

EI-399

WILHELMINE MICK HAHNL

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AGE 23

PASSAGE ON "THE COLUMBUS"

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. And I'm here today, October 23rd, 1993, in Whiting, New Jersey. I'm here with Wilhelmine Mick Hahnl who came from Germany in 1925 when she was twenty-four years old. And I just want to say that I'm very happy to be here.

HAHNL: Thank you.

LEVINE: I'm looking forward to your story. You came when you were twenty-four, so you probably remember a lot about your earlier life.

HAHNL: I do. Well, some of it not so much, but, so (unintelligible) ask me questions.

LEVINE: Okay. Okay. Tell me first for the tape what day you were born, your birth date.

HAHNL: September 29, '01.

LEVINE: And where were you born in Germany?

HAHNL: Town?

LEVINE: Yes.

HAHNL: Kaiserslautern.

LEVINE: Could you spell anything like...

HAHNL: Yes.

LEVINE: ...German names?

HAHNL: K-A-I-S-E-R-S-L-A-U-T-E-R-N. What a word.

LEVINE: I'm sorry, say it again?

HAHNL: What a long word.

LEVINE: Yes, it's all one word? (she laughs)

HAHNL: Kaiserslautern.

LEVINE: What was Kaiserslautern like? I mean, what, what do you remember? Did you live there, first of all, the whole time before you came?

HAHNL: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HAHNL: Yes. Yes. Well, (unintelligible) of people, been all to work. Some were not so well off. And there were rich ones, too. But we lived more on the outskirts of Kaiserslautern, and my father had to work every morning, winter and summer, an hour and a half to his job.

LEVINE: What did he do?

HAHNL: He was a weaver, making some material.

LEVINE: And so he went to Kaiserslautern from...

HAHNL: No, from, from Kaiserslautern he went to where this factory was.

LEVINE: Oh. And how did he travel to work?

HAHNL: He walked because there wasn't that much money to take the train. One day he walked. Had to.

LEVINE: And did, did most of the people in your, would you say you were in village outside of Kaiserslautern...

HAHNL: No, I wouldn't, it was the outskirts of Kaiserslautern. And that's where more or less the poorer people lived.

LEVINE: Was Kaiserslautern a big city, a small city?

HAHNL: Well, medium. I'd say medium. Today it's quite a town.

LEVINE: Do you remember the house you lived in?

HAHNL: Well, I can picture it, but I can't give you the name of the street.

LEVINE: Could you...

HAHNL: Was just the ground floor, and we lived with those, what do you call these, under, under the roof?

LEVINE: Like a...

HAHNL: Have we got them out there? No. We don't have them here.

LEVINE: Eaves?

HAHNL: You know, when you live up...

LEVINE: Attic?

HAHNL: ...there was, yeah, something under the attic. It had a window. We lift it up, square, and some of them had real windows. But it, it was the cheapest.

LEVINE: What was downstairs in, in your house?

HAHNL: Well, a regular apartment, usually the owner.

LEVINE: Oh. And your family lived upstairs...

HAHNL: Yes.

LEVINE: ...under the roof?

HAHNL: Yes.

LEVINE: And did you have more than one room up there?

HAHNL: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Three.

LEVINE: And do you remember anything else about it, like how maybe it differed from the kind of house you lived in when you came here?

HAHNL: Well, when I came here I went straight to Flushing. And my sponsor was picking us up.

LEVINE: I see. Okay, well, well, let's, let's, we'll talk about actual coming here later, but I was just trying to get a idea of your house, anything else that you would mention about what it was like.

HAHNL: Oh, it was not a bad house, and, you know, clean, we always were, everybody, washing the windows once a week.

LEVINE: And did, did, did the house have running water? Did it have...

HAHNL: No. Didn't. It, you had to get one step down, and there was the faucet. So the tenant across and myself or my family, we used that faucet. Then we had to walk a few steps up and each one had the apartment, right and left.

LEVINE: Oh. So, the, there was running water in the house?

HAHNL: In the house, yes.

LEVINE: But it wasn't in your apartment?

HAHNL: No.

LEVINE: I see. Uh-huh. And how about cooking. How did your mother cook?

HAHNL: Well, we had the coal.

