

**EI-060**

**DAVID FROELICH**

**BIRTH DATE: JUNE 2, 1928**  
**INTERVIEW DATE: 8/6/1991**  
**RUNNING TIME: 1:17:36**  
**INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.**  
**RECORDING ENGINEER: BRIAN FEENEY**  
**INTERVIEW LOCATION: BROOKLYN, NEW YORK**  
**TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: NANCY VEGA, 4/1993**  
**TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 6/1993**

**GERMANY, 1939**  
**AGE 11**

**SHIP: VEENDAM**  
**PORT: ANTWERP**  
**RESIDENCE:**

- **GERMANY: BAD MERGENTHEIM**
- **USA: EAST ST. LOUIS, IL**

**Oral Historian's Note:**

**Side Two of this interview was conducted on an exterior terrace and contains a great deal of extraneous background noise. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., 2/2/1993.**

**SIGRIST:** Good morning. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Tuesday, August 6, 1991. We're here in Brooklyn with David Froelich, Froelich...

**FROELICH:** Froelich.

**SIGRIST:** Who came from Germany in 1939 when he was eleven years old. Good morning.

**FROELICH:** Good morning.

SIGRIST: Could you please give me your full name, middle name included if there is one, and your date of birth, please?

FROELICH: David Froelich. No middle name. I was born on June 2, 1930, 1928, in Würzburg, Germany, which is forty-four kilometers north of my home town Bad-Mergentheim. That's a health resort, a very famous health resort in southern Germany for internal diseases.

SIGRIST: I'd like you to spell both towns for us, please?

FROELICH: All right. That's B-A-D - M-E-R-G-E-N-T-H-E-I-M. Bad-Mergentheim. Total population today is twenty thousand. In my day it had about ten thousand. During the summer they have about ten thousand guests who come from all over Europe.

SIGRIST: And could you spell the first town too, please?

FROELICH: Würzburg. W-Ü, with the Umlaut, R-Z-B-U-R-G. That's a university town with a population of about forty-five thousand today.

SIGRIST: And how long did you live in the town that you were born in?

FROELICH: In Würzburg I was five days in the hospital. In Bad-Mergentheim I lived eleven years.

SIGRIST: All right. But talk more about that town. You said it was a resort town.

FROELICH: Yes. Bad-Mergentheim is in the Taubertal. That is a valley. Tauber is a river, a very famous river. It is a medieval town, as so many towns are in

Germany. Initially it was just a farmer's village, and then it became a very famous health resort. That's the main industry. There is no other industry to speak of. It is in the province, in the province of Württemberg [sic: Württemberg] today's Württemberg.

SIGRIST: Spell that, please.

FROELICH: W-Ü-R-E-N-B-U-R-G. W-Ü-R-T-T-E-N-B-U-R-G. Württemberg. And Baden, B-A-D-E-N. That's the province today. It is a very picturesque, tranquil town. It is surrounded by low hills, wooded low hills. It has a river, the Tauber, T-A-U-B-E-R, which is a tributary of the Main river, M-A-I-N, which flows into the Rhein. In English R-H-I-N-E.

SIGRIST: You said the town is very picturesque.

FROELICH: Yeah. It's very picturesque. In fact, I have pictures of it. We had, in my day, a population of ten thousand, and there were sixty Jewish families, all orthodox. Most of them were merchants of one kind or another. It was a very close knit family type of affair. My family was the wealthiest, the richest family. I was literally born with a silver spoon in my mouth. We were the Rockefellers of southern Germany at that time. As a matter of fact, if I can transgress, many, many years later here in New York as an adult I visited. I did not live as an adult in New York initially. I lived in St. Louis, Missouri. We'll get to that later. And I visited Washington Heights where so many Germans Jews still are living to this day. They pulled out the red carpet, not because of me, but because of the reputation of my family.

SIGRIST: Why were you so wealthy in Germany?

FROELICH: We had a large meat packing plant. And in Germany it was allowed in those days to have a cartel. We had not only a meat packing plant, the packing house was leased for ninety-nine years. But we also had a cattle business of livestock, of buying and selling livestock. We were the biggest in Germany, let's say between 1925 and '35.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the company?

FROELICH: Max, no David Froelich and Sons. David Froelich was my grandfather, after whom I'm named. My father being the oldest, it was called Max Froelich and Son, one son, although there were five others. They were employed, my father was part-owner.

SIGRIST: Talk about your father. What was his name?

FROELICH: My father, uh, is still living, ninety-seven years old, lives in Israel today. My father was the oldest of twelve children, and at the age of fourteen he was asked to join the business. He didn't get any salary or he didn't earn anything. Whatever he needed he got. He became part-owner upon his marriage to my mother in 1927. At that point my grandfather was no longer alive. When my grandfather died in '25, the business was owned by my grandmother and then my father became part-owner when he married, and his brother Jacob became part-owner when he married. The other boys never became owners. They were salaried.

SIGRIST: What was your father like as a person?

FROELICH: My father was a very typical German. Very, very strong-willed. Very dominant personality. Short in stature, built like a football player, a fullback. He had a heart of gold, and still has. He's willing to give you the

shirt off his back, but a very impulsive man. Because he served in the German army in the First World War and because he was from a very small town and rigidly trained, he was a very rigid man and very set, and a typical Prussian type of domineering personality. My father and I, our relationship has gone 365 degrees. I worshipped the ground my father walked on until I became a teenager in America and then we had differences of opinion, and we became estranged, and there was a long stretch of time when we didn't have good relations. But as he got older and mellowed and as I got older and, uh, we're now the best of friends and have a very close understanding. And he has a great respect for me, and I have for him.

SIGRIST: Let's talk about your mother. What was her name?

FROELICH: My mother's first name is Kate. She's also still living, although today she's in very bad physical condition. She suffers from Alzheimer's and she's in a wheelchair because she broke her hip and lost the ability to walk.

SIGRIST: What was her maiden name?

FROELICH: Schwatzenberger. Oh, boy. S-C-H-W-A-T-Z-E-N-B-E-R-G-E-R.

SIGRIST: And was she from this town?

FROELICH: No. No, she came from Bavaria. She came from a city which was very well-known as a result of the Second World War. Schweinfurt. That's the home of the ball bearing plants, which was bombed to smithereens. I revisited Schweinfurt for the first time in 1988 after having not been there for thirty years, fifty years. And the downtown area, some of it is still the way it was, but much of it has been destroyed and rebuilt.

SIGRIST: How did your parents meet?

FROELICH: They weren't youngsters. They married late in life. My father was thirty-two, my mother was twenty-seven. It was arranged by, we say in Hebrew *schidduch*. That's spelled S-C-H-I-D-D-U-C-H. It's an arrangement, a marriage broker type of thing. Although there was no money transacted. It was through contacts. You know, this friend has this friend, and so on. My father came from a very well-to-do family, a very established family, very highly sought-after family. My mother's family was also well thought of, but they weren't as financially as well off. It was considered a good match in economic terms. It was very customary and very common in those days, since my mother was twenty-seven and still single, and my father was certainly a very eligible bachelor it was an arrangement that was made.

SIGRIST: What was she like as a person? As a kid looking...

FROELICH :Typical, again, she was a very, first of all my father was a very handsome man. My mother was, I would say, attractive as a young woman, from pictures I've seen. She was very docile, although she was a very strong-willed person in her own way, very God-fearing.

