

EI-735

JULIAS WRAGGE

BIRTHDATE: APRIL 24, 1904

INTERVIEW DATE: MARCH 31, 1996

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE

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LEVINE: Today is March 31st, 1996 and I'm here at Ellis Island at the Oral History Studio with Julias Wragge, who came to this country from Germany when he was nineteen years old in 1923.

WRAGGE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Today Mr. Wragge is ninety-one, about to turn ninety-two next month.

WRAGGE: Yeah.

LEVINE: And I'm delighted that you were able to make this trip and that I'm going to be able to talk with you and record your story for the Ellis Island Oral History Studio. Okay, let's start, if you would say for the tape your birth date, the date you were born.

WRAGGE: The day?

LEVINE: Yeah.

WRAGGE: April 24.

LEVINE: 19?

WRAGGE: '04.

LEVINE: Right, and where you Germany where you born?

WRAGGE: Well, it's Bremen, but you want the outlying little town?

LEVINE: Oh, okay, what was the—

WRAGGE: Lesum, L-E-S-U-M, Lesum.

LEVINE: And Lesum was a village or a town?

WRAGGE: Yeah, a little village.

LEVINE: And that—

WRAGGE: That's where I was born, yeah.

LEVINE: And did you live in Lesum?

WRAGGE: Yeah, I lived there all my life.

LEVINE: Up until you were nineteen?

WRAGGE: Yeah, uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. What do you remember about Lesum? What do you remember when you think about it.

WRAGGE: Just we went to school there, you know, and see what I can think of. I went to all the grades there and we had pretty strict teachers. They liked to use the stick a lot. [Laughs] Even for little things, you know.

LEVINE: Like what would be a little thing that they might use the stick for?

WRAGGE: They see an apple or something like that from a farmer, you know. [Laughs] I remember that yet, yeah.

LEVINE: Were there a lot of farms in Lesum?

WRAGGE: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: What kind? Apple farms?

WRAGGE: No. Yeah, they had apples but mostly wheat and—yeah.

LEVINE: Wheat.

WRAGGE: Yeah, and potatoes.

LEVINE: And was your father a farmer?

WRAGGE: My father was a butcher. Butcher and a brick layer. In the summer he was a brick layer in the winter, September you know, people had all—they raised two, three pigs, people you know, and my dad go around and butcher the pigs and make the sausages for everybody. They all like my dad's sausage. So he had [unclear] and so and so, you know, had to be ready. Then he'd go there. They had to have the hot water already there and they put the pig in a hot water in the barrel you know. Then they turn the barrel over, let the water out and then they shaved the pig, pulled the claws off, you know, the toes. Oh, the people all like my dad taste of sausage and everything, you know.

LEVINE: Did you ever go with your father? Did you go with him when he traveled?

WRAGGE: Yeah. Yeah, then he says I want to help him, you know. "Well," he says, "you hold the tale." [Laughs] Yeah. That was fun, too, you know. But when I grew up, later on I liked to shave, too, you know.

LEVINE: When you say shave, you mean—

WRAGGE: Take the hair off the pigs, you know.

LEVINE: Oh, I see.

WRAGGE: See, in the hot water the pig was put little while, you know, and then take him out and put in the barrel, upside down barrel and start to clean it off and everything.

LEVINE: Did you shave it with a razor?

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WRAGGE: Yeah. No, dad's special knives for that. He had a special knife for he stuck the pig with, you know. First he hit him with a hammer, make him little bit unconscious before he stick him, you know.

LEVINE: In the head? He hit him in the head with a hammer?

WRAGGE: Oh, yeah, and then he stick him, you know. Take the blood out, and my mother was stirring the blood so it wouldn't get thick, you know. Use the blood for making sausage, you know. Yeah.

LEVINE: So he would travel—would he travel beyond your town?

WRAGGE: Just in the little town where we lived. Yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: What was your father's name?

WRAGGE: Johann.

LEVINE: Johann.

WRAGGE: John, yeah.

LEVINE: And what else do you remember about him, when you were a boy? Did you ever do things with him?

WRAGGE: Pardon?

LEVINE: Did you ever do things with your father? Did you go places with him or did you—

WRAGGE: No. My people never went away much on vacation or anything, you know, my mother and my dad. Only once I remember we went away to Hamburg, you know, for—and they stayed over there. Of course, we had the pigs, you know, and the goats here, too. Goats here to take care of. So she was the only one could milk the goat, so what we going to do now? I says to my sister, "You have to milk the goat." She says, "I can't milk the goats." So I notice when my mother milk the goats, she had apron on, you know, and it had a knot in the back, and while she was milking, the goat was chewing on that knot on the back of the apron, you know. So I thought my sister didn't want to do it, I'm going to try it. So I did and the goat stood all right, and this is the first time I did it, you know.

