thirties and my father independently moved to Indonesia to start a business and my mother, on her own, left Holland and went to Indonesia to see the world. And they met there and got married and in 1939, as I say, I was born and within a year the Japanese came and put my mother and I in a camp. My father was taken by the British because of his nationality and transported to Northern India at a little town called Dehra Dun -- and don't ask me to spell it -- where he was put into a camp by the British. They had two camps, actually. One, where, was actually for the non-Nazi and the other one was for the Nazi. And fortunately, my father was not of that persuasion, so he had a very good life, relatively, to many other people.

And there was a book written and a movie made not too many years ago about the Bali Llama -- Dalai Lama – in Tibet, and about a German who had gone there and befriended the Dalai Lama. Well that German escaped the Nazi prison camp and went to Tibet. And roundabout, my father did know him and so forth, so that's a whole other, little situation. But they, as I say, he was interned up there and after the war, he stayed in India and then my mother and I joined him. Through the Red Cross, we were able to touch base and get reunited.

LEVINE: Well, your father was not treated badly?

HUSGEN: No, no. He was interned by the British and, no, being a non-Nazi, just a national and natural German, national German, they had the run of the land. They could go out they could get a very comfortable life, relatively speaking.

LEVINE: So he could actually leave the camp?

HUSGEN: He could leave the camp and he could visit the mount -- the villages -- and so forth, I mean, they had very little confinement. And of course the Nazi camp, they were under, under confinement and they were not allowed to leave. My uncle was also associated and he went through the whole steps with him. My father did washing and my uncle did the laund -- the ironing -- so they had a little business going within the camp (subtle laughter).

LEVINE: And they were brothers?

HUSGEN: They were brothers, yes. Yeah.

LEVINE: And how about your mother? You were too young probably -- well, you were up 'til five -- but what was that camp like?

HUSGEN: Well, what they did was to put walls around the population. It is not just Stalag type of encampment, it wasn't anything like that. They confined us with walls to the residential areas. And they crammed as many people into the individual houses, of course, as they could. They -- the Japanese main problem with us was the lack of food. And the main problem in the camp was the lack of food and the disease -- berry berry, and diseases such as that. They really basically left the population alone unless they suspected of you doing something and I remember when you were near the police station you'd hear screaming

because they'd be pulling nails out, or, you know, torture. But they suspected these people of having some type of espionage against the Japanese or what have you.

So it wasn't a comfortable life, but it certainly was not one that you're constantly endangered by, you know, by the Japanese. The toughest time came after Nagasaki and Hiroshima were bombed, where the Japanese overnight, unbeknownst to anyone, dropped their weapons and they were gone, they just disappeared. And the people that picked up the weapons were the native Japanese. And this is where they gained their independence from the Dutch, where Sakano became president and took over the nation. They were very, very cruel towards the whites, very cruel. And it was a very tough time and it took the British about a week to come in. And they paratrooped in with supplies and such where they took us to the harbor and took us then to safety. So that was a pretty harrowing time, that few week interval after the bombing of Nagasaki.

LEVINE: And you can remember this?

HUSGEN: I remember a great deal of that, yeah. Yeah. Interesting little anecdote -- when I came to Boston, I went into the insurance business. We were being transported by a caravan of trucks from the village where we were to the harbor and I remember the truck in front of us was blown up, somebody had thrown a bomb into it or whatever and fortunately we were able to get around it and get to safety. Well, I met some people who were in the truck in front of the one that was blown up, just by happenstance, you know,

LEVINE: You met them later?

HUSGEN: Later in Boston.

LEVINE: Wow.

HUSGEN: You see, we were talking about experiences in the camp and so forth, and they said, "Yes, we remember that truck because we were the one in front of it." So,

LEVINE: Boy, the probability of that is,

HUSGEN: Zero (both laugh). Yeah. But the British, that was the first time I had chocolate. You know, they came down with their trucks and they flew chocolate out at the kids and everything like that and it was a tremendous, tremendous time of being able, finally, to eat something. Then we had to be careful not to eat too much because of the transition --

LEVINE: Right.

HUSGEN: -- from zero to abundance. So those about five years of Japanee,

LEVINE: Well it doesn't sound as though the Japanese, you know the German people who were interned in this country during World War II, it was kind of "You're guilty unless you can prove otherwise," but it

doesn't sound as though the Japanese treated the people that they interned the same way.

