

**EI-571
ELIZABETH ROESSER
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LEVINE: This is Janet Levine from the national part service, it's November 22nd, 1994. I'm here in Manchester, New Hampshire with Mrs. Elizabeth Roesser who came from Germany leaving Germany in December of 1922 and arriving January 2nd at Ellis Island 1923 and at that time she was fourteen years old just about to turn fifteen years old and I want to say I'm very happy to be here and I'm really looking forward, you have an unusual story about why you happened to come to Ellis Island, so It would be good to get that on tape. OK, lets start at the beginning Mrs. Roesser, if you would say your birth date and where in Germany you were born.

ROESSER: I was born in, the town is Heidingsfeld but the bigger town is Winzeberg[ph], that's a very famous city in Unterfranken, I mean its , that where I came from.

LEVINE: What was the first place you said, Heidsfeld?

ROESSER: Heidingsfeld, that H-E-I-D-I-N-G-S-F-E-L-D, and that is right near that larger town or city that's Winzberg [her pronunciation changes from the first time she says it, I'm not sure which is correct] (mumbles) anyway,

LEVINE: The date, and the date you were born?

ROESSER: I was born January 24th 1907.

LEVINE: Now was there ever any talk in your family about your birth, were there any stories you ever hear about the day you were born?

ROESSER: Well, in those days, the women usually had babies at home and they were happy to have a girl and all that, you know but I mean, other than that.

LEVINE: They were happy to have a girl?

ROESSER: They were happy to have a girl, because they had a couple of boys in between, so that was a welcome change they said. (both laugh)

LEVINE: What was your mother's name?

ROESSER: My mother's name was Teresa.

LEVINE: And do you remember her maiden name?

ROESSER: Yes, Endres. E-N-D-R-E-S.

LEVINE: And your father's name?

ROESSER: (laugh) My father's first name, (cough) don't laugh now, Theobold.

LEVINE: Theobold, and your brothers,' what were their names?

ROESSER: My brother, you see my mother died of child birth.

LEVINE: With you?

ROESSER: No, no with my little brother, his name was Willy, William. And then he was sickly, he was sickly almost all his life, and he died when he was about 23 years old. And he died of Tuberculosis, in those days that was still, you know, quite prevalent over there.

LEVINE: Now how many years after you were born was Willy born?

ROESSER: Oh, that was. Well, I was born, what year was it?

LEVINE: 1907.

ROESSER: 1907, and he was born in, ah, when did my mother died, oh god?

LEVINE: Do you remember how old you were? When your mother died?

ROESSER: Yeah, my mother was, I was about 5 years old when she died. Yeah that's right. And so of course it was hard then, and then we had a step-mother.

LEVINE: Ah ha tell me your two older brothers' names.

ROESSER: My older brothers, one was Max and the other was Amiel [ph], that was two older brothers

LEVINE: Ah ha, now do you remember your mother from your first five years?

ROESSER: Vaguely, vaguely. I do. I probably do pretty good, but you know she was five when I died, (laugh) When she died I was five.

LEVINE: Right, what memories do you have of her? When you think of her, what kinds of things do you remember.

ROESSER: Well, well, she was a very pleasant women and of course I hear a lot about that too, and she was an excilent cook and baker.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything she used to..

ROESSER: Yeah, my father used to say oh she could make the best cookies and she used to hide them, and then she'd say somebody was after those cookies but then my father said I have to confess, it was me because she blamed the children. (both laugh) so I mean, it was a regular, nice family and my mother was very, they all were in praise of my mother, and then she died, and I got a step mother.

LEVINE: Do you remember when your mother died?

ROESSER: Yes, November 1st 19.. Jeeze, I tell you, my memory is not as good as it was when I was at Ellis Island.

LEVINE: Well if it was about five years, it was somewhere around 1912 probibly.

ROESSER: Yes, that right,

LEVINE: So do you remember her being sick, what memories do you have?

ROESSER: Well, all I know I was in a neighbors house and they didn't want me to go near the window where I could look over to our entrance and of course, I

was noseey and I did anyway. And I saw that my mother was being taken by sort of a fancy coach or something to the hospital, but of course I didn't know that, that she was going to the hospital, you know I was five years old, but I didn't think too much further, but then I remembered my sister and I visited her and my sister said she told me she made a remark, my mother, Well I tried to be a good mother to you kids and I hope you also get a good one because she was my older sister's step-mother and brother's see? My mother was the second wife so she was their step mother, and then I cam along too.