LEVINE: And you were able to do it?

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WRAGGE: Yes. Then when my parents came home the next day, "Where's that milk come from?" I said, "From the goats." "Who milked them?" I says, "I did." "Oh," he said, "now we can go away more often," you know. That was funny, you know.

LEVINE: So did you milk the goat after that? Did you—

WRAGGE: No, then my mother took over. Yeah.

LEVINE: Again.

WRAGGE: But it was some experience for me, you know. It was kind of fun for me, you know, because my sister wouldn't do it, so I had to do it.

LEVINE: What other experiences do you remember growing up? Any other kinds of experiences that stand out in your mind?

WRAGGE: No.

LEVINE: How about your mother? Talk about your mother. What was your mother's name?

WRAGGE: Margarite. Margarita.

LEVINE: Margarita, and what kind of a person was your mother? What kind of—

WRAGGE: Oh, nice.

LEVINE: What kind of a personality?

WRAGGE: She was a hardworking woman. For twelve kids—I mean, ten kids, you know. We had ten kids in the family. To raise all them kids was something. I often think about today, what a hard time the women had that time doing the wash and everything. They hang it out on the line, frozen stiff, you know, in the wintertime. I don't know how she did it, you know, could stand it.

LEVINE: Do you remember any food, any particular dishes that she cooked that you really liked?

WRAGGE: Oh, she could cook a lot of nice soup. Lot of soup we eat.

LEVINE: What kind of soup?

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WRAGGE: Oh, bean soup and peas and, oh, and she could bake the nicest cake, you know. The best thing, you know, you always got a cake for your birthday. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. What other celebrations do you remember besides birthdays? Were there any celebrations that had any kind of a ceremony or any kind of festivities that you remember?

WRAGGE: No. Celebration, let's see.

LEVINE: Was there a May Day?

WRAGGE: I don't think so. I don't know. Of course, we had a lot of birthdays, you know, from my mother's side or my dad's side, you know.

LEVINE: Did you have grandparents? Did you know your grandparents at all?

WRAGGE: I only know my grandfather when she was in a casket. She was laid out in the house where we lived, you know.

LEVINE: Did she live with you?

WRAGGE: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: Was this your mother's mother or your father's mother?

WRAGGE: My father's mother, yeah. That's the only one. I don't remember. Grandfather I don't know. It's before my time there, but I can see grandmother yet laid out all in white, you know, in the coffin in our house, see.

LEVINE: Was that typical, that the person be dressed in white?

WRAGGE: Yeah. Yeah, had a white cap on, everything, you know. I remember, you know.

LEVINE: Do you remember anything about funerals there? Were funerals—

WRAGGE: Funerals?

LEVINE: Yeah, were they the same as here or are they different?

WRAGGE: No, no. Funerals, I don't know. There's no funeral in my family, as far as I know. Only my dad at that time, you know.

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LEVINE: When did your father die?

WRAGGE: '26.

LEVINE: Oh, that's right, after you had come here.

WRAGGE: Yeah. He came home, too, from the people what he made the sausage and he carried his sausage machine and everything with him on a bicycle. He fell over on his head and that was it. Took him to a hospital right away, and he was unconscious for about three days and he had a lot of friends. That was on a Sunday. Everybody come and see him in the hospital. Then on Tuesday he passed away, so that was it. He was only fifty-five. He want to retire, too, you know. He didn't make it anymore. Yeah.

LEVINE: Were you a religious family?

WRAGGE: Pardon?

LEVINE: Was your family religious?

WRAGGE: Oh, yeah, we belong to St. Paul Church in Lesum where I was born, you know.

LEVINE: Was this a Catholic church?

WRAGGE: No, no.

LEVINE: What kind?

WRAGGE: Lutheran.

LEVINE: Lutheran, uh-huh.

WRAGGE: Lutheran, yeah.

LEVINE: Did you attend church regularly? Did you have any church festivities or celebrations?

WRAGGE: Oh, yeah. See, I belong to the singers, you know. On Christmas and so, we would sing in church, you know.

LEVINE: How did you celebrate Christmas?

