

EI-295

LOUISE WEHRLI OWEN

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SWITZERLAND, 1923

AGE 2

PASSAGE ON "THE NEW AMSTERDAM"

PORT OF EMBARKATION:

RESIDENCES: SWITZERLAND: RORSHACH

US: FLINT, MI

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here today in Lakeland, Florida with Mrs. Wehrli, I'm sorry, Louise Wehrli Owen, who came from Switzerland when she was not quite three years old, and that was in April 1923. Well, I'm very happy to talk with you, and I know some of what you'll say will be what you have heard your parents say, but you can just preface it with that, and whatever you have to say will be of interest, so.

OWEN: Okay. I'll be very happy to do that.

LEVINE: Okay. Let's start with your birth date, and where you were born.

OWEN: Okay. I was born in Rorshach, R-O-H-R-S, R-O-R-S-H-A-C-H, Switzerland. It's just a small canton. I don't even know what canton it's in, frankly. I should know, but I don't recall.

LEVINE: And your birth date?

OWEN: And my birthday was, my birth date is June the 22nd 1920, I was born. And my parents came, brought me with them when they came in 1923. (she whispers) I wish I knew the date.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything from Switzerland? I mean, before you came to the United States?

OWEN: I just recall once sitting on a bridge. There was a high cement bridge over some river, and I remember sitting on that, and only because my parents took a picture of me on there do I, you know, recall that slightly. That's all I recall about that. And I remember the ocean was very rough.

LEVINE: Do you remember what your parents said about why they were coming to the United States?

OWEN: Not until after I arrived here. I knew why then. Because they, my uncle had come prior, my dad's older

brother had come here prior to him and had gotten work at the Buick factory. Tell me the number down. Buick factory in Flint, Michigan, was just opening up. It has a number, but I can't recall. And he wrote to my dad, but I wouldn't recall this. This was just told to me by my mother over and over again when I was young, and that's why I recall it. She was really smitten about coming because she would have to leave her family, and she just had an idea she would never get back to see them. But my father determined to come, and so that's the reason we came at that particular time, and he did have a job immediately. The reason was because he was a very good and experienced an apprentice, tool and dye man.

LEVINE: Is that what he did in Switzerland?

OWEN: In Switzerland, he took his apprenticeship there, and he learned the trade there.

LEVINE: Were jobs hard to come by? That was 1923.

OWEN: Actually, I would assume that it was in Switzerland at the time, because otherwise why would they be so anxious to come to a brand-new land. I don't know if my father had even considered it until his brother

spoke to him about it and made it look pretty good.

LEVINE: What was your father's name?

OWEN: Godfrey. Godfrey, he didn't have any other name.
Godfrey Wehrli.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And your mother's name?

OWEN: And my mother was Louise, just like mine, only it was
L-U-I-S-E, you know, in Swiss.

LEVINE: And what was her maiden name?

OWEN: Her maiden name was Merkli, M-E-R-K-L-I.

LEVINE: And did you have an extended family, grandparents,
aunts and uncles, right near by in Rorschach, or were
they . . .

OWEN: Uh, yes. They weren't real near us. I don't recall
seeing my grandfather, only the one time. And then he
passed away shortly after we left. It might have even
been just before. I'm not even positive about that.
And so, I have pictures, though. And he has that same
smile that we all have, with those tiny eyes. (they
laugh) It looks like a distinguished fellow there,
sitting there on the wall. (they laugh)

(referring to a photograph) And I also have one of my maternal grandmother, but the frame was taken by one of the other members of the family, and in taking her picture out of the frame she broke it in half, so I never had it patched, but I think I could find a place that would fix it for me. See, I'm the oldest of twelve children now.

LEVINE: How many children were there in your family when you were in Switzerland? You were the oldest . . .

OWEN: I was the oldest, yeah. There was a boy that passed away at eight months of age that was next to me, yes.

LEVINE: So it was you, your mother and father who traveled?

OWEN: Uh-huh. And I do recall one thing about it, just because I heard it over and over again, probably. My mother wore the, they wore these long skirts. She had a beautiful dress that she wore. If I had a picture I would show you. And I used to hide behind her on the ship, because I was so shy. And, of course, people always wanted to talk to little girls and boys on ships. (she laughs) And I used to run and hide behind her because I was just too shy to talk.

