EI-157

HILDA BROKSAS AND ARTHUR BROKSAS

BIRTH DATES:	**SEPTEMBER 30, 1943 AND JUNE 3, 1942**
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GERMANY, 1952

AGE: 8 AND 9

SHIP: GENERAL STUART

PORT: BREMERHAVEN

RESIDENCES:

- **GERMANY: ?, SCHLESWIG-HOLSTEIN**
- **USA: PHOENIX, AZ AND SPRINGFIELD, IN**

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE:

Hilda Broksas and Arthur Broksas are the children of Eva Broksas, Interview EI-158. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., 3/7/1995

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm here today, May 23rd, 1992, with Hilda Broksas and her brother Arthur Broksas, who came from Germany in 1952. Hilda was eight years old and Arthur was nine years old at the time, and they came, each of them one of six children, four boys and two girls, who came with their mother and father, Martin and Eva Broksas, at that time. Hilda's here today from Phoenix, Arizona, where she lives, and Arthur lives in Springfield, Virginia; and we're here today at the Ellis Island Oral History Studio. Welcome. I'm very happy that you're here today and that we have a chance to talk with you and get your story as part of our Oral History Collection.

HILDA: Thank you.

ARTHUR: Thank you.

LEVINE: Why don't we start, since Hilda you were eight and Arthur you were nine, and you came here in 1952, so apparently there was a lot of upheaval in your early life before coming to this country, so perhaps you can fill me in with where you were, where you and your family were prior to your leaving for the United States.

HILDA: Well, I was born in Miltenberg, Germany and lived there for a very short period of time and then we went to next village where my brother after me was born, and then we finally ended up in Schleswig-Holstein, Northern Germany, and we lived there prior to coming to the States.

LEVINE: And how about you Arthur, you were a year older, so...

ARTHUR: Yeah, I was born in Graulmertz [sic: Kalmitz: Skrsin, Czech Republic?]. Graulmertz was what used to be former East Germany, and when we came to the, prior to coming to the States we lived in a lot of different communities. Some of them were in camps because of the masses of people that were, need to be housed after the war. And a lot of people would be putting up people in farms and the like, and that's the last place we lived prior to coming to the United States.

LEVINE: Do you remember any fighting?

HILDA: No. I don't remember the War directly.

ARTHUR: I remember not the War itself but after the War. Some of the problems that my parents had to go through in trying to clothe and feed us. Also remember things like playing in one of the camps and I found a Germany Luger, and I showed it to my aunt and holding the gun as if I knew how to use it, and luckily I didn't pull the trigger. It was loaded. So, there was a lot of military hardware still around in that location. It created problems because kids would be picking it up and becoming injured.

LEVINE: Do you remember, do you have any fond memories of your life in Germany?

HILDA: Yes, extremely. We lived in a very small village, and as an eight year old the village was very large to me then. Since I've been back it's very, very small. I did go to school in Germany, and we had of course, the house we lived in was connected to a barn, typical German style house with a

thatched roof. We walked to school and I do remember walking to school and crossing a farmer's yard which had a bull in the yard and the kids used to tease the bull and the bull would chase us and we'd just barely would always miss the bull, you know, hitting us. We'd climb the fence. Of course, things like picking cherries. And then also, when my youngest brother was born, I really thought he was my baby rather than my mother's baby, and I really was a caretaker. And, then, really, just school was very fond memories of kindergarten. And kindergarten was more than what I think kindergarten is in this country. We were taught crafts, we taught how to knit, and needle-point, and so, and, of course, play. So, yes, very fond memories. And church, going to kindergarten and Sunday School. And that's about it.

ARTHUR: Even at that age, I was active in sports, soccer, which I come to find out they didn't play in the States when I arrived. Also working on the farms and the like and having a number of horses, which I enjoyed. Good memories. Traveling in Germany at the time wasn't that often, but going to Hamburg prior to immigrating to the United States was a highlight in two ways: in seeing the big, major city, but also getting lost because we were on a trolley car. I had a hat. It fell off, and I jumped off the trolley car as it was moving and, all of a sudden, my parents realized I was gone. And here I was trying to catch the trolley car. And somebody noticed and I was several kilometers behind the trolley car when they finally stopped. So memories like that are still vivid.

