

EI-655/WITZLEB

EI-655
OTTO P. WITZLEB
BIRTHDATE: MARCH 8, 1913
INTERVIEW DATE: AUGUST 23, 1995
RUNNING TIME: 1:01:27
INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.
RECORDING ENGINEER: SAME
INTERVIEW LOCATION: TROY, NEW YORK
TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: JOHN MURIELLO, NOVEMBER, 1995
TRANSCRIPT NOT REVIEWED

GERMANY VIA BRAZIL, 1926
AGE 13
PASSAGE ON "THE TUCAMAN" (GERMANY TO BRAZIL)
PASSAGE ON "THE SOUTHERN CROSS" (BRAZIL TO AMERICA)

SIGRIST: Good evening. This is Paul Sigrist for the National
Park Service. Today is Wednesday, August 23rd, 1995.
I'm in Troy, New York, upstate New York, with Mr.
Otto Witzleb.

WITZLEB: Witzleb. Correct.

SIGRIST: Mr. Witzleb came from Germany, was born in Germany,
and then went to Brazil in 1923, and then from Brazil
came to the United States in 1926.

WITZLEB: Correct.

SIGRIST: He was thirteen years old at that time.

WITZLEB: Right.

SIGRIST: May we begin by you giving me your birth date, please?

WITZLEB: Yes. March 8th, 1913.

SIGRIST: And tell me whereabouts [sic] in Germany were you born?

WITZLEB: In Bielefeld, Westphal, which is northwestern part of Germany.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that for me, please?

WITZLEB: Biele, B-I-E-L-E-F-E-L-D. Bielefeld. That's in the province of Westphalia, Westphal in German. Okay?

SIGRIST: There was a ship by the name of The Westphalia.

WITZLEB: Well, it could be. I don't know.

SIGRIST: You said it's the northeast part of Germany?

WITZLEB: More or less, it's, yes.

SIGRIST: What was the nearest, largest...

WITZLEB: Well, Osnabrück, Hanover and the other way closer to Hamburg.

SIGRIST: I see.

WITZLEB: That way.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me, tell me a little bit about the town that you were born in.

WITZLEB: Bielefeld is about a hundred thousand population. That's where the Dr. Oetker industry started with all your baking powders and stuff, was which, is world famous today all over the world.

SIGRIST: What was that name again?

WITZLEB: Oetker, O-E-T-K-E-R. And also there's a big university in Bielefeld now.

SIGRIST: What about when you were a child? What sticks out in your mind about the town itself?

WITZLEB: Well, of course, I was only comparatively small. I

went to school there for few years, naturally. And we used to walk. We didn't have any bus service. I had quite a hike, but like everything else, it was customary. Nobody thought anything of it.

SIGRIST: What was the industry in the town?

WITZLEB: Industry was a lot of small industry, like machinery in the line of embroidery factories and bicycle factories. And the biggest industry at that time was the weaving industry of linen. Bielefeld was known for, Bielefeld linen was known all over the world in those years. Of course linen is a different story today.

SIGRIST: As a child, when you were a small town, what was your favorite part of town? What was the place you enjoyed going to the most?

WITZLEB: Well, we had friends, of course. And don't forget I was born in 1913, and next following year the first world war broke out. So I had, and my neighbor of course we had playmates and friends, and, and that's about it. And then we used visit when the men, of course, went to war in 1914, and my mother was with my

sister and myself, she was by herself. She used to work making great big blankets for the army and stuff like. And everything in the line of coal and stuff you had to get yourself in a little wagon during the first world war years. And those were some of the items that you used to, once in a while you visited with friends. Food was hard to come by. Everything was rationed. So those are the...

SIGRIST: Let's talk about World War One. That interesting. Tell me what life was like during that time.

WITZLEB: Well, it was rough all the years. As I said before, my mother, of course, she got up at five in the morning, had to make some of these blankets for the army. And...

SIGRIST: Can you describe what the blanket was like?

WITZLEB: Well, it was a rough, big, heavy canvas stuff, like. It's pretty hard to sew by hand, but, hey. Everybody had to do their share, just you did over here.

SIGRIST: Was she paid for those blankets, or was that sort of her...

WITZLEB: That I don't know to be honest with you, because, of course, as I say, I was a school child, and my father was one of the first ones drafted in the world war. He was in it for four years. He almost lost his life because he got buried alive in Verdun, which is in France, of course. Those were the trench war in those years.

SIGRIST: What was your father's name?

WITZLEB: Karl.

SIGRIST: Karl. And...

WITZLEB: K-A-R-L. I even have the passport here, too.

SIGRIST: And what can you tell me about your father's family background?

WITZLEB: Well, my father's background, he actually came from Muehlhausen in Thüringen. And those years anybody, you know, it used to be customary for anybody to learn the trade, he used to go a "Wanderschaft," as they used to call it. So from town to town they trade, and

he wound up in, in Bielefeld. And I guess that's more or less where he met my mother. And...

SIGRIST: Can you spell the name of the town your father was from, please?

WITZLEB: Yeah. M-U-E, that's U-Umlaut, Okay. M-U-E-H-L-H-A-U-S-E-N. Muehlhausen. There are several of them. This is in Thüringen, which is not far from Erfurt. It's one time, Weimar. You probably heard of the...

SIGRIST: Weimar.

WITZLEB: ...the Weimar Republic. Weimar isn't too far from there, either.

SIGRIST: And Thüring is spelled?

WITZLEB: Thüringen. T-H-U-Umlaut, you know, I say U-E, because in English, R-I-N-G-E-N. Thüringen.

SIGRIST: And there was a German term you used, Wander...

WITZLEB: Weimar, you mean?

SIGRIST: No, no. You were talking about your father's wandering.

WITZLEB: Oh, oh. In those years when the, he had his master's degree. And over there it used to be customary when you first, you, you learn your trade for four or five years. It depends on what phase that you're in. And he used to wander from town to town and work here and there, but he wound up in Bielefeld as I say. And that's evidently how he met my mother there. She, she was working there for somebody else. I don't know who. (he coughs) So that how they met, I guess.

SIGRIST: You used a German term, though, to describe your father's wandering. You said Wander...

WITZLEB: Oh, Wanderschaft.

SIGRIST: Yes. Can you spell that, please?

WITZLEB: Yeah. W-A-N-D-E-R-S-C-H-A-F-T. Wanderschaft. So that's a wandering. Okay.

SIGRIST: I see.

WITZLEB: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What was your father's trade?