HUSGEN: No. Well, you see, they interned women and children.

LEVINE: Oh.

HUSGEN: Ok. Where we were, there were no men. Women and children. And, so, they really had no reason to -- I've read the books and I've, The Rape of Nanking and things such as this, and they were terribly, terribly brutal --- we were not in one of those circumstances. I'm not saying the Japanese were great prison guards, no they weren't, and they were terrible people throughout the whole Asian theatre. But we just happened to be in a situation where it wasn't as bad as the movies depicted it to be.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And so you, your mother must've been pregnant when your father went to ---

HUSGEN: No, no. I was born a --

LEVINE: Oh, you were born.

HUSGEN: -- year before the, before we were interned. Yeah they, they had a wonderful home and then had a wonderful lifestyle. And it was gone overnight. So when it started I was one and when I left I was six.

LEVINE: I see.

HUSGEN: And then via the Red Cross, we were united with my father in India. I remember flying a DC-3, that was a workhorse airplane to India and then taking trains and so forth to get to the very northern part of India where we lived for two years. He worked for a British lady who ran a plantation that grew sweet peas and rabbits as far as the eye could see there were little white or big white rabbits, and beautiful flowers, sweet pea flowers. So that was a good -- that was an interesting life for, I think, for a seven year old, a six year old, all the wild animals that you would imagine from elephants to tigers to cobras that were within our house and mongoose and, there was a very exciting time, it was a wonderful time.

LEVINE: Well now, your mother and father tended the farm? Is that what,

HUSGEN: No. This was a huge plantation. My father worked for them as my, as did my uncle in, in, in -- yeah, I guess tending the farm, taking care of the flowers and taking care of the rabbits. Yeah. I mean this was a huge operation. There was not a little momma and poppa operation, ya know? Yeah, so they both worked for this lady until they were able to make arrangements to go back to Europe.

LEVINE: So what -- but that wasn't -- your father was in some other kind of business, too, right?

HUSGEN: Yeah, he was into jewelry. He was an importer.

LEVINE: I see. See this [inaudible].

HUSGEN: So he had no knowledge whatsoever about agriculture.

LEVINE: Right

HUSGEN: No

LEVINE: Well

HUSGEN: No. And I'm sure he wasn't the brains in the operation of that,

LEVINE: Was your uncle the brains?

HUSGEN: No, my uncle, he wasn't the brains either. There were people, I'm sure, that they had to account to and follow, yeah.

LEVINE: Interesting. So, why don't you say your father's name?

HUSGEN: Wilfred.

LEVINE: Wilfred?

HUSGEN: Right.

LEVINE: And your mother's name and maiden name?

HUSGEN: Cornelia is her first name. Her maiden name was DeClerk. D-E-C-L-E-R-K.

LEVINE: And, let's see, so your first memories then are in the camp. Is there anything about that, that when you think about being in the camp, you know, is something that sticks in your mind about life there? Or,

HUSGEN: Well, life, you'd have to imagine a neighborhood with homes and many people confined to those homes and maintaining a lifestyle under those circumstances. I remember the soldiers would be in the streets looking for pigeons and shooting pigeons because that was part of the diet. I remember one Indonesian fellow that they had arrested because he had stolen a bike and they tied him up in front of the police station and whipped him until he died, you know? I remember seeing that. As I say, I remember at times listening to the screams from the police station. There was a barracks, a military barracks within a hundred or so yards of where our home happened to been. And every night at midnight, they would attack. The American P-38 planes would attack the barracks. And you could set your watch on it at midnight. They'd come overhead, attack that and, of course, go to other targets.

LEVINE: Who was attacking it?

HUSGEN: The American pilots. They have a P-38, which is an interesting airplane, which I studied about later on. It was a twin fuselage, a very versatile type of plane and they came in so low in the spotlights, you could see the eyes of the pilots. I mean it was just that dramatic, you know, a thing. So at midnight, we'd go down into that little hole in the ground, covered by some bamboo, they'd come do their strafing run and take off again, you know?

LEVINE: And they just hit the barracks, they didn't hit anything else?

HUSGEN: Yeah. They, they, no, they weren't after anything else. I mean they just went where they could find a concentration of troops.

LEVINE: But did they kill troops each time?

HUSGEN: Oh yeah. Of course. Oh sure. Oh yeah.