HILDA: And I recall very vividly when we had to go for final papers to come to this country, my dad brought the entire family and had a horse, and I'm not sure if it was a buggy or a wagon, but there was a car approached us, and the horse reared up, and it was right by the waterfront. And my dad

panicking with the horse almost going into the water and, you know, kids screaming of course. I remember that very vividly.

LEVINE: How about, for the record, each of you give your birth dates, and then the names of your brothers and sisters.

HILDA: I was born September 30th, 1943. I have a sister Ruth and she's married and has four children. I have a younger brother, two younger brothers, Edward and Herman.

ARTHUR: Our oldest brother's name is Rudy, and that includes everybody.

LEVINE: And your birth date?

ARTHUR: Oh, my birthday is June 3rd, 1942.

LEVINE: How about your father? What did he do for work when you were in Germany?

ARTHUR: My father was a farmer most of the time. Prior to coming to United States he worked part time on the farm and did odd jobs because we planned for several years coming to United States, so it was difficult for him to decide whether or not to continue becoming a full time farmer, which was very difficult that time because of the masses of people in Germany at the time. And we were just hoping for a long time that would finally get here, which did happen.

LEVINE: And do you remember how the decision got made? Or do you remember your mother and father talking about how the decision got made that you would actually be leaving?

HILDA: Well, what I remember is, after the War my grandfather made a concerted effort to locate us. Of course, he thought we were all dead and so forth and, with the help of the Red Cross, it took many years for him to finally locate us. And I think the decision was pretty well made, you know, by him saying come over and this is America. So I think, you know, his was the primary reason we're here.

LEVINE: Your grandfather was already in this country? This was your mother's father or your father's father?

HILDA: Father's father.

LEVINE: Your father's father was here?

HILDA: Yeah, he came here quite a number of years before the Depression, like so many other immigrants at that time, to come to America, make it rich. He left his family behind, his children and his wife, and he did do quite well. He lived in Illinois. He had several apartment buildings and, like many other immigrants, did quite well. The Depression came and like, again so many other immigrants and Americans, lost everything, had a little bit left but then he longed for his family, and found us after the War.

LEVINE: And then did he find his wife and all of his children?

HILDA: Yes, the families kind of stuck together. My grandmother came to this country, I think, two years before we did with my father's sister, with their family. But she had escaped same time we, many times she was with our family and many times she was with her daughter, my aunt; but she came with my aunt I think two years before we came here.

ARTHUR: One of things that helped precipitate our family-making decision to come to the United States was also the fact that the family lived in East Prussia and, at that time, it was taken over by the Russians. And, therefore, anything that we had, we lost. And it would have been very difficult to start over. And, figuring that it would be a lot easier to come to United States, the land of milk and honey.

LEVINE: And did you have much of an extended family that you remember from when you were in Europe? I mean did you have other aunts and...

ARTHUR: Yeah, my mother's family was quite large. There were ten children, so a number of them were in West Germany when we were there, so we got to know some of our cousins in West Germany. Some of them were still in East Germany, obviously during that time we weren't able to have any contact with them. But, prior to leaving we were with our relatives from my mother's side. From my father's side, they already had been to the United States. They came in 1948 to the United States.

LEVINE: I see. And were you a religious family?

HILDA: Yes, we were Lutherans.

LEVINE: And to what extent did you practice your religion?

HILDA: We were quite religious. We, when we came to the States, we started out in a parochial school which, matter of fact, we discussed this recently, whether there was a positive or negative thing as far as, we spoke no English, obviously we had to enter the school year in our age bracket, so not only did we have to learn the subject matter but we had to learn

English at the same time. It was a small, very small community we lived in. So we were wondering if going to a parochial school may have helped us a little bit more as far as learning English quicker because they had a lot more facilities. Yes, we were brought up with a strict religious background.

LEVINE: So when you were in Germany were you, you were in a public school there or in a Lutheran school or...?

ARTHUR: In Germany we were in public school, but when we came to United States it was parochial school.

LEVINE: Is there anything else that you can think of that has to do with your life in Germany that you remember or any aspects of it that you have brought with you, that you maintain since that time?