WITZLEB: My father was a master mechanic. Meister. I can prove it to you in the passport of here. Because when they left Germany, of course, it all has to be registered as to what his trade was. And he, in order to become a Meister over there which is a master of your trade, you have to go to a lot of examinations. In other words government examination before you're entitled to use that title. In other words you could hire somebody else to work for you as long as they had their master degree. Otherwise you couldn't do this. So he learned this trade, as I say, from town to town, and he wound up over there in Bielefeld, in Koch Ardler Nähmaschin, which is the firm, K-O-C-H, Koch, Ardler, A-R-D-L-E-R. And Nähmaschin is like Singer over here, right? And he was a master mechanic over there on the machines.

SIGRIST: What was your father's personality like?

WITZLEB: Well, he died very young. Yeah, a very pleasant guy. Very good looking, I'd say. Thank, fortunate for me.

(he laughs) To a degree, my opinion. Like everything else, a lot of things are people's opinions.

SIGRIST: What were the, what sorts of things did your father enjoy doing when he wasn't working?

WITZLEB: Well, as I say, being comparatively small, of course, he liked his glass of beer, too. As far as that goes, and he used to get together with his buddies, you know. He'd maybe go out to, to a play, which in Europe... (he coughs)...pardon me, a little horse.

SIGRIST: Would you like to get a glass of water?

WITZLEB: I'll be all right. How about you? You want a glass of beer?

SIGRIST: No, no, I'm fine. I'm fine.

WITZLEB: (he laughs) Okay. No, it's just, anyway. So, and then, we used to go plays over there. You have like your plays in here, you know, in Saratoga, and, and saw different plays. I used to go there, which in Europe, of course, are much more common. "Theater" (he pronounces it as a German word) theatre, in other

words. Okay. Every town...

SIGRIST: So your father enjoyed...

WITZLEB: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

WITZLEB: That part, that's a family affair. (he coughs)
Whenever you used to go to some, where they have
dancing and stuff like that, you know. It's a family,
a family restaurant, like. So that's about all I
remember as far as that. Because as I say, the next
year after I was born the war started already, in
1914. Then, of course, all those years I was with my
mother and sister.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me any stories that your father might
have told later about his experience fighting...

WITZLEB: Well, the one that I remember distinctly is because,
as I mentioned before, he was almost buried alive.
His buddies just got him out. Evidently, explosion
there, caved in the, the (unintelligible), and,
what...

SIGRIST: The trench?

WITZLEB: The trenches. (he coughs) And he got buried alive, but his buddies just got him out alive. He was, used to be a very good cook in the service, too. I remember him mentioning that, so that's about all.

SIGRIST: How did your father, how did your father feel about his experience fighting? I mean, did he, did he look back on it with fondness, or...

WITZLEB: He never dwelled into it too much, not as far as I'm, I know. I mean, get with buddies together, probably talk about it. But otherwise, hey. There used to be a saying. You know, this was the Kaiser time in those years. The Kaiser said, come on, girls, we need more, more youngsters. So we need cannon fodder. (he laughs) That's what the women used to call, he used to say, which is the truth, actually, you know.

SIGRIST: Were there any stories ever told to you about your birth? Was there anything concerning your birth that you know about?

WITZLEB: As I say, I was born in, in Bielefeld. And they used to have the girls come in, what do they call them, now? "Hebamme." Midwife. (he coughs) Pardon me if I don't have everything in English, you know.

SIGRIST: That's all right. As long as you spell your German words, we're all right.

WITZLEB: Yeah. Yeah. Hebamme, you know. H-E-B-A-M-M-E.
Hebamme.

SIGRIST: And that means midwife.

WITZLEB: Midwife, yeah. So, and I was born on Göbenstrasse, and then we moved over to Edeltröperweg in Bielefeld, same town. And from there we actually immigrated then to Brazil.

SIGRIST: Were you born at home or in a hospital?

WITZLEB: I was born in a house. As I say with a, with a midwife you generally have that at, at home, see? Right.

SIGRIST: You talked a little bit about there being food

shortages and that sort of thing during the first world war.

WITZLEB: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Talk...

WITZLEB: Everything was rationed.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about that?

WITZLEB: Well, you know, as kids everybody liked candy, and you only had so much of this and so much of that. That's the reason I say it stuck in my mind, we had very good friends, my mother and, and her girl friend. Her husband was in the war, too, naturally, and they had a boy. And so they got, we got together every once in a while. She always, you know, as kids you got there, boy, they always had something special for you. And those are some of the highlights you remember, you know? (he laughs) So, yeah. As a matter of fact, even after we got over here, we were still friends. We wrote each other. I mean, my mother and, and her friend. And actually her kids came over here visiting America one time. We were over here.

SIGRIST: Were there any other kinds of shortages that you can remember other than food?

WITZLEB: Everything was shortage. Wood. That's what I say, you got to go a little wagon to get your coal, coal from the, from the depot. Railroad station. Everything was short. You were allowed just so much butter. It was a rarity, so to speak. If you were lucky, if you knew somebody, say, on the outskirts or a farmer and a little connection, you know, you go out and maybe get a couple of eggs or something like that, which is a rarity, too.

SIGRIST: Were the farmers in a better or a different position than people...

WITZLEB: The farmer is always in a better position, because, don't forget they produce their own stuff, and they had food they could trade with. You know, that's, use it for trade.

SIGRIST: Do you remember as a child seeing soldiers?

WITZLEB: Oh, I saw soldiers. Yeah. As a matter of fact all my

uncles were in it too. And even after the, the first world war, we went over and visiting my whole family, and one of my uncles. Well, he was in the second world war. So...

SIGRIST: But as a child do you remember seeing soldiers in the town that you lived, or...

WITZLEB: Well, yeah, you always had your, you had a "Kasserne" there, which is like an armory here, okay? You saw them. Bielefeld is a good size town. Right now it's over hundred thousand people anyway. (he coughs) So, I don't know about that part. Then I do remember going back and forth to school, because it was quite a hike, you know. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Were there any kinds of drills that you had to, to do...

WITZLEB: My mother came from Lippedetmal [PH], which was basically a garrison city. A "Garnisons Stazion," or "Stadt." Okay? That's where they had all your, your training, some of the soldiers in the trainings [sic], and so on. But I was never there and never lived there. I've been in there, but I've never lived

there. But as I say Bielefeld (unintelligible) like every city. They had their, their guards, you know, just like armory stuff over here. And that's about it.

SIGRIST: What was your mother's name?

WITZLEB: Marie.

SIGRIST: And her maiden name?

WITZLEB: Kuhlmeier. K-U-H-L-M-E-I-E-R.

SIGRIST: And what do you remember about her family background?

WITZLEB: Well, of course, she came from a large family. There was seven kids. She lost a couple in the war, her brothers. And some of them, there was a couple (unintelligible) was, has been visiting over here. But they're all dead now. As I say, one brother died in the war, during the war. In the first world war I'm talking about. And the other, a couple of the others, and one of the brother, when he and his wife visiting, and she married a barber. He had his own barber shop outside of Bielefeld. And Schildesche

which is a suburb of Bielefeld, okay?

