

EI-401

ELIZABETH KUHL WOWK

BIRTHDATE: JUNE 11, 1910

INTERVIEW DATE: OCTOBER 23, 1993

RUNNING TIME: 1:00:33

INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE

RECORDING ENGINEER: PETER HOM

INTERVIEW LOCATION: WHITING, NEW JERSEY

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: JOHN MURIELLO, 3/1996

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: CHARLES MITCHELL, 6/2009

GERMANY, 1925

AGE 15

PASSAGE ON "THE STUTTGART"

PORT OF EMBARCATION: BREMERHAVEN

RESIDENCES: BAKGM BEAR BADEB-BADEN  
BROOKLYN, NY

ORAL HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mrs. Wowk is the sister of Agnes Kephart, Interview EI-400. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of Oral History, 2/2/1996

LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. I'm here in Whiting, New Jersey with Elizabeth Kuhl Wowk, who came from Germany when she was fifteen years old in 1925.

WOWK: September 17th.

LEVINE: September 17th, 1925.

WOWK: August. (Levine laughs) August. August, I don't know...

LEVINE: And I've, and I've just interviewed Agnes Kephart who is Elizabeth Wowk's sister, and she came at the same time. Today is October

23rd, 1993. Okay, let's start with your giving your birth date.

WOWK: My birth date is June 11th, 1910.

LEVINE: And where were you in born.

WOWK: I was born in Germany. The name of the town was Balg. B-A-L-G. That was near Baden-Baden. And Baden-Baden was a nice, beautiful city. But where I was born was a town up in the mountain. And we lived right by the Black Forest. We had a big piece of property next to the house. It was a two, two story house which my father built himself. And we had a, a big garden. And after the garden we had a meadow out by the (unintelligible). The garden was fenced in, of course. But, and I always used to love to work in the garden. And any time there was, it was time to pull weeds, my mother used to say, you know, my hands are very big, and your fingers so small. It's better to pull, for you to pull the weeds, because they come out much better. And I was always so proud. (they laugh) And I used to love to pull the weeds. I used to love to work in the garden. And then when I got a little bigger, then we used to go to the forest. The Black Forest was right above our property. Started there. And there was a road in front of it. And we'd go across it. We used to be, I used to be most all day when I was home in the woods. We'd get wood and we'd bundle it up.

We'd carry it on our head home, because we had no electricity and no gas. Everything was done on the stove. And...

LEVINE: How would you carry it on your head? Was it, was it some kind of a...

WOWK: We had, we had a little cushion. A round cushion that we put on our head first. And then we put that load of wood on top. And I always came home, I would never come home without it. One day they used to have people to cut the trees, you know, and you could buy the firewood. They had big pieces of wood, like they had, you see here once in a while, too. And this one day one of the wagons with the horse, they had, not horses, but bulls they had. And they had no, no cars or anything that they could travel that way. Everything was done by animals. Very few horses, though. The horses were mostly on leisure, for leisure people, you know. But there was always those, the cows, and the, the elks.

LEVINE: The bulls and...

WOWK: The bulls, yeah.

LEVINE: Did you have donkeys? Were donkeys something you had?

WOWK: No.

LEVINE: No.

WOWK: No, we had no donkeys in our area that I have ever seen. But this one day one of those, (she laughs) one of those wagons lost a piece of wood, you know, it was about this big, and like that. (she indicates) And I saw that, and of course, I had that piece to put on the head. Well, I tried to lift it. It was awful heavy. I forget how old I was. I think I must have been about twelve years old at the time. But I fixed so, and I put in on the head, and I carried it home. And it was a good half hour to get home from there. When I got home I walked through the meadow and I just couldn't carry it anymore, so I dropped it on the grass. So I went home. My mother saw me and she says, "What are you doing?" So I says, "I found that." And I says, "I can't carry it anymore." She says, "Oh, I ought to spank you. Don't ever do that again. That's too heavy. You could hurt yourself." Well, my, my father come home from work that night. He was sore, you know, and he says, boy that was the best piece of wood he's seen in a long time. (she laughs) But I always was crazy to go to the woods. Always.

LEVINE: What kind of, what kind of trees were in the Black Forest?

WOWK: Well, we had pine trees, and we had, oh, what do you call these other, birch trees. I think, I think some of them are called beech trees. It was a very, very good wood. And oak trees we had. They seem to grow in different sections of more of one kind. But then after so many, there was another one, you know, grew up I guess from seed. I don't know. But it was all mountain. Everything was mountain there.

LEVINE: When you would go to the forest would you go by yourself, or would other children go?

WOWK: Oh, lot's of times I went by myself. But sometimes I would go with, with friends. My mother had a few nice lady friends there. And one, one family, their name was Fischer. I never forget them. They had, I think she had nine or eleven children. And there was three of them. We always used to be together. Most of the time. Not all the time. But when, when it was time to go to the woods to get wood, we used to look for, you know, branches that had fall. And at that time you had, all the forest was so clean, you had no idea. And I haven't seen a forest like that since. (she laughs) But then we had a wagon.