SIGRIST: What did she look like?

FROELICH: What did she look like? She was of average height. I'd say about five-feet-one, five-feet-two. Dark completed. My father was also dark completed.

SIGRIST: Did you have brothers and sisters?

FROELICH: I have two younger sisters.

SIGRIST: Talk about them.

FROELICH: I was the only child for seven years. I surmised that my mother must have had a miscarriage. I can't prove it one way or the other. These are delicate subjects that in those days you don't talk about. It's not like today. Even today I could not approach my mother and father and talk about these areas. However, I recall distinctly when I was about four years old, Germany was filled with foolish superstitions, the idea of a stork bringing babies and so on. I was told to put sugar on the ledge, that the stork was going to bring me a brother or a sister, and I was asked whether I wanted either or, and I said, "I want a brother." And suddenly this stopped. As an adult I pieced two things together, that there was an attempt and my mother miscarried or whatever. And seven years later I had a baby sister. Her name was Leah, is Leah. She lives in Israel today. She is the grandmother of many children. She had thirteen children of her own, which is not unusual because both my sisters are much more religious than I am.

SIGRIST: And what was your other sister's name?

FROELICH: Ruth. She came two years later, and she's nine years younger, and she has eight children and many grandchildren.

SIGRIST: Talk about the house that you grew up in. Can you describe it for me?

FROELICH: Well, you see, the situation was we were living in a rented fancy home on the edge of town for many years, and I was the only child. I was the boss' son. My father had about fifty or sixty employed people in the slaughterhouse. I was already become acquainted with the business. I

was being trained to follow in my father's footsteps, but there was no question in my mind that I was going to be the boss of the business until Hitler came along and, of course, that changed everything.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the house that you grew up in?

FROELICH: Vaguely. I can describe my grandmother's house, the family house, the ancestral home.

SIGRIST: Did you spend more time there?

FROELICH: I spent more time there, yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, talk about that, then. Maybe you should start off by telling a little bit about your grandmother.

FROELICH: I didn't like her. I didn't like either one of my grandmothers. My grandfather was the one I thought very highly of, my mother's father who...

SIGRIST: Why didn't you like your grandmother?

FROELICH: They just didn't know how to handle children. They were very limited in their understanding of how to deal with little children. I mean, I say this now as an adult. In those days they were not very kind to me like my grandfather was. He had a way with children. He was psychologically attune to young kids. My grandmothers, both of them weren't. My grandmother Bertha, my father's mother was living in the ancestral home. She was a diabetic. I remember that. She favored the other grandchildren over me, and I resented that. The others didn't live in the same town. I was

the only one that lived in town. The others came for visitations from other parts of Germany. Many...

SIGRIST: This is a big house that you lived in?

FROELICH: It was a big house, yes. Three stories. A typical medieval house. It still stands, although it has been renovated recently. The family homestead had in back of it a shed and a stable, and they built a huge office in 1935. My father was against it, because Hitler was already in power and the business was going downhill, but my uncle insisted. My father used to joke, "We used to have a big business with a small office, and now we have a small business and a big office." The business began to dwindle in '34. Hitler came to power in '33, only because we were the Froelichs, which meant something. There was a time where the name Froelich meant more than our religion. And then at a certain turning point the name meant less and the fact that we were Jews, it was a common denominator, meant more. My father was the only one whose license to operate was renewed in '35 and '36. But in '37 it was not renewed, and at that point the business was forcibly taken away. It was sold for about one-tenth of its real value to a designated new owner, who was a member of the Nazi party and a former employee of my father's. They held onto the business until it went down the drain. The business no longer existed altogether. But from '37 until about '80, the business was in the hands of these other people.

SIGRIST: Let's talk about your religious life. This is probably a good time to bring this up.

FROELICH: Well, I was born in an Orthodox family. We were not fanatically Orthodox. We were traditional Orthodox.

SIGRIST: You said there were only sixteen Jewish families in this town?

FROELICH: Right. Now, it's interesting to note historically, German Jews were not known for their orthodoxy. On the contrast, most German Jews were Reform, because after 1815 and the division of Europe under Meternick [Metternich] when Napoleon was defeated. As a matter of fact, I want to change course here. My family, I can trace to 1815. They fled with Napoleon. When he fled Russia, many Jews fled with him and went westward. These Jews, in large number, stopped along the way in Germany, in southern Germany, in the small towns, including my own family. Those who stopped in the large cities wound up Reform. Most cities, except Frankfurt, which retained its orthodoxy in the Jewish community. And that's due to one particular rabbi, Sampson Raphael Hirsch, who was a very noted orthodox German rabbi of that particular period. But my family were of peasant stock. We were uneducated, poor. They remained that way. They were not living in Bad-Mergentheim initially. They lived in another community not far away where my great, great-grandfather settled down.

SIGRIST: Was there a synagogue in the town where you were growing up?

FROELICH: Yes, and that synagogue has an interesting history. It was built in fifteen-something. I'm not sure the exact year. They found only recently the grave of the founder. His name was Baron, or Baron in English, who became a free Jew at the time when Jews were not freed by the local baron, and that's probably why he took the name Baron. And he donated all of his wealth that he gained from being the money-lender of this duke who lived there. Now, the town is an ancient dukedom that initially belonged to some

higher order in Prussia and we have a castle that still exists till this day in this town, and part of a wall. It was a walled city at one point. And...

SIGRIST: As a child do you remember attending services in this city?

FROELICH: Oh, yeah, certainly. Not only did I attend services...

SIGRIST: Can you describe the inside of it for me, please?

FROELICH: It was a very beautiful synagogue. It was not burned to the ground like most synagogues at the first pogrom in November of '38. It was destroyed, but only the inside. They wanted to burn it down, but the neighbors were afraid that if they burn it down their property would burn down with it. It was surrounded by, to the rear, a monastery, on the left a farmer and on the right a farmer. And in those days you didn't have space in between. It was all built together. So they destroyed it. It was a horrible sight. I came the day after the Crystal Night pogrom was over, and together with my buddies we had to clean up the mess.

SIGRIST: How old were you?

FROELICH: Ten, and I vividly remember it.

SIGRIST: Talk about it.

FROELICH: Well, first of all, if you want to talk about Kristallnacht...

SIGRIST: Keep to your history. Describe your participation.

