

EI-90

MARTHA LEHMANN

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LEVINE: This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and I'm here today with Martha Lehmann, who came here from Germany in 1938 at the age of thirty-one. It's September 13th, about noon. Welcome, Mrs. Lehmann.

LEHMANN: Thank you so much. I'm glad to be here.

LEVINE: It's a pleasure to have you here, and I'd like to begin by your telling me your birth date.

LEHMANN: Okay. My birth date is the ninth of June, 1907.

LEVINE: Okay. And where were you born?

LEHMANN: In, the city is called Reinheim. It's R-E-I-N-H-E-I-M. It's near Darmstadt, the state was Hessen, and it's about 50 kilometers south of Frankfurt.

LEVINE: Okay. So Reinheim.

LEHMANN: Reinheim.

LEVINE: Could you describe Reinheim when you lived there, what it was like?

LEHMANN: Yeah. It was, Reinheim is first on the, it appeared on the map first in 1276. It was a fortified town, and originally there was walls around it and doors with heavy gates. When I lived there you still could see old walls, and also where the moat was, at that time, that section was called wahl, and that is the German word for moat. And that's where they put the linen there to bleach. (she laughs) After they were washed, they put it there, and it was behind my grandparents' garden, so we got there quite frequently.

LEVINE: Well, now, had your family been in this town for some generations, then?

LEHMANN: Yeah. We have up to 1750 we have documents that the Lehmann family lived there.

LEVINE: What did the Lehmann family consist of when you were a child?

LEHMANN: Oh, my grandparents lived there, and, well, I was born in 1907 and the war started in 1914 so two aunts, who maybe would have been married before, stayed with my grandparents. They were, for me they belonged to the grandparents' house, and my father was called into the army in 1915 after my youngest brother was four. I am the oldest of four children. I have three brothers. And what was it like.

LEVINE: Maybe you can tell me what was your father's name?

LEHMANN: My father's name was Max, Max Lehmann.

LEVINE: And your grandparents, were they his parents?

LEHMANN: Yeah. They were his parents, and also one of his brothers was still living then, one of my grandfather's brothers was still living when I can remember him. And they were originally three brothers. My grandfather had three brothers.

LEVINE: I see. So there were two left in the town. And how about your mother, what was her maiden name?

LEHMANN: Her maiden name was Stahl, Sara Stahl, S-T-A-H-L. And she was born near Worms, near the Rhine. And the town was called Hamm, H-A-M-M. And she was the third, no, the second of five children, and her parents were Adam Stahl and Theresa Stahl nee Goodman. And when she was, the year she was born in 1881, a child of three, the oldest child drowned in a pail of water in their yard. Oh, no, she was the third. There was another older one, Morris, who had died when he was fifteen then.

LEVINE: Did your mother have any of her family living near where you lived in . . .

LEHMANN: No. The family, they lived, some of them lived near where she was born, but they were very close relations with the family's cousins. And their own, my grandmother, my mother's mother, came to live with my parents and her nieces came to see the aunt.

LEVINE: I see. So there was a lot of family, a lot of connections in the family.

LEHMANN: There was a lot of family, yes. And so, and that got me, I think that got me interested, also, in the family, because I knew them.

LEVINE: I see. Could you describe the house where you lived as a child?

LEHMANN: Well, it was originally a farmhouse, and my parents bought it when I was two years old. And it was, well, my father was a cattle dealer, so we had stables there.

LEVINE: A cattle dealer?

LEHMANN: Yeah. And there was a big barn, and behind the barn was a garden, which was so shady that not much grew there. (they laugh)

LEVINE: I see. And did your father, in other words, your father sold cattle?

LEHMANN: Yeah. He bought and sold cattle, yeah. The community were mostly farmers and all the many people went to work in the big town in Darmstadt, so, and so they commuted.

LEVINE: Could you spell that town that you just mentioned?

LEHMANN: Darmstadt? D-A-R-M-S-T-A-D-T. It was the capital of Hessen. And...

LEVINE: So that was close enough to get to in a day?

LEHMANN: Oh, yeah. It was seventeen kilometers only, and so it took, maybe at that time it took forty-five to fifty minutes or maybe an hour, that traveling time. And we left in the morning and came back, as a matter of fact, my last two years of school, I went there to school, in Darmstadt, too. The first four

years I went to elementary school in Reinheim. But if you want to go and have a better education, you had to change after three, or latest after four years to a different school, otherwise you never could go to college. And so after four years I went to a different school in the next town, which was Gross [sic: Groß] Bieberau.

LEVINE: Could you spell that one?

LEHMANN: Yeah. It's two words. G-R-O-S-S, and the next word is B-I-E-B-E-R-A-U. It's three kilometers, and we walked there. And in the morning, in winter it was still dark, and a fellow who went, at that time, to the top class, passed our house. So I was waiting, because it was dark. There were no lights in the morning or anything. So I waited for him, so I didn't have to walk by myself. Because we had to cross a little bridge and walk along the water, so, and a little river, so. And...

LEVINE: What do you remember about your childhood? When you think about it, what are the kinds of things that come to mind?

LEHMANN: Well, I really, it's not very much. I remember when I went to, the first day to school. I only remember that my mother went with me, but I don't know how long she stayed, if she did go, how long she stayed in school, or whatever happened. I knew I had a new leather school bag and with, I was very proud of everything, what I had. And saw the blackboard and the wooden pencil box. It wasn't pencils. It was, what do you call them?

LEVINE: The desks?

LEHMANN: No, for the blackboard. You didn't use pencil, you used...

LEVINE: Oh, chalk.

LEHMANN: Yeah, yeah. And...

LEVINE: You were very excited about going to school?

LEHMANN: Oh, yeah. Yeah, I was very anxious to go to school, wondering what it was all about, and things like that. My grandmother, father's mother, I mean, she always was deciding the Schiller, I mean, the German poet, Friedrich von Schiller. And before I went to school, before I even went to school, I repeated what she said without knowing what it meant. So, and actually, her reciting those pieces made me like that poet. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Really.

LEHMANN: So, and, uh, well...

LEVINE: What about attitudes in your family? I mean, can you remember things that your mother or your grandmother said to you about what you should do or shouldn't do or how to live or...

LEHMANN: Well, I mean, it was so that we had to help. Everybody had certain things to do. I had to help with setting the table or helping washing dishes and I know my brothers, we had to fix the wood box for wood to start the fire in the morning, and also help with the, with feeding the animals, whatever we could do.

LEVINE: How much older were you from your brother, your next-oldest brother, the oldest brother.

LEHMANN: The next one was two years younger, and I remember that he wore glasses before I even started school. And the next one is four years, he was four years. He was, he was born in 1913, and the youngest one in 1915.

LEVINE: And what are your brothers names from the oldest one to the youngest?

LEHMANN: The oldest is Arthur. He's living in New Jersey now. He's the second one. The next one was Siegfried. He passed away a few years ago. And the youngest one is Jules. In Germany it was Julius. And he's living near Washington. So, and the youngest one, the smart one, he was a physicist. And my oldest brother, he was glad, when he was out of school he wanted to earn some money, so, and the third one, well, he was, well, happy-go-lucky.

LEVINE: Were you closest to some particular member of the family, either your brothers or your mother and father or grandparents?