LEVINE: And what was the name of the ship?

OWEN: It was the New Amsterdam.

LEVINE: And where did you leave from?

OWEN: We left out of Port of France. And I don't know any more about it than that, just because her, their visas and their papers, what is it you get when you go travel? A, yeah, you have a little portfolio that you have to . . .

LEVINE: A passport?

OWEN: A passport. I don't know exactly where it is or I could tell you, you know. I wished I'd have put it, I'm sure it's at my home up in Michigan.

LEVINE: Well, if you come across it, and I will send you a copy of this tape, so that if something is not right and you find other information you can . . .

OWEN: Yes, I wouldn't want any of it to not be legitimate, you know.

LEVINE: Okay. So is there anything that you remember about the voyage, or that you heard later?

OWEN: Well, I heard quite a deal about it. Of course, it was very rough waters. And we came, it took us ten days in those days. And it was, being in April the ice was breaking in many places, so it made it rougher. And there were many, many people that were in their staterooms because they were ill.

(she laughs) I can even, just vaguely I can remember this one lady that was just so sick she vomited right on the, right there, out, standing right out on the deck. (they laugh) She was that sick. And, of course, they rushed her to her stateroom. And we talked about that several times. Otherwise I wouldn't have recalled that either, yeah.

LEVINE: So were you traveling first class? Is that, do you know? If you had a stateroom, you weren't in the hold of the ship.

OWEN: No. We evidently had first class. I do recall something very vital. My mother crying because the trunk, the sea was so rough that her trunk, which she had, one of these real old-fashioned trunks got broken all to pieces, and she couldn't recover too many of her things, and my father was so upset when he arrived in New York, he had no one, he couldn't talk English,

he knew no one there. He made her leave most of her stuff right there.

LEVINE: Do you remember what she had packed?

OWEN: Yes. She, what she did retain was a set of very expensive six teaspoons, silver teaspoons, that someone had given her for a wedding gift, and now all five and myself sisters have one spoon each as a remembrance of our mother right now.

LEVINE: Do you know what was in the trunk that . . .

OWEN: Well, mostly her linens. Her linens and some embroidery because, you know, Switzerland is the embroidery country where you get all your embroidery from. And I've got, not Lucerne, but there is one city that is called the embroidery capital of the world in Switzerland. It starts with a G, and I can't quite . . . (she laughs) That is one thing I'll have to supplement. I can find it if I just look through some of my pictures, you know, and things like that.

: Gallen?

OWEN: St. Gallen, yeah, that's it. S-T, S-T, Capital G-A-L-

L-E-N. And my cousin took us there. We went shopping when I returned. My husband took me back there in '89 for a visit, and I rediscovered where I lived and the home that I was born in.

LEVINE: Did you get to go inside the house?

OWEN: No, because there were, the door was locked, and I think there were people that owned it that were going on a vacation or something. We weren't, actually we didn't even take time to, we should have stayed a while there, you know, and found out if we could stay there. And I would have liked to have seen, you know, the rooms and . . . (she laughs) But I took a picture of it.

LEVINE: What did it look like, at least from the outside, what you could see?

OWEN: Well, it was very well-kept for the age of it, see, because that would be like fifty, fifty years ago or more that I lived in it. And it was a beautiful square, like a building that looked like it had apartments. And I believe they lived in one-third of it, and over there they have, like, the ground floor, the second floor and the third floor. And my cousin

lives in one, and it's called im grund, which means "in the ground level." You know, and then they have one the next, the second story, and then the third story. And . . .

LEVINE: Do you know what story you lived on?

OWEN: Well, according to my cousin, she thought we lived on one-third of it, so we probably had three levels that we used.

LEVINE: Oh, I see. I'm sorry, uh-huh.

OWEN: That's what she thought.

LEVINE: And what was it made of?