ARTHUR: At the time in Germany, the American cowboy was a folk hero. He was the Romeo, the lover, and as a young man this is what I thought a lot of Americans were, cowboys – Tom Mix and the like. So, to me, that imagery stuck with me coming over and I expected all Americans to be cowboys.

HILDA: Yes, and I do remember seeing Mickey Mouse in Germany. And it was the black and white Mickey Mouse – I believe it was Mickey Mouse – it was some cartoon. And I had my very first experience with, I guess, cinemas.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you expected or what your mother and father expected, anything else that you expected, before you actually got here?

HILDA: I know that I dreamed, I dreamed of, because we were, we lived in, you know, a one or two room facility, sharing facilities, I dreamed of having my own bedroom. It sounds strange now but when you're living and sharing a

room with several brothers and sisters that was my dream to have my own bedroom, which I unfortunately did not have. I had to share my bedroom with my sister.

ARTHUR: As a boy that age one of the things that I always wanted but couldn't afford when we were still in Germany, and that was a bicycle. So that was my big dream to have a big, shiny bicycle, having seen magazines from the United States, children with bicycles. A red one was my big desire.

LEVINE: And do you remember if there was anything that you personally took with you on the trip here?

HILDA: We literally came with just the clothes on our backs and just small carry-on baggage. We had no possessions, as far as dishes and clothing, bedding and any of that. There were a few pictures that my mother was able to save, but no, no possessions except really the clothes on our backs.

LEVINE: And where did you leave from?

ARTHUR: The port was Bremerhaven.

LEVINE: And do you remember the name of the ship?

ARTHUR: The name of the ship was "the General Stuart". It was a military troop transport. It would take American GI's to Germany and would bring back immigrants, back to the United States.

LEVINE: And, do you remember the trip to Bremerhaven?

HILDA: I do, and this is the one, well I shouldn't say it, if this is the trip or if that was just having our photographs taken in preparation for the trip, where the horse reared up. And, also, I do remember going for the family portrait and also the individual portraits for our passports. And, I do remember an episode where we had to go for our physicals and my mother with all the little children sitting on this long, cold bench and my sister having to, she needed to go to the rest room. And my mother being very strict and us children not, total obedience (she smiles). She had to go so desperately and she wasn't about to ask my mother. And it was a nurse or receptionist that finally noticed my sister needing to go to the rest room and she finally took my sister to the rest room. These are silly memories but these are the kinds of things, you know, I remember as, as an eight year old.

ARTHUR: One of things I remember, instructed by parents that while we were in the company of any investigators, physicians, nurses, etc., that we had our best behavior; that was number one. And number two that we would never cough because we knew that if anyone would have indications of TB that it would be something that would not be the best interest to the Americans. And so we made sure we never coughed or if we did have a cough that we would have candy or an apple, pretending that we would be choking on the candy or apple.

LEVINE: So in other words, you were given physical examinations by the steamship company before you...?

ARTHUR: No, I think it was by the Immigration Service.

LEVINE: By the Immigration Service. So you had a pretty thorough physical before you left?

HILDA: Yes, yes, and I think this is why my parents were very upset and disappointed because they didn't anticipate that this would happen, coming to America and then being rejected and being told that they might be sent back because of health reasons. And, because we were given an " all clear " so to speak from the Immigration Services in Germany. So this was quite a shock to my parents.

LEVINE: Okay, so you were given an " all clear " and you got on the transport, the ship that was used for transporting soldiers, and then what was that ship like and what was the voyage like?

ARTHUR: I was with my oldest brother and my father and we were in the front part of the ship and the women and children were in the middle part of the ship, lower decks where there weren't any windows. I adjusted to being aboard ship rather easily. I enjoyed it. I never became seasick. My older brother and father, they thought they were dying, they were real bad. And I was the only one able to go from the front part of the ship to the back because of my age, because they couldn't mix during the ship, and so there were some communications through me. So it was kind of excited, and, time. And I remember one time out deck seeing whales and, at that time, it was this very exciting period in my life and thinking maybe I wanted to do this as an occupation, being aboard ship.

LEVINE: So you were able to go from one part of the ship to the other because you were young enough so you could go to the women's section?

ARTHUR: Yeah, exactly, otherwise they weren't able to mix. The only time they were able, possibly see their spouses, when we would have fire drills or man overboard, I mean abandon ship drills; that was the only time wives could see their husbands.

