

EI-220 PAUL HERMENAU AND WALDEMAR HERMENAU

BIRTH DATES: DECEMBER 12, 1921 & DECEMBER 20, 1914

INTERVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 21, 1992

RUNNING TIME: 1:14:04

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

RECORDING ENGINEER SAME

INTERVIEW LOCATION: TORRINGTON, CONNECTICUT

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 7/1994

**TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 1994 &
JANET LEVINE, 2007**

GERMANY VIA BRAZIL

PORT: SANTOS, STATE OF SAO PAULO

SHIP: WESTERN WORLD (US SHIP)

**RESIDENCES: GUMMERSBACH, GERMANY
PATTERSON, NJ; LITCHFIELD, CT**

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here today in Torrington, Connecticut with Waldemar and Paul Hermenau, who came from Germany in 1928. Waldemar was fourteen and Paul was six-and-a-half. Okay. Today is September 21, 1992. Well, I'm very

happy to be here and have the unexpected pleasure of interviewing both of you. So let's start by, maybe start with your telling me your birth date.

WALDEMAR: I was born on December 20, 1914 during World War One.

LEVINE: Okay. And you, Paul?

PAUL: I was born December 12, 1921, a few years after the war, but in Germany.

LEVINE: And what town did you live in?

PAUL: I lived in Gummersbach. That's a town not too far from Frankfurt.

LEVINE: Okay. And you really don't remember Gumers . . .

PAUL: No. I was about two years old when we left, our family left Germany.

LEVINE: Okay. And how old were you when your family left?

WALDEMAR: When I left my age was nine - for Brazil, so I had three years of German school.

LEVINE: What do you remember about the town where you lived before you left Germany? When you think about it, what are the things that you recall?

WALDEMAR: I remember the inflation in the early '20s in 19, in Germany. And my

father had saved up money to buy a house and to build a house, but by the time he got a little money accumulated it was worth nothing!

LEVINE: And do you remember, what kind of a town was it? Was it an industrial town?

WALDEMAR: Industrial town. The industrial town made wallpaper, the largest, at that time, uh, uh, paper, wallpaper. That was the main industry of Gummersbach.

LEVINE: And were most people employed in that?

WALDEMAR: I'd say a large percentage of people were employed in that endeavor.

LEVINE: And how about your own father?

WALDEMAR: My own father had his own business. He had a truck garden. He raised vegetables and berries. All sorts of berries, he had in the garden.

LEVINE: Did you have an extended family in the area?

WALDEMAR: No. My father's folks were in the same area, the same town, but my mother's folks were in Essen, Germany.

LEVINE: Okay. And what was your father's name?

WALDEMAR: Paul Hermenau.

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

WALDEMAR: Her maiden name was Emily Volland, spelled V-O-L-L-A-N-D.

LEVINE: And besides the two of you, you have one brother?

WALDEMAR: Another brother, yes, between us.

LEVINE: And he was born in Germany as well.

WALDEMAR: Yes.

LEVINE: Okay. And what's his name?

WALDEMAR: His name is Herman P, for Paul, Hermenau. He now lives in Stockton, Stockton, California.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, how was the decision made, do either of you know how the decision was made to leave Germany? (Waldemar Hermenau pauses and clears his throat) Okay. Well, say it, we'll have it on the tape, as well as the written.

PAUL: Our father looked at the conditions in Germany at that time in the early '20s, and with inflation and all the other aftermath of the war he said, "Germany is no place to raise a family. There's not much future in it." So he decided to try to go to Brazil, first of all, because he was interested in raising tobacco, and he was going to try to start a tobacco plantation in

Brazil.

LEVINE: Do you know why he was interested in that?

PAUL: Being a professional gardener I thought, I'm not sure exactly why he chose tobacco as a crop to grow. But he did smoke, maybe that had something to do with it or maybe some friends encouraged him to try it.

LEVINE: Did he have friends or anyone he knew in Brazil?

WALDEMAR: He went down there cold.

LEVINE: So did your family sell everything when you left for Brazil?

WALDEMAR: They didn't get much for it. Because of the rampant inflation at the time my father had enough money to pay for a house, but it would only buy maybe a door. That's, also the political unrest with Hitler making waves in Munich my Dad said, "I served two years in the German Army before the war. I served four years and got shot up during the war. I want to, and now Hitler is raising Hell. Let's get out of here." That was another consideration, the political, economic and social situation in Germany at that time.

LEVINE: Now, do you remember anything of the war?

WALDEMAR: Sure.

LEVINE: What do you remember firsthand?

WALDEMAR: Oh, soldiers were coming through our town. They were coming on horses and wagons and on bicycles and walking. And the population was expected to furnish them food, because Germany had no food. And so we had two or three soldiers in our home eating our supper with us, such as it was. And I asked my mother, "Why does that man eat so fast?" He was chewing like mad. And she said, "Well, he hasn't had anything to eat for a long time." So we fed two or three soldiers in our home.

LEVINE: So what was the attitude toward having soldiers in your home, your parents' attitude?

WALDEMAR: Well, I think, our family is very generous, and I think we didn't object to feeding them.

LEVINE: Do you . . .

WALDEMAR: And it's, it wasn't their problem. I think the problem was in the politics, in, to which the, Hitler and his gang added later.

LEVINE: When you left did you take much with you? Did your family take many things?

WALDEMAR: Some trunks were taken. Some school supplies were taken. Some

favorite photos were taken. But more or less, we were going to settle in a different country.

PAUL: I might interject here. When my brother Chuck said some trunks were taken, that's both figuratively and literally, because we missed a trunk or two after we arrived in Brazil.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Is there anything that your mother packed, or your father, that was in the family that they wanted to have, any objects that you recall?

WALDEMAR: Not to my knowledge.

PAUL: I seem to remember my mother saying she lost something, which she prized quite highly, but I don't remember what it was.

WALDEMAR: I have something.

LEVINE: Yes.