LEVINE: Oh, I see now did you have other step brothers and sisters besides that one?

ROESSER: Well I had, well of course my little brother and then yes, I had two step step-sisters, Julia and Anna, and they both came to America. They had aunts here, that was their, you know, and so they came over and they came over, they just made it before the World War, the first World War.

LEVINE: Oh, now did they live with you in the same house with your father and mother when your mother was alive?

ROESSER: Yes,

LEVINE: Julia and Anna?

ROESSER: Julia and Anna, yes

LEVINE: So there was Julia and Anna, and your tow brothers, and you until Willy came along?

ROESSER: That's right, yeah.

LEVINE: OK, well now. When your mother did die, did you go to the funeral? Was there a funeral for her?

ROESSER: There was a funeral and strange thing was, I was in kindergarten at the time and they sent me to kindergarten on that day too. And from there, and from there, from the gate there, we could see the funeral, but I had no idea.

LEVINE: You didn't know...?

ROESSER: It went along, you know, and there was a horse with black, the way they dress them up over there. And a special coach.

LEVINE: Describe the coach and the way they dress it up.

ROESSER: Well, its all black you know and then it has like curtains down the side and the horses are real racing horses and they pulled, so I mean, that was a strange thing. But I didn't realize that my mother was...and I saw it pass, and I didn't realize it. Anyways, so that was, it was too bad.

LEVINE: Yeah, was if typical at that time that children were not involved in things like that, like a funeral?

ROESSER: Well when they're, I guess when they're that age, but otherwise once they're a little further in school I'm sure they were too.

LEVINE: Um hum. Yeah, yeah and how about grandparents? Did you have grandparents in Germany?

ROESSER: Yes, I had (phone rings) oh.

LEVINE: oops, we're going to pause here for the telephone... OK we're resuming after phone call. And (phone rings) aww!

ROESSER: Aw come on now!!

LEVINE: Let me get it... now we are going to attempt to resume again, you have so many friends that's wonderful.

ROESSER: Yes I do.

LEVINE: Ok, so we were talking about grandparents I think, you had some grandparents?

ROESSER: Yes, yes I had some grandparents and, well, they both died, my Grandfather and Grandfather. They were in a different village and they were farmers, and they were a kind of very, you know, they produced a lot of stuff and you know and I went they every year on vacation.

LEVINE: In the summertime?

ROESSER: In the summertime. And we have about six, seven weeks vacation in the summertime, in July. And then I used to help, you know like these guys do (laughs) and whatever I could do, I had to you know, had to help along a little bit and I just loved to go there because all my relatives were there. My Mother's sisters were there, two of them one sister and one brother, and they were married and they had kids and the one had little ones and I had to go and take care of them all the time. (laugh)

LEVINE: Ah ha, and what did you like so much about being there on the farm?

ROESSER: Oh well, in the first place, I was away from home you know and then It was the nice fresh air and then going out and doing things, and sometimes I used to bring food to my cousins, you know. That maybe my good aunt would bake and then they wanted it right away while it was still warm so I had to bring it to the field, I had a wonderful time with my cousins and they were all older except one, that they were younger so.

LEVINE: What kind of farm was it? What was your grandfather growing on there?

ROESSER: Oh, just about everything, you know I mean like

LEVINE: [don't know what she just said]

ROESSER: Yes, and that's how they did too with the size and all you know and, oh and potatoes and, you know, I mean, and I was used to it, and then during The War we had vacation when the potatoes were being dug out, see? And so, we had five weeks, and I could go there and help and I always loved it, yes I loved it very much, yeah.

LEVINE: Would you dig the potatoes? Would you actually dig up the potatoes?

ROESSER: Well, not really, no.

LEVINE: No, you would do other things?

ROESSER: I'd get them gathered together and stuff like that, Yeah. (someone speaking in the background) Yeah.

LEVINE: So you have fond memories of your time on the farm?

ROESSER: Oh, very fond, oh my. I, every, I went in, after the first grade I went every year.

LEVINE: What was your grandfather like as a person.

