

**EI-155**

**KLAUS G. LIEBHOLD**

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- **GERMANY: HEIDELBERG**
- **USA: YONKERS, NY**

**SIGRIST:** Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Tuesday, May 12th, 1992. I'm here at Ellis Island with Klaus Liebhold who came from Germany via Switzerland in 1941 when he was twenty-two years of age. Good afternoon, Mr. Liebhold.

LIEBHOLD: Good afternoon. It's nice to be here.

SIGRIST: Could we start by telling me your birth date.

LIEBHOLD: It's January 3, 1919.

SIGRIST: And where were you born, sir?

LIEBHOLD: In Heidelberg, Germany.

SIGRIST: And how long did you stay in Heidelberg?

LIEBHOLD: Oh, boy. About until I was fifteen or fourteen.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about growing up in Heidelberg.

LIEBHOLD: Well, in the beginning I had a wonderful childhood. I lived, I had a brother and a sister in a house where we had just about everything, everything you could hope for, all material wants. And...

SIGRIST: Can you describe that house that you grew up in?

LIEBHOLD: Yes. It was a good-sized house, about nineteen or twenty rooms. And there were servants all over the place and I never really appreciated it until it was all gone, and then of course it was too late. But it was in a suburb of Heidelberg, oh, no, the outskirts of Heidelberg, and my father ran a tobacco factory and my mother just ran a household and I had a nanny. And I loved her as much as I loved my mother.

SIGRIST: So you were very comfortable.

LIEBHOLD: I was very comfortable, yes. Of course, after a while things fell apart, both, even before Hitler my father was not really a very good businessman. Then Hitler came around, and that destroyed everything. My father was Jewish, my mother was Jewish. We really hit pretty bad times then.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

LIEBHOLD: Michael. Michael Liebhold.

SIGRIST: And you said he ran a tobacco factory. Talk a little bit more specifically...

LIEBHOLD: Well, he inherited that factory from his father. His father, his, my grandfather and my grandfather's brother started this factory. It was called M & F Liebhold, making cigars and smoke tobacco, pipe tobacco. And I remember in the main square in Heidelberg there was a, much to my embarrassment as a little boy there was a sign that said, well, I have to say it in German, otherwise it doesn't make sense. It said: "*Jeder Raucher mit Geschmack raucht nur Liebholz-Rauchtabak!*". It meant "Every Smoker With Good Taste Smokes Only Liebhold's Pipe Tobacco." I thought it was terribly embarrassing. (he laughs) I didn't like to see my name on a neon sign. I thought it was not very good.

SIGRIST: Tacky.

LIEBHOLD: Yeah, it was tacky. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Where did your father get the tobacco from?

LIEBHOLD: Oh, actually, it was imported from many different places. There was, believe it or not, some was grown in Germany. Some was grown in Turkey, Turkish tobacco, and much of it came from America. Probably the

best tobacco was considered to be Maryland tobacco. And once in a while I was allowed to go out in the factory and there were bales and bales of tobacco and we, my brother and I climbed over the bales of tobacco, and the best ones smelled just wonderful, and those were usually the Maryland tobacco. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Did your parents smoke?

LIEBHOLD: My mother never smoked. My father smoked a lot, yes.

SIGRIST: That's interesting. What was your dad like? What was his temperament like?

LIEBHOLD: Hmm. I've never seen him get really mad ever. Not ever. But on the other hand he was a hard man to get really close to also. He got mad once when we, I think we, my brother and I knocked off all the walnuts off a walnut tree that he had expected to, that he looked forward to eating the walnuts, and my brother and I had knocked every last walnut off this tree, and that upset him very much. But he withheld allowance from us for that. A serious matter.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

LIEBHOLD: Uh, ooh. It was Amelia. Well, everybody called her Mally, M-A-L-L-Y.

SIGRIST: And do you remember her maiden name?

LIEBHOLD: Marx.

SIGRIST: M-A-R-X.

LIEBHOLD: M-A-R-X. And she came from the town of Bruchsal, which is thirty kilometers away from Heidelberg.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

LIEBHOLD: Bruchsal is B-R-U-C-H-S-A-L. And the wedding of my, the marriage of my father's mother's wedding was an arranged affair. I learned that later, obviously. But I heard many stories about that. But it was arranged that they would meet, and my father was led to believe that he would meet a very eligible young lady. And it was true that my mother's father was also in the tobacco business, but he was only, he was a wholesaler who was curing tobacco. I don't, or fermenting tobacco, I believe it was. I don't know much about the tobacco business, but that's what I understand the whole story was. And that was a good, supposedly a good wedding, a good marriage.

SIGRIST: Let me ask you the same question. What was your mother's temperament like?

LIEBHOLD: She was always ready for a good laugh. She was always ready for a good joke or a good laugh and eager to have that sort of thing. Full of wild ideas and unexpected things. Really my mother's family was less conventional. My mother's mother lived with us for a while after my grandfather died. Even my grandfather was a very, my mother's father was a very unpredictable man. When he came to visit, he would play on the floor and we would rummage and roughhouse with him, even though he was a pretty old man. He was a wonderful guy. I have nothing but wonderful memories about him.

SIGRIST: What's a memory of something unconventional that your mother did, something crazy that you can remember?