WALDEMAR: We settled in Rio do Sul, and my wife's [sic. Mother] favorite jewel was a nice pair of nail clippers. And some guy came and he was going on a trip and he asked my mother for the nail clippers. She says, "You can use my nail clippers in our house, but you're not going to take them." And the guy didn't come back.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, now, do you remember the voyage to Brazil?

WALDEMAR: Sure, both.

LEVINE: Both voyages.

WALDEMAR: Both voyages.

LEVINE: What, is there anything that stands out that you can . . .

WALDEMAR: Yeah. I had my first banana in Spain. And I thought it tasted awful. And another thing, in the Bay of Biscay, shortly after we left Germany, we had a terrific storm in the Bay of Biscay, awful big waves, awful big waves. And we didn't know whether we were going to make it or not.

LEVINE: And what, did you have to be examined and go through very much before you could . . .

WALDEMAR: Sure, medical, medicals. We were examined in Germany, we were examined in Brazil, and when we left Brazil we were examined, before we came into the United States we were examined, and again a thorough exam at Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Well, what happened with your father and the growing of the tobacco in Brazil?

WALDEMAR: Well, they thought it was better for him to grow corn. So they cleared land, planted corn and one day we're going out there, and as we're going

out there to the farm, we had to walk about three or four miles, here was a road, and I saw a log across the road and I said, "Dad, here's a log." I was about ten, then, I guess. And he said, "That isn't a log. That's a snake." And then (slight laugh) when we got to the land where the corn was growing it had been harvested. Harvested by howling monkeys.

LEVINE: Really!

WALDEMAR: In the United States occasionally we had raccoons get into the corn and husk it and they liked the sweet corn. Well, howling monkeys in Brazil, they liked corn, too.

LEVINE: So your crop was . . .

WALDEMAR: Ruined! What wasn't pulled off was spoiled.

LEVINE: So how long did you stay in Brazil?

WALDEMAR: Four-and-a-half years.

LEVINE: So did your father ever get some good crops?

WALDEMAR: No.

LEVINE: No. What do you, did you go to school there?

WALDEMAR: Of course. One thing I will say for the Brazilians, they have darn good schools. And very, very dedicated teachers. They instilled in me that

math was one of the most exciting and most profitable and the most interesting subjects. And usually I got my A's both in Brazil and here in the U.S.

LEVINE: In math.

WALDEMAR: Yeah.

LEVINE: What was the difference between the school in Germany and the school in Brazil? Or how were they similar?

WALDEMAR: The differences were - I believe in Germany we had more discipline. In Brazil they were a lot more easygoing. They had the various schools in Brazil, for example, the Catholic sisters. My other brother went to a Catholic school, and I went to a public school. The school ran, being run by the sisters, Catholic sisters, or nuns, they were a little more religious-oriented than ours were because we were Protestants and most of, ninety-five percent of Brazil is Catholic.

LEVINE: Were you a religious family?

WALDEMAR: Yeah, I would say so.

PAUL: We weren't so much churchgoers, but my father said grace at every meal. He believed in the Almighty and so on. But whether you'd term that religious or not,(slight laugh) it's a matter of interpretation.

LEVINE: So your religion, the way your family practiced it, you practiced it pretty much the same way in Brazil as you had in Germany?

WALDEMAR: Well, no, because we had a different, different neighbors, different environment, different nationalities. So the religion that was practiced in, as far as we were concerned, was different from that in Germany.

LEVINE: So that you didn't really encounter many Protestants in Brazil?

WALDEMAR: Oh, no, ninety-five percent, ninety-eight percent in some places is Catholic. But, my mother sent Herman and you to Catholic school.

PAUL: I never went to school in Brazil.

WALDEMAR: You didn't?

PAUL: No.

WALDEMAR: Okay. But my other brother went to a Catholic school where the nuns were teachers.

LEVINE: What kind of discipline did you have in the German school?

WALDEMAR: Oh, I got a good story to tell you. (they laugh) One of my enemies in German school, he regularly got whipped by the teachers, see. So what happened, this whipping stick that she whipped the kid with, my enemy broke. So I'm going to be the hero, and I get her a good switch (laughs).

I borrowed a knife from my father and cut one in the woods and I brought it to her. You know who got the first whipping? I did! (they laugh)

LEVINE: What would you get whipped for, for example?

WALDEMAR: Well, I had an apple, and I was a genius. I put it in back of the wood stove that we had in our classroom, and I was going to bake it. Well, it got baked, and then it began to smell. And then it began to smoke! (he laughs) And so the teacher found that apple and he called me up, and I admitted that I had put it there. So I am initiated (laughing) with the switch, which I brought for my enemy.

LEVINE: So did you have men teachers as well, in grade school?

WALDEMAR: Sure, in Brazil. That was in Germany.

LEVINE: In Germany.

WALDEMAR: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, we had men teachers there.

LEVINE: There would be as many men teachers, let's say, in grade school?

WALDEMAR: I thought in Germany we had more men teachers than women teachers, and in Brazil we had more nun teachers than men teachers, but I had excellent math teachers, for which I thank them nowadays.

LEVINE: Okay. So then what was the basis for the decision for your father to bring the family to the United States?

WALDEMAR: He wanted his kids to have better and better education. He wanted to be in a little better environment. And the main thing that my father didn't like about doing business in Brazil, in fact, most Latin American countries, is you always had to grease the palm and money under the table. My father didn't relish it.

LEVINE: Do you, what memories do you have of Brazil that . . .

PAUL: Brazil?

LEVINE: When you think about your life there, what are the things that come to mind?

PAUL: Oh, the good teachers. Some prizes I won for making maps. Some good friends. Oh, eating tangerines, living in the tangerine tree hedges.

LEVINE: And were you treated any differently because you were German in Brazil?

WALDEMAR: No. We were treated the same as the natives.

LEVINE: Did you know any, you probably didn't know Spanish when you arrived?