LEHMANN: Uh, well, I couldn't say I was closer. I liked my aunts very much, and, well, since Father was in the war, I mean, we all grew up really, practically with Mother being around all the time. And if I needed something sometimes and Mother didn't want to give it to me, I went, so I went to my grandfather, Father's father, you know. And it's, well...

LEVINE: What about this aunt you mentioned? What was her name?

LEHMANN: Oh, one of them was Jenny, and she married later on and moved away. When she married she moved away, and so the other one was Rosa. She was a deaf mute. And, but since we were used to her we could talk to her with, as if it was a speaking person, because we didn't know different

because we grew up with it. And, so, and, well, she also, she got married only in, she was in '33, and moved to Alsace, and she, her husband was also a deaf mute. Their son is a deaf mute and he is living in France, and he's married to another, also a deaf mute woman, but they're quite happy.

LEVINE: Are they able to function in the world?

LEHMANN: My aunt, who is deaf mute, she was a dressmaker. Not that she worked as a dressmaker, but she could if she wanted to. So, I mean, she was trained as a dressmaker. And there was a brother of my father, a younger brother, who was also deaf mute, and he was trained to be a tailor. It seems they, in the schools they went to it was different school, to a special school for deaf mute children. Not in Reinheim, a different town, in Bensheim. And it seems they, there's a related. One is dressmaker and the other is tailor. I don't know if the school only favors those trades, I have no idea.

LEVINE: Well, it sounds as though education was something that was valued in your family.

LEHMANN: Oh, yeah. It was. And, well, I really wanted to learn something and went to school that was more like, the school I went to was fashioned like gymnasium. Uh, yeah. So more like a boys school, not like the girls school. And all my, at that time, all my life at that time, I wanted to see, I wanted to go to a girls' school. And I always thought, "Oh, girls' school must be wonderful." And so after eight years in school I finally went to a girls' school, and I was so disappointed.

LEVINE: What was it like?

LEHMANN: Those girls there were so elegant and so stuck up. I never had met people like this before, and I made some friends. As a matter of fact, one woman found out, one woman from the class found out my whereabouts, and I corresponded with her for quite a few years, I mean, just, up to two years ago.

LEVINE: Did you get a good education in this school?

LEHMANN: Yeah, we got a wonderful education, especially in that one school where I went for four years, the second one. And also in the last, in Darmstadt, in the *Viktoria Schule*, really. It's, uh, well, I mean, it depends also on you.

LEVINE: Yes. But you wanted to learn, so you did.

LEHMANN: I wanted to learn. Yeah. Really, I was very eager to learn, to know more and something like that.

LEVINE: Well, now, was your family a religious family?

LEHMANN: Yes. I mean, they were religious, not orthodox, what you call orthodox here or something like that. See, we kept Sabbath, you know, Friday night, and my father went to synagogue, Friday night, Saturday morning. And when there were children's services later on, when we went to Hebrew school we went Saturday afternoon to children's service. Sometimes, not quite often, I went to synagogue in the morning just to see my mother or something, or my grandmother. So, but we, they weren't strict, but we didn't know different, but we keep this. It was kept. I know that when I went to Darmstadt, in this school, there were two other Jewish girls who rode on Sabbath, and I wasn't used to ride. And the teacher asked me, "Can you get a dispensation?" I said, "Well, I really don't know. I never had to ride." I

said, "All right. If you don't want to ride, you don't have to." But once I was out of school and I learned a trade, I had to. (she laughs)

LEVINE: So then you did. Well, now, was most of the community that you lived in a Jewish community?

LEHMANN: No, no. We were, the town was about three thousand inhabitants, and maybe twenty to twenty-five families were Jewish only.

LEVINE: So you were a real minority in there.

LEHMANN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And were you accepted as a full community member, or was there some prejudice at that time?

LEHMANN: We didn't realize it, if there was prejudice or something like that. I mean, they knew we are Jewish or something like that, but there was no disinclination that we know, we realized that.

LEVINE: Before we leave your childhood, can you remember any games that you played, or...

LEHMANN: Yeah. We had handball, we called it, I mean, different ballgames. So...

LEVINE: Did you say rhymes like, you know, jumprope rhymes or playing ball rhymes, little children's verses, that you can recall?

LEHMANN: No, I don't. I really don't. Maybe we did have some, and then we played, well, I'm trying to figure, I don't know.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, why don't we move along to when you decided to leave for the United States, what was happening in your town and in your life at that time?

LEHMANN: Well, in, I didn't live in Reinheim any more. I moved to Frankfurt about in 1927 because I had started as an apprentice in Darmstadt, and it meant a commute back and forth every day. And I didn't have a chance to go to any lecture. Going to a theater was a major operation, because the office stopped at a certain time, and where do you go between office and the theater, and then you come home late. So I wanted to go to a place where I don't have to commute, and I went to Frankfurt.

LEVINE: Now, what were you as an apprentice to?

LEHMANN: I was apprenticed in a bank. It was a private bank, and the bank was very well-known for training people well. So once you had finished your apprenticeship you could go to any office and do anything what was required.

LEVINE: I see. Okay, so then you moved to Frankfurt, and what was that like?

LEHMANN: Well, I lived in what do you call this, residence for girls. And this pleased my parents because, I mean, they don't have to worry, they didn't have to worry. And also, in the beginning, I had company and I wasn't by myself. And I found a job soon when I came to Frankfurt.

LEVINE: In the bank? Is that what...

LEHMANN: No, I didn't work in a bank. I worked in different offices then. And later on I worked in an office in a factory, and the foreman of this factory lived close

by, and I got friendly with them. So but also I lived in that residence for a few years, and then with another girl we got an apartment together. So, and, well, we got involved in also not political, but in political discussions. And so I remember in 1933 when my boss, at that time, on Mondays he had something like an exchange. And Monday morning he went there and came only after lunch to the office. And on the 30th of January he came, and it was the only thing he said. "Hindenburg nominated Hitler." I thought, I mean, the roof had fallen in or something. And it was, I mean, at that time I was friendly with the man, I mean, we lived together already before, we lived together. And unfortunately we didn't get married, because he wasn't Jewish. And then we found out it was a mistake because then we couldn't get married any more. And, well, it's, and what happened, we both were arrested because we worked in the underground. A neighbor found out what I was doing. And so it's, so I spent one year in a prison. It was while, I don't know what you call it in English. So what they were trying to do was get the papers together for the trial, but then they couldn't prove anything actually against me. And, but since I was there for one year they, the verdict was one year, but which you spent in prison already.

LEVINE: And what was the prison like? What was it like being there?

LEHMANN: It was, well, you was by yourself. I mean, it was, and once I was in prison it, that must go like, the people knew right away, then, the other prisoners knew, there is a political prisoner in this cell, and the woman who gave us the books. I mean, once a week we got two books to read. She must have been a political prisoner too, because the books she gave me were unbelievable. (she laughs) Books which I didn't even think would be in a library there.

LEVINE: Can you remember what some of them were?

LEHMANN: Yeah. One of them was The Letters of Rosa Luxemburg. Rosa Luxemburg was a Socialist/Communist, and she was also in prison during the war. And she wrote letters. I mean, she was killed, and after, she was released at the end of the war, but a year later she was killed somehow. And so her book was still in the prison. It was surprising.