LIEBHOLD: My grandmother is more likely that, well, my mother?

SIGRIST: Say, your grandmother?

LIEBHOLD: Oh, my grandmother would, oh, my grandmother would pull a trick on my grandfather. My father, my father's father, and she would change her voice and call him up. My father's father just came back from some vacation and she would call him up and say, "Well, my dear Max." My grandfather's name was Max. "I'm so glad I have found out where you are. Don't you remember the wonderful evenings and nights we had together." My grandfather didn't know a thing about it. She made it up on the spot. (he laughs) And it was on the telephone, and he was too embarrassed, so he went along with it, and she just teased him along and he finally, he finally said, she said, "Can I come visit you?" And he said, "All right." And she went over to visit him, and he knew, of course, what it was all about, that the whole thing was a joke. Those things went on quite a good deal.

SIGRIST: Well, so, there was a certain light atmosphere around people like this.

LIEBHOLD: Yes there was, yes, there was.

SIGRIST: Talk a little bit about your religious life growing up.

LIEBHOLD: None. Uh, my religious, well, I should say, my mother wanted, both my parents were Jewish. My mother really wanted me to go through bar mitzvah, which was a very hard thing for me to do because I didn't know any Hebrew. I had to learn all the things I had to supposedly read. I had to memorize, the cantor had to write them out in longhand in German and transliterate the German. I memorized that. I went to some Protestant churches with my nanny. I went to some Catholic churches, mostly to hear

the music, but I went to some services, too. And I don't think I liked any of them. I don't like, I didn't like the Jewish services, I didn't like the Catholic or the Protestant services. And that's probably how it stayed until today.

SIGRIST: It seems like your nanny was a very important person when you were growing up.

LIEBHOLD: She was.

SIGRIST: What was her name?

LIEBHOLD: Her name, her first name was Käthe.

SIGRIST: And tell me a little bit about what she was like.

LIEBHOLD: She was wonderful. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: You said her first name was Käthe.

LIEBHOLD: Käthe. Yes, K-Ä-UMLAUT-T-H-E. Her last name was Zimmermann. She was a daughter of a railroad engineer, of a man who drove, it was a railroad. He drove locomotives. They lived by the railroad yard. My father actually hired her when she was a very little girl, actually before, a few days before my parents were married. And she came to our household essentially to take care of the household when my parents went on their honeymoon, and she stayed with us ever since, ever since then. And she was a very important member of our family. She was a member of our family more so than an employee. I don't know, suppose, I think she did get some regular amount deposited in her checking account, but that was more so she would have some money for herself.

SIGRIST: What kind of responsibilities did she have in the house?

LIEBHOLD: Mostly the children. Mostly my brother and my sister and myself.

SIGRIST: What's your brother's name?

LIEBHOLD: My brother's name is Martin.

SIGRIST: And your sister?

LIEBHOLD: My sister's name is Ruth.

SIGRIST: Are they older, younger?

LIEBHOLD: They're both older. They're both older. My sister is no longer alive, but my brother still is. Well, my, Käthe also did some cleaning in the third story of the house. She did a good deal of upstairs cleaning. And I helped her quite a good deal of cleaning. I helped her polish the floor, and that was, I always liked to do that. She had very long hair, all red. Is it auburn? Red, Titian-kind of red hair. It was beautiful. And after she washed her hair I was allowed to comb it, which must have been incredibly suffering for her, because she had snags in her hair, and I pulled that comb mercilessly through those snags. I loved to do that. Well, after a while things got to be pretty bad. Life for me in Heidelberg was pretty bad. And school life was, you know, it was isolated and my friends betrayed me, and it was pretty bad, so...

SIGRIST: Talk a little bit about school, because that was going to be my next question for you. You went to school right up until the time that you left Heidelberg?

LIEBHOLD: Yes, yes, indeed.

SIGRIST: Talk a little bit about the school experience and what that was like.

LIEBHOLD: Well, (he sighs) let me say that my first experience with Americans was in my grade school, my elementary school. Things were still very bad in Germany because it was post-war, post-World War I period. And one day, well, I should add here that I was going to a school, an elementary school, that was really a teacher's college. And we were, one day we were going single-file over to the side of the teacher's college into a dark hall, standing in line, urged to be quiet, which we were. And we were led into a room and we were each given a wonderful tall glass of cold milk. And I remember that to this day, it tasted just wonderful. Something I hadn't had for quite a while, or hardly ever. And I was told that milk was really American. It impressed me tremendously. And the Quakers had brought it over, and it impressed me tremendously. That stuck in my memory ever since.

SIGRIST: Now, why was school a negative experience for you?

LIEBHOLD: Well, uh, one of the worst things was that I went, from there I went to middle school, is what we called high school, or what you called high school we called middle school. And we had morning breaks. We would go out and eat a sandwich in mid-morning. And my friend and I were standing about and talking as usual, and then my friend asked me, excused himself and he said he had to go inside. And I was surprised because he never did that before, he had never done that before. I was going back inside myself to go to the next class. You know, a bunch of kids waiting for me to come into the building, and they were just beating me, beating the living daylights out of me and tearing up my shirt. And I felt pretty bad about it, especially because my best friend had abandoned me. He knew that it was going to happen, and...

SIGRIST: Was this because your parents were Jewish?