LEVINE: You mean it was clean because people were always picking up...

WOWK: We were always picking up the, the woods. The, the branches, you know, they'd be nice sticks. Sometimes they were that big and around. (she indicates) Sometimes small, you know. And we'd load our wagons with as much as we possibly could. And we'd tie it so it wouldn't fall off. Then when there was one road that we had a, it was very steep. And they were three people, three children, and I was alone. And a lot of times one of them would help me because when you're in front, and you have that coming down that road, it would push you. And they would help. We always helped each other. And that was great. And then in the summertime as much as I can remember I think I must have been, oh, as I said maybe about nine or ten years old. I, I was never afraid in the woods. Never. And we used to look for deer. Every once in a while we'd see a deer. And well, we saw rabbits occasionally. And this, in the summertime we used to go huckleberry picking. And I always used to love to pick. And I always liked to, I always like to beat my mother. And I was, let me see, I was about, I think she was about a year, my sister was about year old or a little bit more. And then I would take her with me, and my mother would come after. Well, this one day I had picked berries. And I said to her, I put the basket alongside of her. I said, "Now, don't touch them. Don't touch them." She waited until I was out of sight. Her fingers would go in. And I come back, I says, "Oh, you ate the berries already." So we always had a lot of fun. And then after the, the

huckleberries they had, there was raspberries all in the forest.

LEVINE: Really?

WOWK: Yeah. Beautiful, delicious raspberries. And after that, and blackberries. And after that was mushrooms. They had, one they call, I don't what they call it here, but one was called "pfefferling."

LEVINE: Could you spell that?

WOWK: Oh, that pfefferling. That P-F-E-F-F-E-R-L-I-N-G. And they were delicious. And my mother always loved to get them if I found them. And I was always one to, always wanted to find something somebody else couldn't find. I don't know why, why it was. And then we had the other mushrooms. They call it "steinpilzer." "Stone mushrooms." They were, had a very thick stem, and over the stem was the crown. And it was very thick. And when I was able to trust myself to go alone and my bro, I should say when my mother trusted me to go alone to the city. I used to go the city and sell it. And I never forget one time there was, oh, going back to the, the huckleberries. In the fall when there was any huckleberries at all, my mother had two friends. As I said one was Fischer, and what was, what was the other one's name again? I don't remember

anymore what the other lady's name was. They would, they were sitting together in the place, and I saw them. And I come from, because I used to bring my father his lunch, see. And after I had brought him his lunch I go to the forest, and pick huckleberries because that, I was, I just loved it. And I saw the three of them sitting there. And then I walked around the other way, and I found a place. I saw the sun shining through and trees around it, but you couldn't see what was in there where the sun was shining. So I was curious. I went over there, and I looked, and there were huckleberries as big as blueberry bushes that high. (she indicates) And the huckleberry bushes are very small, you know. I went in there, and one, two, three I filled my can. We had a three and half quart milk can, and that's what I had, I'd used. And it was full. So I come back to where they were sitting. And my mother says, "Oh, you're here already." I said, "Yes." I brought the can over, she looked in, and she says, the other woman says, "Where did you find those?" I said, "Oh, down there." I went around the other way where I came from first so they wouldn't see where I was. I was smart. So then I says, she had a basket. And I says, "Well, get me the basket, and I'll, I'll see if I can find a few more." So they were all watching me where I was going. So I went the opposite way. And I went down the mountain, and I come around that way again. (she gestures) And I had the basket full. I don't think it took me more than half an hour. Well, they

couldn't get over that. The one woman says, "I think you must have found a place where there was a lot." I says, "Well, I did, but," I says, "they're all gone now." So when we got home, the others had no, no berries at all, and I had a can full and a basket full.

(she laughs) So we got home, my mother says, "Why didn't, couldn't you tell it where it was?" I says, "Mama, I, I know where that place was, and I'm going tomorrow morning and pick the rest of the berries." I says, "They're beautiful berries." So we went home. The next morning, I got up six o'clock in the morning. I took the basket, I went to that place, I picked all the berries to fill the basket. And I thought, gee, there's still a lot of berries there, yet. I took that basket of berries and I walked to the city which was, I would say almost three quarters of an hour. Walked to the city and I stood in front of a restaurant. And a man saw me, restaurant owner saw me with the basket full of berries. He come out, he says, "What have you got there." I says, "Oh," I says, "blueberries. Huckleberries." He says, he says, "What are you going to do with them?" I says, "Oh, I'm going to sell them." He says, "Come on in." He says, "I'm going to buy them." (she laughs) So he, I had never asked for a price, but he gave me good price for it. I went in there, and he, he gave me the money, and I went right back to the woods to that same place and I picked the rest of the berries. It was almost a basket full. So I came home. And my mother says, "Where have you been such a long time. Did it