LEVINE: Coal.

HAHNL: Coals, yeah.

LEVINE: Well, was it like one of those...

HAHNL: Square ones.

LEVINE: ...a big, black iron cook stove?

HAHNL: Yes. Yes, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember, well, first of all, what was your mother's name?

HAHNL: Marie. Mary.

LEVINE: And her maiden name? (Mrs. Hahnl refers to papers she has in her hand) Be careful because you're, you're hooked up here. If...

HAHNL: Oh. I, I don't want to...

LEVINE: ...we, we can find it later.

HAHNL: ..her maid-, her maiden name was Mary Beckman. B-E-C-K-M-A-N.

LEVINE: And, and what was your mother like? How would you describe her?

HAHNL: She was great woman. For the little income we had she did a lot of things.

LEVINE: Like what?

HAHNL: Always looked out that we were clean, and she was a, she could sew.

LEVINE: Did she make your clothes?

HAHNL: Oh, yes. She made clothes. And one Sunday we took a walk in the woods, and there was an umbrella hanging way up in the tree. Purple. She made my brother go up there and get it down, and she made a blouse out of that material for my sister. That was something. And that was, she was always that ways [sic]. She knew how to save and how to do things.

LEVINE: Do you think that she, that you have taken any of her attitudes or...

HAHNL: No, I have not.

LEVINE: No?

HAHNL: My sister got all.

LEVINE: Oh. Uh-huh.

HAHNL: She got it all. Everything.

LEVINE: Did your mother make, can you remember the kinds of clothes you wore when you were in Germany?

HAHNL: Well, that would be old fashioned today. Very old fashioned. But...

LEVINE: Were they, like, did you where long skirts and...

HAHNL: Yes. Yes. And the long winter coats. And these would go from one child to the other. Nothing was thrown out. And then it went to the poor, poorest of the poor.

LEVINE: What was your father's name?

HAHNL: Karl.

LEVINE: And, and, you had brothers and sisters?

HAHNL: Yes, I had.

LEVINE: What, what were their names?

HAHNL: I had three brothers and two, and one sister.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Could you say their names sort of from the oldest on down?

HAHNL: Hans, I don't know if you know how to spell it. Hans.

LEVINE: Hans. H-A-N-S.

HAHNL: Hans. Gerhardt. G-E-R. And Karl. And Karl is still alive. The others are dead.

LEVINE: And how about your sister?

HAHNL: I had one sister. Her name was Anna.

LEVINE: And where were you in the, in the order of children?

HAHNL: I was the oldest.

LEVINE: The oldest.

HAHNL: Hmm-hmm.

LEVINE: So, what would, would you all get together at dinner time, the whole family?

HAHNL: Oh, yes. Yes, yes. And we made sure one didn't get a spoonful more than the other had. (she laughs)

LEVINE: What do you remember having, like, a typical meal? What, what might you have?

HAHNL: Well, a lot of soups. Lentil soup, split pea soup, potato soup, and on Sunday the dinner was a little more festive like, you know.

LEVINE: And would your father be able to be home...

HAHNL: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: ...at dinner time?

HAHNL: Oh, yeah. Hmm-hmm.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HAHNL: Once a week he was allowed to play cards.

LEVINE: Oh.

HAHNL: (she laughs) That was his only pleasure.

LEVINE: And what did your mother do for, for pleasure?

HAHNL: Well, she had all the kids to take care of, right, and the house. And she did some sewing for other people to make an extra mark or pfennig. And she me on the pedal next to the machine. And I was as good as an angel.

LEVINE: This was before you went to school I...

HAHNL: Oh, yes, long before.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HAHNL: After I was born. (she chuckles)

LEVINE: What were your earliest memories? What do you remember as far back as you can remember?

HAHNL: Not too much when, when I was a real baby. No, I can't say too much. Only then when I went to school. And we had to walk back and forth.

LEVINE: What was school like?

HAHNL: Strict. Very strict. Very strict. But we did learn. We learned everything. We had to. My mother saw to that that we did everything.

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

HAHNL: Seven years. Then I, then you could go to higher schools. And that, then somebody came to the house one day, and said that I had such good grades I should be going to a higher school. And my mother said I'm already waiting for her to come out and help support the family. And that was it.