FROELICH: Okay. I'm talking about my own home. My father had already decided to go to America at that point. And he did not have a trade, and he recognized that in order to earn a living he had to have a trade. So he went for the butchery trade. He had signed up for a butcher course in Munich, but he never was able to get to Munich. He got sick a few days before Kristallnacht, and he was laid up with a severe case of strep throat and fever. But a Jewish doctor was already in Dachau, the concentration camp. So the doctor who attended my father was a Gentile, and a member of the Nazi party. On the eve of Crystal Night we knew nothing, although all the other people were attacked and beaten up. Because we were who we were, my father was spared. So we knew nothing until the next morning when the neighbor came hysterically to our door telling us that there is this pogrom, that Jews are being rounded up, males, age fourteen and over, and being arrested, presumably to be taken away to a concentration camp. That they're trying to burn down, the school was together with the synagogue. I was already in the fourth grade at that point, fifth grade. I started school in 1935, and in '35 we have the infamous Nuremburg Laws. These Nuremburg Laws, among other things, prohibited Jewish children from attending public school, so I only attended a Jewish school. The Jewish school was in the complex where the synagogue was. It was like in a courtyard. There was a synagogue and then the school, and then the residency of the teacher. Now, I was at home in the morning, looked out the window. We lived no longer in the fancy suburban areas. We were denied that. We lived in a rented home over a shoe store in the town square. And I knew something was unusual. And then the neighbor came and told us what was happening, and I became petrified, and I pleaded with my parents, "I don't want to go to school." And they said, "Okay. You can stay home." My father, who was sick in bed, said to my mother, "Why don't you go and check on my mother and see that she's all right." Because she was all alone. She lived catty-corner across from the

synagogue in what is called the Judengasse, which is a Jewish street. It's a little alley, medieval alley, like so many.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

FROELICH: *J-U-D-E-N*, that's *Juden*, and *Gasse*, which is alley. That's *G-A-S-S-E*. My mother asked a neighbor to babysit for my sisters and myself and she agreed. In the meantime, a policeman came to our door, and I became hysterical. I knew why he came, and I ran to the kitchen and I began to cry and pray. He was wearing the typical police uniform and the boots, which had cleats, so they made a lot of noise. And he said, "Heil Hitler." He said he wanted to see my father. The neighbors, he thought the neighbor was my mother. She said she's just a babysitter. He asked for my Dad. He was told he was sick in bed. He says, "I want to see him." And that's when I began to pray. I heard boots, I heard a pair of boots, and I didn't hear four feet, I heard two feet. And the neighbor came and touched me on the shoulder and said, "You can relax. They didn't take your Daddy." What had happened was and this, of course, I didn't know until much later, is that he went to my father's bedside, he asked what's the matter with him, my father told him. He looked at the medicine and he saw the name of the doctor, and he recognized that he was a Gentile, he was a member of the Nazi Party. He was a decent Joe. He was about twenty-four, twenty-five years old, and he left my father alone. Now comes another part of the story. When the policeman came in to answer to the police station he got chewed out by the SS, the *Gauleiter*. He's the head of the Nazi party. And he, the SS officer called the doctor to verify, and the doctor went out on a limb, and he said as follows. This I got from the doctor's son when I met him some time, '83, I believe, I met him, at a reunion of Holocaust survivors. Both the doctor and his son are dead today. But he says, "My father told me this story. That he was called by the SS officer and he said

to him, 'This man is my patient. He is ill. Don't you dare touch him. If you do, I will call up Himmler myself.'" Now, everybody knew Himmler was the head of the SS nationally, and that frightened the officer away. Now, he was bluffing. He pretended that he was a personal friend of Himmler. He did this to save my father, and he did. I'm convinced, knowing my father, while he was physically a very tough cookie, even down to his old age, even to this day I might say, he has tremendous physical stamina. But psychologically he would not have survived Dachau because he was not that kind of a person. So this doctor definitely saved my father.

SIGRIST: Did your father get better soon?

FROELICH: My father recovered within a few days, and he was the only man in our town who was not arrested. It scared the living daylights out of my father and, uh...

SIGRIST: This is when he decided to come to America. All right, talk about that, please.

FROELICH: Right, right. He went to Stuttgart to the American Consulate and asked for, we had to have a quota number because it was a quota system. We got a number, and things began to go from bad to worse. Shortly thereafter he lost all rights to operate. He was alone in business by this time.

SIGRIST: What year is this?

FROELICH: We're talking about '38. I might also digress here a little bit about another incident. The person who is still one of my closest friends today, who was my first teacher, the teacher in Germany, who now lives in Chicago. He's retired. David Zucker is his name. David befriended me from the first day I

entered school. I became somewhat of a teacher's pet. There was a certain chemistry between us from the very beginning. He shielded me from a lot of rough stuff. He shielded all of us, but me in particular. He understood I was a very sensitive, a very delicate type of person. I favor my mother when it comes to psych and physical condition as well. While I have many traits of my father, basically I'm the type of person who will swallow things and eat things inside. That's why today I have psoriasis and many other problems. Anyway, he was of Polish descent. He was born in Germany. Hitler took all the Poles one day, about thirty days before Kristallnacht, and dumped them into Poland, including my teacher. David came back to Germany because he recognized, he got permission from the Polish government to get his belongings because they left without so much as a toothbrush. He felt he could do his mother no good. His mother was told that his father was a victim, a casualty of World War One. He couldn't do his mother any good in Poland. He was fearful that if he stayed in Poland he would be drafted in the Polish army, and he didn't want that. So he went to Germany and he recognized that in Germany he would become stateless, and that's what happened to him. I'll talk about David later. David is one of the people that played a major role in my development, together with my father and my grandfather and a few people later on in my life. As far as Kristallnacht was concerned, it was one of the worst experiences I've had. I had one other that was about a year later, just before we left and I want to talk about it. I got beaten up routinely from '35 on. There was one particular person in our town who was the bully of the Hitler Youth. Children can be very cruel, sometimes more so than adults. And the Hitler Youth, which were my peers and those that were a little bit older than me, were merciless. And they used to corner us and spit at us and taunt us and give us a licking, but it was all superficial, nothing really drastic. Until I happened to be the one who was exposed to the first real drastic incident. The incident started out

innocently enough. It was about a month before we left, so it must have been in September of '39. And my father and my mother were taking English lessons and they told me to take this English textbook back to the teacher, who lived only a block away from us. I walked outside, across the churchyard. We lived across the street from the Catholic church, outside, when this town bully spotted me. And he never walked alone. He always wore with his uniform, he always had a dagger with him. He was fourteen years of age. I was then eleven. He spotted me and he cornered me into the churchyard and he threw me against the outer wall of the church. And first the traditional thing was they spit in my face. They said, "Sing a Jewish song." I did as I was told because I was petrified. A crowd gathered, mostly kids, boys and girls, teenagers, pre-teens, and also adults, but they were further back. When he saw the book, he was ignorant of the fact that it was English. He only realized it wasn't German. He thought it was Hebrew. He said, "Read it." I said, "I can't." He says, "Read it or I'll kill you." In the meantime he's being taunted by the kids, "Kill him, kill him, kill him." So he says, "Read it." I says, "I can't." So he took his dagger, and this is something they never did before, but as we move along in date, this is typical of Holocaust. Holocaust was not a revolutionary thing. It was a very gradual strangulation of Jewish life and it was an evolutionary process. Each day and each month and each year it got a little bit worse. And there was no physical danger to adult Jews in Germany in 1938 until the pogrom of Kristallnacht. There was (he pauses), did somebody knock on the door? Okay.

SIGRIST: So what did he do with the dagger?

FROELICH: He took the dagger and cut me across. He cut me here (he gestures) and I saw blood, and I knew he meant business. I got petrified. And the kids kept screaming, "Kill him, kill him, kill him." He said, he saw that I couldn't

do it, he says, "Say your father is a bastard." I refused. And he took his thumbs and began to choke me. And he meant business. And I knew he meant business. And I didn't do this consciously. I didn't do it deliberately. It all happened fast as I can talk about it. But I stopped breathing, and obviously when you stop breathing you faint. And I fainted. And I was wearing the Tiroler pants, the leather pants like in Bavaria, and my knees were exposed and I fell. It was a dirt area with stones and so on. I lacerated my knee and I began to bleed. They also cut me here (he gestures), because I have a scar here. When this happened, I don't remember. But anyway, there was a policeman, just before they cut me, I started screaming, "Help me, help me, help me." And he turned around and went the other way. Now, what happened to me in comparison what happened to others later, long after I left, is child's play, is a Sunday school picnic. The man who was responsible for this is still alive. I don't know where. I don't want to know. I wouldn't want to face him. I don't know what I would do. I have been told that he became a lawyer and that he's an honorable and an honored citizen in another community, I presume Stuttgart, but this is a guess on my part. Because many of the people who survived World War II moved. Most of the people who live in our town, in this town now, are not native born.