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- WRAGGE: Oh, that was always something good, you know. It was a—
[coughs] Excuse me. In our house we had a room here and a kitchen here and another sitting room here, you know.
- LEVINE: All in a line.
- WRAGGE: And the only time we sat in this nice room holidays, you know. Or when the girls came with their boyfriends, he could sit in there and on Christmas, you know.
- LEVINE: And what would you do at Christmas? Did you have gifts?
- WRAGGE: Well, you know, all the gifts we had when were kids, we get a handkerchief. Dollar handkerchief with a couple of nuts in it, maybe an orange or so. That was it. Or maybe a little present or have it about a couple of days and it wouldn't run no more, whatever.
[Laughs] Yeah. No, we didn't make too much, you know. Yeah.
- LEVINE: Did you have a Christmas tree?
- WRAGGE: Oh, yeah, that's what we had every day. Yeah. Yeah.
- LEVINE: And did you decorate it?
- WRAGGE: Pardon?
- LEVINE: Did you decorate the tree?
- WRAGGE: Oh, yeah. Yeah, and the decorations stayed on until Easter and then take it off, on Easter. And we take all the old trees and pile it all in one place, you know, outside somewheres, and on Easter they whole village come together there and they would light the trees. Big pile, you know, and light that up. That was really, you know—
- LEVINE: So they lit the Christmas trees at Easter.
- WRAGGE: Yeah.
- LEVINE: And was that like a big occasion? Was that like a social occasion?
- WRAGGE: Yeah. Yeah, that was a special occasion that had to be that way. We boys, we had to go all around, collect the old trees, you know. Then we piled them all up and put a match to and all the people around there. A real celebration.

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LEVINE: Yeah. Did you do anything else on Easter? Did you have special food?

WRAGGE: Oh, we had a lot of eggs. Easter eggs, you know, boiled eggs. Colored them, you know, and everything.

LEVINE: And would you color them?

WRAGGE: I never did. The girls did that, you know. But on Easter sometimes my dad had company from his side of the family and from mother's side of the family they come together once in a while, you know.

LEVINE: Now, were you close to any particular brother or sister of yours?

WRAGGE: Pardon?

LEVINE: Were you closest to any particular one of your brothers or sisters?

WRAGGE: No, I liked them all. There was no difference there. I liked them all, you know. When the war come, all three of them killed in the war, you know. That wasn't so nice.

LEVINE: They were killed in the First World War?

WRAGGE: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, uh-hmm. Well, my mother had a time because, you know, when we were taken in, you know, outside France or some place, every week she had to make a package with little food in it and cigarettes and something and send it to the boys. You know, that was a tough job for my mother. We sent a lot of stuff to this country. No, I mean from this country to Germany to the people there. We sent a lot of packages, care packages.

LEVINE: This was during—you mean, during the Second World War?

WRAGGE: First war.

LEVINE: When you were in this country?

WRAGGE: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: You sent packages to Germany?

WRAGGE: Oh, yes, lot of care packages. There was always a time you had to be just so many pounds they allow to send. I can see my mother—my wife, yet, you know, take one out, put another one in, you know, to get the right weight. That was terrible that time.

LEVINE: So how was it decided that you would come to America?

WRAGGE: How?

LEVINE: Yeah.

WRAGGE: That I told you.

LEVINE: Yeah, tell it for the tape.

WRAGGE: What did I say? [coughs] In 1913, I was eleven years old then and my mother's sister came from this country, from St. Louis to visit, 1913. So I was eleven years old and her husband, my uncle, you know, he had two boys coming over from the other side, nephews. So my aunts says, "You have two coming over, I want to have one come over for my side," you know, that was me. Only I was eleven years old then, you know. My parents, "What you want to do in America?" you know. Of course, when the time came, she had it all settled, you know, sent me the ticket and everything. Of course, I was some great big young fellow going to America, you know.

LEVINE: What did your friends think about you going?

WRAGGE: They kind of—what you call it? Excited.

LEVINE: Jealous?

WRAGGE: Little jealousy, too, you know. That was something big, you know, young fellow like me going to America. So then was inflation that time, you know, and there wasn't much work that we had and then my parents, that time said it was the best thing to do, to go over, you know, and that's how I came over here.

LEVINE: Did your mother and father give you any advice about, you know, what you should or shouldn't do when you were leaving?

WRAGGE: No. No, they were really great that time, that I have a better life later on, maybe, you know. Well, I did, too, you know. There was much inflation there. You know what my last paycheck was when I left? Thirty-six billion marks, and you get a haircut for it or a loaf of bread. It was terrible. [Laughs] We got paid on Monday and we got paid on Wednesday and then paid on Friday, you know. Millions, just imagine. I forgot. I got it home. I want to show it to you. It was my last pay. I says to my mother, "Here, you want my

last pay?" She said, "Take it along for souvenir." That's what I did. She couldn't get nothing for it, anyway.

LEVINE: Do you remember what you thought about or how you felt when you were leaving for America? What did you expect or what did you hope for? What was on your mind when you were coming here?

WRAGGE: Oh, my dad says, "You only go there, you find a dollar princess over there." Didn't mean, though.

LEVINE: He said you'll find—say it again? Your father told you you'd find what?

WRAGGE: A dollar princess. You know, a girl with a lot of money.

LEVINE: Ah!

WRAGGE: [Laughs] Yeah. Oh, I was really, really happy when my ticket came and everything.