LEVINE: Wow. Well, now, did you write in your memoirs about what you did do before you were sent to prison?

LEHMANN: Yeah. I wrote it. My son even was born there.

LEVINE: Your son was born in prison?

LEHMANN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Oh, my goodness. Do you want to talk about what your activities were that landed you in prison?

LEHMANN: Well, they claim, I mean, I, actually I worked for somebody, I took some shorthand, but one day my son asked me, "What did you actually do?" I said, "I have no idea any more." Really, it's just wiped out. I have no idea what. It's strange, but I have no idea any more. But nobody knew about this. They couldn't find out. They were looking for a woman who worked with him, but they never found out that I was that woman. And what they blamed me for to help, to give an address to get mail, to get mail there, and somebody would pick it up. They never could prove it and said I did it. And so actually they had nothing against me. So, and so what I did was, I wasn't doing anything. But Richard, the man I lived with, the father of my son, he was, he worked at the leftist newspaper. The newspaper was

closed right, the next day after Hitler was nominated. So practically he was on the run then all the time, because he was known. And...

LEVINE: Okay. Why don't we pause here so we can turn the tape.

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BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

LEVINE: A tumultuous time.

LEHMANN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Okay. So when you then were let out of prison, then what did you do?

LEHMANN: Well, I, my son then was the grandmother, father's mother, picked him up in prison because before we went on trial, the trial was in Berlin. So, and we decided it would be best if he stays with her until I find some place to stay again. And when I came out I, an uncle by marriage offered me to stay with them, with the family in Frankfurt until I found a place of my own again and found a job. To get a job at that time you had to go to the employment office, to the government employment office, so I knew I wouldn't get a job through them because on account of being Jewish. And I went there with apprehension. Well, what will I find? And I found the most, well, nice woman there and very encouraging. She said, "Don't worry about anything. There is a Jewish agency. They are looking, I know they are looking for people, and you will find something. Don't you ever worry." And something else happened. While I was waiting in, for my interview there, a friend of mine who had also been in prison some time

before me already, and we were friendly in Frankfurt, she was sitting in the waiting room. It was such a coincidence. We both didn't know where the other one was, and we would not have got anybody because being afraid the Gestapo would find out about it. Well, here we meet by coincidence in the waiting room. So, well, I went to the Jewish agency and I got a job in a very nice company. Well, then there was a law in Germany. If an employee was employed for more than six months, he or she could not be dismissed any more. So they told me that. I said, "Well, I don't mind." So before the six months were over, I was laid off for a few days and started, and that happened three times. And they were very nice, and I liked it very much. But then they said, "Well, we really don't know what's going to happen. You'd better look for something else." I must have seen, I noticed something, I don't know. I got other jobs then. Well, I worked almost on the time I left for the States.

LEVINE: What was it that decided you to leave for the states?

LEHMANN: Well, the people who gave me an affidavit or who vouched for me were relatives of relatives. They had been in Germany when I was still going to school visiting my parents, and, well, I was so used to help. It impressed that woman. I said, "Wow, she's working like..." I said, "Well..." I mean, a matter of fact, it was nothing special for us, for me or something. And she offered me, then, "Martha, when you ever want to go to the States, I will help you." I said, "Why should I go to the States?" The grandmother's birthday and the bar mitzvah coming and things like that. I liked it here, I stay here. But later on when they repeated the offer I was really happy and accepted it.

LEVINE: What made the difference from the time when you...

LEHMANN: Oh, I was still, when she offered it I was still going to school, and why should I leave Germany. I had a good time there. And, well, the times were so different, then. I mean, you had to emigrate unless, you didn't know. At that time we didn't know about the gas chambers and things like that. And so, but we knew it was no future in, for the Jewish people in Germany because there were, the stores had signs, "No Jews." I mean, you couldn't even buy anything. A friend of mine said, "Well, Martha, if you have to buy anything for the child, I'll buy it for you." Things like that happened. And also, as long as I was there, I could buy in the grocery stores and things like that. It was no restriction to buy. But then later on it was difficult.

LEVINE: Were there any restrictions while you were still there that you experienced directly?

LEHMANN: Yes. Like children couldn't go to certain kindergartens, certain children's kindergarten wouldn't accept Jewish children. So, and you had to find a Jewish kindergarten. And the schools, I really don't know because, I mean, the child wasn't old enough to go to school, so. And, like, there were also some kinds of campaigns by the Gestapo where we never knew what was going to happen. I know a friend of mine, even that friend I had met at that waiting room. She called me at the office to find out if I'm still there early in the morning, she called. And if the boss answered, well, she didn't say who it was, she hung up. And when I answered she heard my voice. That was all. She wanted to just hear my voice if I'm still around. And so, I mean, there was, at the time there was, really, there was, you were not sure what was going to happen.

LEVINE: Can you remember what your thinking was when you left? I mean, how you were thinking about Germany?

LEHMANN: Well, I tell you, see, the man I had lived with was still in concentration camp, and I was very close with his mother and with his sisters, and it was hard. But on the other hand I knew there was no future for my son to stay there, so, and we...

LEVINE: Oh, so you were torn leaving him...

LEHMANN: Yeah, leaving him. But in the mean time they had the Nuremberg Laws that means Jews cannot, I mean, Gentile cannot marry Jews, and even being together would have been impossible. So, I mean, it was, you didn't know what to expect.

LEVINE: What was the camp like? Where was the camp, and what was the camp like that your friend Richard was in?

LEHMANN: He was in Dachau. That's very well-known. D-A-C-H-A-U. That's where he was. And, so, and...

LEVINE: And he was rounded up for his political activity.

LEVINE: Yeah. Right, right. Yeah. So once, I mean, he was sentenced at that time for two-and-a-half years in prison, but after the prison time was over, they didn't release him. They sent him to Dachau.

LEVINE: So were you able to see him at any point during that time?

LEHMANN: No, no, no. I didn't see him. As a matter of fact, when he was, uh, when he, at the time from the blitz, when he was out of prison, and, I mean, he was in another prison in Darmstadt and waiting to be sent to Dachau, to

wherever, we didn't know where to. So I tried maybe that he could see the child, and it wasn't possible. He couldn't see him. So we didn't, we couldn't see each other any more. I didn't see him any more then.

LEVINE: Well, then, when you decided to leave, then it was this friend that made it possible?

LEHMANN: Yeah. Those friends made it possible. They sent me every day to the Consulate in Stuttgart. And, so, and I mean I had a hard time getting my papers on account of my year, whatever happened to me.

LEVINE: The prison, you mean.

LEHMANN: So, but I finally got them, and it was after the terrible 9th of November, which they called Crystal Night, you know.

LEVINE: Yes. You were there then?

LEHMANN: Yeah.

LEVINE: Could you describe that, how you experienced it?

