

**EI-909**

**RENATE PELZER NORUM**

**BIRTH DATE: SEPTEMBER 7, 1939**

**INTERVIEW DATE: JULY 17, 1997**

**AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 57**

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**INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST**

**RECORDING ENGINEER: PETER HOM**

**INTERVIEW LOCATION: ELLIS ISLAND RECORDING STUDIO**

**TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: JENNA CIACCIO**

**TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: ELIZABETH ORCUTT/IS**

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**RESIDENCES:**

- **GERMANY: ROSTOCK; KYLLBURG**
- **US: CHICAGO, IL**

**HISTORIAN'S NOTE: Mrs. Norum's daughter, Carin and Kirsten Mueller are also present.**

SIGRIST: Good morning, this is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Thursday, July 17, 1997. I'm at the Ellis Island recording studio with Mrs. Renate Pelzer Norum. And I'll spell Pelzer, is P-E-L-Z-E-R. That's Mrs. Norum's maiden name. And Norum is N-O-R-U-M, her married name. Mrs. Norum came from Germany in 1952. She was thirteen years old when she arrived in the United States. And her family was detained for four days at Ellis Island because of her mother's blurry chest x-ray. I should say that Peter Hom is running the equipment. And that Mrs. Norum's daughter Carin Johnson and Kirsten Mueller are also listening to

this interview out in the other part of the recording studio. Mrs. Norum, thank you for coming.

NORUM: Thank you.

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

NORUM: Okay. I was born on September 7<sup>th</sup>, 1939.

SIGRIST: September 7, 1939.

NORUM: 1939.

SIGRIST: And where in Germany were you born?

NORUM: I was born in Rostock, Germany. That's on --

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

NORUM: ...the Baltic Sea. And it's spelled R-O-S-T-O-C-K.

SIGRIST: And do you know anything about the circumstances of your birth?

NORUM: Yes, I, I do know a little bit about it, because the Second World War had erupted at this point. And, and all the hospitals, of course, were closed to any private people. They were strictly available for the military, and so on. But I was born at home in Rostock. Rostock is not our -- our family, not where our family is from. My father worked for Heinkel, that's an aeronautical company.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that please?

NORUM: Heinkel is H-E-I-N-K-E-L. And he was studying to become an aeronautical engineer and worked for Heinkel, building airplanes and etcetera. This took him away from their hometown area, which was the Rhineland in Germany. And that's why I was born in Rostock. Even though, you know, as I say it's not a family area.

SIGRIST: And you said you were born at home because the hospitals were...

NORUM: Were, they were just closed to private patients. They were strictly available, so my mom said; they were just for military personnel. The war had erupted, as I said. You know it started, I guess a few weeks before I was born, or something. And you know, everything, it changed once that occurred.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever tell you a story about what you were like as a baby?

NORUM: Incurable. I was just a tomboy. I was very active. I just was in trouble all the time, I guess. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Did you grow up in that town?

NORUM: No, I did not. I think we left Rostock, let me think. For some reason, after I, I was born shortly there after. I, I don't remember much about my father. The war, you know, of course, was declared by the United States at that – I, I can't remember. I should have checked all this out. But I think it was just several years after I was born, maybe two or three years after I was born. My father was transferred to Vienna, to work for Heinkel over there. I think a lot of personnel from Heinkel –, I don't know whether Allies destroyed part of Heinkel or, or what was going on. But he was transferred to Vienna. And my mother took me back to the Rhineland,

which was right near; it's in the Mosel River Valley. Right near Luxembourg, French border area over there. And so we, we re turned to that area. And,

SIGRIST: Do you have any personal recollections before we get you to the Rhineland?

NORUM: Ye-,

SIGRIST: ...of the first town, the town that you were born in? Do you have any...?

NORUM: Rostock.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the house, or..?

NORUM: Yes. I remember the apartment building I lived in. My daughter, Carin, and her husband were out there last year. Took some pictures, which helped renew, you know, my memories.

SIGRIST: What are your memories of that?

NORUM: My memories are, of course, being in this apartment. I believe it was the second floor, or so. And I do remember being left alone at night before, you know, my, my father was transferred. And Mom and Dad going out, and I was just left alone. This is the way Europeans do it. They don't have babysitters. And I remember, I would get out of my little bed and go to the bathroom. And they always, always found me in their bed when they got home. I would always return to their bed. And I remember a large dollhouse in this apartment. It was all, it had electricity, and it was wonderful. An aunt of my mother's sister gave that to me. And I was, it

was such an, it left such an impression on me that I have never forgotten that.