take that long to pick those berries." I said, "Yes." I says, "And look what I got." I showed her the money, I gave her the money. "How did you get that? Where did you get that?" So then I told her the story. She says, "Boy, you're something." And I, I always, I always thought that was, oh, if I could make, play a trick on them. I always used to do that, you know. And it was really wonderful. It was a beautiful, and that forest, I was, I was in there every day I think that I was able to, to walk to get in there. Even when I, when we had school. I went to school there. And we had school in the wintertime from eight o'clock until twelve. In the summertime it was from seven o'clock to eleven. That's how early, the teacher had two classes a day. One in the morning and one in the afternoon. Oh, in the beginning I, when I was small I think, I think it was up to third grade we went in the morning. And from the fourth grade to the eighth grade we went in the afternoon. I mean, now, wait a minute. Up to three we went in the afternoon, and after, after that, after fourth grade and up to eighth we went in the morning. Well, we had the school to eleven o'clock. I brought my father his dinner. They didn't have sandwiches like they do here. You know, in this country, you make a sandwich and take it to work. They didn't have that. They had a hot dinner.

LEVINE: What would you bring, generally?

WOWK: Well, soup, vegetables, whatever, you know. And, of course, a few pieces of bread. But we only had meat once a week. We were allowed to take meat once a week for Sunday. And whatever we had there my mother made do for the whole week. And I had to bring my father his, his lunch. They ate one o'clock. At twelve o'clock my mother had a sandwich ready for me to, to eat on the way. And I brought, it took me about an hour almost to get to the place where my father was working, because he always, be working in the city. And it was, when you think back it was hard, it was a hard job, but when you're a kid like that you enjoyed every minute of it.

LEVINE: Well, you're father was a brick layer at that time?

WOWK: He was a brick layer.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And, and why don't you say your father and mother's name for the tape? Your, your father's name and your mother's name.

WOWK: My father's name was Paul, and my mother's name was Katherine.

LEVINE: And your mother's maiden name?

WOWK: Mehfohr [PH].

LEVINE: And, let's see. And you were the oldest child?

WOWK: I was the oldest.

LEVINE: And then after you?

WOWK: After me my brother was born. Five years later my brother was born.

LEVINE: And his name?

WOWK: His name is Otto.

LEVINE: Otto. And then...

WOWK: And then she was born twelve years later. (she indicates her sister, Agnes Kephart) I'm twelve years older than she is.

LEVINE: Right. And, and that's Agnes.

WOWK: That's Agnes.

LEVINE: Right. Your sister Agnes. Okay. Do you remember grandparents in

Germany.

WOWK: Well, I tell you. We lived in what you call Baden-Baden. That was in the southern part, that was near France. And my grandfather and grandmother, they lived in Berlin. And I think it was the year before we came to this country, it might have been two years, that my grandfather visited us in Baden-Baden. Of course, you couldn't go back and forth every week or every year. It was, cost too much money. And they just didn't have that kind of money. Neither did we either. I mean, when you have three children, that time it was rough. And, so I met him then. He visited us. He was, he was with us, I think, maybe a week, or something like that. And then when we came to this country, that's when I met my grandmother. But my grandfather had died since that time. I don't remember what year he died. And, so I met my grandmother in Berlin. Of course, my mother visited all our relatives before we came here, as, on the trip, you know, after we took care of the, the property and everything. And my father had his sister in Berlin. Her name was Agnes. That's what she was named, my sister was named after. And his, her husband's name, my uncle, his name was Otto. And they had two daughters. One was Ursula and the other one was, ah, I forgot what her name, what the other one's name is. Anyway they, they both got married. Or one was, Ursula. (voice off-mic) Huh? (voice off-mic) Berbel [PH]. Yeah, well, the one was Berbel and

the other one was Ursula. And they, they both got married, but they're both dead, too, now.

LEVINE: Well, did you visit them in Berlin when you, before you came to this country?

WOWK: Yeah. That's when I...

LEVINE: That was on your route?

WOWK: ...I just said that's when I met my grand mother.

LEVINE: Yeah. Oh, okay.

WOWK: See? And my uncle, too. That was my, my father's sister.

LEVINE: Okay. And this was when you were, when you were leaving?

WOWK: We were leaving, we were on our way to come here.

LEVINE: I see.

WOWK: And, of course, my mother, she had sister in, in a big city, in Kassel. That's about, almost the middle of Germany. They're all

so far apart that you couldn't be visiting all the time. And then she had a brother near Kassel. It was called Vilsberg. And she had another brother. I don't know, I don't know where he, where he lived. I had never met him. But this one brother had a daughter. And her name is Emmi. And I visited her. I've been back in Germany a couple of times, and I used to visit them every time. And my mother's sister, the one that lived in Kassel, her name was Anna. And she had a daughter. And her name is Kati, Katherine. She passed away about two years ago. I think it's two years ago that she passed away. And she had a few children. And after the war or when, when the war stopped, I used to send packages to everybody. And, of course, at that time to mail was only two dollars. Now it's twenty, thirty something. And they were always so grateful that I, you know, if it wasn't for me, they said they don't know, me and my mother. Because I had sent more than my mother, because I had found. I had sent, my school teacher, one of my school teacher. I had sent her a Christmas card. And she wrote me one back with a nice letter, and she said I was the only one of all the children that she had ever taught that, would write her a card and let, you know, to say hello. Then I, I felt so good about it. And that was the time, almost the time when you could send packages. When you, when you got the, that the mail, we couldn't send packages, yet. But after I got the, the mail af, when we could send packages, I sent, we had two school teachers, two men