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

WITZLEB: Sure. S-C-H-I-L-D-E-S-C-H-E. Schildesche.

SIGRIST: What about her parents? Were they living when you were living in Germany?

WITZLEB: Her mother.

SIGRIST: What do you remember...

WITZLEB: My grandmother. She was a very stately woman.

SIGRIST: What do you mean...

WITZLEB: And...

SIGRIST: ...define that for me.

WITZLEB: Well, in very good appearance, you know. Like, refined. Let's put it that way. (he laughs)
Features, anyway. I mean, I have pictures of her where she is really...

SIGRIST: Are there any stories that you remember of your interaction with your grandmother?

WITZLEB: Well, the one story I remember my, of my grandmother is this. I know my, from my father's side, we used to visit there. And they lived in Mühlhausen as I said before. And we used to go there once a year. And they were always too good to our kids. They had nice fruits and stuff up there. And they had a little play service, you know. They could cook and all that sort of stuff. So that's on my father's side. The other side is, we didn't, she was pretty busy with the other kids and all that stuff, yet, you know. But I do remember one thing, because when she died we were in Brazil. And this is maybe sound screwy to you but it's a fact. In that time you didn't have air, your mail service from Germany to Brazil took about four weeks by ship. So we finally got the notice she had died. She died at about I think it was sixty-three or eight. I forget which. Our clock had stopped in Brazil at the same time that she died. Isn't that an oddity? (he laughs) I mean, you know, maybe it's fantasy on my part. But my mother never, she swore by it. She said that something happened, and four weeks

later we found out about it she had died. It's not like airmail today. You get in a day or so, you know.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the house for me that you grew up in, or the apartment, whatever...

WITZLEB: Well, we stayed in, it was an apartment. You had several families in the house. And, of course, as I say, my father was in the war, you're lucky you had a flat. In those years you had your washing, certain wash days. Each family had a certain wash day. And you used to use the elbow grease in order to get the machine going. No power, you know. I remember that, helping my mother out with that washing.

SIGRIST: How many rooms did you have?

WITZLEB: Well, let's see. We had a kitchen, a beautiful dining room. Not dining room. Combination room. And a couple bedrooms. That's all I remember about that.

SIGRIST: Did you have electricity?

WITZLEB: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

WITZLEB: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Running water?

WITZLEB: This was in the city. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. We had all that.

SIGRIST: Is there a piece of furniture that sticks out in your mind?

WITZLEB: Yes. My father was very good in cabinet making and that stuff. He had built a, a place set for my sister. All in black, ebony, it was stained ebony color. It was fantastic. Beautiful.

SIGRIST: Place set, meaning like child's furniture...

WITZLEB: Yeah, and also he had big furniture. But he didn't make all of that. But he was very good, and picture making. He was very good at carving and all that stuff as a hobby. That wasn't his profession. But as a hobby he liked to do that. Outstanding furniture,

yeah.

SIGRIST: Were there any other pieces of furniture in the house that he had made?

WITZLEB: No. Mostly just particular set. And, of course, when you went to Brazil, you had to sell it all unfortunately.

SIGRIST: You mentioned a sister. Is she younger or older?

WITZLEB: My sister was a little better than four years older.

SIGRIST: And what was her name?

WITZLEB: Olga. O-L-G-A.

SIGRIST: So was it just the two children?

WITZLEB: Just the two. Both of us.

SIGRIST: Just the two.

WITZLEB: Yeah. And she's gone. I'm the last of the Mahicans, so to speak. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: Tell me about, you mentioned school, walking to school. What else do you remember about going to school in Germany?

WITZLEB: Well, school was very good I thought. Of course, in Germany you had your class and you joined in the singing. You know, you selected the, you had a decent voice, say, the good Lord have you a decent voice, so you use it, you know. And that was very nice.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any of the songs that you learned in Germany?

WITZLEB: Oh, oh, God. I can, songs from way back. Oh...

SIGRIST: Can you sing one of the songs that you learned...

WITZLEB: Oh, I don't intend to sing right now with a sore voice. But I have all kinds of German music here. And what I do, I make a lot of tapes for friends of ours, you know. And I got a lot of friends around here that are from the old country. And the Hallelujah Chorus. Today the youngsters have a different taste in music that we had. But even some

of the oh, you know, every generation has their cycle, so to speak.

SIGRIST: But music was important in school?

WITZLEB: Oh, absolutely. We had, at least once a week we had an hour of music, and I belonged to the singing group, as I say.

SIGRIST: And you won't sing us a German song on tape?

WITZLEB: No, I can't right now.

SIGRIST: You're sure. All right. What else did you learn in school? What other subjects?

WITZLEB: Oh, just about every basics. Of course, mathematics and all the stuff, you start in with that.

SIGRIST: What about languages?

WITZLEB: Well, I was too young for that. But in Europe every, after fourth grade it's a must. You got to learn a foreign language. Everything was so close together, you know.

SIGRIST: Could your parents read and write?

WITZLEB: Oh, absolutely. Sure, as a, as a master mechanic, my father don't write? Oh, everybody could read and write. Sure.

SIGRIST: How did your parents approach education?

WITZLEB: They were a hundred percent for it. Hey, even myself, my kids, they're all college people.

SIGRIST: But your parents...

WITZLEB: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...that was important to them?

WITZLEB: Absolutely. Even in Brazil they sent me to a private school. Of course, German, it was a German school but naturally I had to learn Portuguese, which was the natural language, or else, you know. But they had exchange professors from Germany over there. I had a teacher who was, came from Hamburg. A terrific guy.

SIGRIST: Tell me about religious life in Germany. What religion were you?

WITZLEB: Well, religion is very simple in Germany. Actually it's a better system than they have here. The state donates to a certain amount. In Bielefeld you have Catholic and Protestant. I'm Lutheran, by the way. My wife was Catholic, actually. In other words, more or less the southern part of Germany is more Catholic, where the northern part is more Lutheran Protestant. The city is divided as such to say that you either belong to the Catholic or the Protestant. And there are certain churches in the city in the certain areas that you belong to. See? And they get certain amount of money from the state. A little bit. In other words it's not here that they're all private congregations. They had some help from, very little. But you had to go to certain (unintelligible). You belonged to a certain part of the city, that's the church you belonged to. You went to the Catholic one or the Protestant one. So that's the way it was.

SIGRIST: How did you and your family practice your religion?

WITZLEB: Oh we used to, hey, you know, I was confirmed over

here in Troy as a matter of fact.

SIGRIST: But in Germany how did you practice your religion?

WITZLEB: Oh, yeah, we used to go to church. Sure. With my parents.

SIGRIST: What about at home, how did you practice your religion?

WITZLEB: Well, I'll tell you. I don't recall too much of it. We all said our prayers and so on. And we were definitely afraid of Santa Claus. You better be good or else, you know. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Can you, can you describe for me how Christmas was celebrated at that time?