And I also remember having roller-- a scooter I guess it is. And doing this up and down the street. And on the other end of the street, our street dead-ended. On, on a stadium-type thing was, it was like a grass berm]. And the stadium was like a bowl, and I guess that was called like a 'Hitler Stadium', or something. And I remember scampering up that, you know, with some little friends. And looking at all these seats. And, and it was almost like a coliseum. You know, it was all built-into-the-earth type thing.

SIGRIST: An amphitheater, sort of.

NORUM: Amphitheater, right. That, that's,... and I remember that for some reason. And I think that's about. I think I remember an escalator in a store, and getting a stuffed toy from a friend of my parents. And just little,

SIGRIST: Little glimpses.

NORUM: ...bits and pieces like that. Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Let's talk,

NORUM: And the War, I should say the War. I remember the air raids. I do remember that.

SIGRIST: Could you talk a little bit about that?

NORUM: The,

SIGRIST: And this is the first town, not when you went,

NORUM: Rostock. We're still in Rostock.

SIGRIST: Right. What do you remember about that?

NORUM: So maybe I was there 'til I was three or something. I, I really, I should have checked this with my parents. Air raids. You know, frightening.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for us what an air raid was like to live through?

NORUM: The sirens. You know, the sirens, and, of course, the airplanes. And, and you would rush to a shelter. And sometimes it happened so quickly, you didn't even get there. And buildings being destroyed and debris falling and, and that sort of thing. That's, I, I, just remember the, the horrible sirens. And when we came to this country, just hearing these sirens from ambulances was just a very frightening experience. It just recalled all of that, because that's what the air raid sirens sounded like. You know, they were just -- much the same.

SIGRIST: Did, do you know how anyone who is a friend of the family's or a relative who was hurt in any of these air raids.

NORUM: Not in Rostock. My father lost two brothers in the war. But in -- in -- Rostock, I don't remember anyone we knew losing their life. So I don't connect that at all with Rostock.

SIGRIST: Let-let's talk about your dad. What was his name?

NORUM: Frank Pelzer.

SIGRIST: And, um,

NORUM: Or Franz at the time.

SIGRIST: Franz.

NORUM: Franz. He changed it to Frank when he became a citizen over here, so Franz.

SIGRIST: And tell me what you know about his family background and his upbringing.

NORUM: Well, I, I knew quite a bit about his family because we returned to his hometown during the war, when we had to literally evacuate Rostock. He is one of seven children. And his father worked for the railroad and also did some farming. He had property, and just had a, I think just several cows, and very small, production-type farming. And they had a large home, and beautiful gardens around the home. And, you know, every imaginable flower and plant, and I think, fruit tree in the world. You know, it was just a – [not understood] it was a beautiful, beautiful city. Very pastoral, it was a spa.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the city again?

NORUM: Kyllburg, K-Y-L-L-B-U-R-G.

SIGRIST: Is this where you went to when you moved from the first place?

NORUM: From Kyl-, right, right. My, my father comes from Kyllburg, my mother from Dasburg. And they're not too far apart.

SIGRIST: So dad actually went to Vienna, you went to his families.

NORUM: Well, he went to Vienna. And Mom and I, we were left on our own. And it was very frightening for Mom and me to get back. Because again, all the trains, you know, with the military. And we got lifts on, we partially by train and then some trucks helped us out. You know, took us along. It, it was just, well, a country in war. And you know, then you had a dictator in addition to it all. And things were just, very, very difficult. Very difficult.

SIGRIST: Before we talk about that, because I would like to talk about that,

NORUM: Eh-hmm.

SIGRIST: ...but I still want to talk about your dad a little bit. Can you sort of give me a sense of what his personality was like?

NORUM: Oh, he is very outgoing, very social. My father was a great athlete. And,

SIGRIST: What did he enjoy doing athletically?

NORUM: Soccer. My father played twenty-seven years of soccer. He, he's in the equivalent of the Hall of Fame out there. And he was forty-one when he came to this country, and he was still playing soccer. He was just; he's still in excellent physical shape. He still lifts weights and works out. And he's going to be eighty-six years old. So he, he, his family was very athletic...very, very athletic. A brother, who was killed in the war, might have had a chance to go to the Olympics. He was just a, a great track star. You know, very, very gifted. And in running, very fast. And,

SIGRIST: When you were a child, what were some of the things that you enjoyed doing with your father?