WALDEMAR: No, I didn't know Spanish. Neither did I know Portuguese.

LEVINE: Was that what they speak?

WALDEMAR: In Brazil they speak Portuguese.

LEVINE: Oh, Portuguese, yeah.

WALDEMAR: So I had to learn that language.

LEVINE: Did you learn, did you learn Portuguese?

PAUL: I learned a smattering of Portuguese. I never went to school there, so most of my time was spent at home with my mother, and I didn't have much contact with the people around us.

LEVINE: Do you have memories of Brazil?

PAUL: Yes. Well, mostly things like having a parrot as a pet, having a monkey as a pet. And stepping on a snake, which I thought, again, was a stick going across the road. And drinking from a clear, cool stream coming out of the jungle. And one time I drank, (laugh) a hornet hit me on the forehead, so I was kind of leery about drinking from any more streams.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember the difference in the house that you lived in, in Germany versus in Brazil?

WALDEMAR: In Germany we had running water. In Brazil we had a river or a brook from which we obtained water, and I was the water boy in our family.

LEVINE: And what did that entail?

WALDEMAR: Bringing the water up two buckets at a time from a spring-fed pool that my father had dammed up, so you could get the bucket in without disturbing too much of the bottom. He didn't want sand in his drinking water.

LEVINE: And what about washing clothes? Did you . . .

WALDEMAR: My mother did that.

LEVINE: How did she do it? Where did she do it?

WALDEMAR: Well, she and I both went and got water for washing clothes.

LEVINE: Did your mother like being in Brazil?

WALDEMAR: Not especially, but she had a family, she had a husband and she had to do her job and she did it well.

PAUL: She had the philosophy in her relationship with our father, "Wherever thou goest, I go."

WALDEMAR: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did your mother and father learn Portuguese?

WALDEMAR: Yes, but I think the best Portuguese speaker was probably Chuck

Hermeneau, because he was in school longer and was with younger kids, and I learned it pretty fast. I had more contact with Portuguese speaking people in schools the four-and-a-half years we were down there than my parents or Paul or Herman did.

LEVINE: And you say you had good friends?

WALDEMAR: Sure.

LEVINE: What kinds of things would you do for entertainment?

WALDEMAR: I even had a girlfriend down there. (they laugh)

LEVINE: Really!

WALDEMAR: Yeah. I thought I was in love with her. I didn't want to leave Brazil (laughing).

LEVINE: How old were you when you left?

WALDEMAR: Fourteen.

LEVINE: Do you, do you remember what you did as kids, I mean, what kinds of things did you do for fun?

WALDEMAR: Okay. We're coming home from school, and if it was hot we'd go and swim in a brook. Now, one time there was a flood and we didn't dare to cross that brook. It was way after the grasslands, see. And a couple

days later when the water had receded we dove in like we did ordinarily, and I didn't even know to swim. And the bottom had come out of this swimming hole, and some guy had to rescue me. Now, I remember that.
(he laughs)

PAUL: The part of Brazil where we lived was tropical, but it did have some cold and some cold waves that came across the area. There was ice formed in one night, on a real cold night. And I woke up in the morning, I said to my mother, "There's some hard thing on top of the water. What is it?" That's the first time I'd ever seen ice.

LEVINE: Oh. Now, where you lived in Germany it was cold?

WALDEMAR: Yeah. Skiing and sledding and skating there.

LEVINE: But you, of course, didn't remember.

PAUL: No.

LEVINE: Okay. So your father again decided that he could make a better life for his family . . .

WALDEMAR: In New York.

LEVINE: In the United States.

WALDEMAR: Education-wise, social-wise and, uh . . .

LEVINE: Business-wise, it sounds like.

WALDEMAR: Business-wise, too, yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. So then do you remember the ship you came to the U.S. on?

WALDEMAR: Of course I do.

LEVINE: What?

WALDEMAR: U.S. Western World, United States steamship, Western World.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what port did you leave from?

WALDEMAR: We left from Santos, which is just south of Rio de Janeiro. Santos is really the port for the state of San Paolo.

LEVINE: Now, were there a number of people immigrating to the United States from Brazil at that time?

WALDEMAR: Yeah, yeah. Both Germans, Spanish. There were some Argentineans there, and I think some Polish people.

LEVINE: Were there many Germans in Brazil when you were there?

WALDEMAR: Oh, there are towns and schools down there that are completely ninety-five, ninety-eight percent German.

LEVINE: Oh, I see. So your parents could actually, I mean, were you in a kind of

German community?

WALDEMAR: No.

LEVINE: No.

WALDEMAR: But when we first arrived there we were.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. I see. So on the ship were you in steerage? Were you in the hold of the ship, or were you in a cabin?

WALDEMAR: We had cabins.

LEVINE: And was there a steerage on the ship? Do you recall that?

WALDEMAR: No, no. Not in the ship. Not in the twenty-fours. Not the ship that we used. We hadn't had a cabin.

LEVINE: And it was the cabin just for your family?

WALDEMAR: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Or there were other people in it?

WALDEMAR: Yes.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about that voyage?

WALDEMAR: Yes.

LEVINE: What?

WALDEMAR: The first one, going to Brazil, we had a great storm in the Bay of Biscay and they had prayer meetings on board ships. And it didn't make any difference whether you were Polish or Jewish or Catholic or Protestant, we all prayed together. And I had my first banana in Spain, and, oh, when we crossed the Equator I had to crawl through a rain tunnel, and then they sprayed the water to initiate you into the wetback or the, having crossed the Equator.

LEVINE: Oh. They did that with everyone?

WALDEMAR: Yeah.

PAUL: That's quite common nowadays with people who cross the Equator, they go through some ritual and then they're called "Children of King Neptune" or something like that.

LEVINE: Huh. And how long was the voyage, roughly?