HILDA: I do recall being with my mother and constantly crying. And she knew my father was very sick, very ill and I remember a time that she, like all mother's do, they saved the food and won't eat it for the children. But she saved some food because she knew my father wasn't eating and she snuck some food to my brother to give to my father and just all I remember her sitting on a bed holding my, my youngest brother who was just a baby at the time, and just crying. And I, of course, personally I have a recollection of my, my first exposure to Jello, orange Jello. We were sitting there in this long, this long, what appeared a long dining room with these massive tables and all the dishes tied to the, to the table because of the ship moving. And they served Jello as a first course - it was in a salad but it was Jello - and it was a square piece of Jello and as the ship was moving the Jello was wiggling. And they told us that we could eat this Jello. I was really frightened by this piece of orange Jello. To this day I don't have a great fondness of Jello. (they laugh)

ARTHUR: One of the things that all of us, most of us experienced, and that is seeing our first black person, because living in Germany we didn't see any black people, and seeing the first one was almost a frightening experience because it was so foreign to us. And it became rather exciting to, to go up to them and asking them to turn their hands over because we wanted to see the whites of their hands. And so that was our first experience and it was rather interesting. The other thing that was rather fun and some of the people aboard ship, the crew, what they would do is throw pennies and the kids would would scramble and collect pennies. And I forget how many pennies you had to have and you could buy a Coke and that was, again, an experience like my sister's of first time having a Coca Cola, and it was something that we not consume by ourselves, we would share it amongst the family, having a mouthful of Coke.

LEVINE: Now were you familiar with Coca Cola from advertisement or, at that point?

ARTHUR: No, we only learned it when we came aboard ship. We didn't have any idea what Coca Cola or Jello or bananas were, until we came aboard ship.

LEVINE: How long a trip was it?

ARTHUR: It was nine days.

LEVINE: And what were the accommodations, as far as sleeping?

ARTHUR: The section that I and my oldest brother and father were in, there were six bunks made out of canvas. So the bunks would stay straight as the ship rolled. And if someone became sick on top the ones down below paid for it also. And it took quite an effort to crawl to the top bunks.

LEVINE: You mean they were six high?

ARTHUR: Six high.

HILDA: I don't recall how many levels. I do recall just rows and rows of beds and mothers and children just sharing one bed. I don't recall if all of us slept in one, one little bed, of course, they weren't beds, they were cots. And I can imagine none of the mothers slept and children, I'm sure, took turns sleeping. Fortunately, children didn't get seasick, and most mothers, I don't think psychologically they could afford to get seasick. It's the men (she laughs) that got seasick.

ARTHUR: Well speaking about the men getting seasick, since we were, most of the time, below deck where there weren't any windows and ventilation was rather poor, in coming across the Atlantic, North Atlantic in middle of winter, it was rather stormy, that most of the men never made it to the lavatory and, thereby, it became rather smelly down in the living quarters.

HILDA: I do remember approaching the Statue of Liberty and I do remember the excitement of the people, the adults being ecstatic and cheering and even, of course, the tears. I remember the tears. And, of course, as children you don't know why their, you parents or your mother is crying but I do remember approaching the Statue of Liberty which was, you know, grand sight. I didn't know ahead of time what the Statue of Liberty was but people talk and you find out, you know, what that really meant. And of course, after the fact, I found out what the Statue of Liberty really means.

ARTHUR: One of the things I can remember that we were in the front of the ship so it was rather crowded and I, as a nine year old, couldn't compete in seeing. And some people did hold me up to be able to see it for a brief moment, but most of the time I was seeing it in between legs of the adults. And the ship turned in the harbor, so as they turned people went from one side to another and as the rush of people moved from one side to another the ship listed and as it did I was afraid that the ship was going to tilt over right there. And I found it rather ironic that maybe coming all the way we didn't have anything happening and right here in New York Harbor it might tip over.

LEVINE: Do you remember seeing the buildings of New York, of Manhattan, from the ship?

ARTHUR: We did see some of the buildings. It was a faint outline. It was rather cold, blistery, wintry day so the outline, from what I can remember, wasn't that great as in a nice, sunny day. But seeing the big skyscrapers in between the clouds and mist was breathtaking, from the little I did get to see. (he laughs)

HILDA: What I remember was the cab ride.