SIGRIST: Let's get you to America.

FROELICH: Okay. We got out of Germany legally. We entered Holland illegally.

SIGRIST: Did this take a long time for you to get papers?

FROELICH: Yes. Well, we went to Stuttgart five days after the outbreak of World War Two. We got our papers. My father had passage on a German liner that was canceled. We were stuck in Germany. Now there was a new

requirement. You had to have an exit visa, a special permit from the local authority.

SIGRIST: This is for the five of you now.

FROELICH: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Mom, Dad, you and two sisters.

FROELICH: That's right. We had packed the lift with our belongings and that was in port in Bremerhaven.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you took, what you packed up?

FROELICH: Yeah. We packed five rooms, complete furnishings. Some of my prized possessions, which included a rocking horse, a stamp collection, part of a stamp collection because part of it I took with me personally.

SIGRIST: And the intention was to take all this furniture and everything to America.

FROELICH: To America, right. But we were advised not to take it out of Germany until we get on the boat, and put it on the boat. Well, when we couldn't do that, it was sent to Rotterdam, presumably that we would get to, okay. My father did a foolish thing. The day we left, first of all, we left, I said we have German papers, passports. We got the document, the exit permit, which was limited for three days. The end would be October first, 1939, not to be renewed, not renewable. I knew the kids in town, my father didn't. We were not allowed to take anything but a suit, one small suitcase. My father went to a friend of his who was a butcher and says, "Do me a favor. Drive us to the nearest big town, Würzburg again, where there is an express

stop for a train. We want to go to Cologne where I have a sister. And then from Cologne we were supposed to go to Holland. My father had faked papers to get into Holland. We had faked passage on a Dutch liner which had already left. My father was in touch with a cousin in Amsterdam who was in touch with the HIAS, which is a service organization that would help immigrants. Anyway, he told this kid, "Take the suitcases, your boss is going to take us." Well, the kid went to the boss and says, "If you take this Jew, I'm going to report you to the Gestapo." The guy was afraid to do it to begin with, so we had to go to the edge of town. This was during war time. It was complete blackout. We said goodbye to my grandmother and my aunt, my youngest aunt. She's still living today in Israel. And we waited, and waited, and waited. And this same kid came by sneakingly out, and says, "I'm sorry, but Mr. Market can't take you. Something came up." And when my father realized that I was right, we had to go back into the town. We went to the local railroad station. We took a local train. We went to Wurzburg. My father says, "I don't want to go to the waiting room. The train we'd want to take was already gone. We had to take another train. Let's walk out." My father used to travel a great deal by train all over Germany, and he knew all about trains. "Let's go to the track. I know where the train is waiting." The train emanated from Wurzburg and was going as far as Cologne. So we were going from end to end. That's a trip of about eight hours. It was four o'clock in the morning. We went out into the, out to the track to the train. There was a German officer, not a Nazi but a soldier, and he vacated, you know, the German trains to this day are not like American trains. It's not just one big coach, but there are compartments, like all European trains. And we went into a compartment. It was empty. We left at six o'clock. We went towards Frankfurt. We got into Frankfurt. More and more people came on. It got to be crowded by the time we got into the Rhineland. People realized that we were Jews. I mean, who would travel in those days. Most of the people in the train were

military personnel. It was during the war time. They began to taunt us and curse us and spit at us. We had to stand. It was miserable. We finally got to Cologne. It was a holiday, a Jewish holiday. And we took a taxi, now, a taxi in those days was a horse and carriage, and went to my uncle's and aunt's house. They weren't home yet. They were still in synagogue so they waited outside. They came shortly. We spent the weekend with them. Now comes the first of hair-raising experience. Since we had this permit which was expiring on Sunday, this was Sunday morning, October 1st. They set an alarm clock Saturday night so they would be sure to get up on time. There was one train leaving per day for the Dutch border, and that train was at nine o'clock. We were supposed to get up at six. We were an hour's travel away from the station. We overslept. My mother was hysterical. "We will never get out. The permit can't be renewed." My father was a realist and he felt very bad. My uncle, who was a very pious person, says, "If it's God's will," we say in Jewish, or in Yiddish *bashert*, "you'll get out. I'll call the station master. Maybe there's a second train." My father says, "Nonsense. There is no second train. What's the point?" My father has always been a realist. At any rate, my uncle called and for some strange reason, I don't know to this day why, there was a second train, just an exception, at two in the afternoon. Well, we ran like hell to the station, and we got on this train, and we rolled along. We went to the Dutch border. There were a lot of people, but they got off one by one, mostly military. Until we got to the last town, and that I'll spell for you, too. Kleve, K-L-E-V-E, which was the border. There was nobody on the train by my family and one single man. We were in the first coach. He was in the rear. My father says, "I want to get into the station because we're not allowed to take any currency out whatsoever. I'll wire all my money back to my sister." My father goes into the station, and I see three men coming out of the station. One in civilian clothes, one in a policeman's uniform, and one in the black S.S. uniform. He has a pistol. And within minutes he takes the

solo man off the train at gunpoint. My mother sees it, and she gets very upset. "What are they going to do to Daddy?" And we had a coal engine to the border, but the Dutch were a little bit more advanced. They had already electricity. Electrical engine or diesel engine. In those days to change engines you have to take the whole train out, put it on a turntable, and put on the other caboose. We didn't know that. Anyway, the train begins to move, and my mother is worried about my father. They're going to arrest Father, or they arrested Father. We were out there a few minutes, and we moved back into the station, we had the other engine. The three men come back, they come to my mother. "Heil Hitler. Your passport?" And we had, up in the suitcase my parents secretly smuggled out their wedding bands. We were supposed to surrender all silver and gold after Crystal Night. And they had put those in a jar of cold cream. And I had part of my stamp collection, which was forbidden. I hid that somewhere in the suitcase. Because they made us crazy in Cologne. The Jews were suffering a great deal more in the large cities than in the small towns. I had two pair of underwear and three pair of socks, what have you. This man, the Nazi who spoke, he says, "May I see your passport?" He looked at the passport. He says, "Why do you want to leave Germany?" He addressed my mother. And she says, "Well, you see, you see our passport." I have the original passport with me still in Israel. "A great big red 'J'." She says, "You see why we're leaving." So he laughed sort of sarcastically, "That's a good idea." My mother says, "You want to look at our luggage." He says, "That's not necessary." He was correct. He wasn't friendly, but he was correct. And he left us alone. He wished us Godspeed and he walked off. And my mother says, "I know why he was so nice. They arrested Father as a hostage." And the train starts pulling out again. No Daddy. The train moves out, you know, very, very slowly, five kilometers an hour. And I see out of the corner of my eye as we move out of the station, my father walks out of the station like nothing happened. He

doesn't know from anything. He sees the train in motion, and he runs after it, he jumps on, and he comes to us. He looks at my mother and she's white as a sheet. "Kate, what happened?" She opens her mouth, nothing happens. I'm the oldest, he comes to me. "David, what happened?" I opened my mouth, but I can't talk. We move two seconds, we stop. We're at the physical border. On the German side, one soldier with a rifle. That's all. We go around the little hill, forty-five degree angle. We're now inside Holland. Hundreds of tanks, soldiers, all in black uniform. A Dutch security officer comes on. He comes to us, he looks at our German passport. He says, *Dach*, which is Dutch for hello. He looks at our faces, he realizes we don't speak any Dutch. He said something in Dutch. We didn't understand it. He switches over to German and he said, in German, to my father and mother, "You can relax now. You're free." (German), in German. When that registered, we all began to bawl because the realization had sunken in, we've made it. We're out of it, we're free. Now the next hurdle comes. We get into Ninweigen, which is the end of the line.