LEVINE: How did you feel about that?

HAHNL: Well, what could I do? What could I say? (she laughs)

LEVINE: Yeah.

HAHNL: And it happened twice. Then when I was two years older, it happened again that they wanted to put me, in Speyer, that was the closest town where the higher schools were. And it's just there were four after me, right. They want to eat. And that's, from then on, from when I worked, that's when I came over here.

LEVINE: Did you enjoy going to school?

HAHNL: I think I did. Yes. Because I was one of the smart ones. And when I didn't, when nobody could answer the questions that they put, and I couldn't answer it, that was something. "And you don't it either?" (she laughs)

LEVINE: Did you have a nice teacher, or teachers?

HAHNL: Yes, I, I did. Hmm-hmm. (pause) No, school was all right. We learned something. We did. We had to. Came home with a diploma. "One, one, one, one and a

half."

LEVINE: So, let's see. What, what did you do for fun when you were, when you were a girl?

HAHNL: Well, first of all, we did go to the sisters. And they, that's where we learned sing, say poems and play in plays. And that was a wonderful time, to be with the nuns there. And we learned a lot.

LEVINE: Now did the school, the school you went to...

HAHNL: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...was that a Catholic school?

HAHNL: No, it wasn't. We had extra religious learning.

LEVINE: So your family was Catholic?

HAHNL: Yeah.

LEVINE: And you went, how did you, did you, were you very religious as a family?

HAHNL: Say that again?

LEVINE: Was the family a religious family?

HAHNL: Oh, yeah. My mother and father went to church every Sunday. Naturally we kids, too. I remember one time when we had the first world war, and they came and threw the bombs. I was just out of church, and that side came down, the windows, I mean. That I remember well. (pause)

LEVINE: Do you remember anything else about World War One that you personally experienced?

HAHNL: Yes, I do. We had wounded soldiers in our town in the schools. And that had a gate, stone wall around the school, and then a iron fence on top. And there were the wounded soldiers in. And we used to, oh, my mother, as little as we had, she did save always something for the wounded soldiers, like peaches, apples. We could have eaten it ourselves, but she thought it was nice, and that we learn something, to help people in the future. And then one day it came to her. She said, "You know, I always bring that stuff down there in the kitchen. From now on we're going to

put it in a basket, and we go outside on the wall from the school, and we give it to the soldiers ourselves."

And that's what she did. To learn, teach us something, too.

LEVINE: So, in other words, they set up kind of a medical...

HAHNL: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...hospital ward in the...

HAHNL: In schools. Yes

LEVINE: ...in the schools?

HAHNL: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did you have any first had contact with the soldiers...

HAHNL: No, no, no, no.

LEVINE: No. So your mother then went down, too...

HAHNL: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: ...and gave them the food through the...

HAHNL: Oh, yes. And took us with her.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HAHNL: To teach us something, that we should be good in the future to the poor.

LEVINE: So, did you have, was this a farming, was there farming done right around where you lived?

HAHNL: Yeah. Yeah. Not in the town, but we didn't, we could even walk sometimes to the farm.

LEVINE: So some of the food you had was fresh off the farms in the area?

HAHNL: Maybe once in a while. But we had markets, and you got everything there. Twice a week you had to go.

LEVINE: Oh. Were you closest to any particularly, particular family member? Were you, were you close with any particular brother or sister or your mother or father,

were you particularly close to any...

HAHNL: Yeah. My brother who was next to me. We, pretty close, yes. My sister, she had her own ways, and she had other friends. And she like to go, you know, to the town, inside the town where there is, every Sunday you could walk there and show your dresses and your things. (she laughs) And that's where my sister went. And, but I, I didn't go for those things. I went to church, and that was it.

LEVINE: How about Hans, is that the brother you were closest to?

HAHNL: Yeah.

LEVINE: Were, were there, were there kinds of activities that you...

HAHNL: Oh, yes. They...

LEVINE: ...did with Hans?

HAHNL: They count their, well, first of all, there was the school. And after school we had to go to the woods and

get branches that fell down by itself, and that's, we, we needed that to make our fire in the kitchen and keep warm. So there's "was" to do. And then, yes, there were things where they could go for exercise.

