

EI-294

EDITH MICHEL LOWERY DANNER

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GERMANY (born U.S.), 1927

AGE 11

PASSAGE ON "THE DEUTSCHLAND"

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service,  
and I'm here today with Edith Michel Lowery Danner.  
I'm at Mrs. Danner's home in Tampa, Florida. It's  
April 22, 1993. And Mrs. Danner came, well,  
Mrs. Danner was born in the United States . . .

DANNER: Yes.

LEVINE: Went back to her family's country of origin, Germany,  
when she was four years old, and then returned in 1927  
when she was eleven years old . . .

DANNER: Eleven, yes.

LEVINE: To the United States through Ellis Island.

DANNER: Right.

LEVINE: I look forward to hearing your story, and why don't we start at the beginning by you giving your birth date and where you were born.

DANNER: Uh, I was born in Machias, New York, which is about thirty miles outside of Buffalo, New York in 1915.

LEVINE: September . . .

DANNER: September 23, 1915.

LEVINE: Okay. And do you remember anything about Machias before you left for Germany?

DANNER: No, I do not remember anything about Machias at all. I do not. I remember only one thing, and that is that my father was very ill with this disease that was in the family, the William Osler blood disease. And we came to Florida, to Seffner, Florida, which is a little town out about twenty miles outside of Tampa. And there was an old lady who was a neighbor there, and I can remember that she was trying to teach me how to speak German. And she said, and I hear it yet in my, ringing in my ears, "Das ist ein Loffel." And that means, "This is a spoon." And I was about four

years old. Outside of that, I don't remember anything about Seffner, Florida.

LEVINE: What are your initial memories about from Germany?

DANNER: From Germany, at that time, at what age?

LEVINE: Well, from, if you went to Germany at four, any time after . . .

DANNER: That was also, that was somewhat of a trauma, and I don't have too, how shall I say, too decided memories because we went to Germany after the war, and there was a shortage of apartments. And so my father went with me because I was the oldest child, and went to his parents, who had a villa, and we stayed there, and remember I spoke not a word of German. And my mother went with the other two children to her home, and so I imagine the circumstances were stressed, and therefore I don't have a secure feeling and don't remember too much. And also that nobody could talk to me, because I couldn't understand any German, you see. And I knew of no one there who was fluent in English other than my father. And I do not, and my father was ill very often so that I don't know, having too much rapport with him.

LEVINE: What was the circumstance under which the family went back to Germany at that time?

DANNER: The circumstance?

LEVINE: Why did the family . . .

DANNER: My father was feeling that he was ill and had the feeling of wanting to see his mother once more, and so that was the initial thought of going back to Germany. And I can remember we had dollars, or my mother had six hundred and five dollars to her name when we went to Germany. And the ratio of economics was that for one dollar they could buy a bedroom set in Germany. It was inflation over there.

LEVINE: You mentioned before the tape the circumstance under which your mother and father became betrothed.

DANNER: Yes.

LEVINE: Would you say something about that . . .

DANNER: Well, my mother and father came together in somewhat strange circumstances. She relates to me that she had met my father through her mother who had rented a room to him while he was in an apprenticeship in Bruchsal,

near Karlsruhe, for a Kaufmann, which is a salesman, which has a much more dignified meaning to it than it does in this country, I think. And so he met her there, but she didn't fall in love with him at that time. But he apparently did, and he kept her in the eye. Well, so they had some meetings and when they moved to Mannheim, where my father, this was his home.

And so they went together for a while, but in those days you didn't introduce your date to your parents until you were ready to get betrothed, and so nobody knew that they were going together. And so one day he was, they were on the street walking and he said, "Oh, goodness, here comes my father." And so they crossed the street, and she said, "Well, why do we have to cross the street?" And he said, "Well," he says, "I can't introduce you to my father." And so she thought to herself, "Well, if I'm not good enough to be introduced then I'm finished with you."

LEVINE: Maybe you can say why he didn't feel he could introduce her.

DANNER: Because she was from a poorer class of people and they were well-to-do, his parents were well-to-do. And so they didn't want to mix the classes, I guess. And my

mother, my mother had an aunt in, uh, get it right. I can't think of it. Can you shut it off for a minute or not? I can't think of it.

LEVINE: That's okay. Just go on.

DANNER: She had an aunt in the north somewhere. I can't think, I don't think it was Philadelphia. But anyway, she called her, or they wired to her, and my mother went to America, and the fare was, at that time, fifty-three dollars. ( she laughs ) So, well, she went away, and then my father took all of his efforts that he could get up to have the courage to go and ring the bell at my grandmother's house and ask, "Where is Oliva?" And she says, "Why, she's in America for three weeks already." Oh, my goodness, he was devastated at the thought. And then he went to his parents in, over a period of time, and he told his parents he was going to go to Chile, and they thought that was fine, and they didn't know anything about my mother at all. And so he went to Chile, as far as they were concerned, and he went to America and he went to Machias, New York. That's where my mother's uncle was, who was a preacher. And so there they got married then. And so, but then the war came, and it

was three years and the parents still didn't know anything about my father and mother being married. They had three children. And then they, one day wrote a letter. And through the Red Cross, through a sack of potatoes over Holland, got the message to my grandparents, my father's parents, that we were alive in America and that we had met, that they had married and that we have now three children.

LEVINE: What was your father's name?

DANNER: My father's name was Henry Michel.

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

DANNER: Was Oliva, O-L-I-V-A.

LEVINE: And her maiden name?

DANNER: Her maiden name was Bellman, B-E-L-L-M-A-N.

LEVINE: And your brother's and sisters' names?

DANNER: My brother's name was Theodore and my sister's name, now, my brother's name, my brother has passed away about four years ago, and my sister died last November. Her name was Gisela, G-I-S-E-L-A. And I have a living sister yet, Helen.

LEVINE: And, uh . . .

DANNER: Helen lives in Tampa, too.

LEVINE: Oh. So you got the message. The message was received by your father's parents.

DANNER: Parents, yeah. And then, I suppose, after the war, then came the desire that, well, we'd like to return. So in 1919, after the war, they applied to return to Germany and they went over Holland, I think it was. And we had to be hospitalized because we all got the measles and different things. ( she laughs ) And my mother had quite an ordeal. So then they went to Germany, and my grandfather graciously accepted my mother. She was a very pretty woman. But then they had to separate. Not because of any differences, only because of economic situation, until they could find an apartment, because finding an apartment in Europe is certainly not like finding one in America. And so they finally did have, find an apartment in an apartment house that my father, my grandfather, gave to my, gave to my father.

LEVINE: What city, or . . .

DANNER: Mannheim, by Heidelberg.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. M-O-N . . ?

DANNER: No, M-A-N-N-H-E-I-M, Mannheim.

LEVINE: Okay. And, so, do you remember your grandparents?

DANNER: Oh, vividly, vividly, vividly. I have written about thirty pages about how my childhood was. I remember so vividly what they did and what they did for me, and how the different levels of life were for me and in the one group and in the other group.

LEVINE: Could you give a flavor of what the differences were?

DANNER: Well, the differences were such as that there was a great deal of refinement in my father's parents' home. They had a lovely villa. And they, I was read, my grandmother read stories to me. She was a great storyteller. And I remember that on Sundays we used to go there, and every Sunday we would play a cootie game, which is a dice game, in order to win our carfare back in the evening, Sunday evening, which gave my mother a rest from four kids. And so, then I remember that potato salad was always the menu, potato salad and chicken, roast chicken which, of course, is

perhaps has a little bit of relation, you know, when Roosevelt was here, "a chicken in the pot every Sunday." Well, it must have been in those times, too, that the better people had chickens every Sunday, you see. And then my grandmother had the, she had the nicest habit that I thought were so impressionable for children, and that was that she, after finishing the meal, after we had eaten very, I should say, how shall I say, very observantly, you know, that we did everything that they said to eat, the plate clean and all that, you know. So she said, she promised us that she would, she would knead us something, and that was white bread she always had, which not every family in Germany had. It was usually considered a Sunday thing. Sundays you have white bread. During the week you have black bread. And so, but Grandmother had, Grossmama, and the other one was Grandmother. So Grossmama had white bread, and she would knead this and make each one of us little figures we could name a dog or a cat or a little boy or a little girl or whatever we could name that. And she would knead that at the table. To show you the attention that we had, we were not excused from the table to just run away from the table. We had to be excused. And then she

took her hairpin and made the eyes, and the toothpick she made the little legs, you know. And I thought that was absolutely a most cherished memory for me, because I realize today, as an old great-grandmother, that, how valuable time is for children, and this is what is lacking in the homes today.

LEVINE: Were there any other childrearing kinds of practices that you . . .

DANNER: In Germany?

LEVINE: Yes. That you experienced, either by your parents or grandparents?