and this lady. And I sent each one of them a package for Christmas, because they had no flour, no butter, no sugar, no Crisco, and things like that. They had, they didn't even have thread or needles or pins. It was, it was pathetic, when I read about it, you know, when they told me. And so I sent them that. And then I sent, I sent her a package of, I'll never forget it, Bisquick flour. (she laughs) And I, I thought, well, I'd better, and I know she liked pancakes for lunch sometimes, because she didn't have enough time to eat, do a lot of stuff. Because she had the two...

LEVINE: Classes.

WOWK: ...classes. So, anyway, when I sent her the Bisquick flour, I thought, well, I better write this in German, what it is and so on. So I deciphered everything, and wrote her in German about the, how to make the pancakes, you know, and all that, what the flour is and all that. When she got the package, she wrote me a letter. She says when she wrote my letter about the Bisquick, she says she had to sit down and laugh and laugh. And she said it was so funny that you had deciphered the English language into German. And she says I was teaching English. (she laughs) But I didn't know it, you know. And she said she got such a kick out of that. (she laughs) I never forgot it. Oh, she was wonderful.

LEVINE: What was school like for you when you went, when you went to school in Germany?

WOWK: Well, we had to go to school, you know. And I always, I always liked school. I had fairly good marks. Not perfect, naturally, but I mean, there's no, I don't think there's any child who has perfect in everything. But she always liked me. And see, we were the only Protestant family in the, in town. They were all Catholic. And when we went to church we had to go to the city.

LEVINE: What church...

WOWK: We had to walk...

LEVINE: What...

WOWK: The Lutheran church. And we had to walk an hour before we got there. And that minister, I had sent him a package, too, when, after we could send from here, you know. And he got such a kick out of it. And, and then one of the teachers, the men teacher, we had two men teachers and the one lady. (unintelligible) the one mad teacher, when he got the package he happened to be in the hospital. He was very sick. And his two sons thought that was

such a great thing. They had never, they had the same experience as the lady teacher. They had never heard from any school children. And they had taught schools for years. And there was quite a few in this country that never even thought of sending a postcard. Well, I was different, I guess. I don't know. But...

LEVINE: What prompted to, to send so many packages, do you know?

WOWK: Huh?

LEVINE: What prompted to send so many packages...

WOWK: Well, I tell you. I had, I had one aunt. My mother's, my mother had a brother there, and he lived in Wilhelmshaven. And they didn't have anything. So, of course, my mother, and then they always, they corresponded, you know. So then my mother sent a package. I says, well I'll send two. And I, I had a girl friend, I had two girl friends there in Baden-Baden. I sent each one of them a package. And the one of them, she was a dress maker. And that's what she'd learned, you know, how to do. And the teacher used to say the two of us should, should do that, because we were both good in sewing at that time, you know. But my mother never would let me do that. She says we need the money, so I had to go and do housework. And anyway, from them, from the different ones I

found out what they needed. So I, I sent my, my cousin. I had two cousins. I sent them. I had two uncles, and I, I had the other one in Berlin. And I think I sent to about twenty people.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about World War One? Did you have any experiences first hand about...

WOWK: The, the only thing I remember about first World War One is when my mother's brother, George was his name, had to go to war. (she coughs) My father had already gone to war. And one time my mother said to me, "Oh, what do you know?" I said something, and she says, "What do you know about it? You don't know nothing about it." I says, "Yes, I do, when my Uncle George had to go to war." I says, we went, she says, "Where did, what train did he take?" Oh, he took such and such a train. Yeah, but you don't how you got it, because it was two place that you go to the train. I said, and he had to go to Baden-Baden. That was the city. And I says we went down such and such a street with my uncle. And the one street that we went on was really, really steep. It was not too easy to walk down on. I says that's where we went. She says, "Boy, what a memory you got." I was four years old, but I remember that. Because some things, when you're a child you remember that all your life. You don't forget it. But what you learn later on, you forget half of it.

LEVINE: Do you remember food that your mother cooked? Do you remember...

WOWK: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: ...any dishes that you...

WOWK: Yeah, she, we used to love her potato soup. And, of course, we had, we had chickens. And sometimes my father would kill a chicken. We'd have chicken soup, we'd have roast chicken, you know. And my mother was pretty good cook. And as I said, as far as getting beef or something like that, but then later on they raised their own. They had, it was after the war that my father had bought a goat. And we had goat, and she had young ones, three of them. And anybody I mention about the goat having three, they never believed it, because they usually, the most they have is two. But that goat always had three everytime.

LEVINE: Did you get milk from the goat?