OWEN: It was made out of cement and wood. You know, they do beautiful work over in Europe on their homes. And it had, you know, I don't even remember what it was like now, but it had some brick and some wood, and all of their homes, everything looks like it's been washed, they're so immaculate, everything. We went to my cousins, and she lived on one-third of the home, too. And made us a bath on the third floor, put the temperature gauge in the water, and got it just perfect so we could have a bath. And very few people

had that privilege. (they laugh) You know, the average person doesn't have all that. So we were, we were very happy that we could do that. We had traveled quite a bit when we visited her. And, bless her heart, she's very poor now, yeah.

LEVINE: Let's see. So, do you remember coming into the New York Harbor, or do you remember your parents telling about . . .

OWEN: I have to be truthful, I don't remember it, except my dad cried when he saw the Statue of Liberty. He was so relieved and thankful that they could come and that they had the privilege of coming. And, along that same line, I probably might have mentioned it in there, he was very, very patriotic American. Once he got his papers he said, "Now, we're not speaking Swiss-German around here any more. We're speaking the American language. WE're Americans now." And he was very proud to become American. I always thought about that, and every time we would sing The Star Spangled Banner or Salute the Flag or something, I would get teary, just like he did, (she laughs) for years and years and years.

LEVINE: Do you remember any customs that your mother and father kept that maybe were Swiss, and that they retained in this country?

OWEN: Oh, yes. Oh, things like canning foods, you know. And my mother's cooking, she was a very good cook. She had cooked for both Italian and Swiss families and she knew a lot, and French. So she knew a lot of ways, and she was a great one to make us eat Spinach pancakes, which she learned in a French home how to, you know, and they were good.

LEVINE: Are there any other dishes that were Swiss that you recall?

OWEN: Oh, yeah. My mother made Swiss onion pie. She made knopfle, which is a, sort of like a, what is it, dumpling that they have here. They were called knopfle. I can't even spell it, but I would say it's like K-O-N, K-N-O-P-F-L-E, something like that. And I always called them knopfle. I never called them dumplings. (she laughs) Of course, being the only Swiss one, you know, the only one that was in Switzerland, I spoke a lot of words, and I remember when I started school it was not too difficult,

because I didn't start till I was six, and I played with the children that lived around, and I learned the language quite well. That I do recall. And I remember I'd like to talk, and I had to, the first day I was in the school I had to sit in the corner, a dunce school, a dunce stool, like they usually have you do? (she laughs) Like they did years ago? I remember that, and I cried because I didn't know why she put me there, it was just because I was talking while she was talking.

LEVINE: Were you talking English?

OWEN: Yes, I was. (they laugh)

LEVINE: Okay. Well, let's see. Do you remember any stories about Ellis Island?

OWEN: I really can't say I do. I remember a picture that I saw that someone had taken of it, and I remember the lady in the Harbor, you know. And always, like in recent years when they were cleaning her, you know, and making, renovating. I get real sentimental about that, but I can't say that I was really old enough to even take that in.

LEVINE: Were you detained at all, you and your parents?

OWEN: No, we were not detained, and sometimes I wish we had been for a while, because my father was so nervous and upset he didn't know whom to contact. Because he knew he had to come to Michigan, but his brother hadn't given him any ways to do it, you know. I guess he just left him to his own resources. And I remember he, I just vaguely remember my mother crying, and he said something about he wished he hadn't come, or something like that. And then they didn't talk about it any more, though. After I got old enough, we never heard about that any more, because it was just like a, something that we wouldn't say, you know.

LEVINE: Really your uncle had been somewhat remiss.

OWEN: Yes. He didn't really realize how, well, he must have done it himself, but, see, he had married an English woman, and he had learned a lot of English words from her. And so he probably wasn't even aware, and they didn't have children, so we, my mother's and father's family were their children. You know, they were at our house a lot.

LEVINE: So do you recall what happened after Ellis Island, how

you got to Flint?