LEVINE: Wow.

HUSGEN: But,

LEVINE: And were you hungry most of the time?

HUSGEN: Constantly, yeah. That was, that was really the biggest problem. You see my bones? I mean, I'm not very big boned, and there was a lack of calcium, which kept them from growing. Food was the problem. I mean, that's, that's what killed most of the people that, that were in these camps, was the lack of diet. We had a refrigerator in our house. And I opened the refrigerator one day and there was this big eyeball sitting there in the plate. I remember that vividly, 'til like it happened yesterday. Big eyeball, a bull's eye or whatever it may have been. That was somebody's dinner that night. No, it was just, food was the problem.

LEVINE: And were you aware of people dying of malnutrition?

HUSGEN: Oh yeah, you knew people were dying, yeah. Yeah. Oh yeah.

LEVINE: Just off the top of your head, like how many were confined?

HUSGEN: They said in our camp, and we moved to a couple different camps, you're talking probably a thousand people in an area. And I don't want you to get the misunderstanding that this is where barracks of of, -- rows and rows of bunks and this type of thing that, you know, that you would think of when you think of Auschwitz or things like that. It wasn't at all like that at all.

LEVINE: So there'd be a house and in that house there might be -- there were just women and children -- but there might be what? Ten, twenty?

HUSGEN: Yeah. Depending on the house, yeah. As I say, we were the fortunate ones, you know? A lot of people didn't have it as good as that.

LEVINE: Did people go outside the residences to work?

HUSGEN: No. No, there was no work. There was no place to go. There was -- no. You get up in the morning and here's another day and you went to bed at night, you know?

LEVINE: So what did people do, I mean, to pass the time and all?

HUSGEN: No, they, there was a lot of communications they, I remember they sat and played cards and things such as this. They just inter-reacted with each other.

LEVINE: And who were they? Who made up this,

HUSGEN: They were all mostly Dutch. It was a Dutch colony. Indonesia was a Dutch colony and they were mostly Dutch. Some British, some British. And there were many camps like that throughout Indonesia. Into the different islands they had done the same thing.

LEVINE: So what, were you speaking Dutch then?

HUSGEN: I spoke, at that time I spoke Dutch. See, I never really knew my father until I met him in India. At one years old, you don't know your father. So my language was Dutch and that's what they spoke in the camps. And that's what my mother spoke. And then when I met up with my father, he spoke Dutch, but they started to speak both Dutch and German and I learned both Dutch and German.

LEVINE: Do you keep -- did you keep it up?

HUSGEN: Yeah, I've kept it up. Yeah. So then we went to, from India, we went to, back to my father's home, which was in the southern part of Germany.

LEVINE: What, where is that?

HUSGEN: That was south of Munich.

LEVINE: You said the name of the town before.

HUSGEN: Yeah, the little town is called Prutting, I think it's P-R-U-T-T-I-N-G, where they had some property. And that was very much left untouched during the war. It was farm.

LEVINE: Oh, it wasn't bombed or anything?

HUSGEN: It wasn't bombed. It was out in the rural areas and these areas escaped much of the damage. They had a very large home that used to be their home and then they had the lands that they rented out to the farmers and a lake that the fisherman could fish. There were several

farmhouses where they raised cattle and things such as that. And that pretty much survived all of the war, so we came back into that. The house was filled with refugees because, again, there were a lot of homeless, a lot of people that, you know, were trying to reestablish themselves after the war.

LEVINE: So these were German people that were,

HUSGEN: They were, yeah. Yes. They were German people. There were some, could've been Latvian or that, you know the Eastern, further Eastern because they were all displaced. I mean there was a huge problem with, with the numbers of people who were homeless. So that, but that still was a good time for me because, lots of food, and as an eight year old, you're running around the fields and chasing chickens and doing these type of things and you're in a very friendly atmosphere.

LEVINE: Did your father and, keep up with his agricultural direction?

HUSGEN: No, no, no. He never had. He was, I would never categorize him as an agriculturalist. No. What he did, he ended up, both he and his brother, ended up working for the American government in Munich -- he commuted, he took the train in on a Monday and came home on a Friday -- in the office of General Marshall, who of course was very influential in the Marshall Plan and did a tremendous amount of good.