LEHMANN: Crystal Night. I mean, it was on a Thursday morning when I had, I think, I took English lessons, private English lessons, and the teacher was recommended to me by a Gentile friend. And I called her then, and told her that I'm Jewish and I would like to take English lessons, if she could accommodate me. She says, "Yes. But I'm rather filled up. Could you come early in the morning?" I said, "I'm used to getting up early. Why not? I can come." So, and I really don't know if it was the truth, or if she didn't want her neighbors to know that she taught a Jewish woman. Because I

came early, and I saw then, the maid brought her breakfast, and when I left, she said, "Now I have my breakfast and then another student is coming." It might have been true, it might not. I don't know. And so at that morning I'm going to my lesson, I saw Gestapo with men. I said, "Those people are Jewish." I mean, one Gestapo and one man. And I saw it happened twice. There must be something going on. I don't know what. On my way from the lesson, as I go to my relatives, and I stopped off at the jeweler, the watch-maker. I had my watch there, and I asked about it. She didn't say anything. I came to my relatives, and they said, "You know the synagogue's burning." I said, "What?" We didn't know what. A synagogue is burning. So I called my parents. I said, "Don't worry. Everything is all right." I went home. I lived with a friend then. And she, my friend Lotte, she was an only daughter, and her parents lived in middle Germany. I said, "What can I do?" I said, "Well, I'd better go home and see how my parents are." And she left. And after a while I said, well, maybe, Ernie at that time was with my parents because I knew I was running around getting my papers. I said it will be easier if Ernie stays with us.

LEVINE: Now, Ernie is your son?

LEHMANN: Yeah. And so I packed a little suitcase and went with a streetcar to the railroad station. There were so many people in the streets, the streetcar went on a snail's pace. When we came to the railroad, the train I meant to leave with was gone. There was another train later on that would have gotten me to Reinheim late, at midnight. I was somehow afraid to take it. I also was afraid to go home by myself. I went to some friends who lived in that neighborhood. And fortunately they were at home. So through side streets we walked, then, back to my place. And the people where I lived, that was originally where I lived, was originally a large apartment which was separated into two smaller ones, and the people who had it, they

were Gentile people, but they were Socialists, and at that time wanted a Jewish resident because they didn't want to have a Nazi or Nazi sympathizer next to them, because I might listen to the radio and might be announced or something. So they had gone to bed because it was late already. And early in the morning the doorbell rang from downstairs. And I heard Mother's voice and also Mrs. Heckman's, the neighbor's voice. "She left, she went to see you." I said, "No, I am here." And I rushed down. The next day my son said to me, I mean, he was only four years old, "*Mutti* [mother], you came down in your nightgown." He realized there was something not quite right, you know. So, and so my parents came and we made do and then the Gestapo were looking for me, and they hadn't got on the 9th of November. And people, friends, told me about it. I said, "You know, your father is there, but they are looking for me." I said, "What can I do? We cannot hide here."

LEVINE: They were looking for your father?

LEHMANN: They were looking for Jewish men. They wanted to look for, they didn't, nobody knew my father was there, because there were not, in Germany you register whenever you live someplace. And so since only female Jewish people lived in the building where I lived, the Gestapo passed by. And so my father was okay. So, but then we passed the synagogue which was burned, one of the synagogues was burned out. We passed it every day going to relatives. And so I explained to my son, I said, "See, bad people have burned that building, and so." I mean, I couldn't tell him the Nazis, or anything like this. That would have gotten me in jail again. So, and so I said it was bad people who did that. And when we came to the States and we were visiting a brother or my father, uncle and aunt, and he, my son went out with my uncle, I mean, he took him for a walk. They came to a construction sight where also was walls with, a wooden wall

there, and my son, "Did the bad people also do this here again?" This he remembered. It was...

LEVINE: Well, then, how did you, you left from France?

LEHMANN: Yeah.

LEVINE: How did, can you describe when you got ready to leave Germany?

LEHMANN: I mean, I got my visa on the 12th of December, I think. It must have been. And the boat left Cherbourg on the 24th, and I thought it's plenty of time. But my grandmother, my father's mother, lived near Paris, in a suburb of Paris with her oldest daughter.

LEVINE: So they had left Germany already, and they were...

LEHMANN: See, my, the uncles and aunts on my father's side, they left. And so the only one who could take care of the mother was my aunt in France. She lived in France. She had married there, since once she got out of school she, I mean, she was as old as my mother, she looked for a job and went with her employers to England, and from England to France, and married there, you know. And lived there all the time.

LEVINE: I see. So she had been there for a while.

LEHMANN: Oh, yeah. She had been there for a while. She had married in 1906, and so she lived there. And so she took, I mean, my grandmother moved, then, to her.

LEVINE: I see. And did your grandmother move before the Gestapo were getting

more noticeable?

LEHMANN: She moved, maybe in, she lived with my aunt in Frankfurt, and I really don't know exactly when, but maybe in '37 that she moved there to France.

LEVINE: I see. So it was safer, and that was why she went there.

LEHMANN: Yeah. I mean, there was the only place. Where could she have stayed? In Germany nobody was there to take care of her. And so she went to visit to her oldest daughter in France.

LEVINE: I see. So when you left Germany you went there.

LEHMANN: I went there. I said, oh, that's wonderful. I can say goodbye to my grandmother. And we left on the 21st of December in Frankfurt.

LEVINE: Excuse me, were there other family members left?

LEHMANN: Yeah, my parents were still there?

LEVINE: What was that like leaving and leaving your parents in such a situation?

LEHMANN: It was, we had hoped that they eventually could emigrate to either to Israel, Palestine, at that time, Palestine, or to the States, but we didn't know what was going to, how it was going to happen.

LEVINE: In other words, they were making attempts to get...

LEHMANN: Everybody, everybody tried to get out by that time. I mean, as a matter of

fact, I had so many requests from friends to write to people or contact people. Please help them to get out. So I brought my typewriter, and I was sitting all the time in my writing room, whenever Ernie was sleeping in the afternoon, or in the evening. People thought I was a journalist because I was always writing letters to try to help the people who stayed, who I left behind.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So, okay. So then you, when you left there were hopes that your mother and father would also be able to get out, and then you went to your aunt's house where your grandmother was. And how long did that take you, and was there anything about that trip that you remember as noteworthy?

LEHMANN: I tell you, we had, the train was, we left by train from Frankfurt to Paris, and it's a direct train, and we had a compartment. There weren't that many people. The European trains are different, so we had a compartment, my son and I. And as soon as the train was moving, he, I put him on a bench and covered him with his blanket and so on, and he fell asleep. And soon afterwards the door opened, and two officials came and asked, "Passport control". I gave my passport, and they disappeared with the passport. I thought it was forever. And they came back, gave me the passport, and took a flashlight and looked if this person sleeping there is actually that person whose picture is in the passport, you know. Then after a few hours there came another two officers, customs control. "That's all we have." "It's a camera in there?" I said, "No, there isn't." "Okay." And close. Then there came another (she laughs) a short time after, two more people, two more officers, in different uniforms, but talking German. Passport control. So I asked, "How many times do you come?" "Madam, we are the French custom officials." I said, "We are in France?" "*Oui, madam.*" I mean (she laughs), so, I mean, then I was relieved, and I dared to go outside and

look at, by that time it was daylight. And my youngest brother then, he was studying in Paris and also lived with that aunt, and he was waiting for us at the railroad station. So, and my son talked to him (referring to her child) like a mile a minute, his new uncle. And then my grandmother always, he had, my son had so many grandmothers. So my grandmother told him, "I'm your grandma without any teeth." And so when my brother came he told him, "You're going to see your grandmother without any teeth." (they laugh)

LEVINE: Let's see. Then, did you stay there very long, or you had to leave?