SIGRIST: Spell it, please?

FROELICH: That's Dutch. I'm going to spell it the German way. I can't spell the Dutch way. N-I-N-W-E-I-G-E-N. (doorbell rings) I think we have to stop now.

SIGRIST: Just pause for a little bit. (break in tape)

END OF SIDE ONE  
BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist. We are now beginning the continuation of our interview with David Froelich, who came from Germany in 1939 when he was eleven and we have now relocated to his terrace outside his daughter's apartment. So, continue. We are now in Holland.

FROELICH: Okay. We're now in Ninweigen, which is the terminus of the train ride from Germany. It is Sunday afternoon, October 1st, about 5:00 p.m., and we are still, we still have to face the Dutch authorities. I must explain, the Dutch had a strict rule of allowing only transients to enter Holland. They did not accept anyone else. Now, the trick was for us to get across the barrier. There were two gentlemen, two guards, one a younger fellow who was a spokesman, and an older man, a man about fifty. On the other side of the barrier was my father's cousin and a stranger, who was an agent of the HIAS organization, whose function was to see that we get across into Holland illegally. The spokesman asked for the ship's passage, the ticket, which was a fake passage. And he was a clever fellow, and he says, "I'm sorry, this boat has left already. You cannot come in." Obviously all of our hearts sank. Here we are, stranded. At this precise second the agent went into operation. He approached the older man. He whispered something into his ear, and they shook hands. And I saw that in the hand was money. He bribed him. And the older man nudged the younger man, and says, "Hey, Karl, you're mistaken." And he showed him his hand with the money in it. "That boat was delayed. It's leaving tomorrow." And the younger man seized the money, and he says, "*Ach ja*, Karl." And he says to my father and my mother, "I'm sorry, forgive me." And he opens the portal doors, and that's how we got into Holland. We went to another part of the railroad station and went on a train. We went into Amsterdam. This was still the festival of booths, which is a fall holiday for Jewish people. Now, we haven't had any meat in five years because we keep kosher, and there was no kosher meat available in Nazi Germany. Furthermore, we had to

have ration. Jews had less ration than non-Jews, but ration was for everybody in Germany. So our stomachs had shrunken and we were barely subsisting on basics. In fact, my sister Ruth had developed rickets because she was a baby and she didn't get the proper vitamins. We went to a restaurant, a kosher restaurant in Amsterdam, and we sat in one of the booths, the *Succah*, *S-U-C-C-A-H*, the *Succah*, which was supposed to, by tradition, eat during that week. And they gave us, of all things, roast duck, which is about the greasiest and fattest. Obviously, the next day all of us got sicker than a dog. The next day, Monday, my father went to the government, the authorities, and told them the truth. "Here I am, I am here illegally. I have no intention of staying. I have a visa to come to the United States. I ask of you only one thing: to give me a transit visa for thirty days. Tomorrow I'll get me a ship's passage on the liner and I'll be out of here." The official said, "Mr. Froelich, know ye your request will be granted for thirty days. But after thirty days, and if you're still in Holland, you're going to be shipped back to Germany." My father came home singing and dancing, "We have thirty days grace." The next day he went down to the agents. There was one street where all the agents were located. What he didn't realize was that everybody, every Tom, Dick and Harry, had the same idea. There were literally hundreds and hundreds of people who were wanting to get out of Europe before the Nazis march into the low countries. Well, one week went by, nothing. We have three weeks. Two weeks went by. Still no passage.

SIGRIST: Where were you staying during this time?

FROELICH: All right. My mother, my father and my sisters were in a rooming house which was paid for by the cousin. The cousin took me into his home. He had a little baby, a little baby girl who was about two years of age, and they were living in a very fancy section, almost like a suburb of

Amsterdam. And I walked every day. It was about two kilometers from where I was staying, to be with my parents all day long. Two weeks, nothing. The third week still nothing. Now we're really beginning to worry. We have seven days left. Well, in Jewish tradition, Tuesday is supposed to be a better day because in the Bible when God, the creation story, God on the third day didn't say "and it was good," it says "very good." And on Tuesday my father came home, he says, "I got good news and I got bad news." "So what's the good news?" "I got passage on a Dutch liner that's leaving from Antwerp." "What's the bad news?" "We have to travel on the Sabbath," which normally we don't do. But the first law of Judaism is to save life, and to preserve life you can violate any and all rules. My father pleaded with the authorities, please don't move until sundown. This is wintertime. Sundown is over, Sabbath is over about four thirty, five o'clock. "No, no, no, no, no. The procedure is very rigid. You have to report to the port in Rotterdam at nine o'clock Saturday morning. There will be a sealed train leaving with all passengers on board because we have experience that many times people will jump off the train while it's in motion and hide somewhere and stay illegally. To avoid that, we have guards on the train." Well, if you have to, you have to. We said goodbye to my father's cousin in Amsterdam Friday. We took a train to Rotterdam Friday afternoon. We checked into a hotel near the port. Saturday morning we took a taxi and went to the port. We sat there. Nine o'clock, ten o'clock, twelve o'clock, two o'clock, three o'clock. Four fifteen, about fifteen or twenty minutes before sundown they called us. We got on the train. Sure enough it was guarded. Every door had a guard there. And we rumbled along, jam-packed, all Jews, I suppose, all going to the same boat. The name of the boat was Veedam [sic: Veendam]. V-E-E-D-A-M. I guess that's it. Veedam, on the Dutch American line. It was one of the smaller boats, but for me, an impressionable eleven years, it was a huge boat. My father saw the crush of humanity, because there were not only the seven hundred