OWEN: No, I have no recollection of it, and I think my father and mother didn't talk about it on purpose because it was always like a little bone of contention. She thought maybe he could have written to my uncle and gotten better directions or something and, of course, she was so upset about having left her homeland that I don't think, she didn't want to talk about it for fear they would have another argument about it. (she laughs) I'm sure that's what it was. I just, I'm assuming. But my mother never complained a whole lot, and it's kind of sad she didn't talk about things more. See, I would have more to tell you. But anything that we ever found out, we were the ones that did the questioning, and then she would just give us a short answer, and that's that. My mother was a very spiritual, strong, Christian woman, and we had a lot of things like that. You know, we had what they call a family altar, you know, and read our Bible every day, every week and every day, every day before we went to bed, and we had a lot of spiritual nurturing, but we didn't really learn a lot about the outside world, (she laughs) if you

know what I mean.

LEVINE: So what denomination was your family?

OWEN: Well, we're United Methodist, is what we are, right from the beginning. But my mother, when we first came she took us, took me and my sister to a German-speaking Methodist Episcopal church. So I had sat through two sermons, one in German and one in English. And I don't recall ever balking about it, because what else was there to do, you know. And we never had a car. We never owned an automobile. My dad, with that kind of a job, probably could have had one, but he never bought an automobile. And I don't, if I'm not mistaken, he never drove one.

LEVINE: Do you have any idea why?

OWEN: No, I don't. I think he didn't think it was a necessity. See, he could get to his work, and we could get to the store and to downtown on a street car or, in later years, a trolley bus. And that's how we did it. When I was twelve, I was going to downtown Flint buying the groceries, the meats and anything that we could get in large quantity cheaper. That's where I was. I remember shopping.

LEVINE: Why were you doing this? What . . .

OWEN: Well, because my father was always working, and my mother was always pregnant. (they laugh) Well, she had twelve children in about sixteen years. That's being close, you know, very close. And some people ask me, "Was she Catholic?" Because, you know, a lot of them don't believe in, my mother just didn't believe in birth control, even when they had it. When they started having it she didn't believe in it.
(break in tape)

LEVINE: We're resuming now, we're resuming after having quieted down. (they laugh) Okay. So when you were in Flint, did you encounter other families that had also emigrated to the United States?

OWEN: Uh, not right away, but there were several in the church, and when I was about five I recall singing little Swiss songs in the church for these German people because they liked to hear it, and some of them had come from Germany, many of them, as a matter of fact.

LEVINE: And these were now Methodist Episcopalians?

OWEN: Uh-huh. And, as a matter of fact, our minister at that time was called Mr. J.J. Link, Dr. J.J. Link. And he was a German man. He spoke the both languages, of course. And I didn't pay him much attention to the German, but I did hear it in the English, which I liked, you know. There were only about six children in the church when I was five years old, and there were all more elderly people with older children who had married. And then there were, as time wore on, when I got to be about ten to twelve we must have had about six or seven children, and then as we got a little bit older more and more young parents started coming to the church, and they no longer had the two services (there is a rustling disturbance in the background) and they had only English, because we had no ministers that spoke English only. I do recall that.

LEVINE: Were there any social clubs for people who spoke German or Swiss or . . .

OWEN: I'm sure there were. However, the only one I knew about, from Wisconsin there was a group who had Swiss people who would get together like once or twice or three times a year. And my folks knew people in

Flint, in a city park which was a, sort of a small community in Flint, a city park. And they knew the Zumpsteins, and we always called them aunt and uncle, but they weren't any relation to us. But they helped my mother and dad, you know, become, feel more like they were natives of Flint, and then they had friends who they introduced to our mother and dad. And they used to come to the house and play cards, and we had social functions, and we went to several picnics through this organization, I think. And one of the things, the main things that we did, I remember picking elderberries forever. (she laughs) As a child. (a rustling sound is heard in the background) That's one thing we had to do. We did a lot of things. And, of course, having had that many children, we canned from fifteen hundred to two thousand quarts of food which my father raised himself right on the two lots which he purchased. And he got them through a tax, you know, when they have a tax sale, when the lots, nobody pays their taxes and then you're allowed to pay them at a minimal price. That's how he purchased these two lots. And there were, we had pear trees and apple trees, and every kind of a veggie you'd want to know, my dad grew. We learned to

eat cauliflower, rutabaga, along with potatoes, carrots and peas and beans. And we had a large raspberry patch that we picked berries. And, of course, with that many children, it kept us busy. And then we, uh . . .