LEVINE: So what did your father do for the,

HUSGEN: I think a lot of translation, a lot of, you know, a lot of -- he certainly wasn't in the upper echelon decision making areas, but he, he ended up being in a great spot. And because of that, we got very low numbers -- we were number two, three and four -- as far as quota numbers to come into the states.

LEVINE: Oh wow. Uh huh.

HUSGEN: So you couldn't do much better than that. My uncle decided to stay in Germany. They still had the mother and father alive. My grandfather was an architect and he dev-- built a lot of homes and business in Berlin, which, of course, were all taken over by the Russians and what was left. He had buildings in Munich and things, and everything, everything but that country home was destroyed. But they all survived it, I mean, that's the bottom line.

LEVINE: So what happened, just out of curiosity? What, in other words, if your grandfather's property was, was bombed and, was there any compensation for that?

HUSGEN: No.

LEVINE: There was nothing.

HUSGEN: No. Nothing. I think if, if there was some compensation, if he had a business of if you were Jewish or something, I think there was some compensation in that line if you suffered some damages and I think

some people did collect some damages. But for the German citizen, that non-Jewish, German citizen there was never any reparation for that.

LEVINE: And what about the refugees who were in the farmhouse?

HUSGEN: They, you know, people get on with their lives, people find a permanent situation. It took, I guess, a year or two after we got there, and people get on with their lives and, you know, nobody wants to be a refugee.

LEVINE: So they just found places to go,

HUSGEN: Yes, yes, they found a place where they would be happy.

LEVINE: And how about you as a young child? Did, were you aware of the condition of most of the country, I mean when you got back to Germany?

HUSGEN: That was an interesting trip, yeah. We landed in Hamburg. I believe it was January. And it was the most bitterest of coldest days in history, they later told us. The clothes we had were tropical clothes -- that's it. People were eating with, they had mark and stamps.

LEVINE: Ration stamps?

HUSGEN: Ration stamps. And we of course didn't have any. So we, able to found a Salvation Army had a soup kitchen, literally had a soup kitchen. And I'll tell you, putting your hand around that hot soup was just fantastic. And yes, we saw Hamburg, of course, there was not much left of that. And when we took the train, there was no glass in the trains. I mean, it had all been, you know, destroyed. And we took the trains and we went to the cities and we saw the devastation. Yeah. Yeah. It was, you never thought that anybody could ever rebuild from what you saw there. And it was interesting, back, I think the first time I went back to Europe was 1960 or '61 and I went first to London and I could still see, in 1960, a lot of bomb damage. A lot of damage. When I crossed over to the other side, very little -- extremely little damage, still. That, you know, how quickly everything had been rebuilt.

LEVINE: When you crossed over to?

HUSGEN: The Channel, went to Holland and into Germany and I mean the reparations were extremely fast, yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember as a child your mother and father's attitude about getting first back to Germany and then wanting to get out?

HUSGEN: My father -- well they wanted to get home. I mean, this was not their natural habitat, living in India. I would have been happy staying there, but they needed to get home and they had a home to go to. My father always wanted to come to the states. He thought the opportunity was here and, and, he could make a better life for himself. My uncle didn't feel quite that way and, so consequently, he made a wonderful life for himself over there. This was my father's dream to

come here and my mother went along with it. I'm sure she wanted to be here, too. But,

LEVINE: But do you think he would have stayed in Indonesia? You know, if

HUSGEN: If there had been no war?

LEVINE: Yeah.

HUSGEN: Oh. I'm -- they had a wonderful life, I can't see why not.

LEVINE: So they might have stayed there?

HUSGEN: Oh, certainly. But that wasn't to be. I mean the colonies were disappearing.

LEVINE: Right.

HUSGEN: You know, whether it was the Japanese that caused it or the natural progression of things, the colonies were disappearing and those lifestyles were disappearing.

LEVINE: Do you remember -- well how long did you stay on the farm?

HUSGEN: Two years. In India? A couple of years.

LEVINE: No. In Germany.

HUSGEN: Oh, two years.

LEVINE: And that's when the numbers were, when the quota was,

HUSGEN: That's when he went to work for the American government, and that's where the quotas were assigned. So,

LEVINE: So, do you remember when your mother and father realized they were actually going to leave for the United States?

HUSGEN: I cant, I can't tell you that I do because I don't. I don't remember what their, the moment of truth, I guess. No. I know it was kind of a hectic time and he, he manages through the church that he belonged to -- we had to find a sponsor -- and you don't just all of a sudden take up and, ok, land in a different country.