and fifty passengers, but about five thousand people who tried to get on illegally. Because everybody smelled this was the last boat. It was literally the last boat, that we took. My father said to my mother and to us, "Let's make a human chain, otherwise we're going to get separated." So he told me to lead, and I had my sister Lottie on one hand who was four years of age, and my mother was holding her hand, and my father brought up the rear, having my sister Ruth in his arms and a suitcase. Somewhere along there there was a suitcase. Somebody had a suitcase. I think I had a suitcase. At any rate, I went to the gangplank, and they were saying to me, not verbally but with sign language, "Go on up." And I saw only the cranes. I'd never seen a crane in my life before, and the hold being loaded and so on. So I went up and I let go of my sister in this huge crush of humanity. Now, in those days I spoke just German, nothing else. I knew our cabin number. And I got so impressed by what I saw I forgot about my family. I thought they were right next to me. The next thing, I turn around, no mother, no father, no anybody. I wasn't frightened, I wasn't upset. I said to myself when the boat gets going I'll go to the captain. He'll know how to, you know, get me back to the family. But my mother, obviously, was hysterical. She was very, very worried. She didn't know whether I was on the boat or off the boat. I walked around, and I started asking people for the cabin number. And people answered me in every language under the rainbow but German. In my course of wandering around I literally bumped into my mother, and she was so happy to see me she hugged and kissed me. Now, many years later, being a father and a grandfather, if this would have happened, I don't know, it's hard to say, but she really should have beat the living daylights out of me because I was wrong. I mean, I shouldn't have let go. My father, in the meantime, had a very unpleasant experience. There were stowaways in our cabin. They were Jews. And they refused to budge. It was them or us. So he went to the captain, or the person, or some authority, and they had to be forcibly removed. My father

cried, but there was nothing we could do. We finally left port, Antwerp, at about eleven o'clock Saturday night and we went to our cabin, and the next thing I know in the morning we were leaning left and right. I got up. I went on deck. People were vomiting and were seasick all over the place. And I got hypnotized by the water. This is the first experience. This business, up and down. (he gestures) And that's the worst thing that can happen. So my father was thinking he was doing me a favor. He says, "Let's go into the galley. I'll get you a hot cup of tea." Well, liquids is the worst thing you can do, so obviously I began to get sick myself. I was better off than most. I was seasick for a day or two. My mother was in bed throughout the whole journey. We got into the channel, and there were a lot of boats. We were supposed to go to Southampton to pick up more passengers, but there were mines all over the place. The German U-boats were after us. They did not honor the Geneva Convention of Neutrality. And so the captain SOS'ed for a British destroyer escort. When the Germans saw the British coming, then they let us go. They blew up a merchant vessel about a half a mile away from us, and we were given S.O.S. signals to pick up survivors. We couldn't pick anybody up. So we just anchored right there. We had a launch come from Southampton with the people and then went on board. And the destroyer escort guided us into the Atlantic Ocean. When we got into the ocean, then we had a new problem. The weather was bad. The Atlantic is notoriously known to be very stormy in October/November. So the captain told us it's going to change course without going to America, we're going to Halifax, Nova Scotia. We were changing course for a day or two, and then we ran into icebergs, and we had to change back again. And we got into severe storms. We were quartered. Our meals were given to us in our cabin. Two crew members were washed overboard. It was a horrible ride. Two people died of natural causes. We were supposed to be on the ocean seven days. We were on the ocean thirteen. On November 10, at six a.m. in the

morning, we finally made it into New York Harbor. I remember very vividly the impression, very, very elated sort of thing. I was choked up with emotion, even though I was only eleven. I saw all these skyscrapers lit up. It was dark. It was wintertime. Little jewels, little twinkles, and the Statue of Liberty within, I don't know, a hundred feet, the Statue of Liberty, heading for Ellis Island. And, um...

SIGRIST: Was your mother feeling better by then?

FROELICH: Yeah. By that time she was feeling better. My father was very nervous, and the immigration authorities came on board at Ellis Island. They were very not nice. They were all Irish men in those days. They were anesthetized, you know, so many people, and they were very not nice. They spoke only English.

SIGRIST: What did they do? What did the immigration officials do when they were on the boat?

FROELICH: Well, they checked visas on the boat. They checked visas, primarily, and documentation, on the boat. Otherwise they wouldn't let you, you know. And they turned you over to a health inspector. They used to quarantine people, although I know of no one on our boat who was quarantined. They may have, I don't know. I do recall that a lot of photographers came on board, and there was a pretty girl, a young girl in her twenties, cheesecake pictures, you know. Even though in those days skirts were long, she had skirts up to here. (he gestures) Very dark completed, long black hair, and taking pictures. Years later I discovered who she was. It was Hedy Lamar. I remember also that it was Friday. We were petrified. My father was so nervous. They called people in alphabetical order. My father didn't hear his name called.

SIGRIST: This is on the boat.

FROELICH: On the boat. So they said we have to wait till the end. That the boat was due to go to Boston to refuel and pick up food and go back to Holland. And we were afraid that we were going to be stuck on the boat and we wouldn't want to get off on Friday afternoon later than a certain time because of the Sabbath. Well, my father had an uncle who had a brother-in-law who was an American, who had a famous fish restaurant at Times Square. And he came on board at two o'clock in the afternoon, and he talked to the authority. I don't think he bribed them. He just explained. And he had a reputation. I mean, he was, like Toots Shore, that kind of a thing. He had a fish restaurant. I saw the restaurant. It was a fancy restaurant. At least it was fancy to me. And he got us off immediately. And not only that, there were a lot of people we befriended who got off the boat and went into those cubbyholes there in alphabetical order, pens, like. And that's where you get your luggage and you get final clearance, but we had no problem at all. I mean, we were off, once we got off the boat we were in Ellis Island no more than ten, fifteen minutes which, I was told later on, was very unusual.

SIGRIST: What do you think your parents are thinking, your father, specifically? What do you think he's thinking through all of this?

FROELICH: That's very difficult to answer. I really don't know. My father obviously was very concerned. He was always a provider. He was very concerned about what's the future that lies in store for him, especially for a man who never had to work for anybody else in his life. He was a boss all of his life. Not only was he a boss, he was a millionaire. And now he has to start from scratch. He was forty-five years of age, he had three little kids, he had

really no trade. He didn't know the language. He didn't know how to drive a car. He had no money. He was destitute. He lost everything. So what I would imagine, I'm second guessing, is, "What's going to happen to us? Who we're going to manage? What's going to be?" Now, we knew we were not going to stay in New York. This was already decided before. My mother had a married brother and two married sisters who had left Germany before us and relocated in St. Louis, Missouri. Initially, immediately, we were taken from Ellis Island by limousine, which I'm sure that happened to everybody that got off Ellis Island, to my uncle's house. He had a rented apartment in Washington Heights in Manhattan. We stayed there for a week. My father also had another relative who lived in Brooklyn who was very well off who had his own meat packing plant and there was, until I left America, and there still may be today, although this relative is long-deceased, but he had a son who may have taken over, I don't know, Froelich Meat Market. He had a small packing house on Hanson Street in Brooklyn. Well, he slaughtered and sold a lot of the meat. No, the other way around. It was slaughtered in East St. Louis, Illinois by Hunter Packing and was bought by my father's relative. And the relative wrote a letter to Hunter saying, "I will buy X number of sides in addition to what I normally buy if you get my cousin a job in the meat packing plant." And that's what happened. My father got a job, initially, at Hunter Packing in East St. Louis. My father was working from the first day. We never had any problems. My father got a job that was a very low-stationed position. He was a helper in the kosher department. Kosher meat had to be, put a seal into it verifying that it's kosher, and it's a very menial task. I mean, you just take a seal and put it into the meat. He got ten dollars a week, but he made a living of that. In '39 you could do that.

SIGRIST: I want to ask you a question. As a little boy in Germany before you got here, what did you know of America? What did you expect of America?

FROELICH: Good question. Yes, yes, yes. I knew about one thing. America is full of Indians. America is a wild country, cowboys and Indians. In fact, on my tenth birthday in Germany, from my uncle and aunt living in America, I got a cowboy suit. And I also remembered that my first motion picture in America was "Drums on the Mohawk," which scared the living daylights out of me.