DANNER: Well, I just know that I never saw anybody who disobeyed anybody. I always saw obedience with every child. A fresh child, I just never saw. There was, generally that was expected of you. Courtesy, respect and honor.

LEVINE: And what was the difference in your . . .

DANNER: And then at my grandmother's, at my grandmother's, my grandmother, my grandfather was a, originally a watchmaker, a watchmaker, and what else? And a tin smith. But he was employed with the railroad as a

steady employment. I can remember my grandmother's bedroom having about fifty clocks ticking in there because he was repairing them, and he was a gunsmith.

So he had lots of guns in the bedroom where he had his little workbench, and about fifty or gosh knows, near the whole wall was hanging full of clocks. I can imagine. I don't know if I could have slept in there or not. But anyhow, that's the thing, that's the way that it had to go. And the life with them was free. They didn't watch us. We could just run wild. And they lived in the country. Now, my grandmother, Grossmama, lived in the country, but that was like not the country where there's farms, you know what I mean?

My grandmother lived where there were farms. And so we were there, and we were just let run wild. And we just thought this was seventh heaven to just go wild.

But we knew when the bells tolled, that the churchbells tolled, that we'd better be home, because then it would be reprimanding and we would get balled out. But we, we didn't choose to do that. We chose to obey, because they were so generous in their freedom with us, you know. And then Grandmother had, now, this grandmother had another lovely thing. She only cooked for us what she knew that we liked, so

therefore we never had to be urged to, "Will you eat that?" If you don't want to eat spinach, no.

( she laughs )

LEVINE: Do you remember dishes that she prepared that you really did like?

DANNER: Let's see. I don't think so. I think I might have to lie, because I was a very poor eater. I hated food, and I loathed milk. ( she laughs ) Which is an interesting point, which I will have brought up in my letter, that when I came to Ellis Island I saw, I'll hold this back yet for a little bit. But I'm bringing it up that I loathe milk. But anyway, that's, I don't think that, well, yes, she made potatoes. She made little, she made potatoes, and they were rolled and dropped in hot fat. I remember that. And then she made English muffins in the pan, which are called Dampfnudel, which is not made in every part of Germany, but I know how to make them. I learned how to make them. And it's a yeast dough which has to be put in a pan of hot oil, and then she quickly dropped about a half a cup of water in it, and quickly, on top, so it would steam up. And then they would get such real brown crusts on the bottom and, ahh, that

was so good. And they're sweet, but you put salt in the fat, so it had a sweet/salt combination, which was unusual. And to that we ate dried fruits cut, which were soaked and cooked then, you know. And I have something in the story about that, too, what we did with those dried fruits. ( she laughs ) I have that in my stories that I wrote. So, not to this, but I have written, I said, about thirty pages about what I remember as a child.

LEVINE: Can you remember any differences in the homes, between the two grandparents?

DANNER: Yes. Well, of course, my grandparents who were the wealthy people, they had it exquisitely furnished. I remember there were piano lessons and singing. And, oh, we were, we had, which I also liked my aunt. There was a great deal done, I think, in developing what I would call developing character. The dining room and the living room door had the French doors. Well, when we came on Sundays, my aunt, we were somewhat theatrically-inclined, and she would perform dances, and we'd close those doors, and we'd imagine this is the stage now. And here we were four children sitting there like precious little jewels. We were

good kids. Except, of course, when we were let loose. We were instigated by other kids, we were just as bad as any other ones were, you know. But under the supervision we were obedient children. So then they would have all kinds of little imaginary things, and this was, you know, built out fantasy up, and I think this is so great for children is to help develop these fantasies, give them a chance. And so when she was dancing there, of course, maybe we thought, you know, someday we were going to dance on a stage too, you see, and sing and so forth. I thought that was wonderful, to have that. And then at ten o'clock it was time to go home. That was the last streetcar. And so my grandfather would walk with us, we walked about two blocks from the streetcar, would walk us to the streetcar. And we had earned the money from playing the dice, you know. So he took us to the streetcar. And then, of course, he had called my mother that she would be at the other end, and he would deliver us there and we would go home, and it was a thrilling Sunday and to me a treasured memory for life. And today, yet, I have some letters of my grandfather. Can you imagine that? I still have some letters. The paper is just about flaking. But those

are how many years? Sixty years or more. Isn't it something? Sixty-five years, I think. I figured it out the other day.

LEVINE: Now, what did your grandfather do?

DANNER: My grandfather was an administrator of estates, and I don't know what the, I don't know whether that brings that much money in, you know. Because they had a maid, and they also had an apartment house with thirteen families and another two stores in that, so I don't know where the money came from. He was not a crook, nothing like that, you know what I mean. It was no, but to go further back the story tells that there was a story of a, of one, of the marriage of Graven, Countess of Mansfield, is also in the story in our background, from the Michel family. And they had silver mines in Austria. Now, maybe, my cousin, who lives in Heidelberg, still has one of the silvers, silver pieces. And he treasures it like nobody's business, and so they always teased me if I acted a little bit dignified. Well, yes, of course you come from the veins of Countess of Mansfield, you see. So maybe my grandfather had some, I don't know that, and I never asked. Because I, you know, you also don't

ask a lot of personal questions. You were much too refined to go into people's personal things like that, you see.

LEVINE: And your father, before he left Germany, he was an apprentice?

DANNER: No, no. Yeah. Well, he had learned, he had learned apprentice as, uh, apprentice in, what do they call it here?

LEVINE: In sales?

DANNER: No. Well, in Germany they call it Kaufmann, which translates, means a salesman. But it has, like, what do they call, business administration, you know. So he was equipped very well. And he worked in Tampa. Before we went back to Germany he worked in the Ibor City Bank, and they used to go, he said he used to go from Seffner to Ibor City with a horse and buggy on Monday mornings, and on Fridays he would return to Seffner, because there was no other transportation at that time. So that's what he did, and that's the only thing that he could do because, well, what else could he do, you know. But those things, you know, he wasn't, he didn't know how to hit a nail on the head.

I'm sure he didn't. He was not qualified for anything else, but he was well-educated. He knew all the operas by heart and all that, went in that line, you see. And, of course, in Germany he was too young yet and, of course, I mean, he didn't have to hurry up and get a job. He came from a family where he didn't have to be pushed out into the world and make a dollar, you know. I don't know if he ever had a job in Germany or not. I don't know that. And then, later on when we were over there, we lived from the income from the apartment house. You see?

LEVINE: Well, do you remember, were you a religious family?

DANNER: Well, that's all, that goes into another, into another fantasy, let's say. We were religious families. My father was an agnostic, or rather my grandfather was. I don't know how much my father was, because I never talked with him on that. This is what I hear from my mother. But they were, my mother and my father were in Ibor, no, not in Ibor City, in Seffner. And out there was a Dr. Langsdorff. He was once written up in Tampa about his, and he was a Rosicrucian. And so he told, he, they, they were looking for people who were educated, my father was, when he was out there in

Seffner. Can you imagine being stranded, not having anybody intelligent to talk to? So they met Dr. Langsdorff. And so they started off with Rosicrucian, at least the concepts of it, and whatnot.

But I don't think they were really, you know. But then my, I went to Germany. That was in 1919, and my father died in '23. So there were not too many more years that happened, and most of that time I remembered that it was said, "Shh. Daddy's sick. Quiet." And, but I remember, then, after my father died, that his cousin came to her and said would she like to join her for some lectures? And they were anthroposophical lectures on metaphysics. And so she was a student of Rudolph Steiner. I don't know whether you've met him or heard about him or not, yeah. So that's how that, and my grandmother was a devout Catholic, the grandmother on the farm, you know, on the more, what would you call that? A village background. And she, they were devout Catholics. And I was very proud of that, too. I enjoyed that, too. Because I remember one Sunday was Fronleichnam. I don't know exactly how to translate, was it Pentecost? I'd have to look that up, Furonleichnam. [the feast of Corpus Christi] But

anyway I was, my hair was curled into a thousand curls with rags, and that we went to the church, and I had my best dress on, and we had to kneel down and kiss the cross of Jesus or, I don't know just exactly what we kissed. I guess it was the cross. And then we were in the parade, and we threw rose petals, you know. And I felt very, I was very, very much impressed with the church, very much impressed with the dignity of the church, and with these beautiful paintings, and the quiet, the sound added to, that impressed me highly.

LEVINE: Can you say anything more about the fantasy aspect of, that was developed in you in Germany? I mean, do you remember it like specific stories that you can still recall?

DANNER: Well, of course, I mean, I remember that I went to the anthroposophical lectures with my mother at, you know, a very early age. And I do say that subliminally, even if I didn't understand it, you see, those things do register in your brain, and you, I think developing the antennas which you need in later life to become a perceptive person, because we have an aura about us of about eight feet, and I'm very

sensitive. I can tell I don't want this person, I don't know why, and yet I feel it. And I think these things are brought out already at a very early age. And so I was impressed, I was already quoting from, at the Christmas time, which is very, very religious, very, very sincere at Christmas time.

