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ANNA WITTMAN WILHELM

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LEVINE Okay. This is Janet Levine. It's July 18th, 1991. And we are at Ellis Island for the National Parks Service. I'm here with Anna Wilhelm who arrived at Ellis Island from Germany in 1923 at the age of twenty years.

WILHELM: Yeah, I think it was, uh huh.

LEVINE: Okay Anna, tell me first where were you born?

WILHELM: I was born in Germany, in -- in, you know --

LEVINE: Do you remember the name of the town where you were born?

WILHELM: Well, there was Kieberhoff. That was just a farm house, you know, and I was born there, you know. It's called Kieberhoff. But then – then I was – my -- after I was three years old and my mother died and my father didn't keep us together, so he sent me to my uncle, to Benried.

LEVINE: I see. Now what was your father's name?

WILHELM: Johann Whitman

LEVINE: And what did he do for work?

WILHELM: I don't re . . . I think he had a farm, you know. See but I was so little I didn't -- don't remember all those things no more 'cause we lost track of him. We seen him once in awhile but not too often, not after my mother died.

LEVINE: I see. And what was your mother's name?

WILHELM: Mother's name was Anna.

LEVINE: The same as your's.

WILHELM: Yeah, uh huh.

LEVINE: Do you remember her maiden name?

WILHELM: Bodensteiner.

LEVINE: Bodensteiner.

WILHELM: Yeah.

LEVINE: How about your brothers and sisters, can you tell me their names?

WILHELM: Yeah, my sister -- one was Theresa and the younger one was Margaret and my brother was George and Hans and *Augu* -- August, you know.

LEVINE: Okay, now, where did you fit in, were you...

WILHELM: I was the -- the second last one. They were all older than me ---.

LEVINE: I see.

WILHELM: -- exce --- I had one younger sister. She was one year old when my -- my mother died. See, I'm getting nervous.

LEVINE: Well, just relax. It was Olga, is that who was the one that was the youngest?

WILHELM: She was the youngest, yeah.

LEVINE: Now, what was your uncle's name, the uncle you went then to live with?

WILHELM: That I went to live with? It was *Bap*-- Baptist, you know, -- *Baptist*, you know. Bodensteiner was his second, was his real name, you know. That was his first name.

LEVINE: Bob?

WILHELM: Yeah.

LEVINE: Bob?

WILHELM: No, Ba—Baptist – Baptist.

LEVINE: Baptist Bodensteiner

WILHELM Bodensteiner, yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. Now what did, what did your uncle do for work?

WILHELM: He had a farm.

LEVINE: He had a farm and that's where you were living.

WILHELM: That's where I grew up.

LEVINE: And did you live there then, the whole time until you came ?

WILHELM: Yeah, 'til I would came here.

LEVINE: I see. Okay, now can you describe the farm? What was it like?

WILHELM: Oh, yeah, we had cattles and pigs and geese, you know, and, and land, you know, so...

LEVINE: And did you go to school there?

WILHELM: Yeah, that was in a small town, we had to walk there, you know. "Domnitz" that was called.

LEVINE: Say that again.

WILHELM: Domnitz.

LEVINE: Domitz?

WILHELM: Yeah. And when, what years did you go to school, do you remember?

WILHELM: Well, up to eighth grade, you know.

LEVINE: Eighth grade.

WILHELM: Yeah, from first to eighth grade.

LEVINE: And do you remember school? Do you remember what it was like going to school?

WILHELM: Yeah, it was -- we had a -- a schoolmaster, you know. Which, he was real strict, you know, (laughs) but that's what I remember, you know. His whole family lived downstairs and the school was upstairs.

LEVINE: Oh, it was in a house, in someone's home.

WILHELM: Yeah, uh huh.

LEVINE: And there was one teacher, with all the grades together?

WILHELM: Yeah, all the grades, 'cause there wasn't many kids there, you know. Each grade had, I wouldn't say, about eight kids maybe, you know.

LEVINE: Oh, I see.

WILHELM: Yeah, and he would teach the whole, all the way through, you know.

LEVINE: And did you learn any English when you were in school?

WILHELM: No. Nothing whatsoever.

LEVINE: So that when you came to the United States, you were speaking only German.

WILHELM: Only German, yes, uh huh.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about, like the games you played and...

WILHELM: No, we never played. We worked on the farm, you know. We never, we never know that we ever played games out there, you know. Nothing like that.