ROESSER: Ah, he was very nice; He was then already about eighty three, yeah. and he used to come, and I heard that my mother always said, because he would always say, I have to go right away again, and she'd say, well go ahead, don't even come up the stairs, go ahead and go, you know, like stuff, I remember that. (laughs)

LEVINE: He was busy, he was a busy man?

ROESSER: Oh, not really, but that's the way he was, you know. But he used to help everybody, especially during the war, the boys were in the war, In the World War I, you know. SO they had just the women to help. And I know my grandfather says, ah, this is no good with women. Yeah, not the same thing, and so, but oh yes, he helped plenty.

LEVINE: Now did he own his own land?

ROESSER: Not any more, he retired.

LEVINE: No, but I mean at that time, when you were a little girl? Did he..

ROESSER: No, he was already, they were. Oh my gosh, my grandmother and my grandfather they were way over eighty when I was born.

LEVINE: I see, but they were running this farm, and did they hire other people?

ROESSER: No, no they had plenty. (laugh)

LEVINE: No, just the family, ah ha.

ROESSER: Yeah, my uncle really inherited that one and then he had plenty of children to help. And they all were starting to grow up and so, and every time I went out to Germany I always went there. Fond memories.

LEVINE: Where was that farm?

ROESSER: That was, the city is right near us, ah, or was a town. Well, you had to ride about, we could take like a bus and we could, or and then we had to go, I went a couple of times a year, I also went on Christmas. To there because I liked it very much and stayed at Christmas vacation and that was very nice. And they always had such good food, see they weren't affected as much during the war, they had butter and all the goodies, and so. They could bake and, but we couldn't do in the city.

LIVINE: And did they have animals also?

ROESSER: Yes, yeah they had cows and a couple of oxen for the field you know, and then Oh and they had pigs, they'd slaughter a pig now and then, yeah it was good.

LEVINE: What would Christmas dinner be like?

ROESSER: Oh, Christmas Dinner that was (cough) always very festive. (can't make out what she is saying)(cough) We'd have a lot of cookies you know, cookies and then we had a Christmas tree, a real one we do a cadle of course, you know we didn't use any electric so and it was always very nice, and I always also went to the farm.

LEVINE: Could you describe the Christmas tree in detail?

ROESSER: Well, yes, we had, well the usually glass things and then we had of course candles, you know no electric lights.

LEVINE: How would you put the candles on?

ROESSER: Well you lit them, with a match and you had to be very careful, and then we'd sing a Christmas song or two and then we'd turn the off again because you know it was during the war the candles were hard to get.

LEVINE: And did everyone blow them out? How did, what did you?

ROESSER: Well, usually we took turns, my little brother couldn't do much of that.

LEVINE: Was it a big Christmas tree? Was it on the floor or on the table?

ROESSER: No, it was on the table. It was always a table tree, and then I know my father used to. I remember he made the kitchen once like furniture for kitchen, and he told me it was for, we call it the *Kriskindel*, that means the christ child, we don't call it Santa Claus. So he said he had to do it for the *Kriskindel*.

LEVINE: We made like a little cradle and ...?

ROESSER: Yeah like, well he did all sorts like furniture you know.

LEVINE: You mean like a doll house size.

ROESSER: Yeah, yeah, nice it was very nice. My big sisters had that already, and was over to me so I was the youngest and they others all went away when the

step mother came in the house. I mean, the second wife was already a stepmother but that didn't, you know.

LEVINE: Ah ha, the other one was different. Well, just to finish up about talking about Christmas, you didn't celebrate Santa Claus, but you celebrated the Christ child?

ROESSER: Yeah, but on St. Nicolas Day that's some time, I forgot when in December, then so called Santa Claus, but he wasn't dressed like that ,he was dress real, and he had a stick, a big stick if you were naughty, then you got a couple of whacks and if not then you got an apple or some nuts or something. (laughs)

LEVINE: And what, he came to visit?

ROESSER: Yeah, he used to come, and then we were scared, you know.

LEVINE: What was he dressed like?

ROESSER: Oh, he was. He had kind of a cap, and so, he like a Santa Claus you know I mean.

LEVINE: Did he have red suit on?

ROESSER: Oh, not a red one no, no that war time, you didn't get anything you wanted.(laugh) yeah, but when he came from far away already he would call out and where is a good girl or a boy and so forth and so on, and then my little brother was terribly scared, terribly scared, but I knew who it was so. (laugh)

LEVINE: So did some children get hit?