LEVINE: Maybe you could describe Christmas time.

DANNER: And I remember that was, well, now, I was younger than eleven. I don't know which year it was, but I suppose it was maybe ten or nine, that I quoted from Goethe, from Faust, the Prologue from Heaven.

LEVINE: And what kind of an event or . . .

DANNER: Christmas, Christmas event. Christmas, you know, like you go to the churches and you have Christmas, uh, celebrations? Well, and then I was one of the four archangels, which was the beginning of the Faust, the Prologue from Himmel, which is the Prologue of Heaven. And so I remember, and I remember being in this white gown. And I was a super, super shy child, but heavens knows I didn't mind getting up on the stage. Isn't that strange? I didn't mind, I don't remember having any fear of, "I'm not going to go out there." No. I

was going to go out there. And so we did that. I remember that. And I remember my sister saying a little piece and, "A little kiss I will send you all."

And the whole place was roaring with, because she was so adorable. She was only a little tot, you know. So I, and my daughter tells me about this, maybe because I have told her about this already, but she said, she goes to Unity Church and she said, "You know," she says, "the church events are so, they're so meaningless. Nobody puts any love into it and the children are not taught anything." And all that. Who gives any, who gives any time to any of these things any more? Somebody had to coach us, I'm sure. And then, of course, I remember Christmas. Do you want me to tell that? I remember Christmas over there, which was, ahhh, an awesome time. I believed in Santa Claus until I was, I guess I didn't believe in Santa Claus any more, but I believed in the rituals. And that was that there was some woman in our complex where we rented, you know. And she played an angel, and she had wings, big silver wings, and then she would come into the room. Now, you didn't see a Christmas tree being bought or decorated or anything. It's just, Christmas was here. It was imaginary. It was "shh."

And then she came and we had to all say a little piece of some kind, a little Christmas verse. And then we had to be promised that we were going to be good and so forth and so on. And then we got, we always had to clean, we had a small apartment. We had to clean out our whole apartment in order for each one to get his. I had a great big kitchen like this with a stove like that, a real stove that I could burn kerosene in, in those days already. That was a real treasure. And then my sister, she had a bedroom and a living room with beautifully handcarved furniture. And my brother had a store with little sausages and all of these things, little drawers and all. It was just fascinating.

LEVINE: These were like dollhouses or . . .

DANNER: They were, they were like boxes, but they were, it was wallpapered and all that, you know. But so beautiful. My kitchen, I know was this big. ( she gestures )

LEVINE: About three or four feet?

DANNER: Yeah. Kitchen cabinet, and the stove was metal, and it had two little electric lamps on each side, battery lamps, of course. And then, of course, the chocolate

was our groceries, you know, and so forth and so on, you know.

LEVINE: And these were Christmas gifts?

DANNER: No, this came every year. This was not a Christmas gift. This came every year, and it was taken away again. See, that had a special purpose. And then we were played with. We were played with. My aunt played with us. My mother played with us. And we played, like, you know, mother and father and the aunt's coming and we're going to have company now and all that. You see what it did toward family life?

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

DANNER: Well, I mean, we treasured that. And, however, of course the apartment was small, so all of those things disappeared. But it did in a lot of other places, too. Those things did not stay around. It would come back again . . .

LEVINE: In other words, you had them for a period of . . .

DANNER: January 6th, until January 6, yeah.

LEVINE: And what was January 6th?

DANNER: What they call Three Kings [Dreikönige, Epiphany] I think they call that, Three Kings. I think it's, Three Kings is a Catholic holiday, I think. And that's when everything, that's when everything disappears. And you're in school, and you come home, there's nothing there any more. So you see what an awesome thing this is, then, to have Christmas and it comes here and it's, "Oh!" You know, and then it's all gone, and then you anticipate until next year.

LEVINE: Can you recall, did your mother, father and siblings sit around the dinner table? Was that a regular event?

DANNER: I don't remember that too, yes, yes, we did have, but I don't remember it too vividly. Because, first of all, I was a bad eater. Food did not interest me. And secondly, I think my daddy was always the first consideration that, "Shh, be quiet." So there was not, I don't remember lots of things going on at a table. I do not remember that. And I think we were probably at some time, too, left in charge of the maid, with the maid, we were in charge with the maid.

And so we probably ate out in the kitchen or were given food in the kitchen. That's what I remember there. But, and children, which is not such a good thing, children are to be seen and not heard. You see, there was never that rude thing that you don't get a chance, I go to my grandchildren now and I don't have a word to say because they are talking. Quite a change. Now, I think it has its values and it has its disadvantages that you have to let children express some things too, but you have to guide the conduct of the routine of the conversation, I think. So that you will get them to where you can convey something to them that's constructive and not, "Shut up now, you don't have anything to say," and so forth like that. You see? Today is the complete opposite of what was at that time children were to be seen and not heard, and I don't agree with that today.

LEVINE: About the holidays, do you remember Easter?

DANNER: Oh, Easter, yes. We had a, I remember this Easter, the first Easter in America, can you imagine? I remember that. Now, how funny. I found the golden egg in Seffner. I found the golden egg, and that was quite some excitement, you know. I found it. But I

don't remember too many details, but I just know that I was the one that found the golden egg.

LEVINE: Do you remember any differences in celebrating Easter in Germany and here?

DANNER: Now, I can tell you something that's rather interesting in Germany, which is, well, I felt it as a class, as a class, as a caste system, you know. My, I told you my grandmother, one side they were well-to-do and the other side they were poor. So from my poor grandparents we got red candy Easter rabbits. I've never seen them here. Red candy. And from my grandmother we got chocolate. And I remember that the, her daughter, the grandparents' daughter, that's my aunt, that her children got chocolate and they didn't get the red Easter bunnies. So see how you already felt that as a child, less than eleven, or somewhere along there.

LEVINE: Do you think it's had ramifications on you that this . . .

DANNER: No. I think whatever I have experienced, I have been very grateful for just because I think I have been able to look into both sides of life to appreciate, to

have a feeling for the poor and what worthy persons they can be too, that you're not everything just because you have money. I think sometimes it's a deterrent, even, because some people who have had money have acted not so very nice. I mean, just even my grandmother. I don't think that was a fair thing to do, because somehow or other kids will speak the truth. Now, I don't know how I found out, or did my poor mother feel that her children were not as good as my other, her other, her daughter's children, who got the chocolate, and we got the red Easter bunny, the candy Easter bunny. You see how you can already separate that in life? What else do I remember? Easter.

LEVINE: Did you go to school?

DANNER: Yes, I went to school. Oh, yes. I learned how to read in German. Well, I mean, I, how shall I say? Fifth grade, I came, I went to the fifth grade over there, and then came over here and started the sixth grade. And, you know, they have a different, a different script over there than, you know, they call it the Latin. I think you learn that in the fourth grade, the Latin. And that's like what we write, and

the other is a German script, and I learned that, too.

And I think I could, perhaps, write it yet if I wanted to, but never had an occasion to. But I can read it. If I see it I can read it. And I still have some cards from my grandmother that she has written in the German script. Now, I still can't make it out. Now, my daughter says she can't, she can't read. Can you read these letters? In some of the books there are. I'm not aware of it. Can you tell the letters?

LEVINE: I think I can, yeah.

DANNER: But there are other books then, now, let me see now. I'm reading one here. Would you mind getting one of those books over there, because that's a real old one, and see if that, if that print is in there. My daughter says, "I can't read the print, Mother."  
( there is a disturbance in the microphone )

LEVINE: Did you have difficulty learning, uh . . .

DANNER: German?

LEVINE: German?

DANNER: No. Children don't have difficulty learning German, learning any language. Children pick that up like

nothing. Can you tell if this is a different writing now?

LEVINE: I feel as though I can see, I can tell what the letters are but, of course, I'm not . . .

DANNER: You think it's, you don't recognize the words.

LEVINE: I'm not reading it.

DANNER: Yes, uh-huh. Well, anyway, so that, but I did, and I was good in, I was good in, what do you call it, in composition I was good in German. I seem to have been writing nice compositions. And they are so rigid with their, with their school conduct there that I remember I misspelled a word. All nouns are spelled in a capital letter over there. And it was (?) in my composition, and I spelled it with a small "l," and I was taken up to the front of the class, and the teacher whipped me with one of those canes across my hand. Oh, boy, and it swelled up, and I didn't even tell my mother because I was ashamed that I had made an error like that.

LEVINE: And that was typical, to be hit for making a mistake?

DANNER: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Yes.

But I never forgot that I spelled "curl" with a capital "L," right? ( she laughs )

LEVINE: Well, can you remember anything else about the school there that was in contrast to the school when you . . .