LEVINE: Oh. Like what would you go, do for exercise?

HAHNL: Well, like we have it here, it, not throwing the, throwing the ball, too. But, up and down, you know, there's these, I wasn't too much for it.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HAHNL: So, we were poor, but we were always active. She would say (German). (she laughs)

LEVINE: How about your grandparents? Were there grandparents of yours around?

HAHNL: Yeah, there were grandparents. Yes, yes. And the grandmother died young. I can still see Grandfather. He cried so much. And they had a lovely house. That I remember. And had a daughter and a son. Hmm-hmm.. So.

LEVINE: Did you ever do things with your grandfather or grandmother?

HAHNL: We did, with the, not too much with the grandfather, but with the daughter. I used to go there every summer, when we had vacation from school, I would go in the middle of the town where the better people lived, and stayed with my aunt. And we did, we did get along. And I remember she used to make, Grandfather was, steam heat came into being, and he was one of the first ones, my grandfather. So he was a little, he was good paid. And, but he had to go outside from Kaiserslautern, because only the rich could have that put in their home. Steam heat. And he left on a Monday morning, and so I stayed all the eight weeks with my aunt. And she came, there was something, there was something. Oh, she had a fellow. She wanted to go out. (unintelligible) Grandfather didn't like it. So he asked me, "Did he come to the window again after I was gone?" And I said, "No." But he knew he was there, and he said, "You're just as bad as your aunt." And that was my lie, because I lied. And she said to me, "Don't shoot her." Grandfather, that I, that he was here. That's something, so.

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, do you remember anything that was different for you when you stayed with your aunt for those eight weeks that...

HAHNL: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I feel, oh, when I came back up home, I, and spoke, I, I wanted to speak like they do, in, in the fine language. And I made a mistake, you should hear them laugh in the kitchen while wash my hands down there. (she laughs) From that time on I never tried it.

LEVINE: And your other grandparents, were they around at all? Your grandfather and your aunt, were they related to your mother or your father?

HAHNL: To my, my grandfather was to my mother.

LEVINE: And how about your father's parents, were they around?

HAHNL: I don't remember much from them. They must have lived way in the country, too, you know. No, I don't remember too much from them. I'm surprised I remembered this what I just said.

LEVINE: Well, that's great. Well, do you remember anything

else about being in Germany. Do you remember what you thought you wanted to do when you grew up?

HAHNL: Well, no. I, I knew that I had to go to work. But the nuns wanted to put me in the cloister and become a nun. And I said, "I cannot say yes. I cannot say yes." In spite that I went to church almost every morning before I went to work. They saw that. But I could not say yes. And I found out in later life that I had another thing to do, and I couldn't go to...

LEVINE: Was that a hard decision for you then? To say...

HAHNL: Well, it was in a way. Yes. And I pushed it off and pushed it off. And finally, oh, my parents, they were, they were not, they went to church, but they were, they could not go communion.

LEVINE: Oh.

HAHNL: Because they were divorced. My father was divorced. Not my mother. But that time it was very strict, you know, so many years ago. And that was kind of hard. So when I left, in fact, my sister came to this country on the (unintelligible) that if she would be there when

her mother died and father, and they would not be buried by the church, she couldn't take it. So she came over here that she won't be out there. I don't think it bothered me that much.

LEVINE: Was there anything that your mother or father told you about life or how to live or what to do in life that you remember? Sort of lessons that they wanted you to have...

HAHNL: Oh, always to be honest. That I know. There was no thing that we could do or did even. (she laughs) I remember my brother, the one who died here now. He always went certain days to the back door where the nuns live. And because they gave soup to the poor. Not that he was so very hungry, you know. But he was there and got soup, till finally he went to the town with my sister. And my sister was well known by the nuns. And he said hello. And the sister said, "And who was that with you?" She said, "My brother." "Well," she said, "he comes every day when have soup on our back door and gets his soup." (she laughs) My mother never knew that. Oh, we laughed afterwards so much. (she indicates something on the wall) Can you read this where you see this thing up there? The name?

No, huh? I can.

LEVINE: What is it?