LIEBHOLD: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Talk a little bit about that atmosphere in Heidelberg at this time.

LIEBHOLD: Well, it was pretty bad. People got pretty paranoid because when we walked down the street people looked over their shoulders to see who was following behind. And when we wanted to have a really good discussion about whether or not we should leave the country, all the grown-ups were talking, they took a bed pillow and covered the telephone because they thought the telephone was bugged and everybody would listen. I don't know why that would be so bad, but that's. And it was, people were just getting paranoid. I mean, there was, everything was suspect. And nobody, not even your best friend was trustworthy any more. Everybody was turned in, and you heard nothing but horror stories.

SIGRIST: Did your parents experience any kind of anti-Semitic?

LIEBHOLD: Indeed. In this famous *Kristallnacht* [crystal night] my father was taken in and he was taken to a concentration camp. And he actually came back out of the concentration camp. Well, I was in Switzerland by that time. He came out of Dachau, that was the name of the concentration camp where he was taken. My mother called me in Switzerland, but he was alive for about two, I think two more days. She took him to a hospital, a Catholic hospital. That was the only hospital that would take him. He was literally beaten, beaten in many different ways. He was, he had broken bones and he had pneumonia and he was bruised all over his body and he was not, his body was not capable to sustain life any more. And he died two days later, and then my mother soon thereafter. Well, my mother had been in

the house and many times had been visited by the, what was called the SS. And one visit after another, and (?) these people. They took about everything that was to be taken, including furniture, including jewelry naturally, including what bothered me, she told me, they even pulled the ring off her finger, which bothered me very much. I didn't care if they took the furniture or not.

SIGRIST: So this is an awful climate, obviously.

LIEBHOLD: It was a terrible climate. It was very insecure.

SIGRIST: Is this why you were shipped to Switzerland? Was that why you went?

LIEBHOLD: I went to Switzerland, yes. I had been in Switzerland many times before as a child for different reasons, for health reasons. But I was ultimately transferred to a Swiss school because it was the only secure place I could be.

SIGRIST: It was a decision made by your parents.

LIEBHOLD: By my parents, yes.

SIGRIST: What about your brother and sister?

LIEBHOLD: Well, my brother and my sister both were, stayed one year longer or so in Germany than I did, and they went to America. My brother went first. He came to New York first. (he coughs) Excuse me. And a year later my sister followed. And I tried to get an American immigration permit out of Switzerland, which was very, very difficult. It was difficult for a number of reasons.

SIGRIST: Of course, you're still a student, right?

LIEBHOLD: Yes. I was still a student, well, I was a student and I had no money of my own. And there were too many people trying to come to the United States, more people than the quota permitted. Then there was, unfortunately, well, I should say something else, why I wanted to come to the United States. I always wanted to come to the United States. The United States was something, was to me a country full of miracles and wonderful things that I had read in books that were really exciting and nice and high rise buildings. And I heard about, I think it was the Pennsylvania Turnpike, a road that was dedicated for only automobiles without intersections. It was fabulous. And things of that sort really impressed me, and I thought, well, that's a country where you can do almost anything you want to.

SIGRIST: While you were in Switzerland, were your brother and sister writing to you?

LIEBHOLD: Yes, yes, they were. And they had a hard time. You know, they came here with essentially no money and they struggled for a while. Although my sister got a very good job at Columbia University as a medical technician, and she did very well.

SIGRIST: Now, you said you had been to Switzerland as a child for health reasons. Just talk a little bit about why you went to Switzerland.

LIEBHOLD: Well, I was a sickish child, and I had been sent to a children's home that my mother knew of and I knew was in Adelboden, in the Bernese Overland in Switzerland, almost once every year for a few weeks. I became very familiar with it, and I loved it there. I was very fond of it. People there were very, wonderful with children.

SIGRIST: Did your nanny go with you when you went to Switzerland?

LIEBHOLD: No, no, no, no, no, no. That's not, that was, that place was, I was isolated from my home entirely. That place where all, places in Adelboden, you did not know, you only suspected what people's economic background was. Everybody was equal and nobody had any privileges, nobody had anything better than anybody else, nobody had any more clothes than anybody else or less clothes than anybody else. That was very carefully managed, and I enjoyed it tremendously. It was a place where I was, my self confidence was built more so than any other place, and something I needed to have reinforced very badly. And they knew how to do it. They challenged me. They gave me opportunities to prove myself. It's not that they praised me from one end to the other, but they were very good in handling children. The lady who was in charge of the place gave me a large amount of money one day and said, "Well, take it down to the post office and deposit it." She gave me instructions, and I thought it was a very difficult task. I was very young then. I must have been about seven or so.

SIGRIST: So Switzerland has a very good connotation to you.

LIEBHOLD: Oh, yes. Very good connotations. I loved it there.

SIGRIST: So when your parents wanted to send you there when you were fifteen...

LIEBHOLD: I liked it. I liked that idea, uh-huh. I went to boarding school, which was all right. I had fun there. I had a lot of fun there.

SIGRIST: Describe that a little bit.

LIEBHOLD: Well, it was a boarding school. It was actually a very good school. It was a school with students from all over the world. Let's see, the only time I've

ever seen Spaniards and Italians talk to each other each in their own language. They talk, when they don't understand each other they just raise their voices, and then they understand each other. (he laughs) It was very nice. There, you could hear almost any language you could think of, because there were students from all over there world were there.