LEVINE: So you would come home from school and you do...

WILHELM: Work there, yeah, yeah, uh huh.

LEVINE: And were there any other family members nearby?

WILHELM: In where, in what?

LEVINE: Where you were growing up, were there other family members besides your uncle?

WILHELM: Oh, yeah, my aunt. And – and then he had two children after he t-- took me. He had a boy and a girl.

LEVINE: And what were their names?

WILHELM: One was Caroline and the other one was Carl.

LEVINE: And were you with any of your own sisters and brothers?

WILHELM: Yeah, my one sister. She was there. He adopted her because she was older and she could help on the farm, you know. He took her but I was too young. I was only three years old so my father just took me there, that's all.
(laughs)

LEVINE: I see. And what was the sister's name who...

WILHELM: Theresa.

LEVINE: Theresa. And then did your uncle actually then adopt you, also?

WILHELM: Yeah, yeah, well he took us in, you know. There was not such a thing that they had papers or anything. He just took us in, that's all, you know.

LEVINE: I see. Now, how about religion, were you a religious...

WILHELM: Catholic, yeah.

LEVINE: Did you attend church?

WILHELM: Oh yes, every Sunday. Very strict on that. And school we went, yeah.

LEVINE: And did you observe different holiday celebrations, religious celebrations?

WILHELM: Yeah, we did I think. And I know there was always a holiday --now I don't

remember what that was anymore --but they baked a lot of *kuchens* [pastry] and stuff, you know. I think it was Easter I'm not sure, you know..

LEVINE: And what was your aunt like, the one that you were living with?

WILHELM: Oh, she was nice, yah. She was, you know, she raised us.

LEVINE: Was she a strict woman?

WILHELM: Well, they were all a little strict, you know, but she was nice. We had good food.

LEVINE: What kind of food do you remember?

WILHELM: Well, oh she made sometimes potato dumplings and pork roast and chicken, you know, different stuff like that, you know. And we had a lot of stuff without meat. See, like that, you know.

LEVINE: You mean, like vegetables and grains ?

WILHELM: Well, vegetables and then they had like flour dumplings, stuff like that with gravy you know and kuchen.

LEVINE: You remember it as good food?

WILHELM: Oh, yeah. We had good food, yeah. That's true.

LEVINE: What's your fondest memory of the time that you spent living on the farm with your uncle and aunt?

WILHELM: Well, I think growing up with my cousin, you know. We were kind of close,

you know. He was a couple years younger than me.

LEVINE: He was a boy or a girl?

WILHELM: A boy, a boy. Was a girl, too, but the girl was still younger. But we were kind of close. He was only couple years younger than me, the boy, and the girl was a couple years younger than him again. I don't remember no more how old, you know what. We grew up together.

LEVINE: And what was his name?

WILHELM: Carl.

LEVINE: Carl. So you were friends.

WILHELM: And the girl's name was Caroline.

LEVINE: Caroline. So was he like your best friend or...

WILHELM: Oh yeah, we were close together. Oh, we used to fight, too, but like any other kids did, you know, but we were nice. Especially when I went out there again, he took me all around, 'cause I went out for a visit at one time, you know.

LEVINE: Okay, well we'll go, I'll get to that a little bit later, we just...

WILHELM: Okay, all right.

LEVINE: Talk now about when you decided to come to the United States.

WILHELM: Oh, that was my brother's fault, you know. My brother, you know, we had a

step-uncle in Fort Dodge, Iowa and he wrote to him and he says, "You go to America; it's good there." He was here and he went back out again and he got married then out there. So that was through him that I came here.

LEVINE: This is your brother who you were no longer living with, but he...

WILHELM: I was still living on the farm with my uncle, you know but my brother was in a different place again. He got married when he went out there from this country. He was the one that really said, "Now you go." And that's how I went. (laughs)

LEVINE: And how did you feel about it? Were you...

WILHELM: Well, I didn't care. I didn't have no real home anyway, you know, so it was something different. I listened to him. (laughs)

LEVINE: I see. Now had you been seeing your brother over the time when you were, after you were three years old?

WILHELM: Oh, yeah, he came to visit us. I see him. My father came once in awhile, too, but not too often. I was just, well, you know.

LEVINE: And so did you know your step-uncle that was here in the United States?