NORUM: My father is not part of my picture until the war ended. I literally did not see my father again until, I think it was, early fall of 1945. We had no idea where he was. Everything on the radio was controlled by, of course, Hitler's regime. So you heard what they wanted you to hear. The newspaper, same thing. Mail didn't go through. There was just no way you could be connected with anyone. When he left to go to Vienna, we lost track of my father. We just...

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit how, what kind of, how did that affect your mother? Not being able to contact your father?

NORUM: Well, of course, it was very difficult because, now I don't know, I don't know whether my mother received money –, because my father, of course, was employed by Heinkel. So my mother probably received, but I'm guessing, I really am. She, she knew he was all right, but we really had no contact.

SIGRIST: No letters, anything.

NORUM: No, no, it was, it was just very difficult. You know there was a lot of chaos in, in Germany. Because when the United States became involved in the war, you know, everything went wrong all of a sudden. You know, and the war came into Germany after that. You know, they were, he was so busy going everywhere else, invading every country. But after that, you know, things turned around. And, and my father's brothers, one was only eighteen years old; they were just pulled into the – to service. He didn't care what age they were.

SIGRIST: Once things got that desperate.

NORUM: You know, whether you wanted to be part, everyone was just called. So, so it was very chaotic and, you know, you really did not have the normal males and everything. You know, that – that you would expect.

SIGRIST: How did you think about your father when he was not there? Did you have clear memories of him from before he left for Vienna?

NORUM: Not, not very much, not very much at all. Eh-hmm.

SIGRIST: Photographs, um,

NORUM: I, we do have some photographs of those early years. But I really do not connect-- I remember being very attached to him. And, and you know, my father playing with me, you know, for exa--a little bit in the house. But I don't connect him with, with doing things with him as I do after he returned. You know, it was just, it was mostly my mother, her sister who was up there, and friends. You know, I don't, my father does not fit much into the, I just remember being cuddled every now and then when he was at home. But,

SIGRIST: Which would be prior to when he went,

NORUM: Yes, before, right, right. And after that, it's just, my father was just missing, you know, for too many years.

SIGRIST: What was your mom's name?

NORUM: Joanne, or she was called Johanna.

SIGRIST: Can you spell Johanna?

NORUM: That's J-O-H-A-N-N-A.

SIGRIST: And her maiden name?

NORUM: Trost, T-R-O-S-T.

SIGRIST: Tell me what you know about your mother's family background and her upbringing. Stories she might have told about,

NORUM: I adored my mother's family. She was one of eight. And I was the adored grandchild.

SIGRIST: Do you have a story about, that reflects that?

NORUM: Oh, I, every, everything about my mother's family is very special to me. My mother's family, most of the family is in this country. Her father and his brothers and sisters came to this country in the late 1800s. My grandfather was asked to return to Germany because the family had a leather tanning business. And when his father died, his mother asked that he come back to Germany to run the business. He was the only one that went into the leather business, so the others lucked out. They stayed in this country. My grandfather never forgave his mother for doing that to him. He loved this country, wanted to stay.

Of course, he went out, ran the business, married. And had... they had eight children. My father's family had seven. I made a mistake. My mother's family had eight. And when these, when his children became teenagers, he encouraged them to come back to this country. So my mother's sisters, let's see, how many were here? Three, three sisters and a brother came back to the United States. My mother was my grandfather's pet. He was very attached to her. He could not let her go.

So she stayed in Germany and some of the, two sisters and brother who followed her. My mother married, and, my father, of course. And,

SIGRIST: Do you know how they met?

NORUM: My mother, as I said, was from Dasburg. That's a little town right on the border of Germany and,

SIGRIST: Dasburg?

NORUM: ...Luxembourg. Dasburg, D-A-S-B-U-R-G. And that's right on the border of Luxembourg and Germany. And my mother went to work in Kyllburg, right. She went to work in Kyllburg. She was at a small bakery or something. And I don't even know why that happened, why she went over there. Because she was -- she went to Luxembourg to, to be trained on how to be a proper German wife, you know. Where she learned how to cook, and learned how to do all the things women needed to learn in those days. So after Luxembourg, for some reason she went to Germany, to Kyllburg. And she worked in this little bakery. And anyway, that's how she got to Dasburg. And she had family in Dasburg as well; one of her mother's sisters lived there. So she had family there, right, and cousins and everything. So I don't know whether that was one of the reasons she went to Kyllburg; but worked there and met my father. And, of course, they married and,

SIGRIST: What year did they marry?