HAHNL: Oh, I'm not telling you.

LEVINE: Oh.

HAHNL: You have, when you get up and stand here you may see it, can read it.

LEVINE: Oh, okay.

HAHNL: All right.

LEVINE: So, is there anything else that you would say about your life in Germany before you, the decision...

HAHNL: Oh, I think it was a happy life. It was.

LEVINE: And how was the decision made that you would come to the United States?

HAHNL: Well, my girlfriend, they lived in my house, her brother was here. And one day he asked her to come.

And she could not leave home. She was too much for her parents. And then she asked me if I would go. And then she would go. So I made up my mind very quick, and said I, I go. And then she went, and we came together.

LEVINE: Oh.

HAHNL: And came together.

LEVINE: Now, she was living in your house?

HAHNL: Yeah.

LEVINE: With your family you mean?

HAHNL: Yeah.

LEVINE: Oh. Why was that?

HAHNL: Well, well, that's why, that the way it was. There were two apartments in, or three.

LEVINE: Oh, I see. So her family was in the same building.

HAHNL: Right.

LEVINE: I see. I see. So you made a quick decision. Do you know what decided you to go?

HAHNL: Well, it was something that was a little bit out of this thing. And times were bad that time in Germany. And I would have to be, be in my old job maybe for years come. And...

LEVINE: What were you doing for work there?

HAHNL: We made masks from brown, old clothes were made to the material, and they made mask for the soldiers, that, against poison. And we, and that was kind of, it was dirty work. And it wasn't too good. I'm surprised that I'm still alive today.

LEVINE: From breathing the fumes of the...

HAHNL: Well, from being under this material. And, and then when her brother was here, and he, he was satisfied. Very satisfied. (unintelligible)

LEVINE: What was he doing here, do you know?

HAHNL: He, he was a ironworker. And he, our sponsor was a very nice man. His par-, our sponsor was name of Schuhmacher. And he lived in Flushing. And his parents used to have a farm where today city hall stands. So they must have gotten a good penny by selling this material. And they sold it and went out to Flushing and started a farm there. And the two sons also started farming. That's where I worked then when I came over. I did the cooking and my girlfriend did the cleaning.

LEVINE: Oh. So, the, the people who were your sponsors...

HAHNL: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...were the people who were mak-, who had the, the, the factory making the...

HAHNL: No, no. That was in Germany.

LEVINE: No? That was different.

HAHNL: Yeah. That was different.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. I see. So how did you hear about those sponsors? I mean, how did you know that...

HAHNL: From my girlfriend who lived in my house. And her brother was here.

LEVINE: And he knew them?

HAHNL: He, he didn't know...

LEVINE: No?

HAHNL: No. He didn't know them. But they had relatives in Kaiserslautern. And they wrote to them, "You know any boys and girls who would like to come to America?" And he, a friend of his said yes, and, "Ask Karl if he would like to come along." That was my girlfriend's brother. And he said yes. And so the two of them came. And when they came here they stood maybe a week or two on the farm, with the farmer. Don't get me wrong. This, he didn't do it to get cheap labor here. He told them right away, "When you feel like it, go after your own occupation." And he did. And the same thing, then we came. And she, she didn't want to go. Oh, she cried. I think it was a good thing I came.

LEVINE: What was your attitude about leaving Germany and coming here?

HAHNL: Not as bad as, as hers. Not as bad as her. Because my mother had also courage in her. And she would talk, not that she wanted me out, but she talked. And I, I didn't go with a broken heart. I think I wanted to go, too, because I knew I could help them financially.

LEVINE: So your idea was you'd come here, and you'd make money and send some back to them?

HAHNL: Some out, yeah, and pay my thing off.

LEVINE: Did you think that you would stay here forever?

HAHNL: Yes, yes, yes, yes. Because I got a letter from my mother after a while saying, "Save every month, and send that much out to us, and we're going to buy you a house. And after a few years, when the house is paid, you come home." (she chuckles) And I wrote my mother, "I'm not coming home. I like it. And I don't need no house in Germany." And that was the end.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

LEVINE: What did you like about it?

HAHNL: Well, the food, and naturally we had everything to eat and drink, and saved some money. And I liked the idea that that farmer gave us the money. And the way he said to you, "Now, it off," the way we had to pay it off. That was wonderful.