ROESSER: Pardon?

LEVINE: Did some children get hit on Saint Nicolas Day?

ROESSER: They get what?

LEVINE: Did he hit some of them with a stick?

ROESSER: Sick?

LEVINE: Stick.

ROESSER: Oh stick, aw no, no, he always say I will, but you know, no no. It was very friendly you know (laugh).

LEVINE: Oh, ah ha, ah ha. Yeah. So um,(cough) lets see. You were, so you went to the farm as much as you could it sounds like.

ROESSER: Oh yes, yes.

LEVINE: And you enjoyed it?

ROESSER: Whenever, oh yes very much. I was at home there. I had, my god mother lived in that same town, and she used to come home from vacation she was a music teacher and she would be in larger cities and then she also would come home on vacations and that was very nice. So yes, it was nice and I had some friends there too to play with. And yes, it was nice.

LEVINE: What, what was the, how how did you, what contact did you have with the godmother, what did a god mother mean to a young child?

ROESSER: Well, a godmother is a, well, like when your christened, you , she's there and she also has some you know, she's like, she stands up for you sort of speak almost, you know. I mean, she's your god mother and then with the christening she um, she's there and she, and then when the priest asks do you this baby, what would you want you know, and she says she wants it to be christened and become a Christian and stuff like that, it was very, very, very nice.

LEVINE: So did children usually have much contact with there god mother?

ROESSER: Well yes, yeah they'd say I'd go to so and so that's my god mother, yes that's right.

LEVINE: And how about what you played, do you remember the kinds and things you played when you were a little girl?

ROESSER: Oh yes, yes. We played all sorts of games, you know, like what we called *Oreigen* and we'd go in a circle, and recite all those things, you know, I'm sure they do that, maybe not so much here, but anyway

LEVINE: Can you remember any of those rhymes that you recited when you were going around in a circle?

ROESSER: I should, but I, not off hand. That was a lot of fun you know and.

LEVINE: And then what else did you play?

ROESSER: Oh, and then we also played families, one was the father and mother and the other ones were the children and so forth, I guess they played that all over.

LEVINE: Yeah, how about stories, do you remember any stories that you were told or that you read when you were first starting to read that stuck with you, that you remember?

ROESSER: Ah, oh I'll tell ya, I read an awful lot in my time. No.

LEVINE: Ya, but there isn't...

ROESSER: Oh, like for instance, Heidi and I practically knew that in German by heart so all I had to do was you know. That was the first book I read here, Heidi, because it came very easily. So I remember that and I read an awful like.

LEVINE: You did you were a reader, ah ha?

ROESSER: At night and ah gosh yes.

LEVINE: Do you remember what it was about Heidi that you liked so much.

ROESSER: Well, like when she came to her grandfather you know and all that story, and then yes, and it was very nice and all about her and how she came to this other girl who was rich and then she came you know and then Heidi took her to the mountains and she got well because she always had to be carried around, but then when she came to the mountains and met the grandfather and he said none of that and she got well, she was fine she hoped around when her father came from the big city, oh boy I tell you. She really could do things he never would have dreamt of, because she always had to be carried around and Grandfather said ah ah (laugh) he was a real mountaineer in the alps

LEVINE: Yeah, well what was your father like as a personality?

ROESSER: Oh, he was ah, he worked very hard and.

LEVINE: What was he doing for work?

ROESSER: We was a like a making what would you say, like a like in the cemetery the gravestones, he used to carve the names and he used to be a specialist in that. He used to and then some they get filled with gold of whatever, you know, different, yes on the stones, on the what do you call them? Gravestones?

LEVINE: Gravestones. Yeah. so

ROESSER: They were all different kinds and he used to make you know, like the tablet and that was set on then to that yes, I remember, I can hear them at home, and he used to have a very good hand in going that because he couldn't hit too hard, you know, so hear him in my memories all the time.

LEVINE: Wow, yeah. We are going to pause here for one second

ROESSER: Oh, why not! (laugh)

LEVINE: OK, so now we are in a non-squeaking chair we are going to continue. You were saying you remember hearing your father hammering. Now was he, did he have is own business, or was he...

ROESSER: No, no he was working for them in the next town, Bitzberg [ph]. And so, and he was there for many many years, He was like a fixture there and he used to do all of that and a lot of the fancy stuff, I mean not the ones where they just do the stones, that's a different thing, but when the fine work comes, that's very important.