WILHELM: No. I never knew him but he wrote to my brother and that's how it got that I came over here. And that was in Fort Dodge, Iowa.

LEVINE: Right. So when you were thinking about coming here, you were going to stay with somebody, live with somebody that you really had never met.

WILHELM: No, that's right, that's right, never met him. No.

LEVINE: Well, how did your uncle and aunt feel about your coming?

WILHELM: Well, my uncle, he was excited but my aunt wasn't too excited, you know.

LEVINE: What did she say about it?

WILHELM: Well, she – she was nice but she, I could tell she -- I was in the way, you know.

LEVINE: I see. I see.

WILHELM: So then I had – then I went to work. It was a little ways away but there wasn't much doings there so I didn't stay there long. Then I came from there. I knew some kids from where I came from, you know. We wrote together. And I think I was only there, I don't know how many months, you know --- out there, and I came to Buffalo.

LEVINE: Oh, okay, well let's, before we talk about what your life was like here, we'll first talk about your coming here, okay?

WILHELM: Oh, from out there?

LEVINE: When you were still in Germany and you were deciding to come, how did those arrangements get made?

WILHELM: Well, my brother made those really.

LEVINE: And he was back in Germany at the time?

WILHELM: Yeah.

LEVINE: And he arranged...

WILHELM: Oh yeah, he got married out there then and stayed there.

LEVINE: He got married in Germany?

WILHELM: In Germany, then, yeah.

LEVINE: I see. So then he got you your ticket, and...

WILHELM: Yeah, my step-uncle sent the ticket, you know. Yeah. He wanted some body to come over here. I don't know why he did but he did, I guess...

LEVINE: Why do you think he might have wanted...

WILHELM: I don't know. I guess he wanted young people around or what, I don't know.

LEVINE: Was he a bachelor? Was he married?

WILHELM: No, no. He was married.

LEVINE: And you were the only one that came from the family?

WILHELM: Yeah, I was the only one that came.

LEVINE: Why do you think you were the one to go?

WILHELM: 'Cause my brother wrote to him and he said that I would come to this country, you know. He wanted me to come. See, that's how, it was really through my brother that I came over.

LEVINE: And what were your feelings about it when you realized --

WILHELM: I was young and I was happy but a lot of people went to America, you know, that time. So that was, I took, it was daring, you know.

LEVINE: Did you feel as though you were being daring?

WILHELM: Yeah, I think so. I think so.

LEVINE: Did you ever know anybody who had been...

WILHELM: Yeah, I knew, in Buffalo, I knew.

LEVINE: But when you were still in Germany, had you any friends or anybody you knew who had gone to America?

WILHELM: Well, I think some of them, yah, I think, I think I did. Yes. People did come a lot at that time, that I heard of them, you know. Not that I really knew, you know, so --

LEVINE: Were there any reasons why you wanted to leave Germany?

WILHELM: Yeah, I was, I wanted to try something else. I didn't have nothing out there anyway so I came over. My brother coaxed me. He says "You go, you going to like it." So that's how I went.

LEVINE: Can you remember what you expected that you would find when you got here?

WILHELM: Well, I guess I expected more. I thought everything was really glorious, you

know. But you had to work for everything, too. (laughs)

LEVINE: But you expected it would be, it would be wonderful. And...

WILHELM: That I would have it real good, you know. (laughs) I really did.

LEVINE: Okay, now where did you leave from?

WILHELM: Huh?

LEVINE: Where did you leave from? What port did you leave Germany from?

WILHELM: Oh, Hamburg-America Line. I remember that yet. And I remember was -- the boat was Albert Bellin. And it may be second trip. I don't know if you still would -- could look that up or what, you know. That's all I remember.

LEVINE: Do you remember getting to the port? What was that like? What did you have to do in order to get to the...

WILHELM: You mean in Germany?

LEVINE: Uh huh.

WILHELM: Yah, well, they put me on a boat, you know.

LEVINE: You took a boat to get to Hamburg?

WILHELM: No. To Hamburg I, how did I get to Hamburg? By train I think, you know. I think so.

LEVINE: And you were traveling alone?

WILHELM: Yeah, well, my brother was in Hamburg at that time, my younger brother. See, and I stayed with him then, 'til I went -- came over here then.

LEVINE: I see, how long...

WILHELM: For a couple of days. That wasn't long 'til everything was arranged, 'til they gave us our physical and all that, you know. They...