WALDEMAR: From Brazil, I think maybe twenty-one days. It probably took us, because we stopped in several places in Portugal and Brazil. In Portugal, Spain, Madera, Forchau, before we hit Brazil. So it took about, about three weeks to get down through Brazil.

LEVINE: Okay. But now coming from Brazil to the U.S.?

WALDEMAR: We only stopped, if I remember correctly we only stopped in Port-au-Prince and Trinidad.

LEVINE: Oh. So it was a shorter voyage?

WALDEMAR: Particularly, yes, a shorter voyage. Better food, more speed to the ship.

LEVINE: Do you remember, Paul, anything about that voyage to the U.S.?

PAUL: It's strange. I don't remember anything about the ship. The first thing I remember coming north into the U.S. was the Statue of Liberty looming out of the fog.

LEVINE: Did you know what that was at that time?

WALDEMAR: No. (he laughs)

PAUL: Uh, I don't recall whether I knew what it was or not, but I was quite impressed seeing a huge statue looming up out of the water.

LEVINE: Did people gather on deck?

WALDEMAR: Oh, yes. They were there all excited because they realized that we would soon be arriving in port, and everybody started crowding around on rails in the bow of the ship and then they started getting really excited when they saw the statue, and later on the skyline of New York.

LEVINE: Do you remember as a six-and-a-half-year-old that you had any idea about what it meant to be coming to the United States, or what you expected?

PAUL: Yes. I was quite excited about the whole thing, and from the talks that my mother and father, not my father, because he was in the U.S. waiting for us to come up there.

LEVINE: Oh, he left . . .

PAUL: He preceded us because he didn't have enough money to send for the family, to pay for the family's passage up to the U.S.

LEVINE: How long before you came to the U.S. did your father arrive?

WALDEMAR: About a year, somewhere around a year. And he worked in a factory in Patterson, New Jersey and saved just about every penny he could to bring us up to have the family together once more.

LEVINE: Was, did either of you notice a difference in that year when your father wasn't with the family, when you were still in Brazil?

WALDEMAR: There was, like, a vacancy, you know, like something was missing. It wasn't, you could feel it wasn't a complete family. So my mother had to take on the role of parents, and she did pretty well considering what she had to deal with, and the problems that existed at the time.

LEVINE: Did your father send money then?

WALDEMAR: Yes. In fact, the fact is one really humorous aspect of that, he used to send money regularly every month. Somehow he got the idea that the letters containing money should be sent with greater care. So he put on the outside of the envelope, "Twenty dollars inside. Please handle carefully." We got the envelope, but we didn't get the money when it came down to Brazil. (they laugh)

PAUL: He was a very trusting soul.

LEVINE: You must have been the man of the family for that year.

WALDEMAR: No, we had an uncle with us. My wife's, not my wife's, but my mother's brother came up with us.

LEVINE: He came from Germany to Brazil with you?

WALDEMAR: Yeah, and also from Brazil to the United States.

LEVINE: Oh, I see, so he was there. Okay. So, do you remember Ellis Island?

WALDEMAR: Sure I remember Ellis Island.

PAUL: Yeah, I do.

WALDEMAR: I thought there were too many people there. I didn't like the U.S. I hoped this isn't like this all the time. And we had to go through a very

thorough physical exam from, you strip down from top to bottom and they examine you, starting with the eyes and right down to your feet.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you heard about Ellis Island before you actually got here?

WALDEMAR: No.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

PAUL: No, that wasn't common knowledge. The thing that impressed me the most was the long line of people, and it had been well over a year since we had seen our father, and I couldn't wait, and I was looking and looking for him and waiting in line. I just couldn't understand why we had to wait in the line for such a long time.

LEVINE: But you, were you processed in one day, in the same day, the day that you arrived?

WALDEMAR: I think we slept one night there, if I remember correctly. That may not be exactly correct. Maybe from some of the information you'll get here they can look up our visa numbers and find out whether we stayed here.

LEVINE: Well, do you remember food there, or do you remember anything about accommodations there?

WALDEMAR: Yes. The food was good. We had, we had rice and I don't know what else we had. But the American food has always been good to me. And I liked it, from there, I like to eat anyway.

LEVINE: Do you, do you remember seeing different kinds of people? Do you remember . . .

WALDEMAR: Yeah.

PAUL: Uh, when we came into Ellis Island there was a black man in another area, and I saw him and I said to Mom, "What's the matter with that man? He's all black!" My mother said, well, she says, "God gave him black skin just as he gave you white skin." So I accepted that.

LEVINE: Well, then tell me about the reunion with your father.

PAUL: Well, I . . . (he laughs) I just wouldn't let him go. I was really thrilled to finally get back with him, and that's about all I remember as far as meeting him. You know, I was, when that long wait finally was over I was so relieved and so happy.

LEVINE: Um, was your, did your father meet you, come to Ellis Island and have a reunion?

WALDEMAR: Yes, yes, he did, yeah, yeah.

PAUL: He was on one side of the gate, and we were on the other side, you

know.

WALDEMAR: The fence in between.

PAUL: Yeah. He was already a bonified resident of the U.S. where we were not.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, was he a citizen at that point, or he had . . .

WALDEMAR: No.

PAUL: No, he had to wait for a number of years to get his citizenship. I think it's five years or something like that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And then when he became a citizen did the rest of the family become a citizen?

WALDEMAR: Automatically, because we were all minors, the three of us.

PAUL: Except my mother. She had to get her own citizenship papers.

WALDEMAR: Yeah.

LEVINE: And did she learn English? How did she learn?

PAUL: She picked it up from her children and from friends. She never went to school here, but she managed to read and talk, even though she did have a heavy accent, but she was able to converse fairly well, and she

was able to read the newspaper.

LEVINE: So tell me about leaving Ellis Island after you met your father. What happened then?

PAUL: That's . . .

WALDEMAR: I don't remember the voyage or Ellis Island.

PAUL: That wasn't one of the highlights of the trip, and it seems to have been something entirely forgotten. I can't remember anything about it, and Chuck or Wally . . .