LEVINE: Well let's go first through Ellis Island and then we'll get to that part.

HILDA: Great.

LEVINE: In fact, maybe we'll stop here so that we can have the tape turned over and begin again.

END SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

LEVINE: Okay, we're resuming here on Side B of the tape with Hilda and Arthur Broksas. Let's see, so we were, you had just come into the New York Harbor and seen the Statue of Liberty and the outline of Manhattan, and then did you then disembark at Battery Park and take a smaller ferry to Ellis Island?

ARTHUR: What, we came here early in the morning and we stayed aboard the ship and we noticed everybody was leaving. And all the people that were in our section, everybody was leaving the ship and we kept on. And then we, then were told that we had to go to Ellis Island, and that meant bad news.

So we took a ferry and they dropped us off here, and we arrived fairly late in the evening that same day.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you had heard about Ellis Island before you actually were dropped off here?

ARTHUR: There were lot of stories about Ellis Island. Most of them were negative, meaning that, that anyone that came to Ellis Island would return, or would be returned for some reason. And that is the story that came on. And we were wondering why we were coming here. Did something go wrong? Did we say something back in Germany or, again, all kind of thoughts went through our parents minds and, obviously, we felt a lot of the anxiety they were because we passed and we were told that once we were in the United States, in New York, that we would be put on a train and go to Chicago where our grandfather would meet us. And that didn't happen.

LEVINE: So, then, you were taken to Ellis Island, and the other people who had left the ship, had they gone to Ellis Island or they had simply...

ARTHUR: They all left and only a small handful, I would say maybe twenty, fifty people went from the ship to Ellis Island. So we were a very small group that came here.

HILDA: However there were people at Ellis Island already. We weren't the only ones from our ship. There were others staying here at the same time. For how long they had been here I don't know, but there had been others because I recall, obviously the first night, going, being separated again from my father and my two brothers, my mother and the rest of us were with the women and children. And, again, just bunks of beds and just rows

of, of beds and crying and so forth again. So there were others here before we, we were dropped off.

LEVINE: And could you describe Ellis Island? What you remember of it when you saw it at that time?

HILDA: I think, the first thing I recall is the big hall. It was massive and, to a child, I had never seen anything like it. And I remember the coldness. It was cold because it was wintertime and I, I remember the windows and the big hall. And, of course, the sleeping areas were very depressing and, mainly, because everybody was crying, the children and the mothers not knowing, you know, what was going to happen next.

ARTHUR: Speaking about the windows, most of them, from what I recall, they were frozen over because it so cold, there sort of was frost on them or there was dew on them. So it was very difficult to look out the windows. We would try to look to see what was out there and couldn't. And the other part of it, it seemed like we were always discouraged looking out the windows by someone within authority. So we always told to sit down, stay there and not move, and it was rather cold in a sense, the way we were moved from one place to another, very abrupt, without any explanation. There were people that did speak German but most of the time did not speak German to us, and since we didn't speak English, it made it rather difficult. And we were more or less moved around, I would say like cattle, from one place to another.

HILDA: However, my oldest brother was fifteen at the time. He did learn to speak a few words in English, and many times really did help my parents with just minor interpretation, and people noticed that and they kind of were grabbing for him to interpret as well. So he was a lot of help to my parents,

being fifteen years old he really was, you know, second father to us at that time.

LEVINE: How long did it take before you found out what was wrong? And what was wrong?

ARTHUR: We probably found out about the seventh or eighth day we were here. I think we were here nine days. My mother says we were seven days. But towards the end we found out why they were being held back, which was the fact that my father had an artificial leg. He lost his leg, his right leg in World War II in Germany. He had an artificial leg and we never had an indication that would be a problem until we ended up here in Ellis Island. From what I think what happened is that they felt that he couldn't support his family here in the United States. So he had to prove to them, somehow, and I don't know how he proved it, but he proved it to them, that he could support his family, maybe taking into consideration the fact my grandfather was here.