WOWK: Yeah. And, of course, as I said, when the war started, when I was four, see, when, when it finished I was eight. And I used to go to the next town and get milk. That was more than a half an hour to walk, it was almost an hour to walk to the next town.

**END OF SIDE ONE**

**BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO**

WOWK: And I would go alone. My mother would send me. Nobody else was with me. And I found different places where they would give me milk where they would give milk to others. Why they, why they gave it to me I'll never know. But they always, they all seemed to like me somehow. I don't know.

LEVINE: What, how would you describe yourself as a, as a girl? What, how would you describe what kind of personality you had?

WOWK: Well, I always, when I was here I always tried to help somebody else. When, when they had difficulty with something, you know, I could help them, or even, even in school. What, if they didn't know something and I knew it I would help them, whereas others wouldn't bother, you know. But, I don't know, I always enjoyed life as it came.

LEVINE: Do you remember how the decision was made that the family would

come to the United States?

WOWK: Well, I had a uncle in New York. His name was George. And he was in this country. How, he came, quite a, he came before the war. I know he was here way before the war. But how or why he came, I don't know. And then he married a woman in New York. And that's, that's why we came. He and then my father had a friend who was here in this country. And my uncle and this friend of my father, they helped my father to come here.

LEVINE: So when did he come?

WOWK: Well, he came in 1924. A year before we did. There was not, there was no jobs to be had out there. Otherwise he would have lost the house. Because he had people living, or he had a two family house. But the people upstairs, he got rent from them, naturally. But when he came here, my mother lived on the, I mean, we, we took care of ourself as far as food and that goes, we had a big garden. And my mother used to make all her own things. She would make sauerkraut, you know. And then she would make string beans. We had a lot of beans. And she would salt them and that, and then she'd cook them in the wintertime. And we had carrots. And the carrots, I know they had, they used to get straw. How they got it I don't know. But my father, he used

to make a hole, and he'd put straw in there, and then he'd put carrots in there and, and some other things. And then we had a, a bin in the, in the basement. We had a basement. Nice basement. And he had a bin, and we'd put, he'd put the potatoes in there. So we had, we had everything for the winter long. But the only thing that always puzzled me was the tomatoes. When we came to this country, and we were eating tomatoes and that, I couldn't, when I first was told to eat the tomato I says, "No, I don't want to eat the tomato." My mother always used the tomato, we never got tomatoes. My mother had, had a couple of plants, and the tomatoes that she got of that she put in the soup. We never ate tomatoes like we eat here. And we never had a banana. We never knew what bananas were. In the city they had bananas in the stores, but not in our town. And in fact, even if we could buy it, they were too expensive. My parents couldn't afford to buy bananas. That was out. But apples, we had, we had, all the trees that we had, I think we had about twenty-five trees. We had plum trees, apple trees, pear trees, cherry trees. Had, we had, although we had one pear tree that had great, big pears like that. (she indicates) Not too many. But we used to store them up in the attic. The same with the apples. We'd have them up in the attic. And my mother would go up there and bring down what she thought we could eat for a couple of days, and that was it. We had our fruit all the time.

LEVINE: But it was just hard for your father to make a living in Germany, and that was why he, he left?

WOWK: Well, he couldn't, he couldn't get a job. It was hard after the war. There was no work to be had. Everybody was poor, you know. And we just...

LEVINE: So then did he, he got a job as a bricklayer in this country...

WOWK: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...and sent, did he, was he able to send then money for you and, and your mother...

WOWK: Well, he sent what he could out there, but he had us come over here the following year. Of course, with the help of my uncle, and this friend I guess must have helped him, too.

LEVINE: So then, when you left, do you remember leaving your home?

WOWK: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: How, what did you do? Did you sell it, or...

WOWK: No. No, it wasn't sold then. It was rented. And after a while some of the people that lived there, they made, they made a little trouble. And my father needed money here, and he, he sold the property to one of the tenants. And I had said to him many times, I says, "Pop, you should have never sold that house for the price." The people in the house had said all he could get was eight thousand mark at that time. And there was a person in the city that offered my father fourteen thousand. Now whatever this man did, and then he says, well, that man bought another house, and you can't get, I don't know. I don't know what happened there. But anyway, my father got cheated out of all that money.

LEVINE: Do you remember your mother packing up for you to leave?

WOWK: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: What did she take, or what did you take with you to this country?

WOWK: Well, we had to take what she told us to take, what she told us to do. She took her bedding. And, of course, I don't really remember all, all what she, all what she took. (voice off-mic) Oh, well, huckleberries. Yeah, I know that she took, but I'm

thinking of furniture. I don't think she took any furniture.  
No. But I know she took the beddings [sic] and linen and her,  
and our clothing.

LEVINE: How did you feel about leaving?

WOWK: It didn't bother me, as long as I was with my parents. (she  
laughs)

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

WOWK: I didn't care where they went or anything. I was that type. I  
don't know. I, I figured they know what they're doing.

LEVINE: And then was it...