LEHMANN: No, just two days. Two days, because, and then when we were ready to go on the 24th the boat left. And there is a boat train going to Cherbourg. When we came to the railroad station there was a snowstorm overnight and no train to Paris, and it was a, so, I mean, really. We were not used to that. We had to take a taxi. My brother paid with his last money for the taxi, and we made it, my son and I, we were the last persons to board that train to Cherbourg. And I really have no idea how we got to the boat. I mean, I just, there is no memory. I tried to figure out many times, I have no idea. I only know there was a small cabin for the two of us and...

LEVINE: Is this on the boat or the train?

LEHMANN: That was on the boat, yeah.

LEVINE: What was the name of the boat?

LEHMANN: Franconia. And years later I found out that Enrico Fermi, that famous Italian scientist, he was a passenger on that boat.

LEVINE: You didn't know at the time.

LEHMANN: No, I didn't know at the time.

LEVINE: So you were not traveling steerage. You were traveling in a cabin.

LEHMANN: In a cabin, yeah. My parents had paid for the trip. I didn't have money. My parents had paid for the trip. And, well, my son was used to sleep, I had a nap in the afternoon, and though he slept on deck in a deck chair covered with a blanket. And he was rather wild, I must say. And people wondered sometimes, "Who is this child sleeping there so very nicely. That's him?! Who is always running around?" (she laughs) So by running around, I guess he was tired, and he slept a few hours after lunch every day. And also in the evening I didn't take him down to the dining room. He had a light meal in the cabin and the stewardess, they knew where I was in case they needed him, needed me for him, they could find me.

LEVINE: Well, now, was there anything that happened of note before the ship, the Franconia left Cherbourg? Was there any problem getting on? Everything went smoothly. But that, you don't remember that part.

LEHMAN: But it must have been smoothly because the whole train, the people who were on that train, they all were passengers on the boat. So, I mean, so even if you didn't know what to do you just followed. So, and...

LEVINE: Okay. And then, let's see. So, then, was there, how about on the ship, what was that voyage like? Was there anything about that besides what you've already mentioned about your son?

LEHMANN: No, I mean, really it's, I don't know. Every, I think everybody was so

occupied with himself or herself, there were people who knew each other or family, really I did not make any contact with anybody. You know, you are friendly with people and said hello and goodbye. But I only remember once going through a door, and it says, "Push." And I didn't know. And an employee comes, and said, "It says push." And I pulled. I said, "Yes, I know." I could read, but I didn't know it was push and pull. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Can you remember what you were preoccupied with when you were making that journey?

LEHMANN: Well, I wasn't preoccupied with writing as much what happened in Germany to my relatives who had left already. I mean, my uncle in Brazil and people in Israel, or, you know, or friend who, I had a friend who was in India already. So, I mean, I was so busy writing letters that I didn't have time for anything else.

LEVINE: And was it a long voyage?

LEHMANN: It was. It was, because we boarded the boat on the 24th, and arrived on the 2nd of January. And the 2nd of January was a Monday, and the inspectors were so busy they asked me if the fellow who gave, I mean, the couple who gave me the every day with, was my uncle. I said, "No." I was so honest. It was the brother of an aunt by marriage, and he didn't want to hear that. So he sent me to Ellis Island. If I had said yes, it would have been perfect. But with my, I mean, so...

LEVINE: So that's how you got to come to Ellis Island.

LEHMANN: That's why I came to Ellis Island, because I was so honest. (she laughs)

LEVINE: Do you remember when the ship was coming into the New York Harbor?

LEHMANN: Yeah, right. We were very excited to see the Statue of Liberty and so, and also my aunt who had lived in Frankfurt, she was at the boat. The uncle was at the boat. So the people who watched for me, they were on the boat, too.

LEVINE: Okay. Let's pause here while they change the tape.

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE
BEGINNING OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

LEVINE: This is tape two of an interview with Martha Lehmann, who came from Germany in 1938 at the age of thirty-one. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service, and the date is September 13, 1991. We were talking about the ship, the Franconia, that left from Cherbourg in France December 24, 1938. Right. We were talking about that voyage. So is there anything else about the passage, you said that you were writing letters to everyone that had already left Germany at that time.

LEHMANN: Right. Not only to people who had left Germany, to my relatives that had left Germany, but also I wrote letters to people who I was asked to write to them if they possibly could help other people to get out of Germany.

LEVINE: What did that entail? If someone were willing to help, what did they do there?

LEHMANN: They sent an affidavit to the Consulate in Stuttgart, or wherever the people

lived, or if people wanted to different, to go to different countries, maybe they needed financial help, that they didn't have the money to go with. Or some people even asked maybe you could find somebody for us, to give us an affidavit if you cannot give an affidavit. So it's just, do anything what you can do to help us.

LEVINE: So then when you got into the New York Harbor, you remember the Statue of Liberty.

LEHMANN: Right.

LEVINE: And was there anything that the people did aboard ship when they came into the harbor and saw the statue, that you recall?

LEHMANN: No. I can't recall anything. I mean, I was glad, I could see that, because I knew about it, but I guess I was too preoccupied or occupied with my son to watch other people. So, and...

LEVINE: Now, you were in the cabin. You had a cabin, and you were first or second or third class.

LEHMANN: Oh, well, tourist class it was. I don't know what it is. It was tourist class.

LEVINE: And were you treated well? I mean, were the meals good. Was the whole passage...

LEHMANN: Yeah. The meals were very good, and it was really a luxury or something, I would call it. So it was...

LEVINE: Were there steerage passengers on your ship at that time?

LEHMANN: No, I don't think so. No.

LEVINE: No. Uh-huh. 1938, maybe not.

LEHMANN: No. No one on steerage.

LEVINE: Okay. So then you, do you remember seeing New York for the first time? Do you remember your impression when you first saw it?

LEHMANN: Well, I saw the big buildings, and, well, I knew there would be big buildings. That's all I saw, big buildings. By then, when I actually was in New York, after coming from Ellis Island, and saw all those fire escapes, and I saw those fire escapes I said, "Oh, all the people have balconies here." (they laugh) So, and that's, I really was surprised sometimes when I saw, I worked in the following year in Long Island and I saw the light, uh, the, what do you call it? The electric light, it was on wooden posts.

LEVINE: Oh, lamp posts.

LEHMANN: Wooden lamp posts. I said, "Wooden lamp posts they have here." I expected everything to be metal and modern and so (she laughs) I really was surprised it was not everything modern as I had expected it from Germany.

LEVINE: Before we get too much into being in the United States, what about Ellis Island? Now, you answered a question honestly about...

LEHMANN: That was the inspector from the boat, but then in Ellis Island, we just were waiting there. So, and when I was questioned I told them the same thing,

what I had told them before. And it was perfectly all right. The people, also, were there, that could have told whatever it was. So, and so when it was our turn we came out.

LEVINE: Oh, I see. So there was no problem.

LEHMANN: There was no problem whatsoever, no. It just was so many people there, that's why it took that long. And the people who watched for me were in Ellis Island two days because, you know, the first, because they had to be there to take me out.

LEVINE: Right. And how about your son? Do you remember, does he remember that at all?