WITZLEB: Very much. The holidays in Germany are much nicer over here. And in the first place you celebrate for two days as you probably know. It's not over here, it's not so commercialized. And the decoration, the church services are fantastic. Even on Sundays you hear the old church bells pealing, which you don't hear over here. All they peal for is the almighty

buck, so to speak, you know.

SIGRIST: But in Germany describe how you celebrated Christmas for me.

WITZLEB: Well, we used to go Christmas Eve, in midnight "Messe." In other words "Mitternachtmesse." Midnight mass as you say. Oh, yes. We got dragged along. I was probably half asleep (unintelligible) we went with Ma and Pa. Sure, that's, that's customary.

SIGRIST: And then what would happen...

WITZLEB: We celebrated.

SIGRIST: You celebrated.

WITZLEB: Beautiful Christmas tree. Of course, in those years you still had the candles, you know. And my father and mother, hey, live Christmas tree, beautiful candles and decorated beautiful. Not only there was some food on there, nice cookies and stuff. (he laughs) That was good. They all, real old fashioned way.

SIGRIST: Were the children, did the children partake in the decorating of the house, or did you...

WITZLEB: Yes. Well, if you are old enough. But basically in my age category at that time Christmas was something special. We used to, Christ, you were in bed, you were waiting for early morning. We used to celebrate it early morning. And about five, six o'clock you're wide awake, you know. So it must be time to get up for us. And we generally sang a song, you know, for Christmas, to get in the right, proper spirit. And naturally, naturally the gifts, and the beautiful cookies and stuff. Hey. That's kids.

SIGRIST: Is there one Christmas gift that sticks out in your mind after all this time that you got?

WITZLEB: Well, of course, the beautiful cookies, naturally you long for, because cookies and candies are, were a little more on the tighter side over here, over there than they are over here, you know. So they're, especially around Christmas time you, you had the special cookies that your mother used to make. "Speculation," you know, those things. Very fine cookies.

SIGRIST: Can you spell Speculatien, please?

WITZLEB: Speculatien. Geez [sic], I better get my German dictionary pretty soon. (they laugh) S-P-E, Specu, C-U-L-A-T-I-E-N. That's as close as I can remember off hand.

SIGRIST: Were there other special foods that you would eat at holiday...

WITZLEB: At Christmas you had goose. In, in Europe, goose is something special over the holidays, you know. Like turkey and stuff over here, what have we. And...

SIGRIST: And how would your mother prepare the goose?

WITZLEB: Oh, different ways, and with apples and all that sort of stuff in there. And it was very good. So those are some of the highlights in eating as far as over the holidays was going. Holidays (unintelligible) celebrated.

SIGRIST: What were the other important holidays in Germany at that time?

WITZLEB: Well, "Finsk," I don't know what they call it over here. There are so many of them, you know, as far as religious holidays are concerned. Then, of course, May Day.

SIGRIST: How would you celebrate...

WITZLEB: (he sings) "Der Mai ist gekommen, die Bäume schlagen aus." You know, the May is came [sic] here, and the Bäu, the trees are starting to grow, and that sort of thing. That was always nice in the spring. You get an earlier spring over in Europe than you have over here, you know.

SIGRIST: And how did they celebrate May Day? What would you do on May Day?

WITZLEB: Oh, they had the May poles, and the dance around that sort of stuff. You know, and, and the terrain, mountains and the trees around there, and the big opening there. Oh, they had a big celebration in there.

SIGRIST: Tell me, let's see we did school, food. Tell me why

your family went to Brazil.

WITZLEB: Okay. In 1923 were the inflationary years. And from hour to hour the money values used to change. And I'd get money, I'm a millionaire, billionaire even. It's just over printed, you know. And, as I say, maybe one hour for say, the price of the piano you were lucky to get a loaf of bread for it. That's how quickly it changed after a while.

SIGRIST: Why did that happen?

WITZLEB: Why did it happen? I don't know, but, anyway it happened, that's for sure. And the money constantly changed continuously. So my father was working in this embroidery factory. And this fellow that owned it decided he's had it, so he decided to immigrate to South America. He had this embroidery factory. And my father set up all the machinery. He took care of everything. He was a master mechanic. He was very good.

SIGRIST: Did your father go first?

WITZLEB: No, no. We went together.

SIGRIST: I see.

WITZLEB: On The Tucaman, which is out of Hamburg, and used to partial freighter and partial passenger.

SIGRIST: What was the name again?

WITZLEB: Tucaman. T-U-C-A-M-E-N [sic]. That's the ship.

SIGRIST: T-U-C-A-M-A-N.

WITZLEB: M-E-N.

SIGRIST: E-N. Tucaman. And that's the ship that you took from Hamburg...

WITZLEB: From Hamburg...

SIGRIST: ...to Brazil?

WITZLEB: ...to Santos.

SIGRIST: Santos.

WITZLEB: Santos. Which is below Sao Paolo. It's fantastic.
(unintelligible) a few years ago they went and
expanded...

SIGRIST: Tell me about what you remember about getting ready to
go to Brazil.

WITZLEB: Well, of course, as I say, as a kid, what the heck,
you do as your parents do. You figure a lot of things
that we really enjoyed having you had to leave,
because (unintelligible), and don't forget this guy
had his factory going. So he had to get that stuff
in, you know. But...

SIGRIST: Did you, did you as, you ten years old at that time.

WITZLEB: Right.

SIGRIST: Did you have any concept of what Brazil was and where
it, and what did it mean to you?

WITZLEB: At that time none whatsoever. As a matter of fact when
we left Hamburg we went by way of, of course, we went
through the North Sea. And being the freighter made a
couple of stops. As a matter of fact we stopped in

Lisbon, Portugal. And that's a rough area through there. You go through the North Sea down that way. And being a freighter and all that, it's not that huge. It's not like a, you know, a big cruise ship like that. I know one thing. They killed a live cow aboard ship for meat. I remember watching that. You just take, boom (he gestures) on the head, and that was it, you know. I mean that's the highlight aboard ship, you know. And, of course, when the equator, when you cross the equator you got to initiate it. So every...

SIGRIST: What does that mean?

WITZLEB: ...get a big certificate. Anybody who goes across to the equator through they have a ceremony. That, I still got my formula here, my certificate, I forget what the name. Big, huge bird I was named. Everybody was named had their certificate. When you cross the equator you get initiated, okay? So anyway, I remember that, and I remember the cow aboard ship. Took us four weeks to get to Santos.

SIGRIST: It took four weeks from Hamburg to, and it stopped in Lisbon...

WITZLEB: Lisbon.

SIGRIST: ...did it stop anywhere else?