LEVINE: So he would be hammering out sayings?

ROESSER: Yes, well yes with the names and all the. He also was very good at the Hebrew, you know the way they write, so he used to do a lot for them too.

LEVINE: Were there many Jewish people in your area where you lived?

ROESSER: Well, in our town and right among us, you know, we played and everything together and yes. Only we used to kid them because they had to go to school, what they call it on Sunday.

LEVINE: On Saturday.

ROESSER: On Saturday, and so and we had Saturday off you see (laugh) kids are, kids are kids, but we always, oh we played together and everything. We always, it was just like anybody else.

LEVINE: And what, how religious was your family?

ROESSER: Oh, fairly, I mean, normal you know, I mean, we'd go to church on Sundays and all that always.

LEVINE: Was Easter a big...

ROESSER: Oh yes, Easter...

LEVINE: Observance?

ROESSER: Pardon?

LEVINE: You observed Easter?

ROESSER: Oh yes, Easter and Christmas of course, that's always nice and all the other, whatever holidays there are. But you know, fall. So we always did that yes.

LEVINE: Were there any other, you were catholic right?

ROESSER: Yes.

LEVINE: Were there any other holidays, religious holidays in Germany that you celebrated that we don't have here?

ROESSER: No, I can't think of any.

LEVINE: And, let's see. So you started school when you were?

ROESSER: I was in kindergarten from the time I was two years old, I went in the morning it went all day, yea and I loved it. And we had three types, we had the big girl's room, big boy's room, and the little kids room there were girls and boys and they were small yet. And so, but and we got lunch and that was by the city. We had great big pots full of soup and we had oh yes it was very good.

LEVINE: So you went early in the morning and you stayed all day?

ROESSER: Yeah.

LEVINE: From the time you were two years old

ROESSER: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Wow.

ROESSER: Yeah and it was nice, I learned to knit there, I was a good knitter. And we knitted socks for the soldiers.

LEVINE: When did you go with the big girls, in the big girl's room?

ROESSER: Well I did already, because the little ones were under two, and I only went up there when I was two years old, from the time I was two years old until I went to school, until you know, from there we went right to school. Yeah

LEVINE: And what do you remember about school in Germany?

ROESSER: Oh I loved it. And I had good friends, and I always, if I do say so myself, I had very good marks, so, except sometimes in hand craft, but that time it was war and we didn't have the material that we should have had. So well, that's alright, nobody asks anymore.

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LEVINE: What were the teachers like? Do you remember any particular teachers?

ROESSER: Oh yes, they were Notre Dame Nuns. And they were excellent and my sister, my, the one that was younger, my older sister got married and the other one, two years younger (don't understand what she says) and she became a nun. And she became in Baltimore, and she was Notre Dame, I used to go there about three times a year, I used to go often and especially when she didn't feel so good anymore, and then she died when she was ninety three. She always, she was very, with her heart and soul

she was a nun. Oh but full of fun, like on Saint Patrick's Day she would dress in green if you could picture that (laugh) yeah, they had a lot a fun. So it wasn't all just you know, sad and serious and all that, they had a lot of fun, they played cards they even played pee-knuckle[ph], maybe I shouldn't say it. Yeah, they were a nice bunch, I used to be at home with them, I used to go a couple of times a year, and even the last years when she still lived I used to go there at least two or three times a year then I would stay five or six days and live right there we always had fun too.

LEVINE: Well tell me now, when your mother died, was there a time lapse between when your mother died and when your father remarried your second mother?

ROESSER: Yeah, he married (cough) about a year later.

LEVINE: And...

ROESSER: My sister took care of us (cough), she was still home then, gosh, what's the matter with me?

LEVINE: Do you want a drink? Do you want to have something to drink?

ROESSER: I don't know, what is this?

LEVINE: We'll pause here for a second...ok, we're resuming the tape now. Let's see, so where were we. We were talking about your sister; your sister took care of you after your mother died and before your father remarried.

ROESSER: Well my aunt still took care of the little boy, he was sickly, he had rickets and what not. That time, they didn't have so many good things, but

anyway, and he was with my aunt, who had a couple of little ones herself too.

LEVINE: She was on the farm with your grandparents?