LEVINE: What were your particular tasks?

OWEN: My task was, being the oldest, was always being in charge of something. I can remember when Christmas time came we had a little program for my aunt and uncle who always, and my two uncles. One was not married, and the other one was married to the aunt. And we had a program for Christmas, and I was in charge of teaching the children their program. We had pieces that they would say in Sunday School, and then we would practice music, all the songs that I knew well. I played the piano a little, and I would teach them, you know, so we would have a tenor singing, and an alto and a soprano. And we sang, before we could ever open up our Christmas gifts from our aunt and our two uncles. I call her aunt. She was from England. She wanted me to call her auntie. We called her tante, which is a German word for aunt. But she liked, she liked us to call her Aunt, Auntie, and she

was quite English and tried to tell us, teach us how to say, "Cough, and pop," and all those words.

(she laughs) But other than that I don't recall any other things. My mother did, my mother and dad both went to school to learn to become citizens, you know.

LEVINE: Oh, they went to night classes.

OWEN: To classes. My mother took them, mostly, at home, because she was all, most of the time carrying a child or too busy to go with so many children. And my father became one quite soon. I was twelve, as a matter of fact, when he got his real good, his second papers, and then I became one because of him, because I wasn't of age yet. So then in later years, when he passed away, I couldn't be a citizen under his papers. I had to get derivative papers for myself.

LEVINE: Oh.

OWEN: That was what the, what you had, what you were required to do.

LEVINE: Do you remember the day that your father became a citizen?

OWEN: Just vaguely. It was quite an important meeting when he received it. And I remember I went with my mother, I think. We went with someone else also, because we didn't have a car. So we went with another person that was receiving theirs, and they knew, that my parents knew. And I just recall how proud he was, and he would have done it sooner except, see, working all those long hours he didn't have time to go to school any sooner, until he was established in the factory. And then, my mother got hers quite a number of years later. She always wanted to, but she just didn't have the time, I guess.

LEVINE: Well, how do you feel about, about being, having been born in Switzerland and having that as part of who . . .

OWEN: I really love it, I really do. It has really been wonderful for me, and I'm proud of it. I, despite the fact that I was told I was born coming down the mountain on skis and all this kind of thing, or I was called "Swiss cheese" in school a lot, and that sort of thing. And at first it bothered me, but after a while I thought, "Oh, shoot, they're going to do it no matter how you think," so you just forget it. You

know, and I used to pretend I didn't hear it.

(she laughs) My father was a little harder with that, see. The man used to tease him. I can remember coming home and telling my mother that they had put a hot penny and glued it to the floor. I don't know how they heated it. But anyway, they knew he would go and pick it up, and then they laughed at him and, of course, that hurt his feelings. You know, little things that men do to tease one another. And my mother used to tell him, "Godfrey, you've got to just pretend you don't care." You know, they're going to, the more you worry about it and fuss about it, they more they're going to tease you. But he got over that eventually.

LEVINE: Do you feel that there's some aspects of your character that are Swiss?

OWEN: Oh, every once in a while it crops up. (they laugh)
Probably the fact that I really love Swiss cheese, as well. I don't recall, you know, I was in the ninth grade before I got enough self image or enough gumption to stand up in front of a whole audience and give a speech, because I was running for secretary of my ninth grade. I never got it but I, it didn't

bother me too much. And I had a teacher who was wonderful, a Latin teacher, who helped me a lot with my self image. And she kept saying, in Latin, "They can who think they can, Louise." She'd give me a (?).

She said, "You've got just as much or more ability than most of these people. Just because you're foreign has nothing to do with it." She was very good. Her name was Mrs. Selig, and I'll never forget her. Yeah. She really helped me a lot.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: Do you think that your lack of confidence stemmed from the fact that you had come here and that you were foreign?

OWEN: I kind of feel like it, because you hear your mother and father talking about things that they didn't like, or things that hurt them. And you absorb it if you're in the home at all. And I was, being the oldest I sometimes wasn't always there, but I had lots of jobs, you know. Before I could go out to play at night I had two bushels full of ironing to do, many, many times. I learned how to do many, many things in the

home, which I appreciate, really I do. And my brothers and sisters always depended, they even, up until just a few years ago, when I retired, I finally said to one of them, "Now, you guys have got to make a list of your own addresses when you want them, and you have to do this on your own, because I'm no longer (she laughs) the oldest one at home, you know." Especially when I retired, I told them, I felt badly about leaving everybody, leaving everybody. But . . .