WITZLEB: No, not to my knowledge. That was it. But that's quite a ways over there. Of course, being a freighter, you know, they don't travel as fast as some of the others.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how much it cost to go to Brazil?

WITZLEB: That I couldn't tell you. I could show...

SIGRIST: Probably trillions of marks, you know...

WITZLEB: I could show, oh.

SIGRIST: ...with that inflation.

WITZLEB: At that time, I don't know because actually the guy that owned the factory, he sponsored us, because he wanted to get my father along to set up the machinery and stuff when we got to Brazil, see. Which is what happened.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: Well, tell me about life in Brazil and, and what that was like. You were there three years you said.

WITZLEB: Right.

SIGRIST: And I'm...

WITZLEB: Well, let me say this. We got into Santos finally. And then this ship, the machinery up to Sao Paolo. You probably heard of Sao Paolo. (unintelligible) Biggest city in the world, till they're over thirteen million people in there today. (he coughs) So they set up the, we, we stayed overnight in Sao Paolo till they finally found a place to, you know, for the family. And they got a place to set up the factory. It takes, it takes a few days. And embroidery, well, as I say, Sao Paolo is the most industrial country in Brazil, in, in South America. That includes Buenos

Aires as well. Fantastic city. So anyway, they said, they set up the machinery, and everything was working fine for a while. And then this guy who owned the factory started to drink. You know, because of the heat. Although Sao Paulo is considerably higher than Santos. Santos is the biggest coffee port in the world, by the way. You go to Santos, of course, today, we were there three years ago on a cruise. And I just wanted to see where I'd been there, all that, you know, because they took us to Rio and all those place. But it was fantastic. When we first immigrated there, there were maybe just a few docks and stuff. Today it's huge. Santos is huge, all the big buildings. Fantastic city today.

SIGRIST: So the man started to drink.

WITZLEB: Okay. The man started to drink and that's how he lost the business. And in those years, this was in '23 to '26, there was no compulsory school laws. In other words the kids could work, which made it bad for the adults, okay? And, of course, in those years in Brazil they had revolutions every so often. You know, it was customary. They still have them, but nothing like they used to. So anyway then the fellow lost the

factory. And it was hard for the adults to get another job. My father worked the odd jobs here and there. In the meantime the same year that we left Germany, my uncle and aunt came to the states, because they, she had, had an uncle over here. So, anyway, we were writing back and forth. So my uncle says, well, why don't you come to North America, okay, because everything was so lousy in Brazil at the time. It's a beautiful country and all that. So after a while that's what they decided. My parents decided doing that. It took quite a while. Then my father was taken ill.

SIGRIST: Well, tell me, before we get you to North America, tell me about what life was like in Sao Paolo.

WITZLEB: Oh, Sao Paolo, well, I went to a German school.

SIGRIST: Was there a large German community...

WITZLEB: Oh, oh. South America has a large Germ, I'll tell you what happened. In those years, the South American government let a lot of Europeans in provided they went into the, the rain forest and try to clear some of the rain forest. And some of those had to climb,

but the Europeans couldn't stand that. We had one guy, my God, he kicked the bucket in no time. And some of them actually went back. But they made, they committed themselves. That's how they got to Brazil.

Committed themselves for three years to help out. And I say some didn't, some of them just didn't make it, you know. Then, of course, with all your snakes and stuff and the, down in South America area there and the outskirts and, you know, in the jungle it's a different story. A lot of grass huts and so on. But we stayed, my parents stayed with this factory as long as he still owned it.

SIGRIST: You were in the city then?

WITZLEB: We were, we...

SIGRIST: You didn't have to deal with the snakes? (he laughs)

WITZLEB: No. No. Well, we saw, I saw plenty. I killed, I used to live in the suburbs of Sao Paulo. And I tell you what. I used to go to school in Sao Paulo, and we lived on the outskirts, and school started at seven o'clock in the morning because of the heat. And I had fifteen minutes to walk to the railroad station, San

Gaitano [PH], which is a suburb of Sao Paolo.

SIGRIST: What was it called?

WITZLEB: San Gaitano. Okay? And that's a suburb, it's all combined today. And they had to use a train to go to Sao Paolo. Then I had another ten minutes on a trolley before I got to school. And school started at seven in the morning. (he laughs) Let me tell you I had to get up early, right? But then, of course, school was over at one o'clock, then I went back by myself. And my sister and my, my mother, my father, they all worked in the factory that we came over with. So I had to prepare the food and so on, (unintelligible) get things going. My mother generally prepared a lot of things evening before, so it was just a matter of my continuing. She told me what to do, you know.

SIGRIST: Did you eat, what kind of food did you eat when you went to in Sao Paolo?

WITZLEB: Well, Sao Paolo, of course, beans and rice is a national dish. You don't see a meal over there without having beans and rice. That's, that's the

national product. Black beans and rice. It's very good actually. You'd be surprised, you can prepare rice in fifty different ways you wouldn't know the difference. It's all they have in China and those areas, too, as far as that goes, see. But that was one, that's always your basic meal. Then, of course, my mother prepared a lot of German dishes. If you can get the food. (he coughs)

SIGRIST: How would she get European food?

WITZLEB: Well, well, European food. We, we lived with a family outside there, they were Spanish. And they were very nice people, and they had an invalid there, he couldn't, he had too well to see too well. As a matter of fact, I took him every day to an institute, or a couple of times a week anyway, you know. It's funny how things happen in life. You think life is stranger than fiction. Believe me it's the truth. So anyway...

SIGRIST: What were some of the other differences between life in Sao Paulo and life in Germany?

WITZLEB: Oh, well, for one thing, the majority as I say, there

was no compar, no compulsive school over there. So the kids, they hardly knew to write and think. And my, we lived on the outskirts, and they knew I could add and subtract and all that. And in the store that we used to trade in, they got me over there every once in a while to figure out their accounts, because they couldn't do it themselves. I mean, some of the elderly could, but, so I helped out there occasionally, you know.

SIGRIST: What about the language difference?

WITZLEB: Of course, well, the only language in Brazil is Portuguese. The rest of South America is Spanish. So you had to learn that first. I'll never forget, because I went to the German over there, naturally you had to learn Portuguese. But we had an exchange teacher from Hamburg. He was a hell of a nice guy, you know. And he problems, too, learning the language first. But those kids, you know, hey, bend over, you didn't have your lesson. They didn't mind using a little shoe there on your rear end there. So not like over here. Of course the kids get away with murder over here.

SIGRIST: Did you parents learn Portuguese?

WITZLEB: Yeah. Of course, as kids you pick it up faster. My sister and I used to be able to talk it fluently. But then if you don't keep it up you forget it. You know, I remember a few choice words and that's, that's about it.

SIGRIST: Do you remember if the people that were employed in the embroidery factory, were they Europeans or were they natives?