HILDA: I believe, and this is not from my own recollection but what I was told is, that with the help of someone they did get in touch with my grandfather in Chicago, made him aware of our detention and, from what I understand, with my grandfather's help and, whether it was a high official in the church or a senator or someone very political, was able to either make a phone call or something, assuring that my father had a farm arranged for us to live on and could provide for a family at the time; and I think that made the way clear for us, you know, with the help of my grandfather again.

ARTHUR: One of the things I remember when we were here he had to see a number people and physicians and it was rather humiliating to him that he had to go through lot of gymnastics and being able to hop on one leg, climb a

ladder and different maneuvers to prove to them that he was ambulatory, in that his artificial leg was not going to hinder him in doing any type of work here in the United States. And he felt rather humiliated by that experience and having to go through it because normally when he walked his artificially leg he barely had a limp, he mastered it that well; and that was very tough on him.

LEVINE: And so he, did he actually become a farmer?

ARTHUR: Yes, he did.

LEVINE: Outside of Chicago?

ARTHUR: In Indiana, northwest Indiana.

LEVINE: Do you, you then, when you were processed finally and left Ellis Island, then what transpired from there?

ARTHUR: Well, we were put on the ferry and we were met by a person, my sister thinks maybe it was the Red Cross or some other organization who picked us up and put us in a taxi and took us to our first American restaurant, which was quite an experience. And she was very kind. We found that the people here were rather abrupt and business - like, etc., rather cold and this was the first American person who showed kindness to us and remember getting some gifts. Exactly what I received I don't recall. Maybe my sister does.

HILDA: Yes, I do recall and I recall that she was a young lady and I received a lace handkerchief and I know one of my brothers received a ball and we kept that for many, many years - and we lost it through our moving around

– and being with her in a cab. She was very, very fond memory of what happened on Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Did anything strike you about the American restaurant as compared with what you'd experienced before that.

ARTHUR: One of the difficulty was in trying to decide what we would have to eat because after awhile she gave up and had a sample of some of the food that was being served and said that if we wanted to have some – I remember french fries was something very foreign, in the form that was being presented, and tasting it and so forth, and hamburgers was something we had; so I remember that very vividly, having these funny little things called french fries.

LEVINE: So then you were taken after the restaurant, you were taken to the train station?

ARTHUR: We went train station and it was bound to Chicago, Illinois. And on the way to Chicago we had a very interesting experience of having a train wreck. The train hit a coal truck in, someplace in Ohio. And one thing that was very interesting that as a family we were very calm, collected and cool but everybody else was in panic and that probably reflected the fact that the experiences our family had had back in Europe during the War and after the War that we maintained our calm naturally.

LEVINE: And do you remember, did you remember your grandfather? I mean when you met him then in Chicago, was he somebody you had remembered?

ARTHUR: Well he was here in the United States before any of us were born.

HILDA: Yes, as a matter of fact, I believe my father was a teenager when my grandfather left, so my father didn't even know him.

LEVINE: Do you recall arriving in Chicago?

HILDA: Yes, I do. I remember, again, big office buildings and my grandfather owned the office, not the office building but the apartment building that we, I believe we spent the night there. And all I remember is just all these stairs and stories and stories. It was massive. I don't recall sleeping there overnight. I'm sure we were all totally exhausted.

ARTHUR: One of the things at that age, being nine years old, was a fascination with automobiles and I found so spectacular that my grandfather owned an automobile because that was unheard of during the time that I was a boy. And I really was fascinated with it and had difficulty keeping my hands off of the dials and so forth within the car while we were going through Chicago.

HILDA: Yes, but my experience with the American automobile was not a pleasant one. First time in an automobile, in a back seat, I got car sick and to this day I still get car sick. And I remember my cousin, it belonged to him and he did not like his brand new cousin from Europe messing up his back seat.

LEVINE: Do you remember, by any chance, what kind of a car it was?

ARTHUR: For some reason a Dodge is the only thing that I remember.

LEVINE: Then when you, then did you go on from Chicago to Indiana?

ARTHUR: Yeah.

HILDA: I believe it was like the next day. I don't believe we spent any time there. We spent the night and I think we traveled probably even during the night and arrived in Indiana early in the morning and we were greeted by my aunt and uncle and my cousins at that time.