LEVINE: The steamship company did that before you left?

WILHELM: Yeah, uh huh. The people that are associated with the boats and stuff, whatever, whoever they were, you know. I know we went in and out, you know.

LEVINE: And do you remember when you left to go to Hamburg, was there a party for your going (laughs) away?

WILHELM: No party. No, no. They just, it wasn't like that at that time, you know. We just went by train to Hamburg and from there I stayed with my brother, my younger brother that was, because he was working in Hamburg.

LEVINE: Now, he met the train? In other words you...

WILHELM: Yes. He met the train and he took me to the boat, too.

LEVINE: I see. And do you remember what you packed? What you took with you when you left Germany?

WILHELM: Well just my, yeah. I had a basket about this big [gestures], you know, a

wicker basket, you know, they had at that time -- and my clothes that's about all. And I had twenty-five dollars that was, I had to have to come over, you know.

LEVINE: Okay. And was there anything that you felt badly to have to leave behind?

WILHELM: No, I don't think so. I think I was kind of excited. I wanted to just know what it was like. And I, and then we got on the boat and we were in a cabin, I think. I don't know, remember no more. I know that we, I had the upper deck, you know. Somebody slept on the bottom and, I don't know, were there two more beds there? That I don't remember no more, you know.

LEVINE: But you weren't in a dormitory, you were in a cabin?

WILHELM: Yeah, we were in a cabin, yeah. Up and down it was, you know -- upper bunk and down, you know. And I had the upper because I picked the upper.

LEVINE: Because you were daring, right? (both laugh)

WILHELM: I guess so, [not understood]

LEVINE: So were you traveling third class, is that what you called what you were...

WILHELM: Yeah, that's all I could...

LEVINE: Let's see, and did your brother see you off then? He saw you off.

WILHELM: Yeah, he saw me off, my younger brother. He was older than me, you know. I was the second youngest.

LEVINE: Right. And did you know anyone on the ship when you got on?

WILHELM: No. Nobody on that ship. No. No.

LEVINE: Can you remember how you felt, getting on the ship, a young woman...

WILHELM: Well, I was young and excited, I guess, you know. We, we, there was four of us at a table, we ate together I remember. We had a small table and, then, what else we did? We'd -- second class, they had a lunch in the afternoon, so we went under through someplace and we went over there and had lunch with them.

LEVINE: Oh. (both laugh)

WILHELM: Everyday we used to do that. Nobody stopped us. Two of us, I think, went.

LEVINE: Well, how long was your trip?

WILHELM: I think seven days was, I don't even remember no more; four, five.

LEVINE: Do you remember what the ship was like? Was it...

WILHELM: It was new, new ship, you know, yeah.

LEVINE: Was it an easy voyage or was it a hard voyage or...

WILHELM: It was a big -- a big ship. I know. I know It was new. You know. I don't know too much about it. It -- twenty years old, you don't remember too much I guess. It was all, I don't know, it was all experience I guess. But it was nice, the boat ride was really nice.

LEVINE: Oh, really.

WILHELM: We were treated very good, uh huh.

LEVINE: Did you go up on deck?

WILHELM: Oh, yeah. Uh huh. We went up on deck. We could go up there, oh yeah, and look out. Even I sat too close to the water, that could have turned over sometimes, I could have went in. It was like a little spot there and I used to sit there. (laughs) Yeah, sure.

LEVINE: So that was exciting to be on a ship, on a big ship...

WILHELM: Oh, yeah, it was very exciting. I really was. And I made friends there, you know. It was nice.

LEVINE: Did you ever see anyone after that that you...

WILHELM: No, no. They all went different ways. We didn't see each other no more.

LEVINE: So you weren't ill? Were you seasick or anything?

WILHELM: Just one, the first day I threw up, that's all. The first, second day it was, that's all. Once only, and that's all. And then I know, I think I had some --what did I have? --hard salami and rye bread. And I ate that and that helped me, you know. I had that from Germany yet. My brother gave me that. He says, "Here, take that," you know. And it was just a few slices, you know and that helped my stomach. And then after that I was okay.

LEVINE: Great. Now were there any activities? What did you do on the ship for recreation?

WILHELM: No. We mostly just walked around. There was no, no activities, no. And we talked; that's about all, you know. Watch the water. Watch the sharks.
(laughs)

LEVINE: Can you remember what you talked about?