WITZLEB: Most of them were European descent. And as I say my mother worked there, my sister worked there, and I, even I punched holes, you know, for the embroidery stuff. I helped too occasionally when I had the time. So that's how it worked out. And then they, I guess the guy (unintelligible) had a connection somewhere with a guy in the (unintelligible) he had a similar factory over there. But it was something of a novelty. Of course, only rich people could afford to buy stuff like that. Fine embroidery, it cost a lot of money, you know.

SIGRIST: What, when you talk about fine embroidery, what kinds

of objects are you talking about?

WITZLEB: Oh, pillow cases, oh, nice tables clothes. Very fine artistic work. It's done by machinery, but you got to know how to do it, too, you know. You guide it, so to speak.

SIGRIST: How did your father feel about the situation he had put his family into by moving?

WITZLEB: Well, what are you going to do? I mean, once you're there, you're there. As I say, our hope was get the hell out of there, come over here to North America.

SIGRIST: What did you know about...

WITZLEB: We were lucky.

SIGRIST: ...America when you were a kid? How did you envision America?

WITZLEB: Well, all you hear is about is especially in South America is North America is, they're the rich guy. And for years and generations, I mean, South American as far as North America were concerned, they were

junk, slaves in comparison, you know. Don't forget their livelihood over there and over here is the difference between night and day. At least in those years.

SIGRIST: So you had to...

WITZLEB: Of course, the rich, see, you had to in between. Either rich or poor, basically. No middle class.

SIGRIST: Yeah, there's a wide gap between the two.

WITZLEB: No middle class to speak of.

SIGRIST: You had, you had an uncle and aunt here in the United States?

WITZLEB: Right.

SIGRIST: Actually, you had two uncles and aunts, right?

WITZLEB: No.

SIGRIST: No? Just one set.

WITZLEB: My uncle and aunt came over here because my aunt had relatives over here. And she used to own a grocery store. See, in those years, in order to get over here even, you were responsible for the immigrant for a couple of years, so you wouldn't have to depend on your government here, see. So, that's a must, which I think is a good system. But now they run all over here. They come in here like, by the car load. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: So...

WITZLEB: And spend our money.

SIGRIST: So how did your father make the decision to come to America?

WITZLEB: Well, of course, my uncle and aunt wrote us, said, geez, I mean, this is pretty good, it's nice country over here. Even though at the time you were over here they had a big strike on. He finally wound up in the D&H [sic] which used to be a railroad over here. Delaware and Hudson...

SIGRIST: Were your uncle and aunt here in Troy?

WITZLEB: Yeah.

SIGRIST: They had come up to Troy?

WITZLEB: They had, well, that's where, that's where my aunt and uncle lived, see. They had a little grocery store over here.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about getting ready to leave Brazil?

WITZLEB: Well, it was quite a struggle, I tell you, as far as I know, because, as I said my father got ill there for a while, then it was postponed again, because they wouldn't let you into this country unless you were healthy.

SIGRIST: What was he ill with?

WITZLEB: I don't know. Doctor says he sees something in your eyes. As a matter of fact, when we came over from Brazil, as I mentioned before, my mother and my sister and I came. My father, they wouldn't let him come yet. He came a ship later, I think, about four weeks

or so later, because the doctor says there's something wrong with you or whatever. So finally they let him go anyways [sic], but he died. He was here, let's see, he died in '28 already.

SIGRIST: Oh, so you were only here a couple years when he died.

WITZLEB: That's it.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Do you remember getting rid of your, your household possessions or anything like that when you left Brazil?

WITZLEB: Well, what did you have in Brazil when you left? I mean, my God, you had few choice things, boxes and stuff like that. When you immigrate like that you leave a lot of stuff behind. You take the necessities and that's it. Because don't forget your cargo space is limited and you're allowed so much and that's it.

SIGRIST: Were you examined in, in Brazil before getting on the ship?

WITZLEB: Oh, you bet your boots. As a matter of fact, one time we had a passage once before, and they postponed it

because of illness. Not, not as I said my father. So they had to postpone it and he finally made it.

SIGRIST: Do you remember specifically the examination, what, what they were looking at?

WITZLEB: I know, all I know is he said his eyes, he said there's something wrong with, actually he died of, of consumption, my father over here. Remember Raybrook up here, years ago, I don't know whether you're familiar with New York State. Well, he, he wasn't up there. They used to be for, for, what the hell is it?

SIGRIST: It was a sanitarium for...

WITZLEB: Sanitarium, yeah. Of course, that's quite a long, yeah. But actually he died of cancer. I guess they operated on him in the back of the neck, and somehow or other it spread. (he coughs) So anyway he died in 1928.

SIGRIST: So you, your sister and your mom go first...

WITZLEB: We came...

SIGRIST: ...and leave Brazil. Do you know the name of the ship that you took from Brazil?

WITZLEB: Oh, sure. The Southern Cross. It used to be the McCorm, the McCormick Line. The banana line. (he laughs) Yeah.

SIGRIST: And, do you remember how your parents felt about your father not being able to join you?

WITZLEB: Well they didn't feel too happy about it, but what are you going to do? So it was a chance to come here. We had our tickets. You either go or forget it, you know. So my mother and two kids, of course, we made friends on board ship there. A few. There weren't too many passengers on, again it was, McCormick Line was basically a freighter. You had a few, room for a few passengers and that was it.

SIGRIST: Do you remember taking an object that was yours that, that meant something to you? Do you remember taking something to America that was special to you?

WITZLEB: Well, I wouldn't want to say. Well, I know thing. I had these short pants on, which in Brazil was common

because of the weather. And over here, and everybody around here were running around with knickerbockers. When you went to school he says look at that guy. And I couldn't talk any English, you know. So I said, "No comprende Ingles." And they said, and you start out in first grade, learn the ABC's. Says, look at that dumbbell. Of course, fortunately it was a short guy.

But kids can be very cruel, don't kid yourself. So he had it in for me for a while. School 14 over here.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about being on the ship going to North America?

WITZLEB: Well, it was, it was, that was a long ways, too. It wasn't four weeks, but it was, what was it now? I don't remember. Let's see. We left in August, we got into New York 26th of September. Oh, it was two, two weeks or better from, from Santos to New York. I got the passport...

SIGRIST: And does anything stick out in your mind about that trip?

WITZLEB: Well, naturally, being, being kids and so on, they had

so, so many adults up there that took care of us, you know. They like to play around with us kids and so on, so, aboard ship. There wasn't too much you could do being a freighter.

SIGRIST: Can you describe where you slept on the ship?

WITZLEB: Oh, you had, you had a cabin and all that, but it was nothing luxurious about it because, I remember one thing. (he laughs) Because every time you get up you had to go by the kitchen, you know. I never got seasick. Everybody else in my family got seasick. But you could get it easily when you walked by the kitchen. Have you ever been on board ship? Try it. It's beautiful. The ocean is gorgeous.