DANNER: Now, I have another vivid incident now. I don't know what it is, but, you know, sometimes there were teachers. I remember this teacher, she had, she had a collar this way with stays in it, and she was all in black. Her hair piled on top of the head. And she was my religion teacher, because the religion was separate from the class, you know. I had to maybe go to another school because the religious teacher would come then. So I can remember being dragged by two other superior girls who were in the older classes just being pulled, literally pulled, they could pull me to the class. I didn't want to go there. I don't know why I didn't want to go there. And then I had, subsequently I had another teacher who I enjoyed going there because he read us mythology. And we sang in that class, and I loved to sing. Now, isn't that something?

LEVINE: And he was also a religion teacher?

DANNER: Yes! He was also a religion teacher. Now, he was called, he was an agnostic, but it was called a religion. So, but I certainly didn't, I benefitted from him because he taught some classic literature, you know, poetry, and so I didn't lose anything even if I, and today I'm not, I think I've been everything but Jewish. My, wherever my parents went they stuck me in the church somewhere, and so I've been everything, and I have respect for every religion, for every religion. And I want everybody to be happy in his own religion, because I think there's only one higher force, and we call it God or we called it Mohammed or we call it this or we call it Allah, and I think it's all the same. It's the divine source which I think guides us all, and so there really should be no hatred amongst us on account of religion.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about Rudolph Steiner and his teachings in Germany?

DANNER: No, I do not. I only know that I went there after I got married. I was there in 1963, and I went to, no, he was dead by that time. I think he died in '27 or

something like that, I'm not sure. I have his book here somewhere, his life. And, but I just know that my mother took me to these, to these lectures and, you know, then she started to tell me about, believing in reincarnation and, you know, the soul is not, the soul has forever been and always will be, and things like that. So I think that my mind was opened very early.

And I remember in the twelfth grade a Mr. Meeker in English class. I had to get up and report on a poem by Wordsworth, and I talked about that poem, and in that part of it says "the soul has elsewhere had its setting." Well, I talked about that. And then when I got to the French class, my French, I didn't, this is the one time I didn't study French, my French lesson.

And I was called on. ( she laughs ) I told the French teacher, "I'm so sorry, but I didn't study my lesson last night." He says, "Oh, a girl that can interpret poetry like you can, don't tell me you can't decipher this French." ( she laughs ) So, you see, it went with me, reading about this. But later on I went over to Donauch, in Switzerland, where Rudolph Steiner, his building is there, you know.

LEVINE: Did you or your family continue with any of the

teachings of Rudolph Steiner when you came back to the United States?

DANNER: Well, in New York I went for a whole year to this theosophy class. Yeah. And then I had, we studied Faust for a whole year. And here I tried to go to some lectures, and I wasn't too successful because they were, well, I suppose it wasn't very many members, and some of them came from here and from there, and they had just a little, uninteresting place. And, in fact, I was a little afraid to go in the part of town where that little hall was because I was by myself and having, and it would be held in the evenings and I was afraid to go. And really a lot of the things I had already heard. And I said, "Well, it doesn't seem like I'm going to get too much further here." So I've just read by myself, but I do miss it dreadfully. I miss New York. I loved New York. There's no place like New York. You live in New York?

LEVINE: Yes, I do.

DANNER: I lived out in Long Island, Floral Park, for twenty years.

LEVINE: Well, let's, let's say what decided your family, in

1927, to come back to the United States.

DANNER: Oh, well, that was on my father's more-or-less death bed. He said to my mother, when he, before he became delirious, he said, "I would like for you to send the children. If you ever have the opportunity, bring the children to the country where they were born." And so Mother's feeling of perhaps wanting something better for their children than what they had, she, the opportunity came and, strangely enough, some gentleman from Tampa, Florida, came to Mannheim and visited my mother. And then, my mother was a good-looking woman. And now she was, she was, how shall I say, she was four years a widow. And he influenced her, and he said that he had a twenty-two room house in Ballas Point, and that she should come over here. She could rent rooms, and she would have a better living for us children to get ahead in life, and so forth and so on. It didn't turn out that way, because it seemed like he wanted her for other purposes, and she didn't go along with that. So she, so my mother had a visitor one day through acquaintances, and they were sitting on the porch in the evening and something rustled, and she got up and she moved the bushes over, and there

was this gentleman standing. And so this friend that Mother was talking to on the porch said, "Oh, is that how it looks here, that somebody's eavesdropping on you?" And he said, "Well, we'll have to see about that." And so this gentleman started coming around on Sunday afternoons, and my goodness, he asked my mother to marry him. And he was a widower, not a widower, he was a bachelor, forty-eight years old, and he took my mother and four children. And we left that home, and we came and moved on Idlewild here, then.

LEVINE: Let's, just stepping back, would you, did your mother remain friendly with your father's parents after . . .

DANNER: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, yes. There was never any, how shall I say, any war or anything going on. We were still with them.

LEVINE: So it was the prospect of working for this man in Tampa that led you, your mother, here.

DANNER: Well, right. My mother thought that she could bring us into a better world. We were not suffering over there. However, if somebody says to you, oh, you're going to paint the heavens for you, wouldn't you think that perhaps maybe you should do that for your

children? And then I guess subconsciously it was probably in her mind Daddy said, "Bring the children back to the country where they were born." Maybe, you know, he felt maybe there would be more, I don't know, more development for us or something. I don't really know that.

LEVINE: Well, where did you leave from?

DANNER: We left from Mannheim and went to Bremen, and in Bremen we caught the ship.

LEVINE: And the name of the ship?

DANNER: Was the Deutschland. I have it here. Didn't I show it to you?

LEVINE: I just wanted, the S.S. Deutschland.

DANNER: The S.S. Deutschland, yes. ( a rustling noise is heard ) Didn't I give it to you? Where did I put it? Here, no. I don't want to lose it. I just want to be sure that I don't lose it. Well, anyhow, so that was the Deutschland that we came on.

LEVINE: Did you, were you examined prior to leaving?

DANNER: No. Oh, yes, yes. We had to, I remember that I had

an eye problem which was like an infection of the eyes, I imagine, because I had little pimples, little pimples in the eye. And I had, I remember that my eyes were all smeared up with vaseline or some kind of salve. And that I had to wear glasses for a while, and that was in order to be able to come to this country that I, that was my impression. I don't think that was ever discussed much any more after that. But when we came, when we came on the ship we were like, you know, single file. And I thought it was absolutely abominable the way the doctor took, he had a pencil or whatever he had and, you know, this is how he, I could just see how disgusted he was to look at us. And I felt really angry with him that he should have that attitude, because a doctor is a very highly respected person in Germany. And I just didn't think his conduct toward us was, but perhaps now as I reflect, maybe I would do the same thing because some of those people were just, they were like pigs. Pasty hair pasted together, you know.

LEVINE: And he would go through the hair to look for lice?

DANNER: He had a stick. I'm sure it was some doctor's stick, you know, like a long. Anyway, he went, we had to all

go through that to get examined to then go to Ellis Island, you see. And then we were taken to Ellis Island. But I remember how the foghorns tooted in the morning. It was dawn when we came. And then my mother rushed us to the window, to the bullseye, to see, and there was this ( she whispers ) magic statue standing there, you know. And now we were going to go to heaven.

LEVINE: Tell me what you expected.

DANNER: I, I tell you, ( she laughs ) you know, at eleven, I really didn't know. I think we are a little bit more broad-minded having, having had, so to say, the melting pot of the world here in America. Children must be much more open as to what different nationalities would look like. I didn't know what I was going to meet, and how the people in America would look. I was a little scared, I think. I was a little apprehensive. Well, anyhow, and then I just didn't know what to expect. And then these routines were not very enjoyable to be, you know, treated, I felt, then, too, like I'm garbage, you know, going through with all these people. And then being the way the doctor treated us. I thought to myself, "Well, and you're

going to go through my hair just like that, too? You feel about me the same way as you feel about them?" You see, that was a feeling of rejection. And then I, then we went on the, we were ferried, we were taken on the ferry, and gone to Ellis Island. And there, then, came the huge hall and all of these people, there must have been several hundred, and sit there and sit there and sit there. And I remember my mother would go dozens of times up to the front of this where there was a desk, and there was this Negro lady there. And my mother could talk to her, which seemed to be an asset, because she could get through quicker, you know, and make herself understood. Whereas perhaps a lot of these other people would go up, and then they'd talk with their hands and feet, not speaking the English language, to try to get through why they're detained, and why they're detained, you see? And we were detained because of our, my mother and my sister, the younger sister, Gisela, was born in Germany. And so on account of, they, my mother and she had the right to come in here. But somehow or another there was some question about my brother and my sister and, my sister and my brother, the ones that were born in America. That somehow or other, on account of our

papers, we had to go to Ellis Island. I never could find out why that was, why they thought something was wrong. But, anyhow, so we were examined there then, and then, well, then we had the routine of going through the corridors. I think they're displayed on that book there, the little corridors that we went down, single file. I felt like chickens, you know, with single, geese like rather, going single file. And I resented that, I resented that, too. But then my gosh! Then when you came in there, I was thrilled at the, they had big pans like this ( she gestures ) with milk in it, hot milk, and rice. And I thought that was delicious. I hated milk, you know, but I thought that was delicious. And then they had these rolls. They looked something like the ham, like the frankfurter rolls, but they were all together, and you just peeled one off. I'm sure I've seen that somewhere in some bakeries. And that, and that, of course, it wasn't Sunday, and here I'm getting white bread. You know, that was a treat. That certainly was, well, it didn't have crust on it like it did in Germany, but nevertheless it was white.