LEHMANN: No, he doesn't remember anything at all any more. So, and only, on the boat, on the ship he said once he came, "*Mutti* [mother] I have seen a real Mohr." In Germany, in his picture book, he had, there were colored people, and they are called Mohr in German. He said, "Is it a statue there?" "No, real ones. Two real ones." And there were actually two black women as passengers on the boat, which I had noticed, which I hadn't noticed before, but I noticed them afterwards, you know. So, and he calls them, "Real ones." Then he asked me, "Why are they so dark?" I said, "I guess they were sitting in the sun so long." I didn't know what to tell him, you know. What can you tell a four-year-old child about different colors or so? I wasn't prepared.

LEVINE: What was it like at Ellis? You slept there, then.

LEHMANN: Two nights.

LEVINE: And was it, what were the sleeping arrangements like?

LEHMANN: The beds were so, I was disappointed that in the museum they don't have that kind of beds there. They were very high, and my son fell out of bed and had a blue eye. I didn't know where he fell. So it...

LEVINE: They were bunk beds. They were...

LEHMANN: No, they were not bunks. They were individual beds.

LEVINE: Oh, but they were high.

LEHMANN: They were very high, yeah. And metal beds. I mean, they were comfortable, you could sleep in there. The only thing, Ernie fell out of bed, and we slept there for two nights. So I really don't know any much any more. I only know that people went to the telephone and make telephone calls from Ellis Island. I said, "Whom do they call? What do they know?" That puzzled me, but really what I did all day I have no idea.

LEVINE: Well, now, were you, was your English good when you arrived here? Were you able to converse?

LEHMANN: Yeah. I mean, I could talk. I mean, sometimes little words I didn't know, but I tried to learn.

LEVINE: You could get along with your English.

LEHMANN: I had English in school, and then I had that private lessons, so, I mean, I managed.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And so did you eat, then, in a big dining room here? Is that...

LEHMANN: I have no idea.

LEVINE: You don't remember that part.

LEHMANN: I have no, I don't remember it any more. I don't remember what it was.

LEVINE: Do you remember meeting the people, who did meet you here at Ellis Island?

LEHMANN: Max and Stella Goldsmith. They had vouched for me. So they came to meet us.

LEVINE: And do you remember that meeting?

LEHMANN: Well, I only remember that they were there, that's all. And then they took us to Chinatown, to a Chinese restaurant.

LEVINE: Was that a first for you, having...

LEHMANN: I never had eaten Chinese food before.

LEVINE: And what did you think of it?

LEHMANN: Oh, well, it was very strange for me, but I didn't want to say anything because I was too polite to say it, and, well, they asked me, "How do you like it here?" I said, "What can you say?" You have just arrived. So I said, "I do." It's a funny question to ask me. I wasn't...

LEVINE: You hadn't been there very long.

LEHMANN: Yeah, right.

LEVINE: And do you like Chinese food now?

LEHMANN: Yeah, now, yeah. I do. (they laugh) There is a Chinese food on the next corner, a restaurant to take out food. So if I don't know what to eat I go there and pick up something.

LEVINE: Okay. So then when you got, when you came to Manhattan where did you stay?

LEHMANN: See, a brother of Max Goldsmith, they, he and his wife had offered to take care of Ernie until I had a footing here, I had a job, and could take care of him myself. They had two children who were older than Ernie, and so, and they do something, they wanted to help somehow, who immigrates. And that was very nice. And I stayed, also, for two weeks, with them.

LEVINE: Where did they live?

LEHMANN: They lived in Mount Vernon. And they helped me find a job then in Mount Vernon. And my first job then was taking care of a three-year-old child. And, well, I had, I knew how to cook, and even people in Germany, I asked them, "What can I do to make a living when I come to the States?" "Oh, if you know how to cook, it's very, you'll find a job in no time." And so, but if you want to take a few, go to a cooking school and take some lessons, in Germany. Well, I did that for a few hours. I went there. And when I was at Jack Goldsmith's, Jack and Dora Goldsmith, I noticed that cooking in Germany and cooking in the States is quite different. Different

vegetables, different salad. And what I thought, the terrible portions, big portions of meat. I said do all people eat that much meat? I wasn't used to that. And, well, the first job, taking care of that child, and the woman told the woman I was going to work for, "Well, and in the afternoon you give the child a milkshake." I never had heard of a milkshake. I had seen at Jack's, I had chocolate milk. I mixed chocolate milk. "You mean chocolate?" "No, a milkshake." Well, she showed me, then, the appliances, how to make a milkshake. And, well, I didn't last very, not even a week, less than that at that job. (she laughs) Then a friend suggested to go to New York and go to Self Help, a Jewish organization who help immigrants, not only immigrants. They would have jobs, plenty of jobs, any kind of jobs. And I did that. And then I got other jobs. And the first woman I applied for a job, Mrs. Cohen, didn't believe I was Jewish. So she brought a Füller (pen) and when I could, when she saw I could read perfectly my Hebrew, so she believed that I was Jewish and hired me. They also had a child to take care of.

LEVINE: This was a Jewish woman who wanted to make sure you were...

LEHMANN: She wanted to make sure I was Jewish and not just a German. And so I remember then my, that was around 102nd or 103rd Street, near Broadway. Maybe on West End Avenue somewhere. And my relatives at that time lived at 158th Street. So I thought, well, 158th Street. And on Sundays they had company, other people who had come from Germany whom I had known. I wanted to see those people. So I was pushing the baby carriage from 103rd Street to 158th Street, and, well, of course it took much longer to go back again, and people were worried, "Where were you?" I said, "Oh, it was so nice. I pushed the carriage and pushed the carriage and all of a sudden I was at 125th Street." "You went that far?" I said, "Yes. I was to a hundred, and then I pushed it back. That's

why I'm so late now." So I didn't tell them I went to 158th Street. (she laughs) So, and, well, one thing else happened there. At that time, Marian Anderson was supposed to sing in Washington and the, the Daughters of the American Revolution didn't let her sing in the Constitution Hall at that time. So I was reading this in the Times, and when people were out, and when they came back I said, "I don't understand that." So she wanted to explain it to me. I said, "I understand it perfectly, but tell me, Marian Anderson is such a wonderful singer. Why couldn't she sing?" "But don't you know she is black?" And I don't want to repeat what she said. "Black people stink," she said. I mean, it's unbelievable.

LEVINE: So you were really shocked to hear that here.

LEHMANN: Yeah, right. Yeah. So, and, well, it was, and then also Ernie, we made friends with some American people, and they invited Ernie for a weekend or something like that. And they had a black woman as a maid. And Ernie was, he accepted that black woman because he had seen black women on the boat. And so they were so surprised. So I said, "Well..." They questioned it. He said, "Well, she isn't black. Oh, she was sitting in the sun that long. That's why she is..." (she laughs) They told me. I said, "Well, that's what he was told by his mother, who didn't know how to say it."

LEVINE: So now did Ernie go to school right away?

LEHMANN: No.

LEVINE: He was four.

LEHMANN: He was four years old. He was with Jack for about two months, and then I found a children's home in Brooklyn where he could stay, I mean, sleep

there also. And I made, I went there, had an interview, and they told me all right, they could take care of him. When I brought Ernie there there were, an attendant came with these two boys who had arrived on the same ship as we had. I remember those boys. But the boys by themselves did not, because they didn't play with each other, something like that, and each boy was with his family. And so there was no reaction from the children, but I remember the mothers, and talked to the mothers. And the mothers didn't like the home. Neither did I. It was a neighborhood where no park or nothing green was growing. I mean, the place was all right, it was clean, but no, I couldn't see any trees or anything there?