ARTHUR: The ride, since it was part at night, was fascinating with the lights hitting the trees and fences and so forth and I don't remember ever sleeping because I was so fascinated with the ride. And then coming up to the farm that our grandfather had bought was very exciting, knowing that the fact that this was going to be ours some day, some personal property made me, even at that age, something to, to be proud of.

LEVINE: What kind of a farm was it? What did you, did you grow things or did you have livestock or...?

ARTHUR: Initially when we arrived there, it was an eighty acre farm, most of it was partly, maybe fifty percent, was still wooded. And it was primarily pasture and corn at the time. And as the years went on we cleared most of the land, probably ninety percent, and through time we grew a lot of livestock, cattle, hogs and etc. Initially when, the first years, we depended a lot on gardens that the whole family worked in as our, a matter of survival.

LEVINE: Did you start in in school right away then?

HILDA: Yes, almost immediately. We went to a parochial school. It was a very small community. I believe probably no more than eight, nine hundred people at the time. I do recall my very first day of school. My parents had prepared a lunch for us and sitting there, of course not understanding a

word what anybody's saying, and it was lunch time. I didn't know it was lunchtime and everyone was leaving their desk and in my mind I thought they were leaving to go home and I'm sitting there crying. And what turned out to be my very best girlfriend later on motioned to me by hand that it was time to eat. And, of course, the tears stopped flowing at that time. So, yes, we started school immediately.

ARTHUR: With lunch that was given by parents to take along, we didn't have anything to drink so I ate my lunch like everybody else and I notice that everybody was having a, some chocolate milk or milk and we didn't have any money. And the school teacher noticed that I didn't have anything and she went out and bought me one of those small milk bottles. So it was also interesting the fact that I didn't know how to open the cap, which is a piece of cardboard that was in the top and she had to show me how to use that too. I remember also the first days in school that, obviously, we wore, quote, "German clothing." And the children there found it rather interesting at first but then later on we became kind of laughing stock because we were different; and we couldn't defend ourselves because we didn't even know what they were saying, yet we knew rather quickly that what they were saying was not nice things.

LEVINE: But you knew it was connected with your clothing?

ARTHUR: Yes because they would point at it, pull at it, and so forth.

HILDA: Not just our clothing but our whole appearance, because we wore pigtails as a girl. A little time after that I remember begging my mother to cut my hair like the rest of the girls and get a perm. And long ponytails and I had these massive bows, not only my pigtails but on top of my head, and apparently that was very comical to the children.

LEVINE: Was there anything else about your clothing that really stood out as different, when you think about what you wore as compared with what the other children were wearing?

ARTHUR: I think probably the greatest difference the fact that ours were homemade and the children in the States at the time, I don't think anybody had any homemade clothing, at least it didn't appear to be and they could tell it was homemade. It didn't quite match what everybody else was wearing. And I think that was the biggest thing.

LEVINE: Let's see, then how, can you remember learning English and learning to read? And are there any experiences that stand out in your mind regarding that?

ARTHUR: Well, we didn't have any special tutors, instructors whatsoever and the teacher that I had had three classes - first, second and third. Even though I was nine years old I was still put back in the first grade because not speaking any English. And the way I learned English, another student would hold up a pencil, would say "pencil", and then I would say "pencil", and this is how, the way I learned English, from the other children. And trying to keep up with the rest of the courses and learning English at the same time, found it rather rough at that time.

HILDA: Yes, and I, very rough and, of course, we didn't have our parents or anyone else to, to, you know, help us even when we got home. It took, at least for me, several years and until phonics was introduced into our school system that I grasped the English language and it was almost like a light bulb came on and I caught on. And even many years later, and when I entered high school, it was when I quit thinking in German and not

having to translate that things become easier. And it took many years to really get proficient in the English language.

ARTHUR: One of the things that we did as children, we would take our parents and be translators for them, since we learned English before they did. So it was interesting for me a nine, ten year old to go to livestock sales, feed stores and the like, and interpreting for my father or accompanying my parents to grocery stores and the like.

LEVINE: Did you continue to dream in German? Do you still dream in German?

HILDA: No, I don't still dream in German. I don't think in German, except when I speak German. Again, it was almost like there was a particular moment that that happened, where you stopped and all of a sudden it was English and everything became much clearer. But that was some time in my teen years that that only happened.