WOWK: Of course, the other thing is I miss my friends, you know. But,  
and I was fifteen already. When I came to this country I had to  
go to school till I was sixteen.

LEVINE: Well, when you left your home, did you, and travelled to Berlin  
first, right?

WOWK: No, we went to, I think we went to Kassel first. And the other

name of the town, her bro, the other brother's name, was in Vilsberg. That was, his name was...(voice off-mic) Konrad. Yeah. There was another, Heinrich was another one.

LEVINE: So your mother went and visited all her relatives...

WOWK: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...around Germany...

WOWK: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...before taking off?

WOWK: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

WOWK: It was all on the way, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah.

WOWK: And then we had to go to Bremen, because my, the youngest brother, his name was George, he, he lived in Vilsberg. And a

short way from Vilsberg was where we took the boat. That was the last place that we were.

LEVINE: What was it like for you going around and visiting all these relatives...

WOWK: Oh, I enjoyed it. I enjoyed it.

LEVINE: Did, did you know them? Had you seen them before?

WOWK: Well, I met, I met, her younger brother George, I met him because he came to visit my, my mother. My father was already in service. And he came to visit my mother, and so I knew him from that time. And then a while later, I don't know if it was the following year or the same year, he was hurt in the army. And he was in the hospital, and my mother took me to visit him in the hospital. And I will never forget, my mother had made some cookies. And she said she gave him the cookies. And after a while it was, it was past lunchtime, you know. And he said to my mother, "Did you have lunch yet?" And she, she didn't want to answer, and I says, "No." He says, "Are you hungry?" I said, "Yes." So he have me cookie. (she laughs) And my mother says, "Oh, don't take the cookie." She says, that's for my, that's for my uncle. So he got a big kick out of that. But he was in, I

don't know how long he was in the hospital. It was quite a long while. But...

LEVINE: Well, did, did you have to have examinations before you got on the boat?

WOWK: Yes.

LEVINE: What do you remember about that?

WOWK: Well, we, we all had to go, we had to go to a doctor to see that we are well. And that he, he just examined us, and that was it.

LEVINE: And, and, do you remember, let's see. You were on The Stuttgart?

WOWK: Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about that voyage?

WOWK: Yes. (she laughs) We were on it, on the boat a couple of days, and we got a storm. So, of course, I was always, I always wanted to see what was going on. So there was a couple of fellows and a girl. I think that girl was married to one of those fellows. And we went up on deck. And the water was coming over the deck.

So then a steward came and he saw us. "Hey, come on out." He says, "You can't go there. You want to, you want to get washed over and drown? Then you, we can't find you then." So we had to come back. But it was quite an experience, you know. We enjoyed watching it. And we used to, there was some benches on there, and we used, we'd hold onto the benches, you know, because they were nailed fast. And we'd hold onto the benches, and the water would come all, all the way over us sometime. (she laughs) And so then when we, we got inside, but we had a storm for three days. About two and a half days. And for two days we were not able, there, there were so many people that got seasick. I never got seasick, thank God for that. There was, at that time they had the tables from one end to the other, and there was about twenty-four people on that table. Twelve on one side and twelve on the other side down. These couple of days only myself and one other man were at that table eating. Steward would come across with the tray, you know, full of stuff. And I'll never forget we had chicken that one day. And we always had to help ourself, you know. So I took one chicken leg, because, you know, at home that's all we would eat, would get anyhow. So, when my mother cooked. So, anyway, they waiter he, he says, "Take more." I says, "Oh, no." I was afraid because I remember about we had, my mother always says you behave yourself at table, you know. So I, I says, "Oh, no." He says, "You like chicken, don't you?" I

says, "Yes." He put three more pieces on my plate. He says, "You eat that." I says, "I can't." I says, "I can't eat that much chicken." So he says, "Oh, yes you can." And whatever I took he put more on. Oh, my goodness. I says, "I can't eat all that." So he says, "What am I going to do with this?" He says, "If you can't, if you don't want to eat it I'll have to feed it to the fish." (she laughs) Oh, I never forgot that. That was, that was a very bad storm. The boat really went. And then we had, the day that the storm was almost just about over, there was on the end of the, our table stopped, there was a hall, and there was one person walked through there and then she threw up. And that made me sick. Then I threw up right under the table. (she laughs) Oh, I felt like a fool, you know. So I was going to get up and get out in the, the waiter, he was, well, the steward was right there, and he pushed his hand down on my shoulder, and he says, "You stay there. Nobody saw it. I won't tell nobody." I says, "Yeah, but," he says, "Never mind." He says, "That'll be cleaned up. Nobody will know it." And he did. He had the, oh, boy I never forgot that. That was something.

LEVINE: Do you remember the ship coming in to the New York Harbor?

WOWK: Yeah. I, I said before, we came to Ellis Island, and I, I don't remember exactly what happened from there. I think my uncle

might, met us over there.

LEVINE: Do you remember Ellis Island at all? What it looked like, or what your experience was there?