LEVINE: Just before we talk about leaving, were there any attitudes that your mother your father tried to instill in you? Any ideas about who you were or what life was about or how you should behave? Anything like that that your mother or your father tried to teach you?

WRAGGE: No, they didn't. My behavior was always good in school. That was the first thing when I get my report. The first thing they look for, how you act, you know.

LEVINE: Deportment.

WRAGGE: Behavior. Good behavior. If that was good, the whole thing was good for them. Yeah. My dad sometime he get mad and he pull his belt off and psst, psst. [Laughs]

LEVINE: What was he strict about? What kinds of things would he be angry at you about?

WRAGGE: If we did something wrong sometimes, and even the teacher, you know, every little thing he would lick you with the stick, you know. It was terrible over there. Now, it's just like here, teachers are not allowed to hit the kids. Over there, boy, that was terrible. They had a big stick like that, you know, and you had to stoop down and then phewssh. Yeah.

LEVINE: What kind of a trade did you learn and what were you doing in Germany before you left for this country? What did you work at when you were in Germany?

WRAGGE: I worked in a big factory in Bremen. They build furniture. Big furniture factory, and it was the time you had to stay there for years, you know. So when four years were out, then they had to pay you more wages, see. Higher wages, after the four years learning like that, you know. When the four years were up and the Communist regime was pretty strong already, you know, and then they laid me off. They're not allowed to lay me off, see. So I had to go to court, even. My dad was afraid of courts, you know. I had to go before the ten judges there and my boss had to go along. He found an excuse you know, about how it could happen. I left that evening, I left a little earlier to catch a train home. So they blamed that I wasn't there, they blamed that the whole place could have burned up. So the judges after a while there, they considered it. Verdict finally came up, "You hire this man within three days," you know, and they didn't hire me back in three days. They waited until the fourth day. Then they send somebody to tell me about it. So we had to go in court again and the boss was there and "Well, that's out. If you want to hire the man back, you could have done it right away. Unless you send somebody to pick him up or tell him about it." He should have made it in writing. He didn't do that. So they had to pay me eight thousand marks penalty, right. For the time I worked there, the four years, such a percentage of it, they had to pay the fine. Of course he was pretty mad, you know, but he couldn't do nothing.

So a couple days later I went to the office there and the fellow opened it, was a little Jewish fellow there, you know. I say, "I come for my money." "Your money's in the post office," and he banged that thing down in front of my nose. He was mad. So I went to the post office and got my eight thousand marks. Yeah.

LEVINE: So what did you do after that? Where did you work then?

WRAGGE: After that, now, wait a minute. Oh, then I worked in a shipyard. That's right, yeah. I had a nephew there. He was an engineer there. He helped me get a job there and there I worked until I came over here.

LEVINE: And what kind of work did you do in the shipyard?

WRAGGE: In the shipyard we had to go from one end of the ship, all the wires, you know, me and another fellow. Two fellows, and we had to mark and measure them, the blueprints you know. We had to go

from one end of the ship to the other, where they fasten the wires to it's all steel, you know. We had to measure that and punch it with a center punch and then after us, the driller came along. The driller drilled the hole and put the—oh, they put the screws, the plate in it. So that was a job and we got paid extra for that.

LEVINE: Why did you get paid extra?

WRAGGE: Because it was a fancy job and, you know, it had to be just so. And after that, the guys came with the cable, laid the cables, you know, fasten everything. The switch, everything had to be just so, see. Had a guy from Billenhoffen [PH], him and I worked on that. Then I came over here then.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. So you were already an electrician on the ship?

WRAGGE: Yeah. Yeah, and oh, my nephew, the engineer said—I was in Germany then for three months, too, you know, and he said, “Why do you want to go to America for?” you know. “I give you the job right away where you left of.” [unclear] I stayed there three months and then I came over here again to visit.

LEVINE: Were you tempted? Were you tempted to stay there, since you had a really fancy job?

WRAGGE: No, I didn't want to stay there.

LEVINE: You didn't want to stay.

WRAGGE: No, and things that inflation that time, too, with all the money business and things are really bad, you know. Yeah.

LEVINE: Now, you had a brother who worked on ships, right?

WRAGGE: Yeah, yeah. He said he could show me every room on that boat. He laid the floor in the ships.

LEVINE: A ship's carpenter?

WRAGGE: That was on the big ship he worked, the Bremen. I went to Germany one time on the Bremen and he laid all the floors and everything because he was a ship's simmerman [PH], a carpenter. Ship's carpenter, yeah.

LEVINE: And what was that brother's name?