ARTHUR: I remember one incident that I was in American History class and we were learning about the Lewis and Clark Expedition. And at one point during that, the discussion or during the class, I realized what they were talking about. And ever since then I've been fascinated with the Lewis and Clark Expedition. Matter of fact, I followed most of the trail from North Dakota to Astoria, Oregon because of that. And it was, again, turning on the light type of experience where things finally sunk in as far as learning English.

HILDA: Well I think it's very interesting how when experiences in a child's life is, I remember we had, I don't know if it was speech class or some kind of, we had to go up and give a presentation, an essay or what it was, and I wrote my essay, my paper, and I thought I did a wonderful job. Went up in front of the class, started to present my essay. I thought in my mind that I was

speaking perfect English and everyone understood me but, as most people who with a foreign language know, that when you get nervous or upset the accent becomes stronger and stronger, to the point where people just don't understand. And they were laughing and I thought they were laughing at what I was saying and, of course, that stayed with me. To this day I don't like to get in front of big groups and speak because my accent does come out stronger when I'm nervous or upset or in front of groups, so those kinds of things stay with you for a lifetime.

LEVINE: Are there any things that you, qualities that you have now that you can kind of trace back to, to your early life, that maybe stem from your experiences before you came to this country?

ARTHUR: One of the things that my wife points out to me is that we save things. If I find anything that is of value or if something is normally thrown away, I save it. I repair it or use it for something else. And that is because of the poverty conditions that we lived in in Europe, in Germany, and also when we came to the United States, because we didn't have that much. And that stays with me still now. Pack rat, I guess, mentality.

HILDA: Yeah, I think for me it's really the work ethic. We didn't have much of a childhood. Even coming to America, even at the age of nine and ten, all of us had to go out and work in the fields and even work for other farmers weeding onion fields or other harvest, eight hours a day as children, what you would consider now child labor. So we, we, I think we knew work before we knew what play was. Sundays was about the only time of rest. Being, coming from a religious background, we really had to quit working actually on Saturday afternoon and the only chores we were allowed to do was take care of the animals or feed ourselves. But I remember my mother not even allowing us to pick up a pair of scissors on a Sunday. So,

and play was not necessarily allowed either; it was just a day of rest. So I do to this day have the strong work ethic.

ARTHUR: One the other thing I think our background is that is pride. When we came to the United States we never asked for a handout. We never excepted a handout and anything that we acquired through the years is from honest work. And it's something that we're proud of. We never asked for handouts and never accepted any handouts and hopefully we'll continue being that way.

HILDA: And, I think one thing that, again pride, is we're extremely patriotic. My brothers show their patriotism, my volunteered, my brother Art, right here sitting next to me, volunteered three times to go to Viet Nam. My other brothers as well entered, volunteered for the service. I think that's, that's something that the entire family is extremely patriotic.

ARTHUR: When I did finally get to Vietnam, I went there for, obviously, a different motive than everybody else, because everybody else was protesting, but I felt is, the fact is I'm an American living in a free country, in a Non-Communist country, that meant a lot to me. And I felt that at least I can do this for my country, in protecting the United States against Communism, which most people didn't understand during that time and probably never will understand because they haven't had the same experiences, knowing that the country that I came from was Communist at the time.

LEVINE: We just have a few minutes left. Maybe you can just briefly tell me your wife's name. And do you have any children?

ARTHUR: My wife's name is Michelle. She's a Texan. And our oldest son is twenty-one. He goes Washington State University, majoring Political Science. Our

youngest son, he is seventeen. He's going to Washington State University also. Career unknown, possibly Foreign Service, Journalism, something like that.

LEVINE: And maybe, just briefly, what are you doing now?

ARTHUR: Presently I'm working at Department of State. I'm a Physician Assistant and my job primarily is working overseas embassies, providing health care.

HILDA: I am not married. I am a career woman, by choice. I currently have a position working for a mining, a gold mining company in Arizona, which is very apropos for the West.

LEVINE: Okay, well, I think we can stop here. I thank you very, very much. It's been a real pleasure.

HILDA: This has been a tremendous pleasure for me.

ARTHUR: Same here.

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I'm here with Hilda and Arthur Broksas and it's May 23rd, 1992, and we're here at the Ellis Island Oral History Studio.

END OF THE INTERVIEW