SIGRIST: Were there other students at that school who were in a similar circumstance to yourself?

LIEBHOLD: Yes, indeed.

SIGRIST: Their families had sent them there to be safe.

LIEBHOLD: Yes, there were. Quite a few.

SIGRIST: Now, were you in contact with your parents?

LIEBHOLD: I wrote them.

SIGRIST: But you didn't, they didn't come to visit, or you...

LIEBHOLD: Well, occasionally they did, until in the end they could not do that any more. But for a while they could come and visit me, yes. And I didn't understand why they didn't just stay there, but that was up to them to decide.

SIGRIST: So, now, your father died while you were in Switzerland.

LIEBHOLD: Yes. And then my mother was visited by an SS-man one day and said, "Mrs. Liebhold, I'm not here to do any, to take anything away from you, but I have to tell you you must leave the country." And he says, "I remember

you from long ago. I know your family, and I want to do you a favor. You have to leave the country." And she said, "I do?" He said, "Yes. You have to leave today, by tomorrow." And she didn't know what she should do, and he says, "I have a taxi and I will drive you wherever you tell me to, but you have to go." So she packed a suitcase as much as she could and by that time my mother's mother was in Holland, and she said she wants to go to the Dutch border, and it was, at the moment she crossed the border when she heard Hitler give a speech over the, over a P. A. system it must have been broadcast, that Germany was invading Poland and the war had started. And after that all borders were sealed, so that man obviously knew that that was the last chance to get out. It was a favor. It was a good deed.

SIGRIST: That's a wonderful story. And did she stay through the rest of the war in Holland?

LIEBHOLD: No, no, no, no, no. She went from Holland, she went to, she didn't, she had no permission to stay in Holland. She went to what was then known as Palestine. And she went there in a small boat. And she went to Palestine and died there.

SIGRIST: Did you know what was going on with her while you were at school? How did you find out all this was happening?

LIEBHOLD: Well, she wrote me letters. She told me she was going to do that, or later on she wrote me detailed letters of what had happened. She wrote me letters from Holland, and she wrote me letters from Palestine, from Israel, what was later Israel. That was, I can reconstruct it all, of course, and I still have some of the letters, and I re-read them occasionally. I'm now translating them for my kids to read.

SIGRIST: How did you feel about that, though? You know, here you are, you're really rather isolated in Switzerland, safe...

LIEBHOLD: I was very isolated, yes. I felt very insecure. I was a kid who had to learn to fight for his own, to do his own a little bit prematurely, and to fend for myself. That was not that easy.

SIGRIST: Did you understand the seriousness of what was going on in Europe at that time?

LIEBHOLD: Oh, absolutely, yes. In fact, it was so serious, it was very serious. I could not get my immigration permit from American consulate. My belief was, and it was probably true, that if I had had a lot of money, if I would have been more knowledgeable and been able to slip the right amount of money to the right person at the right moment I would have gotten my permit right away. But I was a young kid and I didn't have any money, so I was too naive to do that. And after a while the Swiss got, it was pretty bad for the Swiss because they had a lot of people who they didn't know what to do with, and they were just a burden to them. And I was taken to a labor camp, and I was doing pretty hard labor in Switzerland.

SIGRIST: Was this after you had graduated, or did you graduate from this prep school?

LIEBHOLD: Yes.

SIGRIST: But you remained in Switzerland when that happened.

LIEBHOLD: Yes.

SIGRIST: With whom did you live?

LIEBHOLD: Oh, I lived with a friend of mine. That friend of mine, his mother, and his mother really told me I had to leave because she couldn't afford having me. I said, "Nowhere to go." Well, the whole thing got resolved when I was drafted into the labor camp and I had to go.

SIGRIST: Talk about that experience in the labor camp, how long you stayed there, and what that was like.

LIEBHOLD: Well, about close to a year. It was hard, it was very hard work. It's something that eventually I enjoyed, but I had to learn to enjoy it. We were, it was a very primitive and a very hard life there. We were given shoes with wooden soles but leather, they're boots, but wooden soles, which were very handy because we were draining a swampy area. And the wooden soles isolated us, insulated us from the cold ground, which was actually quite nice. All we had to do was dig out stumps of trees. And I learned to work with my hands then.

SIGRIST: What was that land going to be used for?

LIEBHOLD: Agricultural purposes. I later on saw that land actually being used, some of the land. And they had, I don't know what they were, they were growing things there. It was wonderful. I mean, Switzerland suffered from a great lack of food. They were surrounded by, you have to understand, Switzerland is surrounded by Austria, Italy, France and Germany, and all countries were Nazi-controlled. France had fallen and the, Hitler allowed as much food in Switzerland as he felt like allowing into it, except, ah, that gets us a little bit too far. I can just say that Switzerland was actually manufacturing weapons for Germany, and the, that gave them a bargaining point, so they did get some food into Switzerland.

SIGRIST: It must have been a terrible situation for the country actually with so many people...

LIEBHOLD: It was. It was. And that's why I was taken into a labor camp. I didn't mind. Other people objected to it very strongly. I didn't mind it. I had worked for a while in Switzerland as a, without permit. I was not allowed to work.