WILHELM: I really don't remember, you know. It was just plain talk, you know.

LEVINE: Were the other people in your cabin also speaking German?

WILHELM: Yeah, uh huh, they were.

LEVINE: Okay. Now when you were approaching New York, can you remember what you saw and how you were affected by it?

WILHELM: Yeah. I -- I remembered we got, I think, on a train --didn't we? -- and went to Ellis Island.

LEVINE: On a train?

WILHELM: I think so. I don't remember that so good no more. Wasn't, was...

LEVINE: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

WILHELM: Yeah, I remember then I didn't know what it was.

LEVINE: Did other people, were other people talking about it? Did they know?

WILHELM: They looked. Yeah, they looked. But then, I gue-- think anybody knew what it was, you know. It was just, you know, a lady out there with her hand up, you know.

LEVINE: (laughs) Right. And then, so you would have been landing on Ellis Island from a boat.

WILHELM: Yeah, we came over on a boat from New York I think, didn't we? I think so. I think I remember that. On a smaller boat.

LEVINE: Yes, that would be right.

WILHELM: That kind of comes back to me. Yeah, a smaller boat.

LEVINE: Now, can you remember when you first approached Ellis Island, what impression you had?

WILHELM: Well. We had a lot of physical, I know. And I -- oh, and I --I heard a lot of people, they were crying like crazy. They hang on to the fence --there was a big fence around --I don't know if you remember that? No? It was a fence around. They were hungin' [sic] on 'cause they sent some back and some they left go through at that time, you know. And, and all I heard was really screaming. So it was a little bit scary, you know, because...

LEVINE: That was the first thing that you saw that, that was frightening?

WILHELM: That was the first thing. And then in a cabin where we stayed, there was two girls they didn't have no hair. They were bald. They were still there when I left, when I went to Fort Dodge, Iowa. But I don't know what was wrong with them. No hair.

LEVINE: Were you afraid that you might be sent back? Was that a fear?

WILHELM: No. I didn't, I guess I didn't think anything. I just went on, I didn't know what

was going to go. All of a sudden I was sent on a train and went to Fort Dodge, Iowa.

LEVINE: Well, how about the medical examination? Do you remember anything about that? What it was like for you?

WILHELM: Well, yeah, they just looked you over good I guess. And looked at your hair, you know. I know that. And that's about all I think. I don't know. I don't remember too much about that.

LEVINE: Well how was it that you happened to stay at Ellis Island for two nights?

WILHELM: I – I don't even remember. I don't know.

LEVINE: Well did your uncle come to meet you?

WILHELM: No. He -- they put me on a train and I met him. Maybe I couldn't get on the train or something. I don't know, you know, or the train was gone. I don't know, but then...

LEVINE: Well, how were those arrangements made for you to get on that train?

WILHELM: I don't remember that either. All of a sudden I know I was on the train, that's all I remember.

LEVINE: And did you, you had twenty-five dollars, did you go and have your money exchanged?

WILHELM: No. Twenty-five dollars in American money; I had to have that. Yah, and I never t—never took that in. I gave that back to my uncle when I got out there, you know, so...

LEVINE: Oh, okay.

WILHELM: So I never spended [sic] that. And then he met me at the train.

LEVINE: Well, do you remember what the food was like at Ellis? What the eating arrangements were?

WILHELM: Where? Here?

LEVINE: Yes.

WILHELM: I think it was okay, you know. Must've been all right 'cause I wasn't fussy, you know,. So whatever we got was, I think that was okay, yeah.

LEVINE: And the sleeping arrangements?

WILHELM: Yeah, I think so. I don't remember anymore where I slept or what, if it was in a cabin or what, I don't, that I don't remember no more. Yeah, all I remember is people hanging on the fence outside and screaming. That's – that was a few days like that, you know. And that's all I can remember. I don't know why. Well, they sent some back and some they left go through, I guess. (laughs) So I think that's what that was, you know. But at that time I didn't know really what was going on, you know. I was young, didn't know.

LEVINE: And when you got to the, when you were told you could go and were going on to the train, can you remember what you were thinking or how you were feeling?