WALDEMAR: I don't know how we got from Ellis Island to Patterson, New Jersey. But I know when we got to Patterson, New Jersey there was a nice table set and the first time that we had ice cream.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, did your father have an apartment?

WALDEMAR: Yes.

LEVINE: And that's where you went, too.

WALDEMAR: Yes.

LEVINE: And do you remember anything that struck you as odd?

WALDEMAR: I thought it was a pretty nice place. We lived on the second floor and,

gee, I thought it was wonderful to have ice cream. I'd never tasted ice cream before in my life, until I was fourteen years old. And, I mean, we had the three colors, you know.

LEVINE: Chocolate, vanilla and strawberry.

WALDEMAR: Chocolate, vanilla and strawberry. I thought that was fantastic, with a cookie, besides.

PAUL: The thing that impressed me was candy corn. I had never seen candy corn or eaten it. And I saw that, and it looked fantastic for me. And I made up for lost time.

LEVINE: Well, okay. So then, your father was working at the silk factory?

WALDEMAR: Yeah. They call them silk mills.

LEVINE: Silk mills.

WALDEMAR: They do, at that time Patterson, New Jersey was the silk capital of the United States. And they dyed and printed silk. That was the main industry in Patterson, New Jersey. It has changed considerably since then.

LEVINE: And then did you start, you both start into school soon after you arrived?

PAUL: Yeah.

WALDEMAR: I started immediately.

PAUL: Yes, I did. And I'm amazed to this day that I can't remember having any difficulty with the English language. For the first few weeks I did sit aside and just absorbed everything. I wasn't called on because I couldn't speak, and in no time at all I learned the language and got along as though I had always spoken that language.

LEVINE: Did your family continue to speak German at home, or did your mother and father speak English at home?

PAUL: Uh, at the start we spoke mostly German in our home because our mother and father weren't that conversant in English, and so we spoke German most of the time. And gradually as we got to speak less and less German because of our outside friends and schooling and so on, we would talk more and more English with our parents, and gradually it came around to the point where our parents mostly spoke English to us.

LEVINE: Were there ways that your family, your mother and father, were there certain things they maintained that were German?

WALDEMAR: Yeah. They maintained some of their jokes, some of their errors, some of the mistakes they made. And they taught us jokes.

PAUL: Yeah. My mother's cooking, she was from South Germany and she cooked a specialties there like sauerbrauten and schvetzler, and the

dishes native to that area. So she even, up through her last few years she would often cook German meals.

LEVINE: And what was different about that school for you compared with the two other schools you'd been in up to that point?

WALDEMAR: I was shocked at the (he sighs) cuss words the kids used to their teachers and to each other and the profanities. I really wish, that was, and back talk. And in Brazil, or in Germany and in Brazil you didn't do that. So that was a big difference to me.

LEVINE: And how about the teachers? Were they very accepting of you coming in without the language?

WALDEMAR: Oh, they loved us tremendously.

LEVINE: Was there a large number of immigrant children in your school?

WALDEMAR: No. In my class I think there was two. In my class of about thirty, thirty-two people, youngsters, I think there was two immigrants. One was Walter Spone and the other one was me.

LEVINE: So you . . .

WALDEMAR: In a class of about thirty, in grammar school. And I started in first grade. I did!

LEVINE: Oh, so you were both in the same class?

WALDEMAR: No.

LEVINE: Oh, you started kindergarten.

PAUL: Yeah, I believe so.

WALDEMAR: And I started first grade although I was fourteen.

LEVINE: Then did you progress rapidly?

WALDEMAR: Yes. Then I skipped to the third grade and I stayed there a couple of months in that, then went to sixth grade and then I went through school.

LEVINE: And did your brother start with you in the first grade, the middle brother?

WALDEMAR: No. I don't know. No, he was not in my grade. But I started in first grade. He might have been, he might have been in kindergarten. I don't know. I don't recall exactly where he started.

PAUL: I think they had grades 1-A, 1-B, 2-A, 2-B, things like that.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh, so were there, was there a large German population in Patterson near where you were?

WALDEMAR: No.

LEVINE: No.

WALDEMAR: They had, the church, they had services in German because they had some German immigrants who came from the vicinity of Patterson such as Fairlawn and Ridgefield and Passaic. They had sort of an assembly-type church, and we went to Sunday school there. And then, of course, we had services, and Sunday school, I think, was in English, and the main service was in German.

LEVINE: Oh. Uh, did you stay in Patterson for quite a while?

WALDEMAR: Yes, until '31.

LEVINE: '28 'til '31.

PAUL: The reason for moving again out of Patterson was when the crash came, when the stock market fell apart, everybody was out of work, and I can remember it was I think around Thanksgiving time. We didn't have any food or anything, and we had to depend on The Salvation Army to put food on our table.

LEVINE: So what did you do then after, when you moved, where did you go?

PAUL: Well, my father glanced (he clears his throat) at the paper for all the help wanted ads, and he saw an opening that was advertised in Litchfield for a professional gardener to take care of flowers and hedges and vegetables, so . . .

WALDEMAR: Greenhouse.

PAUL: he applied there and he was accepted. He worked for this millionaire family.

LEVINE: So were your mother and father questioning the decision to come to the United States during the Depression?

PAUL: No.

WALDEMAR: We didn't look back. Forward, yes. Go forward, and not look at what's gone by.

LEVINE: So you came all the way to Litchfield. Did your father write to someone at all to see about it?

PAUL: I think he wrote, and they asked him to come up for an interview, which he did.

WALDEMAR: Right.

PAUL: And they were satisfied with his qualifications and they hired him there. So Litchfield was actually the town that I grew up in and went to school mostly there.

LEVINE: So you really moved, then, from city to country.

WALDEMAR: Yeah.

PAUL: Yeah.

LEVINE: And what differences were there for you at your age and stages?