LEVINE: So when you left your home, what did you, how did you, how were you transported to the port where you took the ship?

HAHNL: We went by train.

LEVINE: Now, had, had you been on trains before?

HAHNL: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HAHNL: Hmm-hmm.

LEVINE: And you went by train. Do you remember what port you went to?

HAHNL: Yeah. Hmm-hmm-hmm. It's very popular, but I don't remember it now. Not...

LEVINE: Bremen?

HAHNL: Not Bremen. The other one. Not Bremen. (pause)

LEVINE: Oh, I can't think either.

HAHNL: I can't think.

LEVINE: Well, you, you do remember the name of the ship, though?

HAHNL: Oh, yeah, sure. Let's get going.

LEVINE: What, the ship?

HAHNL: Yeah, get, that I come here.

LEVINE: Yeah, well, tell me the name of the ship.

HAHNL: Columbus.

LEVINE: Columbus. Okay.

HAHNL: It was a maiden voyage for Columbus. It took nine days.

LEVINE: And what was the ship like?

HAHNL: Wonderful. And when we came to the statue, everybody rant toward on one side, that ship leaned over, and I stayed back because I was afraid it would go down in the water, because they all wanted to see the Statue of Liberty. Ach.

LEVINE: What was, what were the accommodations like? Was it...

HAHNL: Very good.

LEVINE: Yeah?

HAHNL: Hmm-hmm. And I was third class.

LEVINE: In a cabin you were?

HAHNL: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And it was you and your, and your girlfriend?

HAHNL: Hmm-hmm.

LEVINE: Okay. So, then, do you remember Ellis Island? What do you remember about that?

HAHNL: I remember Ellis Island. And it had squares where we had to stand in. It had a little door. And from there on came the inspectors to ask us questions. And it was the first time I saw a colored man, black one. That was something. Don't forget, it's fifty-five years ago. And he asked me questions. And I answered. And then he took his finger, and pa-, showed up on the railing, and said in German, "Your uncle and aunt are here." And I almost busted because that wasn't my aunt and uncle. That was my sponsor. And I was afraid to say anything, they would send me right back. That was something. But when he spoke

German that did it. Now, wasn't that something?

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HAHNL: And then we could go up. And they said what we would want to eat, and I said spaghetti [sic]. And they were a little bit taken aback, you know, but, because I said spaghetti. And into the restaurant we went and had spaghetti. The sponsor did that. Yeah, that's it. Then I was in America.

LEVINE: And what were your sponsor's names?

HAHNL: Schuhmacher.

LEVINE: Schuhmacher. And, and so you met them, and they were on the balcony at Ellis Island?

HAHNL: Hmm-hmm.

LEVINE: And then you went together on the ferry back to Manhattan? And you went to a restaurant right around...

HAHNL: Downtown.

LEVINE: Downtown. Uh-huh. And then, how, do you remember first going to their house?

HAHNL: We went, that I don't remember, if we went to his, his, the two brothers lived apart, but they had a car already that time, so this was not so bad. But the walking would have been too long. One bus here, and one was further away. And it was country all around. No houses. Nothing. There was a trolley going which I had to use when I wanted to go to New York City on my day off. And it was pitch dark when I came home with the trolley. And I had, there was one house standing there. I had to go in, telephone down to our farmer where I worked, and the boys had to come up with the car and get me because it was too dangerous to walk in the dark down this way, and I never forget that. That was so nice.

LEVINE: Do you remember your first impressions when you got to your sponsor's house?

HAHNL: Well, it was more than what I was used to at home. And there were two daughters and three boys. And that was really his brother I went to. Not to him. Not to

my sponsor. His brother had a farm, too. He lived about ten minutes in the car apart. And I stayed there. I, I think I liked it right away. The daughters spoke broken Eng-, German. The father a little better. And he had just lost the mother. So there was a little sadness in the house. But I stayed there a year and a half, two years. My girlfriend left. She went to Forest Hills to take a child, a family who had children, small children. So then I was alone. That's where I met my husband.

LEVINE: Oh, how did you meet him?