( she laughs ) So I was very appreciative of that. And then about ten o'clock in the morning, I don't

remember where we went to the bathroom. I can't remember that. Isn't that strange? I don't remember that. And then I remembered going and walking around and seeing these people working on their looms, and especially this great, big one. But they had said that they had been there for a long time already, couldn't speak English. And they were not allowed to go back to their country, but didn't have permission to get into this country. And, you see, I'd like to bring up this point, which I think is apropos, because the other day I was a little irritated when the, some of the people felt ill at Clinton, about the Haitis, about Clinton, about not letting them in and so forth and so on. And look at what they were doing at the people coming from Europe that if you had lice you couldn't come in here, huh? And then AIDS? Forgive me, I think there's a difference! Now, I, you know, I'm certainly willing to help anybody, but I think this goes a little too far where we're not so, well, if we were sitting on top of the world, but we're not sitting on top of the world, so I don't know why this is fair to infect some more people in America with these people. I don't think that's fair. I don't know, maybe I'm not right, but somehow or another I

don't think they should be let in. Why did they have these rules all those years back? Why did that have those rules? And if you had lice you didn't come in here, and lice is no, it's not contagious, it's just that you get them, you know, if you get too close to somebody. Well, anyhow, because I had them once, I had them once in Germany. That was a stigma. Oh, my goodness, I came home once with lice. My mother about had a fit. So then I was, I had to go with the scrutiny of these fine, fine combs and get combed every day. And then they, I was told to be careful in school, who I sat next to. And I said, well, that wasn't very easy to tell somebody that they're louse queen of the class, you know. So, well, anyhow, so I resented that, the way they were treating us. And then at ten o'clock was time to go out and get fresh air. I don't know, well, the way the building, I guess the air was coming in from the top, because there were no windows on the side. There were windows on the top, and so we were let out at about ten o'clock in the mornings, and it was about half an hour that I recall, give or take. I don't think it was an hour. It wasn't all that long. And there's why I had my thoughts of, "How could I get away from here?"

Now, I think it was the resentment of how I was being treated. Now, I wasn't hit or anything. There was no, but the stigma of the idea that I wasn't treated like a whole person. Look at that, how at eleven years old already, and I don't know if every child reacted that way or not, but I did. I don't think my younger sisters did.

LEVINE: Well, what was your idea about coming to America?

DANNER: Oh, I was, I would think that, you know, that I would be invited in a home and people would be happy that we're here, sort of like going to an aunt or like going to your grandmother. And I thought I would meet American people, and baloney. It wasn't all like that at all. ( she laughs ) You see? Rules of that nature, I thought, were much more rigid than any I had had to adhere to in Germany. You see?

LEVINE: Now, how long did you stay at Ellis Island?

DANNER: Only three days, only three days. Because my mother could speak English, and she was able to convey whatever the, whatever the problem was with our passports. We had them, you know. But I don't know what, I don't know what they're, what they were

stumbling about. I don't know that.

LEVINE: And your living, where you slept . . .

DANNER: So then my mother also, then it was come at night, and we had to all sleep on these benches and all that. So my mother thought, "Oh, my God." And I remember that she had money on her that she told me she had, six or eight hundred dollars. And then, in 1927, that wasn't, that was quite a bit of money. I mean, no rich person, but, I mean, it wasn't like having fifty cents on you, you know. So she thought, "My gosh!" I mean, and these people look at them, you know. She said, "Oh, my goodness." And so she went there to the lady, and so she says, "I think we can help you. We have some rooms upstairs." And so I think she paid twenty-five dollars for that night, for those six beds. And then, oh, lying there, and my gosh, the birds were flying all over and screen on top of us, you know, barbed wire. Cyclone fence.

LEVINE: Screen under the ceiling, but over the beds?

DANNER: Well, it was, it was, you know, not like we were in this way. It was high. It was high, but it was cyclone fence. And then beyond that were those tile

walls that I remember that.

LEVINE: And there were birds caught above the cyclone fence?

DANNER: Above the cyclone. So I guess that must have been opening somewhere, and then they didn't have screens on the, on those windows, because how would the birds get in? I don't know. Let's see whether I remember anything else. Well, and then of course we were shipped out of there. And then I remember some of the ladies that my mother had talked to, in German, of course. Said, "My, aren't you lucky that you speak English, because you're getting out and we don't know how long we're going to stay until our turn comes." You see? So anyway, then, but then I had a nice, pleasant experience coming down on probably The Silver Meteor or one of those trains coming from New York to Tampa. I should have remembered, but I didn't.

LEVINE: You mean, you left for Tampa right from Ellis Island?

DANNER: Yeah. Well, my mother had some acquaintances in Orange, New Jersey, and we went there for a short visit, and the next day or the next couple of days we came down, we came on the train. And on the train was an American couple who had the corner department,

compartment, and they were fascinated with us three German, four German children, you know. And . . .

LEVINE: I think, excuse me. I think we'll pause here so I can change the tape.

DANNER: Yes, fine.

LEVINE: Okay. This is the end of Tape One.

DANNER: Oh, my gosh! ( they laugh )

LEVINE: With Edith Danner.

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

LEVINE: This is Tape Two, and I'm talking with Edith Danner, and we're going to continue now, having left Ellis Island you went to Orange, New Jersey, for a day or two.

DANNER: With some friends.

LEVINE: With some friends.

DANNER: Yes.

LEVINE: And then from there?

DANNER: And then from there we took the, either the Silver Meteor, or whatever, there's another one. I don't remember what it was named. We took that to Tampa, Florida, where my mother had decided to come with this gentleman to take up our new residence in America. And I was so delighted because we met such a lovely couple who had a little five-year-old girl. And we were invited by them to have a dish of ice cream. Well, I mean, a dish of ice cream you had in Germany on a wedding. So you can imagine how we treasured that. Now, we got an ice waffle for ten pfennigs at times, which is like an Italian ice, but certainly no dish of ice cream. I can never, ever have remembered a dish of ice cream except at a wedding. So this was quite an impression. This, now, was becoming heaven. And then we came to Tampa, Florida, with the sunshine greeting us here. And, oh, I was delighted. The weather was just so impressionable. It was just wonderful. And then we went to school, and I was, I was charmed by the teachers. They were so forthcoming, and the children just stood on their head to try to help us with the English language. They would hand us little pieces of paper like, there would be "pencil" on there and, you know, and show us then,

while the teacher was trying to teach the class. And, well, I was just thrilled with that. And what was else? Then some other new impressions. I had a teacher, Miss Wendy. And when it was lunchtime she always had a sandwich of white bread, a sandwich. And it was brown in the middle, and for the life of me I couldn't figure out what on earth she had in between that sandwich, and nobody ever told me what that was, and I came home to my mother, and I said, "This teacher eats some bread with brown stuff in the middle. It looks abominable." And I don't know if she told me it was peanut butter or not, but anyhow, it was, "Ugh," you know. And I loved peanut butter. ( she laughs ) Then another time I had, was introduced in Tampa here years ago when we came in '27, they had quite a nice little place called Sulphur Springs where they had a huge chute for going into the Hillsborough River, and some little, some little shops around, a little, what would you call them, little stands where you could buy sandwiches and things like that. And this friend of, this friend of the friend who came to Germany to get my mother, he had a stand there, and so we ate a dinner, and it was sweet potatoes. And this is the first time I had sweet

potatoes and I vomited, because I had never eaten that before. I don't know whether the sweet potato was so abominable or whether the idea of a potato that was sweet. I don't know. That was mental suggestion, you know. I vomited. And today I just love sweet potatoes. ( she laughs ) But these are some of the new impressions, you know. And then I was just so delighted the way they taught us in school, that they were so forthcoming. And then we must have been very, very good pupils because my brother won the blue prize in arithmetic, something that they had. I got my artwork in the Tampa fair, and my sister got some artwork in the fair. So I think we were not two, not three bad children who came here, right?