PAUL: Oh, we lived not too far from a brook and we went swimming there every summer, and we went traipsing through the woods where there were deer and other animals. And it was, you know, like a fairy land where you could go out and see all types of nature.

LEVINE: So you, was the whole family happier in Litchfield than . . .

WALDEMAR: I think so.

PAUL: Yeah. We had very, in the midst of the Depression, my father started out with eighty-eight dollars a month, and then in the midst of the Depression the millionaire people thought that they couldn't afford all that money so they cut him down to eighty dollars a month. But we, somehow we managed. And my mother was very resourceful. She would, uh, have a variety of ways of cooking potatoes and a variety of ways of stretching out this dish and that dish and we managed pretty well.

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

WALDEMAR: I had gotten out of school.

LEVINE: In Patterson?

WALDEMAR: By the time we, by the time we left Patterson. And I didn't go to high school in Patterson because my dad didn't have enough money to buy me a pair of shoes. And in high school you were required to be dressed up a little bit more than you did in grammar school, so I never attended high school. One day, not formally. But I got my two-year college equivalency test in, uh, Stockton, California, the college of the Pacific. So not having an education (laughs) is no excuse for not getting ahead. (they laugh) But it helps.

LEVINE: Did you work in Patterson?

WALDEMAR: Yeah.

LEVINE: What did you do?

WALDEMAR: For twenty dollars a month I, the same man, no, the son of the man who hired my father, he hired me to take care, help him take care of hundreds of pheasants. He sold them to the state for hunters. And the first . . . Hey! (referring to a cat in the room)

PAUL: Yeah, he'll do that. That's an affectionate bite.

WALDEMAR: Oh. So I was making twenty dollars a month, and every other weekend I had to feed and water the hundreds of pheasants he had, see. And then the following year I got twenty-five dollars a month, and I quit on him one year, and then he called me back, and he says, "I'll give you thirty dollars

a month and ten cents for each pheasant that we sell to the State of Connecticut." So I had an incentive system. And then I joined the navy.

LEVINE: Now, the pheasants, were they, were they in Patterson or Connecticut?

WALDEMAR: They were in Connecticut.

LEVINE: Connecticut. Did you work in Patterson?

WALDEMAR: No.

LEVINE: No.

WALDEMAR: Oh, I had little jobs like paper boy. I sold The Saturday Evening Post -- things of this sort.

LEVINE: So then you went in the service after the pheasant job.

WALDEMAR: Yeah, right. Because at least I had twenty-one dollars a month, and I had my food and my clothes. I always wanted to get into the navy, ever since I was four or five years old. And I liked it. See, I had a taste of it going down to Brazil and coming up to the United States.

LEVINE: I see. So then where did you, where were you sent when you joined the navy?

WALDEMAR: Oh, to electrical school in San Diego.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, how old were you then?

WALDEMAR: Uh, twenty.

LEVINE: And did you have in mind to make it a career?

WALDEMAR: Uh, well, yes and no. I wanted to get ahead as far as I could, and I did. I did, I did very well. During the war, I graduated number one in the recruit company, and I graduated number two out of electrical school where we had about sixty. I did always, my mother always said, "Do a little bit more than is required, you'll get ahead in study." That's what, that's my philosophy.

LEVINE: How about you, Paul? Do you remember anything your mother told you that you have taken on as a philosophy for living?

PAUL: think you'll find in that paper there that she gave me a most unusual punishment one time when I misbehaved. I don't remember even . . .

WALDEMAR: What caused it.

PAUL: What caused the punishment, but I do remember the punishment more, very vividly, and I don't remember misbehaving. One time when I was misbehaving she said, "Come here." She sat me down at the table. She brought out a fresh blueberry pie, still warm from the oven, heaped it high with whipped cream. She said, "Here, this is your punishment."

(Waldemar laughs) I looked at it. I says, "What gives?" She says, "I want you to remember this." She says, "The Bible says return evil for good [sic. good for evil]." And that was a punishment I've never forgotten.

LEVINE: Oh, that's great. So how about you, when you came to Litchfield? Did you, you went into school.

PAUL: Yeah, yeah. I went through grammar school and through high school, and after that I worked in a factory for a while to save up enough money to go to college.

LEVINE: What kind of factory?

PAUL: It was called the Torrington Manufacturing Company. They made mostly air impellers for air conditioners, for, excuse me, for fans of all types for cooling equipment. And I went there to save enough money to go to college. In the meantime, war broke out before I managed to save very much and so rather than going, being inducted into the service, the army or navy, I thought I'd go in the coast guard because my philosophy was I'd rather be shot at than shoot other people. And then I had also applied to the merchant marine. And I was just about to be inducted into the coast guard when the merchant marine letter arrived accepting me for radio school on a merchant ship. So I put in a few months in Boston Harbor at a place called Gallops Island where they had a radio, a

maritime radio training school, and I went through that and got my radio operator's license, and served out the war as a radio operator in the merchant marine.

LEVINE: And how about you? Did you see active duty in the war?

WALDEMAR: Did I see active duty? (he laughs) Ho, ho! I saw the first three bombs in the air at Pearl Harbor. I was there! My wife was in Honolulu, and I had the duty that day. So that was the first action, right. And a humorous thing happened. The guy, the kid says, I had him on the dock. We were, we didn't have any water on board. We had just come in four, five days earlier, he was going to hook up a hose to get on distilled water for the batteries. Batteries in submarines require a lot of water. And he says, "Look, Chuck, there's an airplane up there. He dropped something." I says, "Get that water hose hooked up!" He says, "The second plane dropped something." "Get that water hose hooked up! We haven't got all day!" And the third one. So the first one hit between the submarine base, where we were docked and the shipyard, a big, old faithful water spout when the bomb exploded. The second plane hit in the shipyard, and the third across the harbor on four islands where immediately when the bomb exploded every window in the hangar was blown out, followed by fire and smoke. Those were the first five minutes of Pearl Harbor. And then I go around the submarine and go down and lo and behold, here comes a Japanese plane just over the palm trees. And I saw the