HAHNL: (she laughs) The Schuhmachers used to advertise in the German paper for jobs. If you wanted a job what to work on the farm. And one day there comes a fellow. Usually they had to sit in the kitchen where I was cooking. And they had big pots. And we had to cups for the men that work on the farm. (she laughs) We had boats, you know, where the milk came in. And one of the sons came in the kitchen and asked me, "Helma, you got any lemons in the house?" I said, "Yes, in the frigidaire." So he gets his lemon while that guy was still sitting there. He had to wait for the boss, to ask for a job. And then, oh, a week or

so later I get a letter. And it says, "Miss Helma, Cook on 'Wirt' [sic] Schuhmacher's Farm." I didn't open that letter. I ran upstairs to our daughter. I said, "Look, Miss Martin, and what kind of a letter I'm getting here." She said, "Well, open it." (she laughs) So excited I was. Ah. When I opened this letter, then it came to me that it was from that fellow who sat there on the, waiting to get a job. He never showed up. He got the job, but he never showed up. So, and that's when I met him.

LEVINE: Well, well, what did the letter say?

HAHNL: Well, he said, who, he, he didn't know my second name, right? Well, he would like to meet me. And this was very far away from me. I didn't, I thought he was fresh because when he sat there and saw me set the table, and he said, "Well, if I'm hired here I hope you treat me nice." And I said, "And you will eat and drink just what the others get." And I didn't like it. And that night I go upstairs to my room, and I bent down, I can still see myself down kneeling by my bed and ask God that that fellow should never start work here, and he didn't. (they laugh)

LEVINE: So you thought he was too forward? Is that...

HAHNL: Yes, yes, yes.

LEVINE: Well, did you cook for, for the people who worked on the farm as well?

HAHNL: Hmm-hmm.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, so, then what prompted you to, to see him?

HAHNL: Oh, the, well, he kept, oh, he came out. I think he came out. (to her friend Arlis who in the room) You know this? I don't know no more how, how we came to our (unintelligible). (pause) Oh, he came out with my girlfriend's brother, because he came to see his sister. And then he came with him.

LEVINE: Well, why didn't he want to work on the farm?

HAHNL: Because he had seen me, and he didn't want to have, he had, didn't want to start anything with any girl. But maybe it bothered him (unintelligible). That was (unintelligible). No, I had no, I didn't come to

America to get married.

LEVINE: So you had been here about a year and a half, two years when this, when you met your? So then he came out with your girlfriend's brother, and did you...

HAHNL: Well, then it's...

LEVINE: ...I guess you changed your opinion...

HAHNL: Well, now, I changed my mind.

LEVINE: So did you see him for a while before you got married?

HAHNL: Yeah. Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HAHNL: Hmm-hmm.

LEVINE: Well, then you worked at that place, at the Schumacher's...

HAHNL: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...and then, when did you leave?

HAHNL: My girlfriend left first. And then she went to Forest Hills. And then about six or eight months later I left also, and also went to Forest Hills.

LEVINE: You had another job to go to when you left?

HAHNL: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HAHNL: Yeah.

LEVINE: So you remained close friends with your girlfriend, the one that you came over with?

HAHNL: Who, me?

LEVINE: Yeah.

HAHNL: I still write to her.

LEVINE: Oh, really?

HAHNL: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Oh.

HAHNL: I have a picture right in the kitchen from her.

LEVINE: No kidding?

HAHNL: She's more or less a invalid.

LEVINE: So, so, then you went to work in Forest Hills, and then you were seeing your, your husband to be...

HAHNL: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...at that point?

HAHNL: Yeah.

LEVINE: And, and what did he do for work?

HAHNL: Oh, I what did he do? I don't know what he did. Oh, there was, you know the beer bottles? They were washed somewhere. That was his job then. And he worked there. (unintelligible) lived in New York

City. Ninety-first Street.

LEVINE: Oh. On the east side?

HAHNL: Hmm-hmm.

LEVINE: And did you have children?

HAHNL: Three.

LEVINE: And their names?

HAHNL: Maria, Charlie and Karl.

LEVINE: And your husband's name?

HAHNL: William.

LEVINE: And then when you had the children did you stop working?

HAHNL: Yeah. I stayed with the children.