LEVINE: Well, it sounds like you didn't experience anything like the greenhorn phenomenon where people were prejudiced against because they had come.

DANNER: Well, there was one incident I know, and that was after my mother remarried, we moved on this side of town. We were living over here, and then we moved over there and had a bigger home. And across the street from us were some people, and my mother had cows, and loved chickens and things like that. We

had, I think, a half of an acre there on Hannah Street. You don't know where that is, but it's a half an acre. And we were just on the edge of town. 15th Street was the end of the town. Or, what do you call, the town border. And 13th Street is where our home was. So she could have chickens, and we had some goats and we had everything. Pigeons, she loved that.

And I was delighted that you could put a seed in the ground and something came up. I was just in heaven. I couldn't do that in Germany because we didn't have any ground there. Everything was cement. So, anyhow, something happened, and they had a bad boy. They had a bad boy. And he, now, this comes from the parents, I'm sure, because he did used to say, "You Germans you, you Germans you." And then I thought, "What's the matter with us Germans?" You know. And then we asked our mother, "Why does he say that to us?" Because my mother had not ever taught us about Negroes or anything. They were nice people. We didn't know anything about that, because that was the first Negro that I had seen in New York. So there was no prejudice there, and I didn't know, I didn't know anything about World War, I didn't know anything about that. My mother was not, we didn't talk about those

things. And so I didn't know what that meant. "You Germans you." And so my mother told me then about the war, that the German and American people against, you know, were in the war. And, oh, I felt real terrible.

So my youngest sister was the same age as this boy was. Now, she might have been, she might have been eight or nine or something like that. Anyway, they got each other, in each other's hair. She wouldn't take it. She hit him. She hit him, because, oh, and he spat at her. And so she didn't like that. Maybe she didn't know so much about you Germans, but the spitting part, that she wasn't going to take from anybody. And so she hit him, and then the mother came over. But then the next thing the father shot our dog. We saw him. He hid behind the house, the corner, and there we heard the shot and our dog was gone. So there was, there was hatred there. But other than that I don't think I've experienced any kind of unfortunate feeling toward Germans. Of course, I mean, in the course of conversation later on in life you hear that the German is an arrogant person and so forth, and I agree with that, because I've had to experience it myself now when I returned as more of an American citizen than German. However, I'm equal,

because I speak the German language fluently. I learned how to do shorthand in it. I read a lot of German literature. And so I can think in the language as well as I can think in English. And so I have quite a bit of understanding for the Germans, but, and they are arrogant in some terms. But then we Americans have our own faults, too. So, you know, we have to, the German has always been a military person. We haven't always been a military person, so you have to look at it from that angle. For years these people have fought wars. So what do you expect other than for them to be somewhat on the arrogant side, you know.

LEVINE: If you were to think of yourself as part of you as German and part of you as American . . .

DANNER: You can't divide me.

LEVINE: You can't . . .

DANNER: No, you can't divide me, because I ( she is moved ) when I want to recite the, it overwhelms me, because I'm very fond of this country, and very fond of this country, must you remember. But from, I say, five years old on, from six you make your impressions, you

know. So I had some very deep impressions as to this German style and the German manner of doing things, and living. But I also contribute much to this country's open-mindedness and fairness with everyone.

And the idea of wanting to get on with your life, and that everybody has a chance here that you don't belong in a different category. This is why I can't understand sometimes the Negroes. They're doing much of this themselves. They're putting themselves into a ghetto. I heard this the other day again, and I said, "This person has got the right idea." They've got to think of themselves as being something, and not what somebody else says. You are this, and this is what you develop yourself with. And so this is what America gave me, is that I am something, too. I am something, too. And too bad if I'm German. Now, I will say this. I have got an experience here in Tampa which I do not like, but I heard something said the other day that in, I don't know what, I should have remembered, but you don't always know what's going to be said that you're going to have your pencil there and write it down. They said something that over a protracted period of time that there would be like fifty percent of the language would be Spanish. And

I'm certainly seeing it here in Tampa. And I resent it because, you know, I don't think it's fair. I think it's great for somebody to speak ten languages.

I have such a love for languages, and I've had teaching in four language, so I have respect for that.

But I don't have respect for anybody that sits here and blabs away in Spanish when I'm sitting here. What am I, a jackass? I don't know if you're talking about me, or what are you talking about, or why am I excluded in the conversation. This is absolute tactless. And I've had to tell a person in the bank, and today I told the doctor. Unfortunately I've been going to a German friend of mine, but she's been living in Caracas for thirty-two years so she speaks fluent Spanish and doesn't speak English, just a little bit. And, so she had gone to this Spanish clinic, but I didn't know it was a Spanish clinic. So they're all talking Spanish. Now, I said, "Who am I in here?" I'm paying for the visit, and they're talking Spanish, when I know they can speak, uh, English. That's a different thing. If they can't or if they say, you know, I learned in English that when you come with a French word or a German word it's because that word aptly expresses this particular

idea, and if you study about languages you will know that there are many things that you can, that you have difficulty expressing in this language or in that language, and that's why we use that language, that particular word, because can you translate "Gemutlichkeit." You can't do it, because nobody else but Germans are Gemutlichkeit in their way of living, and that's why there's no word for it in the English language or French language or what. And that's why, other things. And that's why I don't like that, and in the bank when, this is a business place and they're jabbering Spanish in front of me. I said, "Would you mind talking English? I'm standing here, right here."

"Oh, well . . ." I said, "Well, I'm sorry that if nobody's ever pointed that out to you, but I'm going to point it out to you." Because when I came here and couldn't speak English, the teacher went out in the hall, because we have a place here, Ibor City, and that's from Ibor, from Cuba. And so that's a community that speaks and stays with Spanish. And I remember when we would be in the halls the pupils from Ibor City would be talking, yappity yappity yap. And the teacher would say, "Speak English, speak English, speak English." And today what are we doing? Here

where I'm living in the complex they'll say, "Cerrada.

The pool is closed." Why? For those few Spaniards that live here? You have to put everything in Spanish? Is that right? Why don't they learn English? This is America. And if they like America, then I think they can do the American language the honor and try to learn it. Because these are not imbeciles. Doctors are not imbeciles. Why can't they talk English, then, when they're, when they've got a customer or a patient, right? Am I right? Or what do you think about it? So, anyhow, I'm delighted to be an American, and I tell you, I feel as good. Now, what I like about Germany is that it is so closely populated and the villages and towns are all so close.

And if you have lived in this country and you ride out west and you spend hours on end sometimes without seeing anything. I remember I was out in, oh, in the canyons, you know, and you ride. One night we rode at two o'clock in the morning because the day was so hot we couldn't stand it even with an air conditioner on, that I said, "Oh, my goodness." I said, "Where would you ever, other than here, find, well, maybe in Australia." But, I'm saying, we're talking about this country now. Where would you find where you could go

for hours and drive and not meet anybody, right?

Well, this is what the fascination of Germany, that you can do, in a short time you can see so much, where here you need so much money and so much time to see anything. And we have it all here, too, if not more magnified than over there. We have everything here, it's just so far separated. And a lot of people don't know where they are. This is what I say. Sometimes people come to Tampa, or they came to, what was it called, Miami. I had met some tourists who were at the airport. And I said, "Did you see this? Did you see that?" "No, nobody told us about it." I said, "Oh, God." I said, "It makes me sick that you go back to Germany and you didn't see this here." You know. They said, "Well, nobody told us about it." You see?

LEVINE: Well, did you stay in school, then, here, in the Tampa area?

DANNER: Yes, I finished high school here. I finished high school here. And then I went back to Germany again because it was, it was, that was in 1934, and there was Depression. And my step-father had lost his job. And my mother, shall I tell you this, too, about what my mother did? My mother sold everything she had

sold, all her jewelry. And she bought cows, some more cows, and she made her living, we made a living selling butter. Butter was ten cents a pound. No, it was twenty cents a pound. My mother bought margarine and two loaves of bread, because a loaf of bread was a nickel. So we bought, we did that. And we had music lessons from a Leipzig Conservatory graduate and also didn't have anything to eat and was glad to trade, to barter butter, cheese and eggs from music lessons, and I'm proud of that. I'm proud of that. I'm no musician, but I enjoyed piano for many years, and I play it a little for myself sometimes yet. But it was a rounding up of education. It made me appreciate when I listened to concerts, you know. So I think that I'm a happy person.

LEVINE: Did you, then you went back to Germany for a visit or did you go to stay?

DANNER: In 19, I went, let's see. I went in 1920 . . . In 1934, I went in '36. No, I went in '34, after I graduated, yes. I graduated, because I remember I was an honor student. I was going to be exempt of all the exams. And then the Tampa school system had problems and they said they had to close the school in eight

months. And, but my exam, I studied and everything, and they said no, I didn't have to take it, that my grades were good enough, and all that. Well, then they decided they did have enough money and the school was going to be in session for another month. But I wanted to go. I had already bought the ticket and everything. So they said, "Well, you'll just have to take the examination." So I did, but I passed. And so, but that was, I was a little disappointed about that. So I went over there, and I went to business school for a year over there.