SIGRIST: Well, why would walking by the kitchen make you sick?

WITZLEB: I don't know. Whatever it is, and, you know, your waves and your ups and downs and all that, and that's what does it. Sure, it's you get seasick. Even your best sailing you get seasick. Oh, on a cruise one time went through the Panama Canal before we got there. We were outside the hurricane zone, and you'd be surprised how many the sailors got sick. It can

happen to anybody. But I haven't been seasick. I've done a lot of cruising already.

SIGRIST: Can you sort of map out the route of the ship for me from, from where you...

WITZLEB: Well, from, from, from Santos. I don't know. The shortest way to New York. That's it.

SIGRIST: But did it make any stops?

WITZLEB: No stops.

SIGRIST: You were just talking about the Panama Canal. Did you, was that...

WITZLEB: No. No, that was on a cruise.

SIGRIST: That was a different trip?

WITZLEB: Had nothing to do with this, where it coming.

SIGRIST: So the ship didn't stop anywhere that you can remember.

WITZLEB: No. No, it was, as I say, it was the McCormick Line.

There used to be two ships the size (unintelligible) Southern Cross and Panamerican. We came on the Southern Cross. I got the passport here. Can show it to you afterwards. (he coughs)

SIGRIST: Tell me, do you remember, do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when the ship came into New York?

WITZLEB: Oh, yeah, we saw that. But, I'm just trying to think, now. We got in around daytime, and we got shipped to Ellis Island, and that's, I never forget that for the simple reason that I had, you know, these crackers, saltine crackers. And it was mobbed on Ellis Island. And they gave us, as I say, being a kid, you know, hanging around there for hours, and before you get through and all that. I said, "Boy, they got lousy cookies over here." (he laughs) I never forget that. And the mob. And you, you know as a kid, Christ, you get rambunctious. You got to sit still, stay there and there, and a pain in keester [sic], or what are you going to do?

SIGRIST: Do you remember what it looked like on the inside?

WITZLEB: It was very mobbed and crowded at the time. But as I say in those years, the Europeans didn't have to come over any more. The only reason we came because we came from Brazil.

SIGRIST: And how long do you think you spent on the island?

WITZLEB: Well, we got there during the day, and by the time you get processed through there and everything else, then they put us on, on the train in Hoboken. By this time it's pitch black. It's night already, all right? And we had to go to Troy. So not being able to speak the language, you got a big sign on there with our name and destination on and my mother, my sister and I. So they put us on the train and the whole, shipped us up to Troy. That's the years we had a big railroad station over here. So we got into Troy about two o'clock in the morning. Fortunately they had the travelers agent saw you there. So there we are. Nobody there to greet us. We figured my uncle and Stan would be there, but they were never notified him that we, that we were on the way. They lived up here on Fourteenth Street at the time. So the first day the travelers aide put us in a taxi, shipped us up to where they lived. And at about two-thirty in the

morning we got there, rang the bell, my uncle came down, "Well, where do you come from?" I said, "We come from Brazil." I didn't say it. I was half, half asleep. So that's how it happened. The taxi, the guy wanted to get paid, you know. But you think they let them know beforehand, you know. Of course they didn't have a phone.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what kind of, you mentioned the processing that you had to go through at Ellis Island. What, what does that mean? What...

WITZLEB: Well, it, health, getting the health inspection and so on. And the kids, of course, just to keep us shut up gave us couple of these lousy cookies I just mentioned. (they laugh) And you sort of wait your time. And then...

SIGRIST: Were there medical examinations that...

WITZLEB: Medical examination. Oh, sure. Before they let you into the city. Otherwise you wouldn't have gotten off the island, see. Sure.

SIGRIST: What do you think is going through your mother's mind

during that process?

WITZLEB: Well, I, all I got to say, boy, you had to have a lot of courage. Your two kids in your hands, and not being able to speak the language and all that, as I say, just a big sign on there. Well, hey, that's life. Stranger than fiction, right? (he laughs)

SIGRIST: We've got about ten minutes left, and I'd like to talk about, you already started talking a little bit about going to school, and they put you in the first grade and you're thirteen years old...

WITZLEB: Oh, when we came over here. Yeah, I started up in school at fourteen over here. And as I say I went to this private school, so I had a pretty good education up to that point. And so they, not being able to speak anything I had to start in the first grade to learn the ABC's, you know. And they all, look at that dumbbell, he's still in the first grade. It's quite an impression. And then I had short pants on. Everybody's running around with knickers at the time. Look at that...

SIGRIST: Tell me about learning English and how you did that.

WITZLEB: Well, you learned ABC's. I graduated within a year and a half, or two whole grades...

SIGRIST: Do you remember the first word in English that you learned?

WITZLEB: Well, I wouldn't remember that. It wasn't money, I know that. Not as a kid. (they laugh)

SIGRIST: Do you remember...

WITZLEB: More, more candy, you know.

SIGRIST: Do you remember an instance where you were trying to say something in English and it didn't come out correctly?

WITZLEB: I tried to say plenty to my schoolmates there. But all I could say, "No comprende Ingles." What are you going to do, till you start learn [sic], you know. But I know one thing. The principal in school when I graduated, "Now, here's a little foreign boy. He's going just about a year, a little better than a year and he's graduating already." You know. (he laughs)

Hey, I don't want to brag but that's the way it was.

SIGRIST: Tell me about things that you saw when you first got to America that you had never seen before.

WITZLEB: Well, everything was new to me. Especially, don't forget, Brazil is the tropics, and over here is the difference between night and day. You had palms and stuff like that down there, and the heat, and everything else over here is entirely different. And don't forget, we got here in September. And it's quite a change in temperature, too, you know.

SIGRIST: What about your mother? Did she attempt to learn English?

WITZLEB: Oh, sure, she attempted. We, they went to night school over here in Troy for, for learn English. As a matter of fact, my pastor where I was confirmed at, his daughter used to talk [sic] immigrants English language. They had courses over here in high school. And my mother and my whole family, my sister, they all went to learn. So that's how they, how they picked it up and learned. And, of course, I went to

school.

SIGRIST: How long did it take for your father to get to America?

WITZLEB: Oh, I think he was about, if I remember three or four weeks later. On the next ship from the McCormick Line, he came over on the Panamerican. (he coughs)

SIGRIST: And then did he follow the same course? Did he have to go through Ellis Island and then up, or...

WITZLEB: I don't recall, to be honest with you, whether he did or not. I know one thing. Everybody was happy when he got here, you know.

SIGRIST: And what work did he get when he first got here?

WITZLEB: Well, he worked over here in, down here, Marshall Ray's, down here.

SIGRIST: Marshall...

WITZLEB: Marshall Ray down here used to be, used to make suits and pants and jackets and all that.