LEVINE: Because you didn't have relatives in this country.

HUSGEN: Nothing. So we had to have a sponsor and the church arranged that.

LEVINE: Which church arranged it? Do you know?

HUSGEN: They were, he was a member of the Christian Science Church in Boston --oh, in Germany I guess. The big church was located in Boston,

and through that, had a lot of contacts. So they made the arrangements and we stayed with a family for a while until he was able to get on his feet and get a, get his own apartment and, you know, get going.

LEVINE: Well do you remember anything about the preparations? I mean, did they, did they take a lot with them?

HUSGEN: We had nothing to take with us. I mean, we had a suitcase when we landed in Germany and maybe we had two suitcases when, by the time we left Germany. I mean there was, there was just nothing. Nothing. And --no, there wasn't much. (Laughs)

LEVINE: How about the Christian Science Church? Did you have -- did you belong to it? Did you -- was that something that was part of your life?

HUSGEN: It, well, because my father was very active, very strongly believed in it, it made, made it part of my mother's life and made it part of my life. I can't go along with the philosophy of the church. I went to Sunday school when we lived in Boston and something I, quite frankly, didn't like doing. But as I got older, I was put into a Sunday school class with the publisher of The Monitor. And -- very wonderful, Aaron C. Cannon, wonderful person -- and what he did, he made world news kind of tie into religion. And it became a very, very interesting class. So we got a lot of wonderful information because of it. But again, he was an active member and always was. My mother not so, she was kind of an appendage to that and -- as I was. And when they left Boston that was basically the end of the relationship with the church. He never went to any of the churches here.

LEVINE: I see. Well, do you know anything about the Christian scientists bringing people over? Was that, like, a mission of theirs?

HUSGEN: No, it wasn't a mission of theirs. It was an individual -- I don't know how many they did -- we never met anybody else --

LEVINE: Oh.

HUSGEN: -- that they had brought across. They may well have but I don't ever recall having met anybody else that was a part of that. No, there was not to my knowledge any mission.

LEVINE: Yeah. Now where did you leave from? What port?

HUSGEN: Hamburg.

LEVINE: Hamburg. And the ship you thought maybe it was a troops, a troop ship.

HUSGEN: It was an old troop ship.

LEVINE: Called the Tabinta?

HUSGEN: Well the Tabinta, we were on the Tabinta. Now I can't recall if it was the Tabinta that took us from India to Europe or it was that ship that brought us to, to the U.S.

END OF SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

HUSGEN: One of those extremely rare occurrences were a hurricane hit the British Isles. We had two this year, I think, or three this year that went up into the Northern Atlantic, bypassing Florida, which was wonderful. And when we, I don't know, just very shortly out, this damn storm hit. And I remember looking thirty feet up in the air and there was the water and then thirty feet the other side, there was the water. And they did everything they could to get away from the shoreline. This was right around, maybe County Cork or somewhere there in Ireland. So that was kind of a scary beginning for an ocean journey.

LEVINE: Did people actually drown on the ship?

HUSGEN: No, no, nobody drowned. I mean, I don't think there was a well feeling person on the ship (laughs). But no, no, no, nom I mean you were just a little, like a cork in this huge, huge sea. It wasn't very pleasant. But I remember -- the next thing I remember was when we came into the New York Harbor. And, you know, the States were described as the land of opportunity and all those things that -- the land of freedom and so forth -- and this was something that, when you haven't had a heck of a lot of it, you really yearn for it. And you can use all the clichés you want, but they're true. And the symbol of that, to us at the time, was the Statue. And I remember seeing it, I can still see it as we, the ship went, went by and around it. And, you know, that damn thing probably just was tilting a little bit to the left. But that was my first recollection of having come into the States and that was cause I remember the feeling. It was a wonderful feeling.

LEVINE: Was it, was it morning when you came?

HUSGEN: Yeah, it was morning. It was probably eleven or twelve, somewhere in that time. So we had a good view of it.

LEVINE: And it was what? It was October?

HUSGEN: October.

LEVINE: Yeah, October. So, and it was a clear -- clear day?

HUSGEN: Clear day. It was a beautiful day.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HUSGEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Wow, and how about New York City? Do you remember seeing that?

HUSGEN: No. We didn't spend any time after we, we were cleared. We got into, I remember getting onto a train and heading directly into Boston.