LEVINE: What are you proudest of, that you've done in your life? What makes you feel good, proud, that you did?

HAHNL: Well, first of all, I could help my parents when I came over here. That was something. And I met my husband. (pause) I came to see the Great Lakes (unintelligible). He lived here, too, you know. So, and it's nice here.

LEVINE: Was your husband also coming from Europe?

HAHNL: He came from Austria, from Vienna. Oh, he's been all over the world the hard way.

LEVINE: How, how so?

HAHNL: Well, like he couldn't, this was a time during the war where you had to have a ticket for everything when you went from one town to another. And he was a great reader. And as a boy he wanted to read books. And his father was very, well, the money was not that much. So he would go to bed and have a flashlight. And then he put blanket up, and "mit" [sic] the flashlight he read the books. And he made up his mind that he will see all the places what he read in books. And he did. But the hard way.

LEVINE: Does that mean he, he would what, work on ships, or...

HAHNL: Yes. Yes. He worked on ships. So that was, but he saw what he wanted. Had seen things what only the soldiers saw in the Second World War. Too bad he isn't here, huh, Arlis? My husband.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HAHNL: Oh. (she chuckles)

LEVINE: Yeah. Well, it turned out that you had a nice marriage...

HAHNL: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: ...after you thought that you didn't like him at all, huh?

HAHNL: We had our, his mother coming over for a while.

LEVINE: Well, how is this period in your life, this, this time of your life?

HAHNL: Now?

LEVINE: Yeah. For you.

HAHNL: I'm satisfied. I have Arlis as a good friend. That is enough. And good neighbors I must say. They're all nice. And we help each other. I keep my car. Of course, I cannot go travelling like some other people do, but it means a lot to me.

LEVINE: To have it, your car?

HAHNL: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. Can go to the cemetery. Can go shopping. Take Arlis with me.

LEVINE: Well, is there anything that you can say about the fact that you did come here as a young woman, and spent really most of your life in this country? Do you think coming here, immigrating here had some kind of an impact on you after that period? Do you think that it made some kind of a difference?

HAHNL: I think it had to be that way. That's the way I would put it. I had to come over here. Because I could help my parents from the beginning, I find my husband, and then we meet, met people in New York City. And

somebody lived in Cedar Plain, and we went to visit her, and she, her husband brought her over here because this was newly built. There was nothing here yet. Just this "Paar" [sic], few houses. And we decided then that's the place we want to live. We lived on Long Island. We wanted to get away because we didn't like the people that all of a sudden came in there. And, but I read today in the paper about Long Island and where I lived. I'm really grateful I live here.

LEVINE: Is there some way that you could talk about what parts of you are German and what parts American, or how do you see yourself...

HAHNL: Oh.

LEVINE: ...as between the German and American.

HAHNL: Oh, I am American. Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Yeah.

HAHNL: I have relatives here that I write to. I have a brother there. But I like it here.

LEVINE: Is there anything else you'd like to say before we close about anything? (she laughs) About your life, about coming here, about living here?

HAHNL: Well, this was good to here about this place here, because we wanted to get away from Long Island. And it suited us, and it was built new. And we, we liked it here. Even my husband. I still have good friend in Long Island. But they live in Moriches and this is not so bad yet, but.

LEVINE: Well, it sounds like you found a nice home here and...

HAHNL: I did.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HAHNL: Hmm-hmm.

LEVINE: Okay, well, I'd like to thank you very much. A very interesting set of experiences and stories that you report, and now...

HAHNL: Look at all the friends that I have.

LEVINE: Wonderful.

HAHNL: Twenty-two cards for my birthday.

LEVINE: Ah-hah. Wow. That's wonderful. That's wond-, from your grandchildren, too.

HAHNL: Great grandchildren. Finally I'm a great grandmother.
(she laughs)

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Okay, well, I'm going to sign off now, and I thank you again. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. And I'm speaking with Wilhelmine Hahnl...

HAHNL: Hmm-hmm.

LEVINE: ...who came from Germany at the age of twenty-four in 1925. And at the time of this interview Mrs. Hahnl is ninety-two.

HAHNL: Right.

LEVINE: Okay, signing off.