SIGRIST: Marshall Ray you're saying?

WITZLEB: Marshall Ray Corporation. They're out of business, but still run a store down there.

SIGRIST: And is that what he was doing?

WITZLEB: Well, he was taking care of the machinery. He was being a top rate machinist, see. Took care of the machinerics [sic] So then, of course, he got sick and died in '28 already. So that's life.

SIGRIST: Where, where did you live in Troy when you first came here?

WITZLEB: Fourteenth Street here with my uncle for a little while, because they didn't have any children. Just my uncle and aunt. So when we first came over we moved in with him for a little while. And her relation, or aunt and uncle, they used to have a grocery store across the way. So they were elderly couple already, so I helped out in the store. I gave them a chance to get around in their car once in a while, you know.

SIGRIST: Was that your first job here in America?

WITZLEB: That was my first job.

SIGRIST: Did you get paid for that?

WITZLEB: Well, I, put it that way I got a lot of candy anyway.
(he laughs) Nickel here, oh, they were good to me.

SIGRIST: What was the first job, paying job that you got here?

WITZLEB: Well, then eventually I worked in the brush company
over here, the Alpha Brush Company in north Troy there
for a short while.

SIGRIST: Alpha Brush...

WITZLEB: Alpha Brush Company.

SIGRIST: And how much were you paid for that?

WITZLEB: Oh, God, I was in the stock room at that. It was very
minimal, you know. Then after while I was lucky.
Somehow or another I met the guy, and he was running a
campaign to raise money for the Albany Academy for

Boys in Albany. And he hired me as an office boy. You know, to run errands and take the cash and the checks and stuff to the bank, and all that sort of thing. And I ran for about a year and a half or better, till they finally had enough money to build a new home in the Academy for Boys, which is still in existence. And, says, when that was over with, he says, "No, I got two chances for you. You can either start in the telephone company or you turn to a bank.

So what would you prefer?" I said, "Well, I think the telephone company has a better future to it." And banker, to get to be a teller maybe or whatever, you know. And I'm glad I did, because then I worked for Ma Bell for, for forty-six years.

SIGRIST: You worked for the telephone company for forty-six years?

WITZLEB: Forty-six years.

SIGRIST: Wow.

WITZLEB: And then they broke it up, the stupid things. You know, we said years ago, I said, that the worst thing they can do. You watch it. The public is going get

it right up the keester. That exactly what happened.

I mean, all your little Bell's are doing well, as far as that goes. So anyway, then I was a supervisor. I had my crews going.

SIGRIST: Did you ever, in the early years here in America, did you ever experience any prejudice because you were an immigrant?

WITZLEB: Well, as I say, kids can be rough. You know, as I say, especially in school days, and so on. But...

SIGRIST: Is there one instance, one story that sticks out in your mind about...

WITZLEB: Well, basically, you know, they heap all kinds of stuff on you when you come in there with short pants. And they says, geez, you must be from the Ozarks or some place, whatever.

SIGRIST: Did you become a citizen?

WITZLEB: Oh, absolutely.

SIGRIST: What year?

WITZLEB: Actually it was during the second world war. I was trying to get in to become citizen before then, you know, because, don't forget I worked the communication department. And during the war, you know, that's delicate. The F.B.I. comes around, I say, I went to the F.B.I., say, say if you want to have any information from me, I'm here. I'm available, you know. But the company was very good to me. Even though I wasn't a citizen, you know. I never forget, we had a hurricane I worked with a guy, also cable splicer at the time I was still working for a living. Even as a supervisor you worked, too, don't get me wrong. But anyway, we're down on Long Island, and we happened to work, Nassau has an air base down there. This was during the war, okay, and I wasn't a citizen yet. But I went down and helped this guy. And this guy happened to have a friend on the base. He was some kind of a colonel over there. So just for the hell of it I inquired, I said, "How's So and So doing?" About two o'clock in the morning he, there's the military police, "Who want to know where such and such a colonel is?" (unintelligible) We had a lot of crews from there because of the hurricane damage. So naturally, but everything turned out good. The next

day we went out again, the guy laughs himself sick. Said it wasn't funny, you know. You get up about two-thirty in the morning with the M.P.'s there. (he laughs)

SIGRIST: Did your parents become citizens?

WITZLEB: Oh, yeah. They all were citizens.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

WITZLEB: But as I say...

SIGRIST: Well, did your father even though he died so young...

WITZLEB: Not my father.

SIGRIST: But your mother did?

WITZLEB: My father, everybody. Sure. Everybody that was still alive. Oh, yeah. My, actually, my brother-in-law was in the service during the war, for second world war he was stationed in San Diego. And then finally he wound up in the Philippines. Oh, yeah. He was in the service over here. I enlisted. Tried to get in the

Navy. You know what? They didn't take me because I was partially color blind. In blue. Afterwards they came around, said we're looking for guys like that because he can make our camouflage better that way. I tell you, it's, it's not funny, but it is in a way, you know. Afterwards I said the hell with it, too late now. But the company was good. So anyway, finally I wrote to Taylor, was our congressman. I say, I'd like to get a hold of my citizenship. He says, delayed, delayed, delayed. You know how red tape is in Washington. So he finally got it. We got it in the, we all got to be citizens.

SIGRIST: We need to end. I just have one final question for you. Do you, how do you consider yourself? What, what nationality do you consider yourself?

WITZLEB: Oh, I'm American now. I mean, I still, hey, I don't regret being German. Don't get me wrong. I like, a lot of things I like in German, and they're pretty well educated people. And this holocaust business, forget it. That's a different generation. I never believed in that. But...

SIGRIST: But you think of yourself as an American?

WITZLEB: Oh, hey, I did very well here. I've travelled all over the world. A lot of places. And I've seen a lot of things. You're still the best, you still make the best thing, people, you start realize what they got over here. It's as simple as that. You go and see somebody in Haiti, some of those places, or even Australia which is beautiful, all that, or Japan, I've been all those places. You're still the best country here. But right now they're, they're dragging it down like nobody's business. It's a shame. It's terrible. You know, the elderly people are off better in Germany today than they are over here. They don't have to worry about medicare. At least you are taken care of. You don't see these elderly people laying around in the gutters over there. They're taken care of. As it should be. Take Denmark, take Norway, Sweden. They're all taken care of there. The richest country in the world, why can't they do it here?

SIGRIST: We need to end. We're just about out of time.

WITZLEB: Oh, that's all right.

SIGRIST: But I thank you for...

WITZLEB: I'm just chit chatting with you.

SIGRIST: That's all right. I thank you very much. It was a very interesting interview, and I hope you'll come and visit us at Ellis Island.

WITZLEB: I'd love to. Oh, after all...

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Otto Witzleb on Wednesday, August 23rd, 1995, in Troy, New York.
Thank you.