LEVINE: Would your son stay there during the week and then come home on the weekend, or would he just stay there?

LEHMANN: No, no. He stayed there, I went to visit. I didn't have a place of my own, then. I had a sleep-in job. That was, I had to make, I mean, I had no, I came here without any money. So I had to save money, and so as a matter of fact I didn't have to pay in that home, that was free. But my family, my relatives from Frankfurt, they had settled in East Strasbourg in Pennsylvania, because sisters of my uncle by marriage had lived there, so they came there. And he was a butcher in Germany and there was no kosher butcher there, so they opened a kosher butcher shop in there. And they invited us, they said, "Any time you can come, you are welcome to come and see us." And so I don't know, was I between jobs or something. One long weekend we went there, and I remember that bus ride. When I took, asked for the tickets, the man behind the window said, "Make sure and tell your bus driver that you want to get off in East Strasbourg." I said, "Okay." So I wasn't worried, you get off, because I knew it was a few hours ride. But then all of a sudden I saw signs "Strasbourg" along the road. I said, well, at every stop I went and asked, "Is this East

Strasbourg?" He said, "No, not yet." And I was so glad when we finally got to East Stroudsburg and my cousin was waiting for us. And it was, I knew it was a small town. I was surprised to see it. It was beautiful. First of all, surroundings in the Poconos, it was beautiful. And there were beautiful stores in that town, and then my family's relatives who lived there said, "Don't go, go and stay, try to get a job here and don't go back to the city in summer. Don't stay in the city in the summer. It will be terrible." So then also there was a farm, Lord's Farm, who had children of their own, always took one or two children as boarders. And, well, we went there and asked. I talked to the Mrs. Lord. She looked very severe, a tall woman. But then once you talked to her it was all right. And Ernie somehow like he was running around on that farm as if it was his own, so I, all right. We made arrangements, he might come back. And so family friends drove around with me to find a job for the summer, and found a job in a boarding house at the end of May, Ernie and I, we went to East Stroudsburg.

LEVINE: That was your first summer.

LEHMANN: That was the first summer, yeah.

LEVINE: In this country.

LEHMANN: So, and I had a job, and Ernie stayed with Mrs. Lords, and whenever I had a chance, I mean, on my day off I went to see him.

LEVINE: And then in the fall you came back to Manhattan?

LEHMANN: In the fall I came back to New York, but I left Ernie there because it was much better, the surroundings were much better than in that home in New York or in Brooklyn. And I thought so, well, it was bad. I couldn't go there

every week to Strasbourg to see him. And I said, "Well, I come as often as I can." And that's what I did then.

LEVINE: So then how, did you, you came back here, and did you find another job here?

LEHMANN: I find another job, yeah. The job I found then was very strange. It was with Countess Gernine. Gernine was, the husband was the son of the last Austrian-Hungarian foreign minister. And he was a writer and also a monarchist. The woman was half Jewish and, I mean, she was half Jewish, but I mean, she was brought up a Gentile. Her mother was Gentile, her father was Jewish. Very wealthy, from a very wealthy family, otherwise the count wouldn't have married her, I guess. (they laugh) So, and they lived in a remodeled farm on Long Island. It was real strange. I enjoyed, I liked that place. It was so different. And they had a wonderful library. I mean, I could read whatever I wanted to. So, and they had a child which was, the child was a year younger than Ernie was, so somehow the woman, I thought I know how to get along with a child, and it turned out all right.

LEVINE: How long did you stay there?

LEHMANN: I stayed there until I went back to, to the boarding house again the next following year.

LEVINE: For the summer.

LEHMANN: For the summer. Before I had lived in that boarding house, that woman Mrs. Luntner had asked me, "What are you going to do? Would you like to come back next year?" I said, "Well, we don't know." Because in the

meantime the war had really started in Europe. And I don't know what's going to happen, but if I can I will come back. And I gladly came back, because it was, they had nice, the guests were very nice, and the Luntners were nice. So I came back. In the meantime my parents had arrived here. My one brother and my parents also had arrived here. And my brother, he was the oldest one, he stayed a few weeks in New York. He said, "I don't like it in New York." He went to Philadelphia, and he made friends there, got a job there, and so then my uncle and aunt said to us, "Well, whenever your parents come..." In the meantime, we had sent an affidavit for them to Germany to make sure that they could come. And also, Max and Stella Goldsmith helped us with an affidavit, gave an additional affidavit. And so whenever they come they should stay with us, my father's brother, to get used to the States. And when we were sitting together, after my parents came, what we're going to do. So my brother had settled in Philadelphia, so, "Why don't we all go to Philadelphia, and he finds a place for us to live. And when I come back in fall I come also to Philadelphia." And that's what we did. He found a house in, uh, a row house, a typical Philadelphia row house. The only thing was there was a tree in front of the house, so in case he come home late in the evening he could find the house because there is one house like the other. (she laughs) And also it was a one fare, I mean, we didn't have to pay extra fare to go there. We could go right, walk to the subway. In the beginning, when I came to Philadelphia then, in the beginning it was hard to find jobs and I tried everything. Because I didn't want a live-in job any more, because after all I wanted to live with the family. And so there were many jobs there. I worked one day, two days or something. And then finally I found a job in a restaurant in West Philadelphia. I worked the night. I worked in the evening. It was the night. Well, at least all those people were Jewish, but they didn't want me to tell the customers that I am Jewish. It was very hard. And also I, they had a fountain, I had to learn the

fountain, and things like that. But I was glad I learned it. The only thing, going home in the morning, I felt dirty. And here people who are going to work, they are so clean. I mean, not that I looked dirty, but I felt dirty. And I stayed there for quite some time. And when I got a job in a drugstore...

LEVINE: Now, was Ernie now back with you?

LEHMANN: No, Ernie was still with Mrs. Luntner, in Strasbourg. And even when my parents came in the beginning, I said, "It's much better if he stays there." Because it was everything so unsettled and we, it was really no good for a poor child to get there. And I worked in a drugstore that was like an apartment house, and the drugstore was on the street floor, street level. And people thought I was Spanish. I don't know why. At that time I didn't speak one word of Spanish. When they came, they asked for the Spanish girl. "Let the Spanish girl bring the newspaper up." (she laughs) Well, I liked to do it because I knew I got a dime tip. (she laughs) And, uh...

LEVINE: And what was your attitude about being here? I mean, how did you feel when you were just getting settled and finding your way in the country?

LEHMANN: Well, I was glad to be here. I was glad to be here. And you heard, then, about things happening, being people deported. And I said, "Well, how did I deserve, when I could make it and the others didn't." On the other hand, I was glad. Then, when the war started here, I was an enemy alien because I had come from Germany. And we had to file then papers and they were asked, "Why did you want to come," and what happened. And I said, "Well, I want to come here to bring up my child in a free society." And so, well, that was okay. They had nothing against me. But if I wanted to see Ernie I needed a permit. You couldn't travel, like, going from Philadelphia to Camden is like going from New York to Brooklyn. So going to Camden

you needed a permit because this was New Jersey, and Philadelphia was Pennsylvania. You always got the permit, but you had to go to the office to get it. And also, when I wanted to see Ernie in Pennsylvania, I needed a permit to go there. It was not that you didn't get it, but the idea you have to go there and get the permit, you know.