SIGRIST: Because this represented the America that you were...

FROELICH: Right. I did not think of civilized life here. I thought it would be like it was in 1492.

SIGRIST: So what was it like being a little German boy in the middle of New York?

FROELICH: Well, New York was like paradise. I wasn't here very long. I was here a week. I do remember a subway ride, which was alien and strange to me. I do remember seeing 42nd Street and all the neon signs and all the hubbub and so on, but I didn't like it. I didn't like St. Louis when I first came either, and I was crying I want to go back, Nazis and all.

SIGRIST: Now, you said before that in Germany your parents had taken English lessons?

FROELICH: Yeah, some rudimentary English lessons. First of all, it was English English, not American English. Second of all, they only learned "yes" and "no" and "hello." Not enough to really speak.

SIGRIST: So you were in New York a week?

FROELICH: A week.

SIGRIST: And then you went to...

FROELICH: The HIAS gave us a railroad ticket on the, in those days New York Central, to go the long way. I took a two-day journey to St. Louis by train. That was also horrible.

SIGRIST: Talk about that trip.

FROELICH: Okay. We went to Grand Central and took a train to Buffalo. That was a good train, it was an express train, but it was an all-day affair. It took about ten hours. But we had to go from one railroad station to another. Now, we had American money that was given to us by HIAS to tidy us over on the train ride, but we didn't know one coin from another, and we didn't know how to speak. My father and I went to the heart of town looking for a kosher deli, or a place where we could get some kosher food and something to drink. And we spotted a kosher butcher shop that had the word *kosher*, *kasher* in Hebrew, and the guy spoke Yiddish, which is near to German. And when he heard that we were refugees, he gave us a lot of food free of, he wouldn't take any money, but he didn't have any drinks. So we went back to the railroad station. Now, the other thing about the railroad station is, the railroad station had a symbolical stuffed buffalo, life-size. My little sister Lottie saw that buffalo and she went hysterical. And we had to move away from the center of the station because of that. What we didn't know is that my sisters had contacted measles on the boat, and they began to break out on the train. And they were getting sick with fever on the train. Oh, we were looking for some liquid and we didn't know any words. We just pointed, and we got something entirely different than we wanted. We gave them a coin. We didn't know if it was the right coin or the

wrong coin. They gave us some coin back that had no significance whatsoever, but somehow we managed. We went from Buffalo. The train left about eight o'clock at night, and went all night long to Cleveland. And from Cleveland, this is really going the long way, I mean, the Pennsylvania Railroad would have been much quicker going from here to Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Indianapolis, St. Louis. But we went the long way, from Cleveland, all the way through Ohio, Indiana, and then down to southern Illinois, to Cairo, Illinois, and finally up to St. Louis. We got to St. Louis on a Friday again at three, and we were met by my mother's brother and sisters and they took us to a rented apartment, furnished, a one-room, two-room place. And my aunt went to the store and bought some food, and we were very lonesome and miserable. But my father got a job and I was taken to school, and gradually we acclimated slowly.

SIGRIST: Did your mother get a job?

FROELICH: No. My mother never worked. My father was the only provider. My father got raises and got different jobs and I went to elementary school and gradually I learned English. Relatively speaking I learned it rather quickly. My sister certainly did.

SIGRIST: Talk a little bit about being, you know, a German child in the Midwest, and what school was like for you.

FROELICH: All right. The Jewish children were very kind to me. There were several Jewish children who spoke Yiddish, and with them I was able to communicate.

SIGRIST: Was there a large Jewish community in this town?

FROELICH: Yes. St. Louis had sixty thousand Jews. St. Louis in those days was one of the top ten cities in America. I think it ranked sixth or seventh in the nation. We had seven hundred and fifty thousand people in St. Louis, which is about double of what it has today. And it was a white town, not a black town like it is today. And the Jewish community was still living in the city proper. Today, there are many Jews in St. Louis but there isn't a single Jew in St. Louis city, just like there isn't any white people in St. Louis city. They all live in St. Louis county, which is the suburbs. St. Louis is an oddity. It is the only city in America with no county. Washington also is like that, but every other city has a county. St. Louis county is not St. Louis city. It's separate, and University City and Clayton and La Dieux and Webster Grove and Ferguson and fifty other suburbs are St. Louis county, and St. Louis county has about a million and a half people today.

SIGRIST: So there were other Jewish children in school?

FROELICH: Many, many. I went to a very lousy elementary school in a poor section of St. Louis.

SIGRIST: What grade did they start you off in?

FROELICH: Fifth. I repeated the fifth grade because they felt that's where I belonged. The regular teacher was not there. She was recovering from an automobile accident. We had a sub-teacher. She just left me alone. She didn't do much of anything. And when the regular teacher came back, who was a very strong disciplinarian but a very kind woman who befriended me, like my teacher in Germany, she was very rough on me in some ways, she demanded a great deal, and it did me a lot of good. Miss Farrell, may she rest in peace, and I became friends in adulthood. She and I met when I became a teacher myself, and we had many

reminiscences. She never married because in those days, by law, it was forbidden for married women to be teachers. Only single women were allowed to be teachers.

SIGRIST: How did you learn English?

FROELICH: She helped me a lot, Miss Farrell.

SIGRIST: How did she help you?

FROELICH: By demanding that I pay attention. By repeating over and over. She gave me a lot of private lessons after school, but an awful lot of time with me individually on a one-to-one. She used to make an example of me. This was good for her, vis-à-vis the other kids that if I didn't respond because I didn't understand, she would grab me by the ear and drag me to the blackboard. She was also instrumental of my becoming a history buff because she was basically a major in history.

SIGRIST: Did you experience any anti-Semitic behavior at this time?

FROELICH: None.

SIGRIST: Again, because of the Jewish population?

FROELICH: No, no. None. This was an integrated Jewish, non-Jewish. Not black, white. There were no blacks. I had no contact with blacks for many, many years thereafter.

SIGRIST: But was it almost odd to you that there was no anti-Semitic attitude?

FROELICH: No, no. It was not odd, no. Because I did not...

SIGRIST: Because you grew up in an environment like that.

FROELICH: Yeah, but I didn't experience it in Holland, and I didn't see any anti-Semitism in New York. And I recognized already then that I was in a free country.

SIGRIST: Talk a little bit about your mother in St. Louis.

FROELICH: My mother was a homemaker, and she was...

SIGRIST: Did she adapt to America easily?

FROELICH: She adapted to America. What she didn't adapt to is having to do all the work herself, because we had maids and butlers in Germany, and now she had to do it all herself. We had a series of illnesses. I was the one who came down with a middle ear infection and I was very sick for about two weeks, oh, after a month we were in America. My mother became very ill. She had a goiter, an external goiter, and in those days they didn't treat it the way they do now. Eventually she had surgery and she, it was fifty-fifty. It was very tough. This was in '44. By that time I was a teenager and I dropped out of school, took care of my sisters. My father had a job in World War II he transferred from one department to another department in order to make more money. And he was in a cooler in the beef-boning department and his blood froze on him and he got diphtheria. And he was very sick, and he was in an isolation hospital. We had some very rough sledding. My father had to work from scratch. I mean, here was a fellow who worked with his head all the time, and now he had to work with his

hands. My father worked for others for nine years till '48. Then he went into business for himself again.