SIGRIST: Because you were German-born?

LIEBHOLD: Yes, only Swiss natives were allowed to work. But I had to get some money somehow, so I worked for an architectural photographer in the darkroom, and a friend, a cousin of my friend one day found out that the police had found out that I was working, and I quit working. And I asked him what I should do, and he said best thing I could do was disappear. And I knew, from long ago I knew a farmer who had a hut up in the high mountains he, I could rent for one franc a day, twenty cents a day. And I went up in the high mountains, and I stayed there for a couple of weeks.

SIGRIST: Well, good. Well, hold that thought, and we're going to, Kevin's going to flip the tape over.

END OF SIDE ONE  
BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: Okay. So you've rented the farmer's house, and...

LIEBHOLD: Well, it was sort of a hut. It was a very primitive proposition.

SIGRIST: Not a Swiss chalet.

LIEBHOLD: No, no, no, no. They go up, they drive their cows there, up high into the mountains in summertime and they stay up there and tend the cows, come down in fall.

SIGRIST: Were you alone?

LIEBHOLD: Yes.

SIGRIST: And how long did you stay there?

LIEBHOLD: About two weeks. It was pretty lonesome.

SIGRIST: Are you in the process of trying to get your papers at this point?

LIEBHOLD: All along I was in the process. All along, I had been trying for years and years trying to get my papers. And the American consulate always told me, "Well, you're now two numbers closer. You're now 257." It didn't mean a thing. I was trying to get better affidavits from people to come here, from the United States. My brother tried to help me. Well, while I was in the labor camp I had a letter that my American visa was now available. And I asked for permission to leave and they said, "Of course." And I went to go, and when I went to the American consulate, they said, "Well, you may have your American immigration permit, but you know why you're getting it." And I said, "No." He said, "Well, we have a letter from the chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee, the House Foreign Affairs Committee, inquiring about your case. And here's a copy." And I still have a copy of that letter. And somehow through many, many connections, direct and indirect, my brother had found somebody who had a lead into the House of Representatives, and he wrote a letter to the consulate, and that's all it took.

SIGRIST: Well, thank God he did.

LIEBHOLD: Yes.

SIGRIST: Well, talk about how you got out of Switzerland and how you got ready to come to this country.

LIEBHOLD: Well, then came the real problem. Then came the real problem, how in the world do I get out of Switzerland. Switzerland, as I said earlier, was surrounded by, either by outright Nazi countries or occupied countries. France, of course, was divided into occupied France and so-called Vichy France. But what happened then was that the Swiss government started negotiating with the German government to let some trains go through, through France, so they could get rid of some of the people who were living in Switzerland. I was lucky that I was, I could benefit from one of those trains. So I went down to Geneva and I got on one of those trains and it was guarded, it was a sealed train. And on the way, the train took forever to get out, I was very uneasy leaving Switzerland, I must tell you, because I still felt secure in Switzerland, but as soon as I left Switzerland that was the end of my sense of security. But as we went through France the, our guards slowly disappeared. There were a few guards left, but not many, by the time we got into Spain.

SIGRIST: Describe what the train ride was like. You say you were in a sealed train. What does that mean exactly?

LIEBHOLD: Well, it was a passenger train, a very long passenger train. All people wanted to get out of Switzerland, or had to get out of Switzerland. And at the doors, you know, European trains have, all European trains have a corridor on the side, along one side. And the end doors were either locked

outright, inoperative, or they were, they had a guard sitting there. And, with a rifle, and obviously to discourage you from getting off. Well, nobody, I don't know why they were insistent on doing that because nobody had any intentions of getting off, getting out in France, of all the places. Although I must say that we made many, many stops, and after the while many of the guards disappeared. They had just dropped off and gone home. And some kids, including, I joined them, actually got off on the railroad station and ran around just to raise hell. And then we heard the train whistle and we quickly ran back on the train and it was, I barely caught it but it was still running, it was already moving, and that was the last time I got off the train. I wasn't about to get off the train again.

SIGRIST: So where did the train go to?

LIEBHOLD: I don't know. I don't remember the name of the port, the town where we crossed the border. It went along the Mediterranean into the, in the foot of the Pyrenees, where you cross into Spain, and there the train ended. The train ended because Spain was still suffering greatly from its civil war which started, what it was, 1935, and had not been rebuilt at all. But we took a bus from there. That was all, that was all on the ticket that I had bought. I had bought a ticket that was all comprehensive from Zürich to New York. That included the transport from Zürich to Cadiz from where the ship was to leave and from there the ship to New York. Because none of that happened really. It's true, we went to, we went from, through Barcelona to Sevilla, and from Sevilla to Cadiz, but there was no ship there.

SIGRIST: So then what happened?

LIEBHOLD: We waited and waited, and I ran out of money, and it was desperate.

SIGRIST: Where were you staying in Cadiz?

LIEBHOLD: I was staying in a hotel. I was staying in a hotel, which I probably couldn't afford, but I stayed there anyway.

SIGRIST: Did you find there was a great comraderie, a comradeship developing among the people?

LIEBHOLD: No, there was not much.

SIGRIST: Everyone was out for themselves, sort of.

LIEBHOLD: Yeah. Well, there were a few kids that got along very well. Not too much, no. People suspected each other and, well, they were friendly, they were friendly. But not, always at a distance.