LEVINE: Okay. Well when you got -- do you remember anything about Ellis Island?

HUSGEN: The only -- the one thing, there was a big fear because I had contracted something and I had a fever. And the, you know, medically people had to be checked out and were checked out. And there was a delay and it wasn't, you know, a smooth, let's get through the lines type of things. There was a little lane, they had to check it out and check it out. And I was cleared, obviously. I just remember a lot of waiting in line. I mean, it was just,

LEVINE: Do you remember -- were you, like -- did you go through a lot of medical inspections --

HUSGEN: Yeah.

LEVINE: -- because of the fever?

HUSGEN: I know that there were doctors inspecting me. And then I think that it was quickly determined as I was a non-infectious -- not a major issue. A ten-year-old boy probably gets fevers quite readily. So it obviously wasn't a problem.

LEVINE: So you didn't have to stay over?

HUSGEN: No, no. That was a big fear that they had, that they would have been delayed and had to stay over, but we didn't. No.

LEVINE: So, how about, did you get food at Ellis Island? Do you remember that?

HUSGEN: I don't recall eating, not eating, or that even being an issue.

LEVINE: Do you recall if it was very crowded?

HUSGEN: It was very crowded. Yes, it was busy.

LEVINE: Did you have a sense that it was a whole lot of different people, or were there mainly people coming from Germany at the time? Can you attest to that?

HUSGEN: It was -- I had a sense that it was mainly European people that were there. Yeah. Oh yeah.

LEVINE: Anything else? Was it clean? Dirty? I mean is there anything else about Ellis Island?

HUSGEN: I can't. I'd be making things up if I were to say that I remember that. I remember it was dark, gray. I mean the whole atmosphere was a gray atmosphere. You know, it was a typical bureaucratic, gray, non-descriptive atmosphere.

LEVINE: Ok. So then you didn't spend any time in New York City?

HUSGEN: Didn't spend any time in New York City, no.

LEVINE: And do you remember any closed sections, either on the train or where you got off in Boston, of this country, as a ten-year-old boy?

HUSGEN: It felt so damn big. (Laughs) I mean, I -- Europe has a lot of skyscrapers, but after the war, none of those existed. So first skyscrapers -- and you could see the New York skyline, of course, when you came in. That was just magnificent, to see these tall buildings. And then when we got into Boston -- I guess it was South Station we got into -- and there was some, some nice buildings, certainly not to the degree that there are now. So I thought it was pretty exciting. I thought Boston looked pretty exciting.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HUSGEN: And then we were picked up and drove -- we were driven to a town called Belmont, which is one of the suburbs of Boston, where we spent, I can't tell you, several months with people while my father looked for a job and until we could get our own apartment. And we got our own apartment in Boston on the Fenway. It was a basement apartment and if you stood on a chair you could look out this little window and you could see the sidewalk and the people walking by it. But as far as Boston's concerned, it was a magnificent area. It was a couple of minutes walk from Fenway Park. And I just got into baseball and I'd walk over to Fenway Park after the seventh inning where they would let you in and you could sit and watch all the baseball players. And I'm still a Red Sox fan today. You know, Ted Williams and all of these renowned people, you could see those, and that was kind of exciting for a kid.

LEVINE: And how about your father? Did he continue in any way with the American, or with government?

HUSGEN: No, what he did -- my father was well educated. He sold himself short a lot of times and, and I don't think he ever reached for the ultimate he could have reached for.

LEVINE: Do you think that was, in part, due to the life experiences?

HUSGEN: Yeah. And this is not to belabor a point, but he and his brother -- the brother was the good guy, my father was the other guy, and the parents put one on the pedestal, and here's my father. And that relationship always existed and I think that's the fundamental problem that he had to place.

LEVINE: Was his brother older?

HUSGEN: My -- no, his brother was the younger brother. Yeah. And, I mean, this is not really of interest to anybody, but he ended up working for the Christian Science Church in the publishing house where they published all the manuals and the books and stuff like that -- certainly wasn't a high paying job, but it kept him going. And he then opened up an importing business, ultimately, whereby he would import things from Europe and sell them to the ware -- gift shops and Jordan Marshes and Filene's in those days. He became a jobber, sold hot trays and, on wholesale basis. So he developed his own little operation and that sustained him until he retired.

LEVINE: And did your mother ever work?