WILHELM: No. Nothing at all. I just thought, "Well, new country," and I went where they – where. I had a sign pinned on, you know, where I was going; I remember

that. 'Cause I remember, I think it was in Chicago, I went out and I bought a apple --I must have had some extra money --and they looked at me kind of funny. That's all I remember. It's a wonder that I didn't get lost, that I went back on the train and got out there. It is a wonder nothing ever happened to me, really.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you were wearing? Do you remember how you were...

WILHELM: I know I had a coat on. That's why I had on a coat and a dress because we didn't wear pants in Germany at that time, you know. And a dress.

LEVINE: And these were like your very best clothes that you were wearing?

WILHELM: Yes. It must have been, you know. and the others I packed in a -- in a trunk I had, you know. Whatever I had.

LEVINE: So what was the train trip like?

WILHELM: Oh, it was nice. It was very nice. In fact, I was talking to some people, some went to different places, you know, on that train. In fact, we wrote -- I wrote to one. I don't remember no more where he was from though, you know.

LEVINE: And did he write back?

WILHELM: Yeah, at -- at that time I did but I don't remember no more where he we--. I can not remember no more but I know that we were talking. And but he got off before me. So where he went I don't remember no more.

LEVINE: Was he an immigrant also?

WILHELM: Yeah, uh huh, he was too. He was going to his uncle too, also.

LEVINE: Oh, I see.

WILHELM: So we rode together for awhile, you know.

LEVINE: I see. So how did you find, so then your step-uncle met you at the train?

WILHELM: Yeah, he met me at the train and he was there. And I thought well, he was going to be, oh, real dressed up, a big --you know, celebrity or whatever, I thought, and here he came. He had real Frenchy pants on, you know, and I thought to myself, "oh, you're not my uncle. I'm not gonna go with you." So I walked away and he walked up to me. He says, when he came walking towards me, I walked away. Then, well, nobody else was there no more (both laugh),. Then he came again, he says, "Are you Anna Whitman?" I says, "Yes." "Well, I'm your uncle," he says. I almost went through the floor. (both laugh) I thought, "Oh, my gosh." So that was it and I went to his house.

LEVINE: And then?

WILHELM: And then we had something to eat. And I was there a couple of days and then, right away, I looked for work. And then I had to walk pretty far. It was an over—over—overalls factory that I worked there. And I didn't work there long 'cause, oh, they didn't have no work then. So I didn't go in and then they thought, I thought they laid me off but they didn't. They didn't just have no work and I could have come back the following week. But I didn't and then I did, I think I, oh, a lady had surgery and I took care of her then for a couple weeks. And, I stayed there. Then I stayed a couple months yet I guess. I didn't, I wasn't out there long. I wrote to the people in Buffalo here and I came to Buffalo.

LEVINE: Now who was in Buffalo?

WILHELM: In Buffalo was the kids I went to school with.

LEVINE: Oh.

WILHELM: And they met me at the train. And they got me a place to work. I slept overnight by a girl and she – she -- the next day I had -- did housework.

LEVINE: Oh.

WILHELM: Yeah, seven dollars a week.

LEVINE: And did you keep that job for awhile?

WILHELM: I beg you pardon?

LEVINE: Did you stay with that job for awhile?

WILHELM: Yeah, I stayed there 'til I got married. Met my husband there.

LEVINE: Okay, so how long was that, from the time you arrived until --

WILHELM: I would think it would have been about, I don't even remember. Hmm. I don't know. It wasn't too long. Maybe four, five months or something. I don't know. He was working. He delivered butter and eggs there, at that house and that's how I met him.

End of Side A

Begin Side B

LEVINE: Okay, so Anna, tell me now, how did you meet your husband?

WILHELM: He delivered butter and eggs at the house I worked there. And that's how I met him. At that time they did that a lot. They had baker wagons, they had butter and eggs, and all that stuff. Some ti— some deliver cookies, but they don't do that nowadays no more.

LEVINE: Right. So can you say anything about your courtship, how you started seeing him?

WILHELM: Oh yeah, yeah, he used to pick me up and he used to take me to a show and then we ---. When did we get? Then we got married, and then I had four children.

LEVINE: And what were the names of your children, starting with your first?

WILHELM: Oh, my, now wait, see I'm nervous now.

LEVINE: Well, just calm down.

WILHELM: Four children: Johnnie, Ruth, Norm and Annette. Annette was the youngest one. In fact, he died when she was seven years old. Then I had to go to work and raise my own children. Then I went to work in a factory. I went to the employment office and I – I said, "I need a job."