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- WRAGGE: Henreich. Henreich, Johann, Maknos and—yeah, Henreich, Diesely, Bernard, Maknos and me. [Laughs]
- LEVINE: Okay, so when you decided to come, you said that your aunt who was in St. Louis, sent you the money for the ticket?
- WRAGGE: Oh, yeah, hundred eighty-five dollars the ticket was that time.
- LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.
- WRAGGE: See, they lived in Cincinnati then, you know. A hundred eighty-five dollars. So when I came over and when I got a job, my started a bank account right away.
- LEVINE: So you paid her back?
- WRAGGE: To pay her back, you know. So I wanted to pay her every week.” “No,” she said, “put some money in the bank first, and when you think you have enough, you can pay me back.” She only charged me six dollars room and board that time.
- LEVINE: Okay. We’re going to pause right here. [clears throat] Excuse me. We’re going to change the tape over. We’ll just pause for a minute.
- WRAGGE: Okay.

END OF SIDE A
BEGIN SIDE B

- LEVINE: Okay, Mr. Wragge, we’re continuing now. Why don’t you tell me about the day you left, when you said goodbye to your mother and father and your sisters and brothers and you were leaving for America? What was that like for you, leaving home?
- WRAGGE: Well, we don’t—oh, you mean with my sisters? We didn’t get that too much together, anyway, you know, so they didn’t bother much about what I was doing anyway. Where I was going, you know.
- LEVINE: Uh-huh, how about your mother and father?
- WRAGGE: Well, they were happy. They were happy for me.
- LEVINE: And do you remember anything in particular that you took with you? That you brought with you to the new country?
- WRAGGE: You mean pictures or something?

LEVINE: Any pictures or anything you had in your suitcase?

WRAGGE: Yeah, my mother had a picture made and that was the only picture with the whole family on it in Lesum where we lived, you know. And before I left, they had to have a picture from the whole family. So they made an appointment with the photographer, you know. So he got us all together and that very seldom happened that we got the whole family together. So one time they think he got them together, all of them. So my dad, he was funny, he says, "You better go ahead, half of it. It looks terrible with a big family like that walking on the street." [Laughs] So we then had our picture taken. I still have the family picture. It's about that big. There's everybody on it, see.

LEVINE: Where were you in the line of children? Were you among the older ones or in the middle or were you one of the youngest?

WRAGGE: I was the youngest one.

LEVINE: You were the youngest one.

WRAGGE: The youngest one, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh, I see.

WRAGGE: Yeah, I was the last one.

LEVINE: So by the time you were nineteen, a lot of your brothers and sisters had left home and were—

WRAGGE: Yeah, some of them had died already, you know, and broken up, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, do you remember leaving for Bremerhoffen, where you took the boat from?

WRAGGE: Yeah, they take the train to Bremerhoffen, yeah, and then we took the boat.

LEVINE: And did you spent any time in Bremerhoffen before you got on the ship? Were you there for—

WRAGGE: When I left there, we went to Bremerhoffen several times, you know, on a visit. Yeah.

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LEVINE: And the day that you left, did anybody accompany you?

WRAGGE: Oh, my parents went along, yeah. Parents and I know some friends, too. I don't know who it was anymore. [Laughs]

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, did you have a girlfriend before you left?

WRAGGE: Girlfriend? No. No. No girlfriend. We went dancing a lot. Yeah, we had a lot of girls there to dance with. I belonged to a Germany Society, you know, gymnastic and stuff like that and a singing society. Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. So when you left, when the ship left, was there anything that happened during that voyage that you remember?

WRAGGE: No, I couldn't think of anything. Just got on the boat and that was it. A lot of things to eat, anyway.

LEVINE: You did?

WRAGGE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Good things?

WRAGGE: Oh, yeah. Yeah, food was good. I was seasick, too. I was seasick for nearly the whole thing and then I would down in the boat, you know, when you get seasick. By the time you got up, you know, it was too late. Yeah.

LEVINE: And how about the accommodations? The sleeping arrangements?

WRAGGE: Yeah, it was all right. We young fellows, we didn't care, you know. Just as long as we could have had a mattress to sleep on and that was it. It was nothing fancy. Like I said, just bunks put together, that's all, with a bed in it. And here along side was a big room where they put the—what they send to other countries.

LEVINE: The—oh, you mean the cargo that they were taking?

WRAGGE: Yeah, yeah, cargo was. There was a big, big room with the cargo. It come down from the top.

LEVINE: Was there cargo on the ship when you were coming over here?