tomato on a wing. I knew it was Japanese. So I go down below and tell the duty officer, I rang the alarm, and the duty says, "What's going on? What's going on?" I says, "Well, we've just been attacked by the Japanese." He says, "Oh, no!" I says, "Oh, yes." And since I was a machine-gun crew member on the U.S.S. Dolphin, I asked him for the key to get the ammunition and the guns out. He couldn't find his key. I said, "Don't worry, I have one." He says, "You have a key?" I says, "Yes." I went back in the engine room, got me a crowbar. He says, "What are you going to do? Open the magazine. This is my key." He says, "You can't break into the magazine. That's a Court Marshall offense." I says, "I'm not going to get a Court Marshall if I do my duty, but maybe you will get one for not letting me do it." And he never got a Court Marshall and neither did I. So we fought the Japanese from the top with our 50 caliber machine gun where every third bullet is a tracer, and you can see exactly where it goes.

And then, I couldn't get out before the war started, now I know I can't get out. So I re-enlisted, got my own citizenship paper dated the 11th of December 1991 in Honolulu. And then I, at the end of the war I had ten years service and I had a commission so we, I stayed another eleven years, (?). Not bad for an immigrant kid. (he laughs)

LEVINE: You made good. Do you have anything to say about having been an immigrant and then living as an American for the better part of your

lives?

PAUL: To my way of thinking, I think more importantly than anything else was the upbringing we had and the values instilled in us, rather than realizing that we might be different from anyone else. This to me seems much more important and . . . (he clears his throat).

WALDEMAR: Whether you're rich or poor, and we've been poor. But I think the most important thing is the ethical and standard of living and doing the right thing and giving of yourself, doing your job well, and that was recognized in his case. It was recognized in my case. It was recognized in my brother Herman's case.

PAUL: We didn't actually feel that we were immigrants. We were in a locality, earning a living and doing the best we could. And, so being an immigrant was never actually in our minds.

LEVINE: Yeah. You were a family and, regardless of where you were that was your . . .

WALDEMAR: We adapted to good things in American life, and we rejected some of the poor things in American life.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. What were some of the good things that . . .

WALDEMAR: That we (?) Education, love, ethics, study, give it the best you got.

PAUL: And living a relatively good life, because even, as we were growing up we realized there were other countries where people never had enough to eat. And our table was always, always filled with food when it came mealtime.

LEVINE: What are you proudest of that you've done?

PAUL: I think raising three children. We have two girls and a boy.

LEVINE: What is your wife's name?

PAUL: Elsie.

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

PAUL: Uh, Westerdale. She, I met her in England and I also married her in England.

LEVINE: Oh, when was that?

PAUL: Back in 1944. And this was a few, well, it was in December of '44 when I got married, and the skipper, we were anchored in Southampton at that time, so I went up to Hull where my wife lived to get married. But the skipper said, "Leave your telephone numbers. If there's an emergency we'll call you, we'll know how to get a hold of you." And two hours after we got married the telephone rang. "Come back here. We're going to leave port." We're supplying the invasion forces in Normandy. It wasn't

the same time as the invasion, but a few months later they still needed ships to supply the, our troops. So after two hours of marriage I left my wife and (laughs) I went back aboard ship, didn't see her again for a few months.

LEVINE: Oh. Was your wife English?

PAUL: Yeah.

LEVINE: So you met her when you were in the service?

PAUL: Yeah. When I shipped out on our first trip, my first trip our ship docked at Hull, that's a sea coast town on the eastern coast of England, and I met her there, corresponded with her and the friendship deepened into the point where we both made the commitment.

LEVINE: And how about your children? What are their names?

PAUL: My oldest child is Dale. She's in the middle forties, maybe forty-three, forty-four. The second child is Vicky. She's about a year-and-a-half younger. And the third child is Jimmy, James, and he's I think two or three years younger than the middle child.

LEVINE: And then did you, did you, what happened after you got out of the service? What did you do then?

PAUL: Well, uh, I got married, and I had to support my family, and I still had it in

back of my mind going to college but I never quite made it because the demands of a growing family required that I provide enough money to support them, so I wound up working in the factory in this town, and I retired from the factory as an assistant foreman.

LEVINE: And how about you, Chuck? How did you meet your wife?

WALDEMAR: Uh, in church.

LEVINE: In Litchfield?

WALDEMAR: Litchfield, yeah. And she's back now, although in ashes. (they pause)
Her burial was Friday.

PAUL: So we're kind of giving each other mutual support. My wife had, two weeks earlier where she left us and my brother's wife left two weeks later.

LEVINE: Well, it's nice for both of you to have each other. Chuck, do you have children?

WALDEMAR: Yes.

LEVINE: And what are their names?

WALDEMAR: There is, my oldest is Walt, the same name as I have. They call him Walter, it's a more usual name. And the second one is George. He also

retired from the navy. And the youngest one is Edward. He works for a big insurance company in Boston.

LEVINE: Prudential?

WALDEMAR: No.

PAUL: John Hancock?

WALDEMAR: No, that's not it. It's right on the tip of my tongue. But, anyway, he's been working for them. Yeah. He's an underwriter in a casualty insurance . . .

END OF TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE A, TAPE TWO

LEVINE: And grandchildren, do you have?

WALDEMAR: Yeah, let's see. (he sighs) Uh, Walt has three, George has two and Ed has two. So they have four, four, no, three, three and two. So I . . .

LEVINE: And great?

WALDEMAR: Eight, eight.

LEVINE: Eight grandchildren.

WALDEMAR: Eight grandchildren and two, one, two, three great-grandchildren.

LEVINE: Oh. And what would you say you're proudest of having done, looking back?