HUSGEN: Yeah. She had men-- very unfortunately, menial -- people took advantage. She cleaned homes for very little pay. And there's nothing wrong with cleaning homes, and I don't mean that that way, but people took advantage. You were happy to get what you got. So she did that for many years and then she ended up baking cookies and sold them to a shop in Harvard Square in Cambridge.

LEVINE: She's not Mrs. Fields? (Laughs)

HUSGEN: What's that?

LEVINE: (Laughs) I said "She's not Mrs. Fields,"

HUSGEN: What's that? Yeah, no, no, no. So she had quite a good operation going for that. So, but that's basically how she worked.

LEVINE: And, so how was learning English for you?

HUSGEN: Easy. I mean when you -- at the age of ten, it's extr-- as a child I think learning languages is very easy. And I remember I was put -- I had no education at the age of ten, and I was put into the Boston school system and I was put into first grade. So here I am, standing at four foot whatever and the rest of them were half my size. So it took me one year to get to my age level, then I was fine and I had no problem learning English at all.

LEVINE: Do you know what it was that helped you most in learning?

HUSGEN: Being forced to speak it. I mean there wasn't anybody out there that spoke German and being that my second, first or second language, German or Dutch, whichever way, there weren't too many Germans or Dutch people out there. And having spoken German wasn't extremely popular in the late forties in this country, and rightfully so. So there wasn't any help. So you learned.

LEVINE: You probably learned it more quickly than your mother and father.

HUSGEN: Yes. My father was very affluent in, in, German, in English. Yeah. He had learned that in school.

LEVINE: Oh.

HUSGEN: And my mother had learned English in school as well, but certainly not to the degree that he had. So, I mean, in New York, everybody learns English. That's at least a second language. So, you know, they were famil-- my mother certainly was familiar with it, but he was, I mean, as I say, he translated material --

LEVINE: Oh right.

HUSGEN: -- when he ended up in Germany. So he had no problem at all.

LEVINE: Do you think he, or did you, encounter any prejudice from people in this country because you were German?

HUSGEN: Yeah, yeah, a couple of reasons. My mother used to fix me my lunch and all the kids were eating this toasty white bread, awful white bread stuff (both laugh) which I still can't eat today.

LEVINE: Me neither.

HUSGEN: The little red balloons and blue balloons, gosh what's the name of that company -- but anyway. And I'd have my dark bread. I wore shorts all summer long. Nobody wore shorts in those days, nobody wore shorts, everybody wore long pants. So I stood out. And, yeah, they laughed at me, and I said "Ok. Too bad." I mean, I -- you went through a lot worse stuff than that.

LEVINE: Did it bother you or did it --

HUSGEN: No. No.

LEVINE: -- or did you, it didn't really get to you?

HUSGEN: Didn't get to me. As I say, I've gone through a lot worse stuff than that, so, no, it didn't bother me.

LEVINE: Do you think having gone through everything you did go through -- or I guess the question is "How" -- how had, did it influence your approach to things or the way you, you deal with things in life, having been through horrific,

HUSGEN: I've had some, I heard he was in counseling but that's introspective meeting sessions. It made me a survivor. And in my yearbook -- I went to Brooklyn High School -- my yearbook, a lot of people have said "To the survivor." Not that I went out there say, "Hey, guys, I'm a survivor," but I think you learn to cope and you learn to deal with situations and then that you do whatever it takes to survive it. I can operate completely alone and basically, I mean, I rejuvenate myself in a cave. You know, I don't need people around me to build me up again. I can do this on my own. So I think it taught you that you can do it. Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HUSGEN: It made you stronger, it really makes you a lot stronger.

LEVINE: I guess if you get through it, you're stronger for it.

HUSGEN: Yeah, sure. Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah. Let's see. How about your mother and father, do you think it influenced them? Well you said something about your father, maybe his experiences kind of brought him down. Although I don't think working for the Christian Science Monitor publication was a bad thing in any way.

HUSGEN: Oh no, it's not a bad thing at all. But it was just very financially non-rewarding. And it was a struggle. I mean we, they were poor. But it also didn't require a great deal of mental work. I mean, he had the capacity. He had a great brain, a great mind and, and, a very sharp man.

LEVINE: So he didn't get to use it at all?