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- WRAGGE: No, the cargo was put on in New York and the ship [unclear] and then they took all the beds away, you know, stacked on one side and they filled everything up with the cargo.
- LEVINE: Were most of the passengers German? The passengers that you came here with, were they mostly German?
- WRAGGE: Mostly Germans, yeah. Yeah. Uh-hmm. Of course, they were from other countries, too, you know. I could see on the islands, you know, what kind of people they were, you know. Some of them were really down, too, you know, didn't have much I guess. So I was really rich between a lot of them, you know. Yeah.
- LEVINE: Do you remember when the ship came into the New York Harbor?
- WRAGGE: Yeah.
- LEVINE: Do you remember seeing the Statue?
- WRAGGE: Oh, yeah, that was the main thing. That was, you know, I heard about it in Germany in school, you know, and that was really—it feels great thing. When I came to this country, you know, everybody want to see that. Yeah.
- LEVINE: And how about Ellis Island, what do you remember? What were your impressions of Ellis Island?
- WRAGGE: Well, I really didn't see too much of it, you know because we pushed through, you know. Like I said, they didn't examine much or anything like that and we didn't stay here long before they shipped us right off to the station. Railroad station, see.
- LEVINE: And how did you know where to go?
- WRAGGE: Oh, was somebody with us. A German lady directed us, yeah. The German lady gave us the sandwich and things. You know, she talked German. It was nice, you know. She directed us. We had to take the boat. I don't know where to, until we got to the station. To the railroad station. I don't know where it was anymore.
- LEVINE: Uh-huh.
- WRAGGE: Well, anyway, we got on the train at seven thirty that evening.
- LEVINE: And then what did you have to eat?

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WRAGGE: Pardon?

LEVINE: What did you have to eat?

WRAGGE: We got a lunch box for one dollar. It was a sandwich in there and a banana, I think, and an orange, to take us to Cincinnati, I guess. [Laughs] Yeah.

LEVINE: And how long did the train ride take you to get to Cincinnati?

WRAGGE: Oh, I told you, it was that night. We left New York seven thirty in the evening and we got on the train and it was all the way up. Oh, you know.

LEVINE: Seven thirty you went through the night.

WRAGGE: Until the next day seven thirty. That was seven thirty until twelve, you know, twelve to and then—well, it took us a day and a half to get to Cincinnati. We left New York seven thirty and we got to Cincinnati the next day at eleven o'clock at night. At night. That was a long train ride. We had to wait on the way, you know, let the freight trains go by before we could go ahead through all the tunnels there, you know. It was really something and it was hot there. Bashful to take my clothes, jacket off. Kept it all on, heavy underwear, you know. Oh, it was something. Then them ladies sitting there, you know, half naked you know. I was sweating. The girls start complaining, "It's cold in here. Turn the thing up." So the conductor come around, you know, and he looked at me, "Don't you do that and turn it off." I don't know what it meant that he says, you know, and he turned it on again.

LEVINE: He turned the heat back on. Uh-huh. And so how did you know where to get off? How did you know where to get off when it was Cincinnati?

WRAGGE: Oh, I got off in Cincinnati, that beautiful station they had there in Cincinnati. It was beautiful. I don't think they have it now, of course, there's no more trains running there now, you know. But they made like a museum out of the railroad station. It was beautiful. When I was there a couple of days, my aunt says, "Come on." It was eleven o'clock at night. "You got to see that railroad station." I want to see it, too, again. So we went there eleven o'clock the next night.

LEVINE: How did you know—how did you recognize your aunt?

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WRAGGE: Oh, she knew me right away. She wrote me, she says, "You put a card on your head so I know you."

LEVINE: A card? Uh-huh.

WRAGGE: And she knew me right away and so did I know her.

LEVINE: And what were your first impressions? When you went home with your aunt to her house, what were your first impressions of this country?

WRAGGE: Well, everything seemed to be all right, you know. Then I got a job and everything and speak a little, and I went to school at nights. Five nights a week to learn the language.

LEVINE: How long was it before you got a job?

WRAGGE: Oh, only about three weeks. A neighbor—a neighbor got me the job, the first job.

LEVINE: What job?

WRAGGE: He worked there, yeah.

LEVINE: Was this a German man? A man from Germany?

WRAGGE: No.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. He was a neighbor of your aunt's.

WRAGGE: They were good friends of my aunt, you know. So—

LEVINE: And what kind of a job did he get you?

WRAGGE: I had? The first job I had was paper box factory. Paper box factory and it was all right, you know. Making paper boxes by machinery, you know, and everything. Well, I liked that one. That was not in my line of work, you know, but I stuck it out. Then finally somebody put a new machinery in there, new machines, you know, for make boxes and stuff like that. So the electrician there. So I asked one fellow, I say, "Need anybody where you work?" They're lining motors, electric motors, you know. I thought, "Oh, that's something for me." So I asked him once. "Sure," he said, "come in." Next day they give me a job there. Yeah, so I stayed there for a while. That was experience and it was [unclear] motors, you know. I stayed there until—oh, I had a sister then in Pennsylvania. She came over

three months before me with two little babies. One was six months. The other was a year and a half, and she went to Pennsylvania. Her brother was there and let him come over, you know. So that was in Philadelphia, you know, and she was so homesick. Homesick. She wrote me a letter, "Come to here. I'm so homesick." She couldn't speak English, you know, nothing. So I said, "No, I can't come now. I got to pay my debts off first. You know, my ticket. Then I might visit you." So I stayed there until I had my thing all paid off, had a little—I want to pay my aunt, had enough money in the bank. "No," she said, "don't you do that. I want you to start from the [unclear]. I want you to have some money in the bank, you know. Don't take it all out. We don't need it that bad."