SIGRIST: So how long were you in Cadiz?

LIEBHOLD: About a month. And it was much more than I could afford. And finally we got news that the ship was coming, and the ship was coming to Sevilla. And they were actually providing us transportation to, from Cadiz to Sevilla. And you rode the bus to Sevilla. Sevilla is much more inland, and there's a river that you have to come out of that connects tidal waters to the ocean. We spent, I spent my last night in Spain in a hotel. It was wonderful. I blew my last money I had. Sevilla was a very nice town. I enjoyed Sevilla. I did not like Cadiz. Perhaps I liked it so much because I knew that my ship was there. And the next day we all went out and there it was, the great, what to me looked like a very, very big ship called Navemar. It was black hull and, uh...

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

LIEBHOLD: N-A-V-E-M-A-R.

SIGRIST: Is this the first time you'd ever been on a large ship, or had you been on one before?

LIEBHOLD: No. I'd never been on a large ship before, no. I'd seen some, but I'd never been on one.

SIGRIST: What were your accommodations like on the boat?

LIEBHOLD: Very poorly. I don't know, well, I was appalled how many people were waiting to get on board that ship. It was a freighter which literally was set up to handle eighteen passengers. You know, a few passengers. And it had booked thirteen hundred. So accommodations were pretty poor. We had triple decker bunks in the various holds. There were three freight holds, and bunks were set up, triple-decker bunks were set up in those holds for the thirteen hundred passengers. Not very, not very good. The holds were left open for air, which was all right, except when it rained, of course. It rained into the holds and people got wet. Thank God it didn't rain very often. But I didn't sleep down there. I slept in the lifeboat. That was much better. We had fresh air and we had privacy and we were about eight kids all told slept in the lifeboat. The lifeboat was covered with tarp, and we opened up the tarp a little bit, sneaked in every night and slept in there. It was wonderful.

SIGRIST: Because of what's going on in Europe at this time and because I'm sure this freighter conversion probably happened quite a bit at that time, was there an atmosphere of desperation among the passengers, or was everyone more relieved than desperate?

LIEBHOLD: Well, some people were pretty, some people were very desperate. Some people felt that they could not make this trip in this boat. I couldn't understand it, I remember, because I thought that it was going to America, it was wonderful, it was just what I'd been looking for all the time for so many years. And I couldn't understand why people felt so bad about it. I knew it was uncomfortable, and I didn't care. Some people just couldn't stand it. Some people jumped overboard as time went on, and some people died. They were sick and died. It was a pretty horrible situation. Finally we actually formed our own ship board police regulating matters a little bit, and I became a member of that police force. Not that that was very enjoyable, but it was a job.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things were you policing? What was going on?

LIEBHOLD: Oh, that people, well, we had, see, we could eat only in shifts because we were too many people to eat, and we had two meals a day. We had to take great care that people would eat just their two meals. There were some people who would eat first shift, and second shift and third shift. And then the other people couldn't get any meals at all, so that had to be regulated, and the ship's crew was unable to regulate that, so we succeeded in doing that.

SIGRIST: That sounds like a certain feeling of desperation right there that people felt they had to...

LIEBHOLD: They had to do it. Oh, yes, I think so. And, well, then some more trivial things. We had many deck chairs and people were not allowed to reserve deck chairs to hold them as their own. At night you had to give up the deck chairs and in the morning, first come first serve. But nobody had dibs on any deck chairs.

SIGRIST: You're also probably seeing quite a cross-section of people.

LIEBHOLD: Very much so.

SIGRIST: Was this eye-opening for you?

LIEBHOLD: They came from many different countries where many people, I know, I met a girl who, from France, with whom I got along very well. She, and she wanted to speak, she wanted to speak French, and she wanted me to speak French. My French wasn't that good. I knew French, so I understood, I understood. She didn't want to speak English, and I wanted to speak English with her. So I felt we should speak English, practice it. So she spoke French and I answered her in English. And we got along fairly well in this bilingual conversation. Fairly well.

SIGRIST: How long did the boat trip take?

LIEBHOLD: Forty-seven days.

SIGRIST: Forty-seven days!

LIEBHOLD: Yes. It was...

SIGRIST: Why did it take so long?

LIEBHOLD: Well, it was a slow boat. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Over Iceland? That's a long time.

LIEBHOLD: It was. We went from, from Sevilla we went to, uh, Lisbon, Portugal where we stayed a week, a whole week in harbor, in the outer harbor. We had to

take on food and we got some, actually some live cattle put on board that stood up on the deck. And, well, that's, they had no refrigeration. That's the only way they could do it. And then all of our American immigration permits had run out because we had waited so long and they had run out. And we were taken in, then one day we were taken in to Lisbon also in shifts, one bus load at a time, to the American Consulate. And those were such wonderful people. I have just a direct opposite experience of the American people, the American officials in Lisbon as compared with those in Zürich. It was just wonderful. They were friendly and helpful, and their thing was a person who was waiting for me who my, the husband of my sister had heard I was aboard that ship, which by that time it had become, a bad reputation. She was waiting for me at the American Consulate, and she was giving me a care package which was full of good food, which I didn't know what was in it, and I took with me. And I opened it by myself and I saw it had canned sardines and other wonderful things. And a bottle of brandy, which was just heaven, which I shared, in the end, I shared with all, we usually shared everything with the other eight kids in the lifeboat.