LEVINE: Did you go by yourself?

DANNER: Yes, I went by myself. You see, my mother still had the apartment house in Germany that my father had given them. And so there was the income from that there yet. So I, so I went to school for a year over there, and volunteered for two months, I think it was, in the business over there, volunteered because I couldn't earn any money because Hitler was at the rule, and no foreigner was allowed to work there. And I was a foreigner, because I was born in this country. So, well, I didn't want to come home. And then I fell in love and, but my visa expired and I had to go

home, and I couldn't marry this fellow because he was divorcing his wife, which I was not the correspondent to of. And so I came back over here in 1936. Then I got married. I married a seaman, a merchant seaman. I was married thirty-two-and-a-half years and lived twenty years in New York and saw all the sights in New York that I could because I said, "Someday I'm not going to live here any more," and sure enough. So we moved to Tampa in 1960, and . . .

LEVINE: And what was your husband's name?

DANNER: His name was Lowery. He was Irish descent, yes.

LEVINE: And his first name?

DANNER: Was Judd, J-U-D-D.

LEVINE: And you had children?

DANNER: Yes. I had two children. I had two daughters.

LEVINE: And their names?

DANNER: One lives in, Sonja, one lives in Naples, and Juanita lives in Tampa.

LEVINE: And so you came back to Tampa with . . .

DANNER: With my husband.

LEVINE: With your husband.

DANNER: With my husband, yes. Uh-huh.

LEVINE: And, let's see. Uh, and then did you work at any point, or you . . .

DANNER: Well, when I came back from Germany, wait a minute, how was that? Yeah, when I came back from Germany I worked one year for a lawyer as a secretary. That was good training, good logical thinking. ( she laughs )  
So I enjoyed that.

LEVINE: And so, so you've been here in Tampa for how many years?

DANNER: Well, now I've been here since 1960. But I did go back again in, let's see, in 1963 I had, I think that you might have put on your, I don't know if I explained that on the tape, or did we say that before, that I've been a very sensitive person, and so forth.  
And anyhow I never, I never forgot this boyfriend that I had over there, just never forgot him. That was a very strange meeting, too, how we walked, for nine months we passed each other and only tipped the

hat and said hello. I was going to school in his father's school and didn't know that he was the son. Yeah. So, well, anyhow, so I said, well, you know, I had hoped that I would see him someday again. And my aunt, my mother's sister was living in Germany, and she was only ten years older than I was. So I had a great deal of rapport with her, and I just loved her so. So I went over there to see her, and so she said, "Why do, whatever happened to your friend?" And I said, "Oh, well, I never heard from him any more." Because it was twenty-seven years that the war had come, and so forth and so on. And so she said, "Well, why don't you call up and find out if his uncle is still there?" So I did, and his uncle told me, "Yes, he's living, and he lives in Frankfurt." So my aunt said, "Why don't you write him a card, you know?" So my girlfriend also knew about this gentleman. And so she took me to his uncle, and he told me yes, he was married, and so forth and so on. So we, the three of us sent a card, you know, signed it, so that his wife wouldn't get jealous, an open card that anybody could just see. I said, "I'm in Germany once more. Hope you are well." Or something like that. Well, he called up the next day and called my girlfriend and

was very much interested in seeing me. He wasn't happy. And so he said, "I can't believe it, I can't believe it. After fifty years, after twenty-seven years," he said, "you come back." And he says, "And I've just married a year, and I'm not too happy." But I was still married in this country, you see? So, well, we saw each other and, well, we still were in love. We were still in love. And I went back to America, and he wrote to me on my birthday and at Christmas time, but no love affair letter, you know, just what we could, our true feelings were buried in each others' heart. And so then in 1970 my husband died, and my aunt wrote to my, called my boyfriend. I didn't. I didn't. Because she knew we belonged together, she said. So she called him. Well, then he wrote me a very nice letter and then in 1963 I went, I went over there. No, that was '63. I mean, '70 I think I went over there. Yeah, in 1970. My husband died in '70. So in '71 I went over there. And we met, and then he already was to the point that he said he was going to get a divorce, that. So then we saw each other about every two years. I went there for a few days to see him and visit my other relatives. And then one day he said, "You know, I don't want to live

without you any more." He says, "I think we should get married." So after fifty-two years of knowing each other we got married.

LEVINE: So this is with Danner.

DANNER: This is Danner. This is Mr. Danner now.

LEVINE: What is his first name?

DANNER: Othmar, O-T-H-M-A-R. He was German, and he was eleven years old than I was. So I was seventy-two when I married and he was how old, he was eighty-three. And we had a honeymoon coming to Tampa, Florida. The doctor said, "Mrs. Danner, can I send your husband away like this?" And I said, "Doctor, if I didn't think he could, you know, take the ride, the airplane ride, I wouldn't want to go, because I don't want to lose him." So he said, "I'm going to have to go by you." I said, "God can take him tomorrow." I said, "He can also take me. So," I said, "it's in God's hands." So he says, "Okay, go with my blessing."  
( she is moved ) So we had six weeks here together, and he was, oh, he was so elated, he was so elated. He had been, he had, fate was so terrible to us. Twice he had been in New York and neither one, and I

lived outside the airport, you know, in Long Island there. He came to LaGuardia Airport and we didn't even know that we were so close to each other, right.

And he didn't know if I was living or if I was dead.

So then we got married and he was, so I lost him almost three years ago in this May. Coming this May it will be three years that I lost him.

LEVINE: Well, how wonderful that . . .

DANNER: Wonderful, though, that it ended like that, yeah. So I have sort of written my life. I've written a little bit of a synopsis of my life. I don't know if anybody, everybody I talked to said that I would love to hear it, you know. So I have written it down, but I don't know if I'll ever do any more with it or not.

LEVINE: Well, if you, if you like to, it certainly would be welcome at Ellis Island in the library.

DANNER: Yeah?

LEVINE: In the transcription of your tape we'll mention that there are there memoirs that you . . .

DANNER: That I remember of my, well, I've always said, which I think is interesting, because I said I've written

about thirty typed pages of what I remember of Germany.

LEVINE: That would be wonderful.

DANNER: But I've written it in German. However, I could translate it. But the thing why I think it would be perhaps of interest is because I've read it to a German girlfriend of mine. And she says it's amazing how you remember all of this. She says, "I don't remember anything like that about my childhood." So, you see how in some child's memory the memories are more impressed and long-lasting and all that. Well, my husband said, too. My second husband said, too, he says, "I don't know how you can remember all of those things."

LEVINE: What do you attribute your good . . .

DANNER: Observation, observation.

LEVINE: Do you want to mention what your nickname was?

DANNER: Oh, yes. Okay. I do a little bit, I write children's stories, too. I haven't printed any of them yet, but anyhow I took a writing course, and the lady did say, she says, "You have talent. You should write." You

know. So I do want to say that things that happen to us in childhood so often leave a stigma which later on reverts itself to turn into something positive. And that was with me at, when I was, well, when I was still, before I came to this country I can remember we were at a wedding, and my mother lost the diamond out of her ring. And they said, "Let's get Edith because she with her lynx eyes will find it." And I did. And for that I got a ride in the automobile, which was also something very special. ( she laughs ) And I do remember that I got the stigma of, "Be careful! Edith must have seen that. Be careful! Was Edith there? She saw it." I could tell you, when I went somewhere, "She had on blue shoes. She had on a green hat. She had on a red pocketbook. She had," I could tell you everything. And they did speak about that. "Why does she do that?" And I thought, my goodness, I was like almost put in the corner for, you know, having this trait about me that I could see everything. And I thought, "Well, why didn't my sisters see it?" You see? And so then later on in life, when I was living in New York, I was already married, and my husband was a merchant captain, and went to sea, and so I was left alone, and had to do something with my time because

sometimes he was gone four-and-a-half months at the time. And so I read a great deal, and I thought, well, maybe I could learn how to express myself more aptly. So I took a writing course, a correspondence writing course. And in that examination that they sent, when they returned it it said, "Unusual powers of observation." That means that you can tell that on the left shoe there was a button missing, you see. And in a detective story or something like that that could be a very important point, some salient point to bring to some investigation or something, you know. So I said, "Oh, I have something that's good about me." And it was quite uplifting. So I look at it differently today. I see how many colors. I can see, I watch for, if I look at a picture, if there was a clock there what time it was, and all of those things I tried to be observant, and I think that it has just made everything so much keener in my life, and tracing it back to so far back in my childhood.