SIGRIST: Did your parents keep in contact with their relatives that they left behind?

FROELICH: Only until Pearl Harbor, then it was impossible. Once America got into the war, we were cut off. Yes, and in fact I have a letter in my possession of my father's sister, who had wanted to come to America but somehow we couldn't raise the necessary money to get a visa and the American Consulate in Hamburg was not as nice and as generous as the one in Stuttgart, and they didn't get it, and they perished. This is the only family that there were no survivors. Even those uncles and aunts who did not come out had children who came out ahead. That's another thing. My mother was the instrument here. My father was very keen on my leaving ahead of the family in what was called a children's transport and the one that I was supposed to go on perished. My mother says we were going to survive. We're going to die together or live together. She was dead right. Now, I have one friend who now lives in Atlanta who was in a children's transport and he survived because he was taken to France and nuns were able to hide him and some others. But he was cut off from his family throughout the whole war and he didn't get liberated until 1945. His family got out in '40 and came to America. Between '40 and '45 his mother and father and sister were in the United States and he was in France, and they didn't know whether he was living or dead. But most cases the children, transport children did not survive, and they perished. Now, the only thing that perished as far as we were concerned was our lift. The lift was confiscated by the Germans once they marched into Rotterdam.

SIGRIST: The lift, you're talking about your possessions?

FROELICH: Our possessions. That was down the drain.

SIGRIST: So basically you had just your suitcase.

FROELICH: That's right. What happened was that people who were Polish Jews and Russian Jews who had come to St. Louis in the '20s and '30s and had made it, you know, established themselves. One donated a chair, one a bed, a table, a dresser. That was our first furniture until our father was able to have enough money to buy his own stuff. We lived in a rented furnished apartment six months, then we went into an unfurnished apartment which we lived for ten years. And by that time my father was in business for himself and, uh...

SIGRIST: You were on your feet.

FROELICH: Yeah.

SIGRIST: In our final few minutes...

FROELICH: All right. The other thing is that my mother and father both learned English sufficiently to be considered fluent, to be able to write it and read it and speak it. My mother learned how to type on the English typewriter and was able to type letters. My father had to know English in order to use it in his work. Ironically, when they retired and emigrated to Israel, over the years they lost it. My mother, of course, can't speak at all today. She is completely vegetable. But my father communicates with us today in German. Now, with my wife, he still communicates in English, but his English has deteriorated greatly.

SIGRIST: Did your parents ever want to go back to Germany for any reason? Maybe not to move, but even to just visit?

FROELICH: No, no, no. In fact, my father had the opportunity, because I had the opportunity to go visit. He refused. What my father had wanted to do was to come back to America, but there was no chance for doing that.

SIGRIST: I see.

FROELICH: He had very good years early on in Israel, but as he got older things got worse for him, and he's still thinking and dreaming of how, he doesn't realize that things have changed in America drastically. There are dichotomies in my own mind. Financially, of course, had I stayed, I would have been much better off than I am today.

SIGRIST: Had you stayed in Germany?

FROELICH: No, no, no. I'm talking about, I'm not talking about Germany. I had never wanted to be in Germany or wanted to go back. I have gone back to Germany a lot to visit.

SIGRIST: I'm sorry, had you stayed in the U. S.

FROELICH: Yes, had I stayed in New York or in St. Louis. Had I stayed in St. Louis, I would have easily become a high school principal within a short five or six years. Had I stayed in New York because of my political affiliation, I would be a member of Congress today. There's no doubt about that. As it is, I am a publicly elected official. I've been the Chairman of the Democrats Abroad in Israel. The democratic party and the republican party have branches in foreign countries and there the democratic party are treated

like states. And a country chair is like a county chair. I've been to three democratic conventions, the last three as a delegate. We have representation at national headquarters in Washington, and I've become very active in that. I became an educator. I have a high school principal's license. I've served as a chairman of the department, as an assistant principal, for a short time in Israel as a principal, although I don't like administration in Israel. I just finished as a classroom teacher after thirty-five years. I have my own newspaper, English newspaper, local paper in Rehovot today. I'm very active with our City Hall as a volunteer. I've been a playwright. Uh...

SIGRIST: You've had a busy, full life.

FROELICH: Yeah. And I hope I'm not through yet.

SIGRIST: No. No question about that. Well, my final question to you is the same question that I ask everybody and I think the answer is sort of obvious, but I'll ask it to you anyway. Are you glad that your parents made this decision to come to America?

FROELICH: Absolutely. No doubt about it. If they hadn't there for the grace of God I would be exterminated along with the six million, no doubt about it. Another fair question of me is, and I'll give you a definitive answer on that, "Are you glad you emigrated and left America and went to Israel?" And that is, while it's definitive, I would say yes. It requires an explanation. The answer has to be yes, because I have no opportunity to do it any other way. When I came to Israel I had a year where I took a leave of absence and I could have come back. But we burned our bridges, and it's humanly impossible for me. It's not true in the case. In every case there are many people who came to Israel and went back. In my case it's just not possible.

The Israeli government is not as generous as the American government, and I cannot take with me, or can get my pension from Israel in America, as I can get an American pension in Israel. I'm a dual citizen and I take my citizenship, my American citizenship very seriously. When people ask me, this is different from most of my colleagues, I say, "I'm an American living in Israel. German-born American living in Israel." Most of those people like myself who have come to America and moved to Israel and been there permanently, will say, "I am a former American. I'm an Israeli." I don't look at it that way. I am first and foremost and always and last an American. I'm thoroughly ingrained. I have vested interests in this country. I have great love for this country. I know this country saved my life. I am proud of being a Jew, and I live in Israel. I'm not completely in concert with what's going on in Israel, politically or otherwise, but I've learned to live with it and deal with it, and I've found a niche in Israel. I was a little fish in a big pond here, and I'm a big fish in a little pond there. And for the rest of my days I do not want to live anywhere but in Israel, hoping to come and visit America as often as I can. I have at this particular moment my children and my grandchild here, in addition to other close relatives. Many friends, many fond memories, and I hope America will hear from me in the not-too-distant future. I still have high hopes of peddling my play. My play has not been produced. While the subject matter of the play is very traumatic, what happened to it after it was completed is equally traumatic. I've had it sold three times and yet, at the last minute before it was staged, something unusual happened and it was not staged. I'm hoping that in the near future it will be staged. I have not given up hope. I know that the children of Israel wandered in the desert for forty years. Menahem Begin waited to become Prime Minister of Israel for twenty-nine years. I'm only in my thirteenth year since I've written it, so I keep plugging it.

SIGRIST: Well, we certainly wish you, you know, a lot of luck with that, and I want to thank you for having Brian and I out here and for your time.

FROELICH: I want to thank you for listening to me and coming out here, and I hope that whatever little I said, or a lot I said, will have some use to your work and to the people who will hear what I have to say.

SIGRIST: I'm sure it will. Thank you.

FROELICH: I do want to say, in closing, that people who come to these shores, if you really stick your nose to the grindstone and keep plugging there is room for everyone in this country, and it certainly is a Land of Opportunity.

SIGRIST: Indeed. Thank you very much. This is Paul Sigrist signing off for the National Park Service.

END OF THE INTERVIEW