Well, anyway, I went to Pennsylvania visit my sister. There I met a fellow from Germany and I visit him. He said, "You want a job?" Said, "What kind of job?" "Machinist job." "Yeah," I say, "you got a job? How much does it pay?" So I got double what I got in Cincinnati and I stayed there because my sister was happy. Of course, I went back to Cincinnati several times to visit, you know.

LEVINE: So how long did you stay in Philadelphia?

WRAGGE: And then what was it? Oh, I took a trip to Germany. That's right.

LEVINE: 1929?

WRAGGE: No, was it? Yeah. Yeah, I stayed there three months, that's right. When I came back, no more jobs. The Depression was that time. I guess you felt that here, too. The Stock Market crashed and everything. Well, I got over there, too. I couldn't find a job. I spent a lot of money over there, had a good time. [Laughs] So I had picked apples for five cents a basket there, you know, and somehow I got through, anyway. So that was a tough beginning again, you know. Wasn't always easy for me, yeah.

LEVINE: When did you meet your wife?

WRAGGE: Oh, my wife I met in 1936, I think. Yeah, 1936 June the 6th we married.

LEVINE: How did you meet her?

WRAGGE: I met her on a picnic. I met her on a picnic and we've been married forty-seven years. Then she had to pass away. Now she's gone already—well, quite a few years, anyway. Ten year at least or

more. She died of cancer of the liver. Yeah, after forty-seven years married. That was [unclear]

LEVINE: Where did you settle then? Did you stay in Philadelphia or where did you go? Where did you live when you were married?

WRAGGE: Oh, we had our own house.

LEVINE: Where was that?

WRAGGE: In Pennsylvania, in Morristown, Pennsylvania and that's where we lived, all our lives there.

LEVINE: And did you remain a machinist? Was that what you did? You were a machinist?

WRAGGE: Yeah, and I worked there for thirty-three years, one place.

LEVINE: What was the name of—

WRAGGE: Thirty-three years.

LEVINE: What was the name of the place?

WRAGGE: Oh—oh, what was the name then? Mr. Webber was my boss—

LEVINE: If it comes back to you, you can say it. It's all right.

WRAGGE: Yeah. Oh, Philadelphia Asbestos.

LEVINE: Philadelphia Asbestos. Uh-huh.

WRAGGE: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: And when you look back on your life, what makes you feel satisfied? What do you feel proud of having done?

WRAGGE: I feel proud when I got married. I got a nice wife. We both worked together nice and she helped along, worked a little bit, you know. Well, we got along beautiful. That was really sad when she passed away, you know.

LEVINE: And how many children did you have?

WRAGGE: Just one.

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LEVINE: One child.

WRAGGE: Just one, yeah.

LEVINE: And his name?

WRAGGE: John Dietrich Wragge.

LEVINE: And he's with you today?

WRAGGE: Yeah, he was—he was born on my father's birthday, April 11th. Coming up, too. Of course, we named him after my father then.

LEVINE: And—well, how do you think about having come, having immigrated to this country as a young man and lived out your life here? What do you think about that now, the fact that you did immigrate and become an American? Did you become a citizen?

WRAGGE: Oh, yeah, I became a citizen in 1933, I think it was. That time you couldn't get a citizenship. A First Paper, you know. Then we had to wait six years to get the second paper, see. So I got that as soon as I could get it, you know, being a citizen. And it was hard, too, them days. They asked you lot of questions, too, to get that paper, you know. To pass the test. [Laughs] They don't have to do that today no more. Today they have them all in one room, a hundred people and give the citizenship paper, you know. Yeah.

LEVINE: How do you think about yourself? Do you think about yourself as German and as American? Do you think of yourself as some part of each or how?

WRAGGE: I think both ways there, you know. I still like my country, too. Never forget that, you know. It's always nice to go back once in a while, course there ain't many living anymore, friends. But I mean friends, you know. I belonged to a singing in society in Philadelphia, you know, and we had about thirty-five singers there. We had our own club, you know, sing every Saturday night and I found out I'm the only one living out of the thirty-five people used to sing together. Yeah.

LEVINE: What kinds of songs did you sing?

WRAGGE: Oh, German sings, you know. We had a fest, German fest together, you know, from other singing societies they come visit us, you know, and then we go visit them. It was nice. Yeah. It's a nice bunch together there. Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah, and how is this time in your life?

WRAGGE: Pardon?