ROESSER: No no, she was, her husband was a tailor master so, and that's where the baby was, and my father would come and look at him and my brother and one sister, the one that became a nun here, she used to take him out in a carriage for a walk and things like that, and then of course afterwards it was, he was really wasn't supposed to live, he was supposed to die. I guess my step mother was a little disappointed he didn't die sometimes. It was tough, that part. But why do you think we came over here? Because my sister was here already, so she said you come on over. You know. Get away.

LEVINE: So in other words your sister was the first one in the family to come to America?

ROESSER: Yeah my oldest sister, Julia. She came over with her aunt, her mother's sister. Her mother's sister was the first wife of my father, and mine was the second one, but then she died too. It was tough for the man, you know he had to work, they worked many hours in those days. They couldn't take care of the children, that's for sure, so we did the best we could.

LEVINE: So, you had a hard time from the time you were about twelve until two years later when you left?

ROESSER: Yeah, I knew better. I don't know. I did as best as I could. I found a lot of friends and I met my relatives on the vacation and it was ok.

LEVINE: Do you think your father was aware of the fact that your step mother wasn't treating your brother well?

ROESSER: Yes, I'll tell you when my sister, she came over for a visit, what year was it? Some years later anyway, but then she already knew that she was going to the convent, she entered the convent, but she didn't want to say anything because it would make it too hard. It made it very hard for her because she knew, and then she couldn't go over anymore. But later on, they went over just the same all the time. The nuns here, you know, they became a little more modern. But then my father wasn't alive anymore. It was tough all around. That's why she went over, because she wouldn't stay there.

LEVINE: Was she very strict?

ROESSER: No, not strict in a way. A little tricky, let's put it that way. I don't know. I left home when I was that young, so that was fine, because my sister was all for it. Bring her over, bring her over.

LEVINE: Now were you in school up until the time you left Germany?

ROESSER: Oh yes, and the sister over there, we had the same sisters, she wanted me to stay and finish my school over there but I was just as anxious to go.

LEVINE: Now, had you been corresponding with Julia who was in America when you were still in Germany?

ROESSER: Julia and Anna, yeah we were in Germany, but in those days all you could do was send a letter, not even air mail or anything like that. It took a long time.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you had heard about America before you came here? What did you expect?

ROESSER: Oh, yeah, pretty much, because my sister came over then she told me why don't you come over too and how it was and you're your own man so to speak. Of course, I liked it right away when I came over here.

LEVINE: Tell me about leaving, do you remember saying goodbye?

ROESSER: Yes. That was hard. That was hard. Because in those days you figure you go just about for good you know. I remember I wouldn't let my father come to the train station and I said nothing to him because it hurts too much for you and for me and what's the good of it. So I just came to the one train station in our town, and then when I came through the bigger town my big brother went with me to Braymen where I had to do all kinds of things. I even had to have my hair washed. Stuff like that. When you came over they made sure.

LEVINE: And did they examine you medically as well?

ROESSER: No, no, no. but they wanted to make sure that that's done I guess. But otherwise, by the time I came to the town where the boat left, then I was practically all finished. And I met my friend whose ten years older than I am and she's still my friend only she's sick now, and all these years still friends.

LEVINE: Now did she also go to America on the same boat?

ROESSER: Yes, yes and also for the first time. But of course she was that much older already. She must have been about...

LEVINE: Twenty four.

ROESSER: Yeah.

LEVINE: Now what's her name?

ROESSER: Emma.

LEVINE: So you traveled, uh, what was the name of the ship?

ROESSER: Uh, I know this as well as my name...the Hanover. Yeah, the Hanover. I landed on January 1st, and that's why, I should have been dismissed on the boat, but they couldn't because they said I wasn't sixteen yet and I had to go to school until I was sixteen and I have to go to Ellis Island. And I said ok, so I spent another evening in the boat and had a good time.

LEVINE: Well, what happened with Emma?

ROESSER: Well she got married...

LEVINE: No, I mean when you first landed.

ROESSER: Oh, oh, well her sister came.

LEVINE: And did your sisters come also?

ROESSER: They came too. Both sisters came and my aunt, but they couldn't do anything about it. They said I had to stay and go to Ellis Island. Then we went over to Ellis Island the next morning.

LEVINE: Now, were you traveling first or second class?