WOWK: No, because we went right out as, as far as I know. We didn't stay there. And at that time you couldn't. You had to keep on moving, you know, and get out, because, I think we came by subway. I think there was a subway there, that we came to New York, you know.

LEVINE: After you left Ellis Island?

WOWK: Yeah.

LEVINE: Do you remember your sister Agnes? Can you, do you remember her when she was around three, and when this whole journey happened?

WOWK: Well, she was with us.

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you remember anything about her? I mean, she, she was so young to remember...

WOWK: Well, she was...

LEVINE: ...a lot herself.

WOWK: Well, she was okay. I mean, I, don't remember her ever getting sick, either. But my mother was sick. She, I think if she got on a boat, whether there was a storm or not, she was, she didn't feel good. She'd throw up or something.

LEVINE: Were you way down in the hold of the ship? Is that where you were sleeping?

KEPHART: No.

LEVINE: No.

WOWK: We were at the, where the cabinets are, you know. No, we had a nice place to sleep.

LEVINE: What, what struck you about New York when you, when you first arrived here, the first few days or weeks? Do you remember things that struck you as very different?

WOWK: Yes. You know what?

LEVINE: What?

WOWK: Dirty windows. We were on the eleva, came in on the elevator, and, of course, my uncle always tried to tell my mother and my, well, my father, too, he told us, we used to write down the names of the stations we would pass to go certain places. And we'd look out the windows and we saw all these buildings, apartment buildings, and the windows were just filthy. Oh, that was terrible. And my mother was such a fuss pot. In Germany, those windows, I mean, we had no traffic or anything. But those windows were washed every single week. Every single week. And when we came to New York, the first thing my mother says, "Look at those filthy windows." (she laughs)

LEVINE: Is there anything that you remember as, as being different?

WOWK: Well, I mean, we had, as I said in our town was all homeowners. You know, they all owned their own home there, houses. And in New York, I mean, it was all apartment houses. We weren't used to that. And, of course, the elevators, you know, and that. It was, it was, but, but it was, it was interesting.

LEVINE: Where did you settle at first?

WOWK: Well, we were there uncle's for I think a week or two. And then we moved to Brooklyn to, the number was, the name was Green Avenue. And that, it was a three story apartment building. And that building belonged to my mother's uncle I think. I think it was a uncle to her.

LEVINE: And this was a section where there were a lot of German families?

WOWK: They're are all German people there. Not anymore. And it used to be spotless there. But the last time I was there was quite a few years ago, I, I rode through there. It was filthy. How it is now I don't know.

LEVINE: Were there like German social clubs that were, that were going on in that area at that time?

WOWK: Yes, they had a, I even forgot the name of it. I know we used to go dancing there. We used to go dancing there, but I don't know, but, well, my father belonged to some kind of club, but I don't know what it was.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well...

WOWK: Because I had to go to work.

LEVINE: Had you finished school and worked before you left Germany?

WOWK: I finished school in Germany. And when I come over here, because I wasn't sixteen, they made me go to school till I was sixteen.

LEVINE: Oh.

WOWK: And then we had to get working papers.

LEVINE: When you went to school here for I guess a year however...

WOWK: Yeah.

LEVINE: ...until you turned sixteen, how was the school different here than it was in Germany?

WOWK: Well, I really don't know if it, well, we had, in Germany we had more discipline in school than what they had here. That's one thing.

LEVINE: Did you know any English when you came?

WOWK: No. All, all I knew was "money." (she laughs) My mother, my

mother says, I don't know how it happened one day, and I think my uncle told her. She wanted to know what that meant in English, you know. So she, he says, "money." So that, that's all she would, the first thing was money. But, I mean, that's...

LEVINE: But did you...(a telephone rings)...We'll pause here for a minute. (break in tape) Okay, we're going to resume now after the phone call. So let's see, where were we?

WOWK: We were at school.

LEVINE: School, being, oh, the English language.

WOWK: Oh, the English language. Yeah. Well, I learned very fast.

LEVINE: Do you know what helped you to learn fast. Was there anything that...

WOWK: Well, I'll tell you. The day I was sixteen I, my mother made me go to school, I get working papers, and took me to New York to get me a job. And I didn't want to do that kind of work. I wanted to work in a store and learn English. I says, I can learn English better. No, you, you're going to do housework, you're going to learn how to cook and this and that. I says okay. So

I, I could have gotten a couple of jobs without children. I says, "I don't want them." I says, "I want a job, if I have to work I want a job, there's a small children that I can learn English with them. One that goes to school." The first job I had was, there was, he was a lawyer. And he had a daughter six years old. And she was very slow in learning. Of course, the mother never bothered with her too much, and never taught her, I think when you have a child, you should stay home with the child and make sure she does her homework right. But they didn't. Neither one of them. So the girl was six years old. She was left behind that one year. So when I got there, I used to pick her up at school. I used to love to walk. That was my habit, you know. I'd pick her up from school, take her home, and we both sat down, and I learned what she had to learn. And we both, it helped us both. It helped me to learn English and it helped her to get ahead. In two months the girl was transferred to the right class where she was supposed to be. And when I was working, and I told the lady when I took the job, I said, I'll work one year here and then I'm going to leave and get a different job. So when I was, she didn't believe me. So when the year was up I told her. I says, I'm going to leave now. Next month. I says, you get somebody, oh, they didn't want me to leave no how. They said you got away, along so good with my daughter, and you both learned very good, you know, and, I felt

like saying, well, you should teach her, or help her with her school work, you know.