LEVINE: How do you like this time in your life, when your retired and you're older?

WRAGGE: It's nice, you know. Could be better, but where I live now, you know, is a big apartment, you know. We get two meals there and now sixteen hundred a month's rent. You get two meals there, but it's nice. You know, there's different entertainment there. Play pool and movies and stuff like that, you know. Of course, there's all people older than—no, not older, but just as old as I am, you know. Most women, you know. [Laughs] Yeah.

LEVINE: So is it pleasant being around people your age? So you have something in common and you do things together?

WRAGGE: Well, we have a few men there. We generally stick together like you know. I'm not good in conversation with women, you know. [Laughs] But you is different now. Yeah.

LEVINE: Let's see. Is there anything else you can think of that has to do with your coming to this country? Do you think you've retained any German ways? Any German qualities?

WRAGGE: No.

LEVINE: Do you feel as though you have kept up some aspects that are German?

WRAGGE: Well, see, I live too far away where most of the Germans live, you know. Down in the beach, you know. That's too far to go for me. And they got a lot of German clubs there and everything, but like I said, the church, John and I used to go to church, but it took about an hour to get there. That church they going to tear down, too, now, so I don't know what they going to do. I have thirty-five hundred dollars for a new church. They don't have that much money and the people get old like in the town where I come from. We used to have a German speaking pastor in church, but all the German people all died off. There's nobody there and you get a good pastor, can't speak German and English. You can't get that no more either. Can't find anybody. We had a woman pastor one time, but she didn't last too long either, you know.

LEVINE: Why was that?

WRAGGE: Huh?

LEVINE: Why didn't she last?

WRAGGE: Well, I don't know. Just how that is in church, too, you know. Some people they don't like the pastor, you know. Like a friend of mine, too, he's a pastor and a couple in the church just don't like him and they kicked him out, see. That's not nice, and he hasn't found a job now for years no more either. So—

LEVINE: Okay. Well, is there anything else you would like to say before we close? Is there anything we maybe didn't cover that you can think of about coming to this country or how you feel about having lived in this country? Or you feel about visiting Ellis Island after all these years?

WRAGGE: Yeah, that was really—that's the greatest thing for me now. You know, to get back here again. Of course, I don't remember any more exact how everything was. I know only bunch of people got off the boat and we were all together here somewheres in the place, you know. And some of them got examined more than I was, I guess, but I know I wasn't here very long. I met a German lady there and she—she brought me that lunch box, see, and took me to the station. That was it. A big number six on it. So then I look forward who I got to, you know, Cincinnati, how it would be there. The next day was Thanksgiving and on the boat, you know, it was pretty rough. I was seasick. There I was seasick. Didn't each much of anything, and so what would I say?

LEVINE: Well, you must have been hungry.

WRAGGE: I was going to say something yet. [Laughs]

LEVINE: Were you hungry then when you started on that train ride?

WRAGGE: Not really. Not really hungry, but I was going to say something now. [pause] That's funny, ain't it? Well, it wasn't too important, anyway, I guess. But that was really some experience for a young fellow to come America. That was a wonderful experience. Nobody had that luck like I did, you know, to come over. So here I am. [Laughs] It's been really nice.

LEVINE: Well, I'm delighted that you were able to come here today and that I was able to talk with you.

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WRAGGE: Oh, that was very nice. I didn't expect anything like that. Well, it was really nice of you to come here and talk that much with John and me. I was glad to have met you.

LEVINE: Well, thank you.

WRAGGE: And I hope I can hear that tape.

LEVINE: Yes, well, we're going to give you a copy of the tape and then there'll be a copy here at Ellis Island.

WRAGGE: Okay.

LEVINE: For posterity.

WRAGGE: Of course everything looks different here. Well, that time, you know, I wasn't too much interested in what's going around here, you know, in the building or anything. The only thing I wanted to get to Cincinnati. Oh, I was going to say yet. I didn't sleep much the last few days and next day was Thanksgiving and I slept and slept and finally my aunt come, "Wake up. Time to eat," you know. She thought I was dead or something. I didn't wake up, you know, twelve o'clock. She shoved me, you know.

LEVINE: So your first real meal was Thanksgiving dinner in this country.

WRAGGE: Oh, yes, yes. Oh, my aunt, she could cook. She used to on Fridays, you know, we used to eat eggs. I think I had a dozen eggs the first night I came here. [Laughs] Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, we're going to close here. I want to thank you so much.

WRAGGE: Oh, and thank you!

LEVINE: I've been speaking with Julias Wragge.

WRAGGE: Yeah.

LEVINE: Who came from Germany in 1923 when he was nineteen years of age.

WRAGGE: Yeah.

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LEVINE: And today he's ninety-one, about to turn ninety-two next month, and this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service at Ellis Island and I'm signing off.

END OF INTERVIEW