ROESSER: Yes, I was in the right class, there was no first class on that little Hanover. I seemed to enjoy the storm. Oh and one man, he was an elderly man, and we were the only ones at table for about a week. Nobody would come because it was so bad. It was very stormy, it took sixteen days.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything else about the voyage?

ROESSER: Oh yes, it was great, I mean it was really nice. We enjoyed it.

LEVINE: And do you remember coming into the New York Harbor?

ROESSER: Oh yeah, and then the Statue of Liberty of course, we had to see and all that. Yes, it was quite exciting, to say the least. And my aunt and my sister came to fetch me off the boat and they had to go home empty handed because they didn't let me know. It was a Sunday and what not, all kinds of excuses they had. So that is how I came to Ellis Island then. I really had no idea.

LEVINE: So what was your impression of Ellis Island?

ROESSER: Oh, Its so much more....beautfiul...oh my god. What a difference. I was in back when I came off in January 2nd 1923, I hadn't been back in seventy years. I was really surprised there was another floor higher and all that. Oh yes, I was amazed. I was surprised.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you thought that day? January 2nd 1923? Can you remember the impression of it?

ROESSER: Well, yes. This Emma, and her sister, we met them too. She didn't want to wait like I did for a second class passage so she says I want to go now.

So she was third class and therefore she had to go to Ellis Island. I couldn't eat a thing. All that stuff that was thrown on the tables for the people to eat, it was noisy and it was, you know, and there were a lot of people it was crowded at dinner, we had sandwiches. It was an experience, in those days.

LEVINE: So you and Emma were together on Ellis Island, Emma was on Ellis Island with you?

ROESSER: No, we were not together, she was in her category and we didn't have to stay any night at all. No, no. They came to fetch us the same day.

LEVINE: So what was the reunion like with your sisters and your aunt when they came for you?

ROESSER: It was good, I had never seen my aunt before. It was good, and she lived on 133rd street and 8th avenue.

LEVINE: So that's where you went? You went right to 133rd street and 8th.

ROESSER: and then I went to school until I was about sixteen or so, and then I went over to New Jersey, that's where my sister was. As a matter of fact, she went to the convent and I took her place then. I went to this family, they were nice, had a couple of children they were very nice.

LEVINE: Tell me what it was like for you learning English.

ROESSER: Maybe you think it's funny, but I don't really remember. I mean, it didn't come naturally of course, I mean it was no big effort.

LEVINE: Do you remember what school was like? Those few years when you were living at your aunt's place?

ROESSER: Oh, it was just a few weeks. That's all I was in school. I should have been until I was sixteen but anyway I, and then I went over to new jersey, I had a place there. My sister left and I took over.

LEVINE: Oh I see, so you were only a few weeks in 133rd street?

ROESSER: Yeah.

LEVINE: I see, and then you went and you were like a governess or something, you were taking care of the children.

ROESSER: Later on, yes, yes. I did that. And then I landed on Park Avenue. Like governess, not really, more like, I don't know....

LEVINE: What were your duties?

ROESSER: Oh, well I took care of a little boy and I went to France with them, and he was only two years old then. He was smart, he was a cute child. Later on they had a little girl so I took her over, and so that's what I was. I was a children's nurse.

LEVINE: And how long did you keep doing that?

ROESSER: Oh, well until I got married.

LEVINE: And how did you meet your husband?

ROESSER: Oh, well he was German too, and he came to a family that was related to me. He used to come every once in a while and that's where I met him. You know how things go.

LEVINE: Did you like him right away?

ROESSER: Oh yes. Oh god yes. He died. Yup.

LEVINE: So, um. What was your husband's name?

ROESSER: Carl. C-A-R-L. That's how he spelled it. He came over after I did, later.

LEVINE: I don't think we mentioned your maiden name before. What was your maiden name?

ROESSER: Kampf. K-A-M-P-F. There are lots of them that are Kempf with an E. I always protested when somebody accused me of that.

LEVINE: So then you were married, and where did you live?

ROESSER: oh, well lived in Astoria. You know, Astoria, Long Island. And got married in September because the people wanted to go to Europe and they didn't want to have a new person with them so I stayed and my husband stayed there too. And they liked him very much. My husband was a tailor, a very good tailor. He made some very nice garments.

LEVINE: Ok, and how many children did you have?

ROESSER: Just two girls.

LEVINE: And their names?

ROESSER: Uh, the older one is Ellen, she was with me in Ellis Island and the other one is Margaret.