PAUL: Well, I'm very thankful to the many teachers I've had, for the good contacts I've made. And I feel that my efforts have been more than rewarded from the people that I have worked for, see. They encouraged me, and I was proud of having accomplished it. Now, I'm one of the few officers in the navy that never went to high school. And I got a commission, and I retired from the navy with a commission officer's pay, and that isn't bad. And then my, my wife never worked, but she took care of our family and the children, and took care of me. And I had, I can contribute my advancements to doing more than what was required, maybe doing something extra sometimes that wasn't required. And supporting my officers and doing what they wanted me to do, and I did it extreme, I think I did it extremely well, and they recognized it, see. And I got promoted and not many, none, high school graduates have retired with my rank. They asked me, "Where'd you go to school?" I was in midway. And I says, "I graduated from grammar school." "Where'd you go to high school?" "I didn't go to high school." "Where'd you go to college?" "I didn't go to high school." "You didn't!" And he saw what I was doing, and he liked what I was doing, so he got me another promotion. So when, you do a little bit more than you have to I think, and I think the other thing that helped me considerably is trying to be a good

human being, don't' be cruel and don't be overbearing. Be reasonable. Except a great deal, and you'll get a great deal. And some of the officers were like that for me, so I tried to emulate their foresight, their interest in my promotions, their helping me. Want a cute story? (he laughs)

LEVINE: Sure.

WALDEMAR: In 1945 I got to, I got reassigned to a submarine. We went out in the Philippines. And the man that I used to work for in 1938 or '39 happened to be an admiral. (a cat is hearing meowing on the tape) And I had just taken the exam to qualify for my gold dolphins, which means qualified in submarines, that's like a pilot when he gets his wings, okay, the same thing for a submarine. And we're in the Philippines and he comes down the line, he's now a rear admiral, and I'm a young ensign, no almost middle-aged ensign. See? At the end of the war. And he says, "Chuck," he says, "it's been a long time since we've seen you." I used to run messages for him. He rode our submarine. He was the head of about four or five submarines. And when the weather changed, when we got a message, when we met a ship, well, I had to wake him up and give him this message, and he always encouraged me. And then, now in the Philippines in July of '45, he's an admiral, he's coming down the line. And I had just taken the exam by various different officers to qualify as an officer on submarines. And he came down to the end of a line where I was standing. He says, "Mr. Hermenau," he says, "I have something

for you. But," he says, "I'm going to pin it on you so he (?)." So he takes the submarine and pins it on me. He says, "But I'm not going to kiss you." (they laugh) "I'm going to let Ruth do that when she gets back to you." (they laugh) And I knew him when I was a low-rated enlisted man. See, now I'm an officer and (?).

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, yeah. That's really something to be proud of. And how about you, Paul? Do you have grandchildren?

PAUL: Yes, um, two, two, seven. Seven.

LEVINE: And great? Any great?

PAUL: No, no.

LEVINE: Not yet.

PAUL: No, not yet. Although one of, my oldest grandchild, she's quite enthralled with her boyfriend. So for me it won't be too long before that event occurs.

LEVINE: Well, is there anything else that you can think of that you want to say, either about your life now or looking back?

PAUL: Well, I think one of the things that made me much more aware of life and my surroundings and my mortality is when my wife passed away. I was holding her hand as she died. And it's quite an experience watching

someone die and go into the next world. And it, I think it affects anyone who has a dear one close to them dying, especially if he sees the dying taking place, and it makes you aware of your mortality and I think it makes you a little bit more understanding and a little bit more, with a little bit more humility. But that's an experience, well, everyone goes through sooner or later, but not everyone is there when someone you love dies and you're right there at the same time. It's a tremendous experience, and it gives you a different outlook on life I think. And now I can look back and hope that my wife and his wife are having a ball wherever they are. (they laugh)

LEVINE: Do you think about death, I mean, actually what happens, or . . .

PAUL: Yes, yeah. I think about death as being another process of life, you know. It's all intermixed one with the other. You can't get away from it, and it's just part of your life. It's, I don't think it's so much as, I don't think it's so much as a death as it is another aspect of having lived.

WALDEMAR: Could we ask you a question?

LEVINE: Yes. (break in tape) Okay, we're resuming now again. What were you saying about . . .

PAUL: I think the people who have immigrated into the U.S. have a different set of values or goals than those who still live in the country of their origin. Just the fact that they want to go to America means that they're more

ambitious. They're not satisfied with the status quo, and I think most of your immigrants have that drive in back of them that they want to improve themselves and their lot. They don't want to stay back in their country and just vegetate or just not have any hopes for a greatly improved future. So I think largely they're more ambitious than the people that are still in the country of origin.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I think that's maybe a very good note to close on, and I want to thank you both very much. It's been a pleasure.

PAUL: Oh, it's been our pleasure to talk to you about it, and I think you've done a terrific job of interviewing us. Have you ever considered going on TV like Barbara Walters? (they laugh)

LEVINE: Well, who knows? Maybe. Okay, thank you very much.

WALDEMAR: Another question.

LEVINE: Okay.

WALDEMAR: What speed is the tape? Thirty-three?

LEVINE: That's a good question.

WALDEMAR: You have a regular cassette in there?

LEVINE: No, I have a DAT, a digital.

WALDEMAR: Oh. Where can, is there any opportunity for us to get a copy of that tape?

LEVINE: Definitely. I'll send you one as soon as I get back to Ellis Island, uh, a regular cassette that you can play in a regular cassette player. Uh-huh. Yeah.

WALDEMAR: Well, you'd like to have one, wouldn't you?

PAUL: Well, if you're going to send two you can send them both to me and I can send him his.

LEVINE: Fine.

PAUL: Oh, terrific.

LEVINE: Okay. Okay, well, thank you very much.

WALDEMAR: You're welcome.

LEVINE: And this is Janet Levine, and I've been talking with Chuck and Paul Hermenau in Connecticut, in Torrington, Connecticut on September 21, 1992.

END OF INTERVIEW