LEVINE: Was this...

WOWK: Because she helped me and I helped her, you know.

LEVINE: Was this a German family?

WOWK: No.

LEVINE: No.

WOWK: No. No, neither one of them, I think she was, I think they were Jewish.

LEVINE: Well, can you say sort of briefly, then what did you do as your life went on after you left that job?

WOWK: Well, I left that job, I took another job with children. And, of course, the people that I worked for, they were a little different. They cooked a little different. You learned different things. Which was very good, too. And they lived right near a park, near Prospect Park of Brooklyn. And I used

to, she had two children, and I used to go with them over there.

I worked there a year, and I quit them, and I went to another.

I, I wouldn't stay any place anymore than a year.

LEVINE: Why did you decide that?

WOWK: To learn English. That was my idea.

LEVINE: Yeah. So then, did you ever marry?

WOWK: Sure. (they laugh) I married a man. He was divorced, of course, and I married him, that was in 1933. And I still, occasionally I used to do housework. I used to work out by day then sometimes. Of course, I quit my other jobs, but I, I used to take day work sometimes. And the one time I had, so many people were after me, and I says, I can't do all that. I can't, I used to work, there for a time I used to work seven days a week and several nights a week they wanted me to go baby sitting. They didn't want anybody else but me. I says, I, it's too much. So I, I quit that after a while. And then I, then I got, as I said before my father was a brick layer. And in Hempstead, A&S. build a house, a store. And I always had to do what my mother told me. And I want to do one thing, no, she didn't want me to do that. She wants me to do this. Okay. But this time. (she

laughs) It was very funny. We, when the store was all finished, I took, I used to take her shopping Fridays, you know. And I'd stop the car across the street from A&S. She says, "What are you stopping for?" I says, "Oh, I just want to see if I could, if they would take me, if I could work there, you know." "Oh, what do you want to do that for?" I says, "I just want to see if I can get a job." "Well, what are you going to do?" I says, "I don't know yet?" So I went across the street and went to the, to the girl at the desk. She gave me a paper to fill out, I fill that out. And I saw a lot of young people standing around with the papers in their hands, you know. When I was finished I thought, what the heck am I supposed to do now? So I went to the desk and I said, "I filled this out. What am I supposed to do now, wait until you call all them," and you know, because I says, "I don't have that much time." She says, "Sit down." I sat down. So she asked me a couple of questions. So she says, "Well, we have jobs." She says, "You can work from nine thirty until five thirty, till quitting time," she says, "forty hours a week." So I says, "Oh," I says, "I don't think I could do that. It's too much." I says, "I have a big house." To have her take care of, have her, somebody living upstairs. I says, "I have to clean that before I go out." Well, then she says, "We have another one, Monday, Friday and Saturday." Twenty, I think it was twenty hours. So I says, "I don't have to work every

Saturday, do I?" She says, "Oh, yes, you have to work Saturdays, every Saturday." "Oh," I says, "that's not good, either, because, we go away a lot on Saturdays." So I talked myself out of a job already.

LEVINE: Yeah.

WOWK: So I started to get up. She says, "Wait a minute." She says, "We got one more left. It's a part time job. It's twenty-eight hours a week." She says, "You start eleven o'clock and you work till four thirty." So I says, "That's sounds good." So I took that job. I took that job. She says, "You start next Tuesday." This was Friday. The store hadn't opened yet, but there was, they're opening that, that day. And I said okay. I came in Tuesday. They took us upstairs. For three days we got briefed on what we had to do and how we have to, we should wait on the people and all that. I says fine. So then I worked there I think it was about...

LEVINE: The tape is nearly over. Just, if you could just sort of sum it up...

WOWK: Yeah, okay. So anyway, my, my husband had gone to, to Florida. And then when he, so I told her I could work full time while I

was in Florida. And when he come back I'll go back to the old time again. Well, when he came back I told the, my boss that he's coming back, I have to go back to the old time. "Oh, no," she says, "they have the paper upstairs." And she says, "You can't changed that anymore." She says, "You have to keep on working full time." I worked twenty-one years full time.

LEVINE: (she laughs) Okay, well, I think we're going to have to stop here. I want to thank you... (Mrs. Wowk sneezes)...very much.  
(Mrs. Wowk) Some very interesting observations...

WOWK: Yeah, well.

LEVINE: ...and experiences. And this is, I've been talking with Elizabeth Kuhl Wowk.

WOWK: Hmm-mm.

LEVINE: And it's October 23rd, 1993, and this is Janet Levine signing off.