LEVINE: When you think about coming to this country, and sort of starting over again, what difference do you think it made to you in your life that you had immigrated to a different place?

ROESSER: Oh a big difference.

LEVINE: In what ways?

ROESSER: Well, I mean everything is bigger here and better, especially after the war and then the inflation and everything and when I went away it was bad over there. Big difference.

LEVINE: Would you describe anything about the First World War that had an effect on you.

ROESSER: The food was not so good, you know. And every once in a while a neighbor would fall in the war and a certain church bell rang and it was tough, it was tough. And a lot of them were gone you know. We had prisoners of war, French prisoners of war in our town that helped our neighbors, some of them were farmers. When they saw a little girl they used to take them on their laps because after all they were fathers too. Sometimes when they were sick, I don't know, its just how sick they were. But then the farmer that had them, they used to mostly go to the farmers and help in the field and so. And I used to bring up food to where they were in some sort of camp or whatever. And they sent wonderful food up there. They liked us, we girls.

LEVINE: How was it that you happened to bring the food up to the prisoners of war?

ROESSER: Well, because I was the neighbor of the farmer, I was chosen to bring it up and at first we were a little timid and I always used to picture an enemy entirely different than what they were. They loved the little girls, they said they had them had home. Then they started to talk German and we started to talk a little French. They were right among the neighbors. It was all very friendly. Until the end was declared, then they marched through town. We all were glad when it was finished. It was a long one.

LEVINE: do you think there were any customs that you still carry out, customs that are German, even though you've been in the country now over seventy years?

ROESSER: Oh yeah, I still cook German food. (laughs) and every once in a while we have a real German feast. Lately, something happened to me, I don't know. I'm getting old I guess.

LEVINE: Let's see, you're eighty seven; you're going to be eighty eight.

ROESSER: I'm going to be eighty eight in January, so I mean that's not young anymore. I was a walker, everybody knew me as a walker. Now I can hardly walk. I have to be careful I don't fall. You know I'm not very steady on my feet I don't know why, and I don't know what to do with it.

LEVINE: What do you feel most grateful for in your life?

ROESSER: Gee wiz. Oh, I don't know.

LEVINE: How about proud. What makes you feel proud that you've done in your life?

ROESSER: well I always put myself through whatever, you know I mean and I started young and I learned an awful lot that I didn't know. It was very good. I, gosh, off hand I don't know.

LEVINE: Is there anything you would say about this country having lived most of your life here?

ROESSER: Well I love it. It's good to me. I achieved, I must say. And so, it was very good. That's all I can say.

LEVINE: Ok, well is there anything else you would like to say before we close.

ROESSER: Well...

LEVINE: You must have seen a lot of changes in your lifetime.

ROESSER: Oh yes, you know moving around. Because I was, you know, first I was in Jersey, then I was in New York, and then, you know. But then I liked New York, and I had a very good position where I was working. Very well respected. I went to France that time with the family, I was in Paris with the go cart, you know. I went to the Champs Elysses up and down it. (laughs) that's a funny thing though. I remember it's a very wide avenue if you know that, so anyways. One time I stood there and thought, why didn't I cross by the arch there, you know. Why didn't I cross, I cant cross. All the cars, do they still do that. But anyways, all of a sudden a cop comes over and throws open his cape and makes all the lines stop. (laughs) I felt very important. It was very funny. I mean, I got around.

LEVINE: we'll I want to thank you very much, its been most interesting. I want to thank you for all your stories.

ROESSER: Oh well thank you.

LEVINE: This tape will now be part of the Ellis Island Oral History Collection so everyone can hear.

ROESSER: Oh yeah, and probably cut a little bit.

LEVINE: Well, no, well put it in just like it is.

ROESSER: Oh yeah?

LEVINE: And then whoever is researching whatever they are researching they can take the parts that they want.

ROESSER: Oh, yeah.

LEVINE: Ok, this is Janet Levine for the National Parks Service, I've been speaking with Elizabeth Kampf- Roesser who came from Germany, well arrived in early 1923 at the age of fourteen. Were here in Manchester New Hampshire, where Mrs Roesser lives at this time. This is November 22, 1994, Mrs Roesser is eighty seven going on eighty eight in January and this is Janet Levine signing off. Thank you.

ROESSER: Thank you very much.