LEVINE: You mean to come to Florida?

OWEN: Uh-huh. And they're not that much younger than I, but none of them have yet, they've all, several have retired. I have a brother who's a pastor, but he has ALS now, and he's retiring. But he's about sixty-eight. And, see, all the rest of them, they used to say they were jealous because they wished they could have come from Switzerland, too. They're real proud of it, too. And I have lots of things, memories, because my cousins quite frequently sent me beautiful calendars of Switzerland. And then when my uncle passed away I inherited some of his books and important pictorial books of Switzerland. I really am very sentimental about the country. And, like I say,

when my husband took me back it all came back, you know, the feeling was all, was there. And I went on a cable car. I'd always wanted to go on a cable car, despite the fact that there was all kinds of snow and it was cold, we took this cable car clear up to the top of the mountain where the three countries come together and they all claim that spot. I don't even know what it's called now, so I did enjoy that.

LEVINE: Well, is there any advice that you would have to give to somebody coming to this country from someplace else now?

OWEN: Oh, yeah. I think I would tell them to be very proud that they're in a new country. And, after all, every country, I still have a little place in my heart all the time for Switzerland, but I don't know if I'd ever go back there and live, and stay there, because I've made my friends here now. And, uh, of course, I came at a good time, you know, in the twenties. Things were booming. There weren't too many difficulties. It's an entirely new world here now. (she laughs) Like fifty, what is it, well, we've been married fifty-three years now. Fifty, sixty, seventy-three. That's quite a long time, you know. We're seventy-

three now. My husband and I, this year we'll be seventy-three.

LEVINE: Were you working after you finished school?

OWEN: Yes. I didn't go to college, but I went to business school, Baker Business School in Flint. And I took a bookkeeping and a stenographic course, and I, through that, I took it for about a year. Through that we obtained a job at the, at a credit bureau, and that's what I did, my typing. I wanted to go to college but, see, being the oldest of twelve, my dad couldn't afford to do it, and I didn't have anyone to urge me to work and go to college. I didn't think, I couldn't even consider that I could do this. That was my problem. I needed some kind of a figure that would come into my life and prove it to me. I guess because my sister and brother, several of them did that.

LEVINE: Somebody encouraged them to do it.

OWEN: Uh-huh.

LEVINE: So when did you meet your husband?

OWEN: I met him in, we were married in '43. I met him when I was about nineteen, nineteen or twenty. We were

married over in '21.

LEVINE: Do you remember the meeting?

OWEN: Oh, yes. I went to a square dance. I went to a square dance with my girlfriend and her parents. Her parents used to go to these in a little town called Russelville outside of Flint. And every Friday night and Saturday, too, they would have square dances and round dances. And I went with them, and that's where I met my husband and his friend, and they were both, his friend lived in Flint, but he didn't. He lived out in the country. So I rode, they asked to take me home. Well, John didn't have the car, the friend had the car, so he drove me home. That's how I met him.
(she laughs) (there is a rustling disturbance in the background on the tape)

LEVINE: And so your husband's name?

OWEN: Is Donald, Donald Arthur Owen.

LEVINE: And do you have children?

OWEN: Yes, we have six children. I have a picture around? We have six children, and we're very thankful and proud that we have two doctors, a son-in-law doctor

and a daughter-in-law doctor, and we have one, two, three, four, five, six teachers, teaching school, and some in-laws and some children. And our youngest one is the only one not married, and he's a Chrysler engineer.

LEVINE: And what are your children's names?

OWEN: Donna is our oldest one, Donna Lou, Marjorie Ellen, who's the second one, Gary, Dale is our oldest son, the next boy, and we have the second boy, who is Mark, Mark David, and then we, Mark Daniel, I'm sorry, Mark Daniel. (she laughs) He's the lawyer. And then we have Philip, who is Philip Donald, and he has two, I should have told the other children. He has two children. We do have ten grandchildren, by the way. And then the baby is Kip, Kip David.