LEVINE: Can you think of ways when you were rearing your children that you were like your parents were when they were rearing you, or ways that you were different?

DANNER: With my own children? Of course, they tell me today I was much too strict. They didn't like that. What child does like that? And they haven't given me credit for having made the people out of them that I did because of the rigidness, and adhering to rules, and so forth and so on. However, I mean, I think that they're grateful for other things that my daughter said, "Don't you know you taught us that? Don't you know you taught us that?" You know. So there will come up things, and I said, "Oh, well, I'm glad something was, is hanging on there yet," you know.  
( she laughs )

LEVINE: In the strictness, you were like your parents, would you say? ( Dr. Levine coughs )

DANNER: Yes. They were very, very rigid. Sometimes I think too rigid, because I can remember I was fourteen and we were, I was allowed to go to a Halloween party. And I had a stepfather, now, who was very good to us, but somewhat overprotective, I think. And he, well, I was invited to this birthday party, and it was Halloween. And so they had everything with orange paper and orange around the lights, and everything like that. And I went, like the girls do, I went in

the bedroom and looked at my nose and in the dresser.

And, oh my goodness, I looked so pale. So what did I do? I put rouge on. Well, at ten o'clock my father came to pick me up, and, of course, when I was in the regular light I must have looked horrible. Well, I was punished for six weeks. I was not allowed to go anywhere because that's, you don't abuse cosmetics in that way that you look like a gosh-darn, you know, street girl. So boy, that made me have respect for cosmetics, right?

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE TWO

DANNER: But my father treated us like the Three Graces. We were three girls. We had to walk with books on our head, and straight up to keep the posture. And our books were checked. Our, how shall I say, our reports were checked. I mean, anything that we needed help on we were supported. And we had to do our homework. That was a must. And we had to help in the home, for which I'm ever so glad that my mother made us do that. But I had something, look at how revolting, how children think. When I said, now, my mother made us do work. We had a maid at home when I was in Germany,

and now remember I'm under eleven. And in Germany nearly every household has what they call a hukah, which is a plain chair, not painted. And that's to stand up on and do this and that and the other. Well, you know what my mother made me do? She made me, on Saturdays, scrub that chair. And I resented that because we had a maid. Why didn't she do it? Look at the logic already in me, huh? I did it, though, because I didn't dare give her any back talk, but that's what I was thinking. Just like I was thinking about escaping from Ellis Island, you see? So, well, I mean, I can tell so many things about school, and some serious things, too. When my father died, I remember how my mother sent me at two o'clock in the morning, she sent me across the street into a tavern to get ice to put on his head because he was delirious, you know. Well, and then she, I remember when I got, and what I observed in the taverns, they have such cute taverns over there, with nice little seats and pretty little lamps, and really make it cozy. And I went in there and, of course, at two o'clock in the morning you can imagine how it was qualmy, and I observed that there was such a shocking difference of going into my home and going into this

place and seeing how they were all happy to be in there, and I go home, and to this dismal contrast of a dying father. And then I remember that my mother told me to stand in front of the bed, that she had to go to the telephone and the bed was here and the telephone was, like, over on that wall. And she went there, and my father got up in his delirium, and he fell in front of the bed. Oh, and I never forget that, that I thought, ( she gasps ) that it's my fault, that I didn't hold him. But my God, seven years old, he died when I was seven. And, you know, so these are impressions on children that make you think in life, that make you think.

LEVINE: Well, is there anything that you would say, a discernable impact on you of having been born here, spent some years in Germany, came back here, that whole experience of Germany and here.

DANNER: I think it has made me a much more broad-minded person than I would be. Because if you know about the daily feelings and habits of people of a country, you have much more insight into their remarks and to their ways of expressing themselves than you would by, you know, not, look at, why are the Germans, the American

soldiers so fascinated when they go over there?  
Because they're seeing an inner, an inner, an inner  
expression of the German people. And I haven't found  
one yet that it has come over there. One said to me,  
"Oh, that potato salad! Can you make any like that?"  
You know? ( she laughs ) I had a woman that lived  
in Temple Terrace. And I said, "Well, how did you  
like it over there? How did you like the people?"  
"Oh," he says, "they were all so nice to us." And I  
think the American is quite revered over there. Quite  
revered. In spite of the fact that they say we're  
ill-mannered and we, we're, what's that word that I  
want to use, we're superficial. Whereas the German is  
much more of a thinker. But I don't know just how  
they want to put that, you know. I have experienced  
lots of people over there that are not very much  
thinkers either, but they're good people. And so I  
don't know. You see, that's hard, I think, to do  
because we have such a bigger realm of living than we  
do in Germany. You live on top of each other in  
Germany. I said to one gentleman one time in the club  
department on the train. I said, "I don't know," I  
said, "why we do certain things here." And he said,  
"You must remember," he said, "when you have . . ."

Why they do certain things over in Germany. He said, "You must remember, when you lived so closely inhabited as we are, they are sixty million and we're two hundred and sixty million here, right. And so he says, "You must remember that there will be a different attitude toward, 'this is mine!'" And that's your part of the street, and this is my property. We don't do that to that extent in this country. I have never observed that. "Get off of my property!" That's something that you'll find much more readily over there than you would here.

LEVINE: Interesting observation.

DANNER: Because I think it's true. This is my square here, so get off of it. You know.

LEVINE: Well, do you have any advice that you would give to immigrants coming to the United States now?

DANNER: Now, above all, go to school, go to school. And extend your vocabulary as broad as you can. And take up the subjects that are offered, because we have many courses. I took a course here, a senior citizens course. I took a course here. What was it? I took a course in sociology. I took a course in psychology.

I took a course in music appreciation. It was all given to me for nothing. I got that from my taxes. ( she laughs ) I kidded the teacher. I said, "I'm getting some of my taxes returned." ( she laughs ) He laughed. But, you see, and I do think that is one of the most important things is that they have a vocabulary to which, with which to express themselves.

Because if you cannot bring your ideas across, how are you going to make somebody understand you and have respect for you? And I noticed my daughter married a German. She went over there, well, when I was, I went over there in 1963 again, and I took my daughter with me. She was about seventeen, and she celebrated her seventeenth birthday over there. I know this is getting hot. ( referring to the tape machine ) And she, oh, now, I lost my thought.

LEVINE: You went with your daughter and she met and married . . .

DANNER: Oh, yes. So she married, she married a German fellow. He was twenty years older than she was. And they came back, they came over here to this country. This was just on a visit, because she was going to live in Germany. And they would argue a great deal. And I

came in on one of the arguments. And he said, "She said so-and-so." And I said, "Oh, no, she didn't." You see, because I knew the German language that well that I knew that what she said was not what he understood her to say. And you see what it did? It broke up their marriage, because they just could never see eye-to-eye on things. And I said, "On too many things, you do not understand her." And perhaps the other way around, too, that she didn't have enough German to understand him equally. Now, they were starting to do nice things, that they read the book. Both he and she were avid readers. And so he would read and she would read, and then they would discuss something, you know. So I think that helped a lot. But they got divorced anyway, so. But I think that's what I would advise them. Will you excuse me? ( the microphone is disrupted )

LEVINE: I think this is actually . . .

DANNER: Finished?

LEVINE: A good place to stop.

DANNER: Okay, yeah.

LEVINE: If there's anything else you'd like to say?

DANNER: No. I would just like to say that I think America is still the place to live and see as much of it as you can, and I do think that they should take advantage of all the courses that we Americans offer them so that they can become good citizens. And we need apprentices. We need apprentices so that we have crafts again, so that we can become a nation of some quality again. I had a cousin who came here some years ago. She tried I don't know how many places and how many stores and what to find something "Made in U.S.A." She was not able to. Think of that. This was what, she wanted to come back to Germany with. Well, we had nothing made in the U.S.A. And I know of the time when I came over here, "Made in Germany." Ah, that was a product. That was something to be represented. It was made in Germany. That had some character. I was watching a show here some time back and they were showing where they were trying to work, steel workers, that they had to go for hours planing things to get it to such-and-such a point or whatever. And it said that they were trying to work on getting apprentices again and becoming master of something

instead of, you know, jack-of-all-trades. And I think this is what we need in the world today because we don't have a decent plumber. They all know something about plumbing, and maybe if they're lucky they'll get it right. Then we don't have any particular ones. In lots of fields we don't have anybody who you can really qualify and say, "This is a good plumber. This is a good mechanic." And I'll guarantee you if they know something they can always find a job here, because a good mechanic is looked for everywhere, and the same in other categories. So that's what my recommendation would be, okay?

LEVINE: Okay. Well, thank you very much.

DANNER: Thank you, Miss Levine.

LEVINE: It's been a pleasure. This is Janet Levine, and I've been speaking with Edith Danner at her home in Tampa, Florida. It's April 22, 1993, and I'm signing off.