LEVINE: Okay. Let's pause here for a minute until the tape is turned.

LEHMANN: Yeah.

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO
BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE TWO

LEVINE: Okay. So we were saying that you had to, in this country, have a permit, because you were an enemy alien, in order to travel.

LEHMANN: Yeah, right. Yeah. So that it was, after the war had started, you know. And, uh...

LEVINE: Did you have any communication with people in Germany during this period at all?

LEHMANN: Yes. I mean, up till the war I did write. I mean, I corresponded with the other grandmother, you know, with the man's mother. And so, and, it stopped, then, when the war started, it stopped. I couldn't write because then there were, people who were related to them, distant relatives of the Kempners were here. And I asked them, I had met them when I was, originally, when I came here. And after the war was over I asked them if

they had any news of Germany, from the people in Germany. They didn't have anything either. So some, I don't know any more who started writing. Well, later on I got mail again. So, and, but I can't recall who started it, if I started it, because I didn't know, they wrote to the address which they had from before the war.

LEVINE: So what were you and the other people from Germany who were here when the war started, how, what was it like? I mean, what were you thinking?

LEHMANN: I mean, it was, we didn't know what to expect, or whom to, I mean, it just, it was really strange. Because, first of all, you didn't know, then you heard that the Germans, they went into Belgium, into France, and then also into Russia, and I mean, what happened there, on the east front. So it seemed there was one victory for the Germans, and for the other, and we were very upset about it. "What are they doing there, and the poor people in those countries, what they have to go through now." That was it. You know, we didn't want the Germans to succeed, of course. So, and it was, it was very strange.

LEVINE: It must be strange being both German and Jewish.

LEHMANN: Yeah, right.

LEVINE: To reconcile...

LEHMANN: Then I became a citizen in '44, in 1944. Yeah. And could vote, then, for President Roosevelt. So, I mean, I voted for President Roosevelt. And it was very strange. When President Roosevelt was campaigning in Philadelphia, and I was working at Gimbel's then, and the youngest son of

the founder, Ellis Gimbel, he was retired and lived in Philadelphia, and he came to the store quite frequently. And everybody, I worked at the fountain. Everybody liked to wait on him, and he, all he had was a cup of coffee for five cents, and nobody gave him a check. "No check." I said, "No, it's on the house." I mean, he always checked, and shook his head. I said, "It's impossible with you." And I said, "Thank you." (she laughs) Really. And when that day when President Roosevelt was campaigning in Philadelphia it was raining on and off. Not hard, but it was raining. And Mr. Gimbel was standing in front. He was an old man. He was standing in front of the store because, waiting for the parade there to come through. And he was told to come, to go inside, and not stand in the rain. So he said, "When that man can sit in an open car in the rain, I can stand in the street in the rain also." (she laughs)

LEVINE: What was your opinion of President Roosevelt?

LEHMANN: I thought he was tops, you know what I mean? At that time, he was a democrat, and he was for the small people, and that's, I mean, at that time, I don't think we had many experiences, any experience whatsoever. So we thought just President Roosevelt was tops. And, well, I know then, when President Roosevelt died, then I was in, I mean, my son was in Philadelphia by then. As a matter of fact, he had scarlet fever, and he was in the hospital. And when I came to visit him I said, "You know?" He said, "Yes, Mommy. The nurse told us that President Roosevelt has passed away." So it was also he...

LEVINE: He meant a lot.

LEHMANN: Yeah. He meant a lot. Yeah. So...

LEVINE: Well, now, did you ever have any other children besides Ernie?

LEHMANN: No, no.

LEVINE: Ernie's your only child. And now do you have grandchildren?

LEHMANN: Yeah.

LEVINE: And how many do you have?

LEHMANN: I have two grandchildren, a girl who is twenty-three, and the boy will be twenty-two in another month or so.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what are their names?

LEHMANN: Dena. I mean, she is being called Dena. You want to call the full name? Dena Montserrat Mathilda. (they laugh) Montserrat is her mother's name, she's of Spanish descent. So in Spain the children get the mother's name. And Mathilda was a grandmother's name. And my grandson is Ernest, for his father, and Stephen, for a grandfather, and Max, Maximillian for another grandfather. But he's called Stephen, Stefan. He's called Stefan. And he is in Burlington now at the last, he will be finished in December.

LEVINE: Well, now, is there anything, having had the experience you lived through, do you find that it's left it's impression on you in some ways that you can mention? I mean, is there anything about that experience that has, that changed you in some way, that you can now...

LEHMANN: Well, I don't know if it changed, but I mean, if I would, I couldn't live in Germany any more. This, I realize that it's, I was visiting there once and

so, and I talked German. I mean, I didn't say any word in English. We were in the store, and somehow the salesgirl said, "How come I don't talk a word of..." How come she knows I'm not a German. I said, "You don't know, you don't realize it, you act quite different from us." So I didn't, I didn't notice. So, and that...

LEVINE: So you don't notice that you're different, you've changed in ways...

LEHMANN: Yeah. I didn't notice it, you know. But the German friend did. She said, "You are different." I mean, freer or something like that. I don't know what it is. So I mean, besides, I mean, that's why I was hesitant, meeting that German woman. So you don't know what other background, how do they, what do you they believe in, or something like that. You know, you always, no, wait a minute.

LEVINE: There's a caution about discussing your past.

LEHMANN: Not only that, even talking to them. So you don't know, do you want to talk or don't you. You know, you don't know their attitude, what are they, and things like that. So it's, maybe it's, I mean, I have a cousin I'm very close with. She's only ten years older than I. And, (she laughs), we grew up on the same place. Many times we say, "Well, we live comfortable and everything, but something was taken away from us." You know, it, so, like when you get a letter from Germany and mentions things like that, just to see it, or to go there and that you cannot do any more. It is, I can't explain it what it is, but there is something like children of friends came, I'm sure they still come, every year they came to the States. And the last time I saw them I told them every time they come it's so, I don't sleep for three weeks or something like that because everything comes back and it makes me, I don't know, it upsets me somehow. And maybe after I told them that they

don't contact me any more, and I'm glad for it, because you don't want to go through this, be reminded of what happened. I mean, you lived through it and you know it, but it's so, it's buried somehow.

LEVINE: And you'd rather keep it that way than to have it stirred up.

LEHMANN: Right. So it's, I don't know if it's strange or not. Often you read, like, when people had emigrated as young people came back and lived in the States, they want to go, they go back to the country. I'm thinking in particular about a woman who left Italy. She was so anxious to go back to Italy, she wants to see it. And after she has seen it and she lived there, she was supposed to stay there for three weeks. After two weeks she said to her daughter, "Let's go home." She said, "I know now the United States is my home." And I think that I would feel the same way. So it's, you just, you grow into it. I mean, and this is what you like, and that's where you live and, uh, believe in.

LEVINE: I think maybe that's a very good note to close on.

LEHMANN: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: And I thank you very much...

LEHMANN: I thank you.

LEVINE: ...Martha Lehmann, for being with us today. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service.

END OF THE INTERVIEW