HUSGEN: He didn't use it. He didn't get to use it. That's a shame. My mother was a pioneer. For the thirties, for a woman to pack up, jump on a steamship and go into this foreign country, that's pioneering. I mean today it happens all the time, but it didn't happen in those days. And so you've got to give her credit for that, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HUSGEN: She -- and she made a life for herself and, it worked, I mean fortunately, everything worked out.

LEVINE: Yeah. And she became entrepreneurial with the cookies.

HUSGEN: Yeah, (laughs) with the cookie thing, that, that, yeah.

LEVINE: And she's still going strong at ninety-eight. Is she well?

HUSGEN: She is, yeah, she walks with a walker and she's had some strokes, but she's -- her mind is extremely good. She's physically, for ninety-eight, in damn good shape. And she lives in an assisted living facility and she's, she's happy.

LEVINE: Yeah. Did you have any brothers or sisters?

HUSGEN: No. No. No, that -- I think the war got in the way and, of course, life was pretty much of a turmoil until we hit the States.

LEVINE: How do you think about the German side of you and the American side of you, where would you put them?

HUSGEN: I don't think of it as a German/American thing, I think of it as a Nazi, and I really have to distinguish the two, because if I didn't, then I would have a very bad feeling towards the German race and I'm a part of that. There was a terrible element that developed and, and there was a terrible storm that went across Europe and the world and I, I have to look at them as a separate, basically almost a separate race. I -- you couldn't find anybody more nationalistic as I am for the American side, and I cringe when I see some of these -- well I've done a lot and you can see some of the books -- I've done a lot of studying about the war and I cringe in some of the atrocities that were performed. And I don't look at them as my landsmann, I, you know, somewhat removed from that. I find it very difficult to believe for a nation as intelligent and as, as the things that they have created in music and in art and in all of these things and construction that they could have this element of this terrib le hatred, you know. And I don't consider myself part of that.

LEVINE: So what would you say has been very satisfying to you, just thinking about your life, that you've done, that you've accomplished that makes you feel good and proud or whatever?

HUSGEN: I've -- I think I've been very fortunate that I've got a -- I'm sixty-seven years old now and I've had a good life, I had a won-- I had a good education in Boston and was always able to basically call my own shots and my endeavor to earn a living. And we developed this beautiful home and we're comfortable with it. So we've, we've -- I married a wonderful woman about fifteen years ago and she's out today, but I'm happy with what we've done. I've got two boys that are by another marriage, who are both still in Boston, in the Boston area.

LEVINE: Why don't you say their names?

HUSGEN: My oldest son is Eric, and the younger of the two is Christopher. One works for the National Park Service.

LEVINE: Oh, really?

HUSGEN: Matter of fact, Christopher was situated on the Statue at one time --

LEVINE: No kidding.

HUSGEN: -- maybe six or seven years ago. That was one of his duty posts.

LEVINE: Really? Is he in the Park Service now?

HUSGEN: He's still in the Park Service. He's on Plum Island -- I guess it's Plum Island, in Boston. That side of Boston. Yeah. He's, he used to be in the interpretive, where they have the,

LEVINE: Rangers?

HUSGEN: Interpretive Rangers, yeah. And he's now on, in the, kind of the law enforcement side of things.

LEVINE: Is he?

HUSGEN: Yeah. So he's doing well. He's happy.

LEVINE: Good. And do you have grandchildren?

HUSGEN: Nope. No, we -- they haven't learned that system yet (both laugh). I don't know.

LEVINE: Ok, well you said on the questionnaire that, that I have here that it was well worth it, so I guess that's kind of what you're, what you're saying.

HUSGEN: It's, it was well worth it, yeah. Good God I, I don't know what I would have changed. Certainly made a lot of mistakes along the way, but it's been a great trip and I think having survived and, you know, I think of these American servicemen and the European service people that went through the Second World War. I think of them with the greatest admiration and respect and love (begins to become emotional) and I sometimes I break apart because of it. I don't think we'll ever see that again. And those who survived think it's worth it and I don't put myself on that plateau. I was just a little kid trying to wipe my nose. But having gone through some of those things that makes you better, stronger individual, I think more respectful --and if you survive it, it's worth it.

LEVINE: Well thank you very much.

HUSGEN: Oh you're welcome. I enjoyed it.

LEVINE: It was an interesting interview. And I've been talking with Paul Husgen and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm signing off.

END OF INTERVIEW
EI-1438/HUSGEN