LEVINE: Is that a grandchild?

OWEN: No, he's our youngest son. He's the sixth one. In other words, we have the two girls and the boy, and then two years later we had two more boys, and then about, it was six years later we had two boys, and then another five or six years when we had the youngest boy. So the oldest girl, the oldest child is

twenty years older than her baby brother, than her youngest brother. And she sort of half-raised him, because he was in the eighth grade when my husband retired, and he stayed home and went to school okay, but we felt bad we didn't want to take his home away from him. And we lived in a home on the lake where we could not let anyone rent there, and to live this way six months here and six months, you know, we had to make a change. And finally, as he was in college at the U of M in Ann Arbor, his sister, oldest sister, whose husband is a doctor, we have an orthopedic surgeon, the oldest one, he went there a lot, and she taught him how to iron and how to do his laundry. She was like his mother. See, she was twenty years older than he. So it was a godsend that we had the children the way we did. (she laughs) We always wondered why, you know. So it keeps you younger, dear. You know, at least that's the way we felt. And he grew up in a hurry, our youngest boy did. Of course, he had all his brothers and siblings doted on him.

LEVINE: Well, is there anything else that you would say about having come to this country?

OWEN: Well, I would say that I was very happy that I did. I

have never had any remorse about that at all, but I do dearly love that beautiful Switzerland. It is such a wonderful country, and it's so clean, and so many devoted family people live there. I'm sure they have their problems, too, but when you stop and think of how they've controlled their own, you know, all of the men have to go to military service just in case someone attacks their borders. And my dad did that. He had to go two years. Every young man, when he, I think it's between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two, I'm not sure the exact age, has to do a two-year stint in the army so that he's prepared. And they do this, each generation, to make sure they always have preparation just in case they're invaded. And it is, the people there are hard-working, and many of them don't have cars. Many of them don't have bathrooms, but they're happy. They are a happy people. They've learned to be happy with what they have. It's amazing. I'm sure there's some that don't. I don't know all of them, but the ones that I know and I've seen, they're very happy and content with themselves. Like my cousin, who is about my age. He has the two children, they've never had an automobile or a refrigerator. They have one of these cute

refrigerators that the kids have in college. That's their refrigerator. They run to the store to buy a little piece of meat if they want to eat meat. (she laughs) But they don't always have meat. And my mother, by the way, their family grew, they had goats, and the lower part of her home is where the animals were, and there was goats. And I think they had a cat, and I don't recall what else, but they were in the lower unit. And the next unit is where all the flowers and things are so beautiful around their houses. I don't know if you've ever seen pictures of them, is where they did most of their living. And then up on the third floor would be where they would have their bedrooms or whatever. And it's amazing how many of them don't. I think they have their bath facilities up there because they don't have the kind of plumbing we have, or something. I mean, they have to have it drained down, and they're very careful about their resources, you know. They don't want to spoil any of their land. You have to be cremated because there's no areas for . . .

LEVINE: Burials.

OWEN: Burials, for, what are they called, cemeteries. They

use every stitch of their grounds for the groves, the grapes, the grapevines, grape vineyards, you know. And very, very careful with everything. Which is kind of, people say, "Oh, that's kind of backward," but they're happy, they're happy with what they're doing. The ones that I know are.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I think we, this is a good place to stop.

OWEN: Okay.

LEVINE: I want to thank you very much.

OWEN: Oh, thank you for coming. I appreciate it.

LEVINE: And I . . .

OWEN: Now, if you want, when I, if I can think of something that would be of interest, you could just put a little mark on it there, if you thought I could think of something else. But maybe if I'm home and have some of my literature, and some of the things that I've saved from letters down through the years, some of that would come back.

LEVINE: If there is anything, you can send it along, and I'll . . .

OWEN: You can add it to . . .

LEVINE: We have a folder, and we put in any additional information.

OWEN: Oh, I see.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. I've been speaking with Louise Wehrli Owen in her winter home in Lakeland, Florida, and it's April 22, 1993, and I'm signing off.