SIGRIST: So you're in the boat for forty-seven days.

LIEBHOLD: Yes. From there we went, we got intercepted in mid-Atlantic by a British ship. We went to Bermuda. In Bermuda all the women and children were taken off by British and fed and they were allowed to take a bath, which was heaven. We only had salt water, cold salt water showers. And from Bermuda we went down to Havana, to Cuba, and from there we went up to, uh, to New York.

SIGRIST: Do you remember coming into New York, the Statue of Liberty?

LIEBHOLD: Yes. It was very disappointing to me. I'll tell you. Because for some odd reason I thought New York was right along the ocean, was on the shore of

the ocean, and it was not, as you know. (he laughs) So we came to a light ship, and I saw the light ship, and I thought it was interesting. And then we entered the, I think the outer harbor. I saw nothing but islands with greenery on it, and I couldn't understand where New York was. I said, "Where's New York?" And we couldn't see it. It was very disappointing. And we were all, by that time, of course, we had, that day, the night before we had all gone down below, all dressed in our very best clothes we had, because we wanted to make a good impression when we came to the United States. And finally we came through all those funny green islands and we came to the outer harbor and there, a long distance away, we saw the skyline. It was very exciting. Everybody rushed out to see the skyline of New York, and we stopped. And it was very surprising, very disappointing. We couldn't understand why we stopped. And we dropped our anchor, and finally somebody observed that we had raised the yellow flag, which meant we were being quarantined. And so the Public Health Service came on board in a launch and examined everybody and some people said, I didn't really know whether I was allowed to go or not, I just know I didn't get my papers through to get off the ship, so I knew I was not allowed to go. We pulled, after a while we pulled into the harbor. I noticed some, I should tell you some specifics that I remember then. The ship was going alongside, the launch was going alongside of our ship, which was a press ship, and I noticed that they were shooting, they were taking pictures with flash bulbs, and I couldn't understand why anyone would be so foolish and shoot flash in the middle of the day. To me that was a waste of flashlights. I remember that clearly. And we then pulled into the harbor somewhere in Brooklyn, I believe. And my brother was already drafted in the army. It was the early Roosevelt draft, the pre-war draft.

SIGRIST: What month is this, do you remember?

LIEBHOLD: That was September, '41. And he came there, he already had, I think stars

and stripes, or first stars and stripes. He was good. He could come, he talked his way through the immigration person. He could come to the front of the dock. And he yelled up the, I was up on top of the dock, on top of the deck, and I yelled down to him, and he yelled up to me, and we talked to each other after a while. He had to go on. And I was, we were all yelled out anyway. But it was nice. I'd seen my brother, and I felt very good about it.

SIGRIST: It's been a long time since you'd seen him.

LIEBHOLD: It had been a very long time.

SIGRIST: Yeah. It's too bad you couldn't get to him. (he laughs)

LIEBHOLD: No, no. I couldn't do that.

SIGRIST: So tell us how you, in our last ten minutes or so, tell us how you got to Ellis Island. Why were you brought to Ellis?

LIEBHOLD: Well, I was running a fever, apparently, and they told me I had to go to the hospital to come to Ellis Island. And they had to find out why I was running a fever. I was not permitted to see, go, come to America. That was very disappointing to me. That was very, very disappointing. And, as you might imagine. And I thought here was another really big problem. We were taken in a launch over to Ellis Island, and all I remember, we were taken over, we crossed some lawn, or a grassy area, were taken into a building which we're told is the hospital and a lady checked off our names. She was sitting downstairs by the door, checked off our names, and make sure she had all the people that were to come were there. We were separated by sex. We were only male people.

SIGRIST: How many?

LIEBHOLD: About a dozen. The rest of them were all gone. The rest of them were allowed to go. It was terrible. (he laughs) Very anti-climactic, I'll tell you. And then we were sent upstairs. We were sent upstairs, and there it was wonderful. It looked, real beds. I hadn't seen a real bed for so long. And we were told we could take a shower, which I did, which was absolutely unbelievable, with real soap, something else I hadn't seen for so long. Warm water, unsalty. It was just, that was, I was beginning to get in a much better mood by that time. And then we came out of our showers and we were sitting around the ward and suddenly somebody asked us, "Have you guys eaten yet?" And we said, "No." Even if we had eaten, we would have said no. We were a hungry, we had been hungry for so long. You know, we had been hungry for a long, long time. And, so we were taken to a cafeteria. A cafeteria was new to me. I had seen something like this in movies, but never in real flesh, in the real, in reality. So they had explained what you do. What we had was we were given stainless steel trays that had partitions in it, and we had to go from one station to the other where they dished out the food into it. That's the kind of cafeteria I was talking about. So we went down the line and they said, "You want some of that?" And I know to this day what we had. We had ham and mashed potatoes and green peas. And at the end of the line there was some ice cream, an ice cream bar. I think it was strawberry. It was pink. And it was unbelievably good. I hadn't had any food that good for I don't know how long. And so we sat there and we talked to each other and we ate all the food and we didn't want to go away. So finally somebody from the cafeteria came by and said, "Well, have you had enough, or would you like to have some more?" We asked, "Can we have some more?" And he said, "Sure, you can go through as often as you want to." That was a bad piece of information to give us. So we ate, and we went through the line. We went through the line about five times. And then the doctor came by and

found out about it, and he said, "You're going to make all these people sick from eating too much. Don't give them any more food." Then we went to the wards, and I had, I slept just heavenly. It was just wonderful.