LEVINE: Now what year was that Anna, do you remember?

WILHELM: I don't even remember now. Must have been, I don't remember no more. It was not long after, you know.

LEVINE: Would it have been, let's see, '23?--

WILHELM: About a year after—

LEVINE: --in the thirties?

WILHELM: in nineteen,

LEVINE: No, I guess it was around '25 --

WILHELM: No twenty-five, twenty-- twenty-five was when I got married.

LEVINE: And then you had four children.

WILHELM: Four children, yeah.

LEVINE: And then your husband died when the youngest one was seven years old.

WILHELM: And then – then I didn't know what to do. Then I had to go out looking for a job, like I said. Then I went to the employment office and I says "I need a job." "Well," they says, "we don't have anything right now. But there's one place they hire and fire a lot, you could try." Well, then I did go there and they did hire me with fifty-six cents an hour.

LEVINE: And what was the name of that place, do you remember?

WILHELM: Buffalo Meter

LEVINE: Meter?

WILHELM: It made liquid meters. I was working on the drill press and – and slotting

machine, all different machines, you know. Yeah, the boss hired me and then I worked there two weeks and then he says --- he came over by my machine and he said, "Well, you're going to get a raise. You're going to get four cents, two cents this week and two cents next week, but don't tell nobody." (both laugh) And that's what I did. And then – and then I worked – but gradually I worked myself up then, you know.

LEVINE: So then you stayed working at that place?

WILHELM: Yeah, for twenty-three years I worked there. 'Til they reti—till they moved out, they moved to South Carolina. Then I was old enough to retire.

LEVINE: I see.

WILHELM: Yeah. So I could retire then and I got a little pension, you know.

LEVINE: Well, Anna, what was it like being an immigrant, coming and getting a job and...

WILHELM: Oh, it was I – I – it was okay, you know. I got through it all, you know. I spoke English very soon.

LEVINE: Oh, you did.

WILHELM: I went to school.

LEVINE: You went to school and learned English?

WILHELM: Yeah, and -- but the hardest part was when – when I had to go to work. Where to find a job, but I did. See, so and I raised my children.

LEVINE: I see. Are there any ways that you learned in Germany, things about you that you have kept? You know, kinds of ways of doing things or ways of thinking about things?

WILHELM: I don't know, it came easy, easy to me. Things came kind of easy to me. That's why, look at that my boss liked me. In fact, he did like me 'cause his wife had died and he and then -- I was working there then for quite a few years already I think, and he asked me out, you know. And we did go out. We went out a few things. We had a date that one night too and he came to work in the morning and he got sick and he went home and he died in his home.

LEVINE: Oh, my goodness.

WILHELM: So there was that again, you know. So then I never got married no more.

LEVINE: I see. So now, you have now, your four children have children.

WILHELM: Oh, yeah, oh, wait 'til I tell you. I got thirteen grandchildren and nine great grandchildren and expecting two more.

LEVINE: Wow.

WILHELM: Yeah, that's what I got.

LEVINE: Wonderful.

WILHELM: Yeah, isn't that great?

LEVINE: Uh huh. (laughs)

WILHELM: One is just, only, she's only, one was just born now. My daughter, she was born -- my granddaughter was born on my birthday, June the first. And she had a little baby now and she was born on my other daughter's birthday. And she's only about six weeks old now, my ninth great-grand child.

LEVINE: Well, is there anything, Anna, that you can think about, think of, that you would like to say about coming here?

WILHELM: No, I think I was happy I did come here 'cause you could do a lot more here than out there. I would only have been on the farm anyway, you know. So, no, I think I did enjoy it. I really did, no matter how -- if I had it tough, but I did enjoy every bit of it. I loved raising my children. I always took good care of them so there's really nothing to worry about, you know. I was used to hard knocks, I guess. So I didn't mind, not a bit. And I love this country. I think it's beautiful. It really is. I would never want to go back no more.

LEVINE: You say you went back for a trip?

WILHELM: Oh, yeah, one year, yeah.

LEVINE: But you never had the desire to move back?

WILHELM: No never, no.

LEVINE: Is there anything else that you can think of that you'd like to mention?

WILHELM: No, that's about all, that's about all that I know of now.

LEVINE: Okay, then, this is Janet Levine for the Park Service signing off an interview with Anna Wilhelm.

WILHELM: Okay.

END OF INTERVIEW