SIGRIST: Were there other people in the room with you who were not your twelve?

LIEBHOLD: Yes. There were some other people. I had no idea what they were. The, to them the cafeteria didn't seem to be outlandish or wonderful. What's more, they had eaten already.

SIGRIST: Were you guarded at Ellis?

LIEBHOLD: No, no. Uh, however, not that I know of.

SIGRIST: So what happened the next morning?

LIEBHOLD: The next morning we had breakfast, a very important event. (he laughs) And then the man came by and he said, "Well, your distant cousin is here." And he said, "You may, it's all right if you come off. You may now leave." I thought that was just wonderful. And he, so he said, "I have to show you." So I take, I had a suitcase, that's all I had with me. I took my suitcase and I stuck that used piece of soap in my pocket, and I had a piece of sugar in my pocket also, which I had swiped from the cafeteria. And I went from the hospital a long distance into a building, into another building, again through a grassy area into the main building, what looked like the main building. It was in back of the main building. Then we went upstairs for some strange reason inside the building. Went across a long balcony, which I saw earlier today, and I saw some people sitting around down below. I didn't like that sight, because it looked like they were just sitting around waiting, and I didn't want to wait any more. I felt like I was through waiting, and then we went down a staircase with the elevator in

the center, and came down to the bottom. There were three tables, I believe, with immigration officials. My guide by that time said, "Goodbye and good luck." And I just stood there, and he said I had to wait till, I guess, they would call me. And then I saw my distant relative, which I assumed my distant relative was. I had never seen him before, sometimes in my stories to my children I call him my fairy godfather, appeared through the back door and together with an immigration official, which I recognized as an official. And he talked to one of the people on the table, and he said okay, and he sent the people he was interviewing away, and he called out my name, and I knew right away it was my turn to come. He wanted to see my passport, which thank God had been fixed up well, properly, in Lisbon. Well, my immigration permit was all right. My passport had run out. My passport was no longer valid. The Germans wouldn't renew it. They said, "If you want to renew your passport, you have to go back to Germany." Which I wasn't about to do. But my immigration permit was still valid. That was dated, how long it was good for. And he looked at it, stamped it, and said, "You may go." It was wonderful. Out, and I stepped outside and it was warm, breezy, summery day. It was just heaven. And we were taken over by ferry to the mainland, taking the car. And my brother was waiting over on the mainland, and we were driving up what is it called, the West Side...

SIGRIST: The West Side Highway?

LIEBHOLD: The West Side Highway, uh-huh. That was very exciting, a fancy highway. It was very, what I thought was very high speed, and all these high rise buildings. I saw an awful lot of people. I hadn't seen so many people in all my life. And we went up to Yonkers to where my distant cousin lived, and we went to his house.

SIGRIST: In our last few minutes, tell me what was hard about America to adjust to.

LIEBHOLD: (he sighs) I could talk hours about that. (he laughs) A lot of things.

SIGRIST: Pick a couple things. (he laughs)

LIEBHOLD: Well, later on I lived in a YMCA. I had to go to the hospital soon after I came out. One of the things that was hard was understanding the coins. When I came out of the hospital, I had to count the coins which were returned to me when I entered the hospital. You have to understand, the coins in Europe and Switzerland and Germany and France all have numbers on them that show what they're worth, but in America no coin has any number on it. Show me where a quarter says twenty-five, or where a dime says ten, or where a nickel says five. Nowhere. And he says, "Well, count your money and see how much you have. It's supposed to be sixty-five cents." And I tried to count, and I says, "I guess it's all right." I didn't know. It was very difficult.

SIGRIST: What about learning English?

LIEBHOLD: Well, I knew some English. I knew a lot of English. Enough to get around, but not American. I knew British English.

SIGRIST: Was that awkward for you, knowing a perhaps more formal kind of...

LIEBHOLD: I felt very funny. I tried to say "laugh" instead of "lawgh." I felt very awkward saying that. But it was, many times, I still have trouble, well, not as much any more, but I had a lot of trouble. Later on I, you know, speaking of English, let me jump forward a little bit. Five-and-a-half months after I entered the United States I was drafted in the army. And I go through basic training, speaking about English. And my drill sergeant yelled, "About face." And I had no idea what it meant. I knew "about" and

"face," and I had no idea what he wanted me to do about my face. And I looked right and left and I saw everybody was turned around, and "about face" was a silly way of saying turn around. But that's how I learned it.

SIGRIST: Well, Mr. Liebhold, I want to thank you for taking a few minutes out from your visit to do this interview for us. I suspect we could probably go for another hour.

LIEBHOLD: Probably.

SIGRIST: But, uh, I do want to thank you.

LIEBHOLD: We've run out of tape.

SIGRIST: We're run out of tape. (they laugh) So, anyway, I want to thank you very much, and this is Paul Sigrist signing off for the National Park Service.

END OF THE INTERVIEW