NORUM: They would be married sixty years this August. So we're talking about 1937, right? 1937, they married. So that was two years before the war of course, and,

SIGRIST: Were you the first-born child?

NORUM: Yes, I was the first-born. And,

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about your mother's personality.

NORUM: My mother, [Laughs], let's see. My mother was a controlling type of a person. How can I describe, as the children say, *Oma* [Grandmother]. She was a lot of fun. She was very dedicated to her family. Family was everything to her, but she was also controlling.

SIGRIST: What were some of the aspects of family life that she liked to, to be in control of?

NORUM: She very, well, very nurturing, and she was in charge of her kitchen. No one was permitted in the kitchen when she cooked, no one, absolutely no one. And I blame mother still today that I absolutely hate to cook. [Laughs] I cook every day, but I don't like it. I don't really enjoy it.

SIGRIST: But that was her domain.

NORUM: That was her domain. She passed away this February-- February, was eighty-seven and a half years old. And she would not let anyone in the kitchen. And Christmas, when she cooked dinner for us, Christmas dinner, even at her age, she did not want anyone around her. At the end, you know, the last few years, she did permit Dad in the kitchen to help her clean up a little bit. But that was her domain. And she liked being in charge of the household money as well. And did a good job. And, but, when I say a little bit controlling, she, she liked meddling a little bit. You know, when I married, she still liked knowing what was going on. Or even with the grandchildren.

You know, she just -- our older daughter )and I know my older daughter's going to laugh and my younger daughter will too) her husband was very attached to an antique lamp he brought into their marriage. And my mother hated this lamp. So last year she said, 'We're going out to get new lamps.' Didn't even ask whether they wanted new lamps, but she was very nice. You know, she loved buying the children things. But it was meddling, and we couldn't make her understand this. So mother was a meddler, but nice.

SIGRIST: What were some of the things that your mother enjoyed doing for herself? You, you mentioned cooking.

NORUM: Eh-hmm.

SIGRIST: What were some of the other things that brought her, her own personal pleasure?

NORUM: Ah, she loved needlework. Absolutely loved doing that. And I think; mom was not a lot of fun to do things with. You know, like being a daughter, you think she would have enjoyed going out to lunch with me, and doing things. She never really enjoyed that. Shopping, yes. You know, every -- when she was younger, she enjoyed that. But I think she basically just loved being with the family. I, I, that's the closest thing. She didn't like going to movies. And, but just being together with the family. She just absolutely loved it. And she loves her -- the girls' husbands. And she would spoil them and cook for them. And, and she was just a nurturer,

SIGRIST: Very family oriented.

NORUM: ...just a nurturer. This is when she was happiest. You know, to be with us.

SIGRIST: You mentioned needlepoint. Did she teach you how to do any of that?

NORUM: The knitting work. She didn't do needlepoint per se, but she liked needlework, oh yes. Yes, she taught me how to knit and crochet. And I guess some, the cross stitch and this sort of thing. And I enjoy doing that as well.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a story or a recollection of something that you and your mother did together when you were, maybe when your dad was in Vienna?

NORUM: Eh-hmm.

SIGRIST: An experience that you shared together at,

NORUM: Eh-hmm.

SIGRIST: ...that time.

NORUM: My fondest memories of, of doing things with my mother were walking to neighboring towns. And I just absolutely loved doing that with my mother. We would just set out in the morning, and we would walk and visit friends, or, or family. And you know, the towns might be several kilometers away from where we lived, but it was always so wonderful because you got, you got cake and cookies, and you know, and maybe mineral water. And Mom would of course have coffee, you know, with friends. And that to me was just really the best. And when my father returned, going to soccer games, and watching Dad play. You know, that's --and walks --Sunday

walks. You know, in those days, you just went out and you just walked because it was so beautiful. You know, it was so scenic. And, and the woods, and the water, and it was just magnificent country, just magnificent country.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about what life was like when your father was in Vienna, and it's you and your mom. And some of his family, I believe?

NORUM: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: And some of her family too, or no?

NORUM: No, in Kyllburg --. Well we went back to my father's family in Kyllburg. Now this, this gets a little confusing, because we went back to her home.

SIGRIST: To your mother's family.

NORUM: My mother's home first. But they had all been evacuated to Westerwald. How do you say Wester-- to a different area. Because the Battle of the Bulge came right through Luxembourg and everyone had to leave. So they were all evacuated. Her brother did stay in their home. And my, my mother's parents had a beautiful, beautiful home. They had the manor house, that belonged to the, (whoops), that belonged to the fortress. And as I said, they had the business. You know, the leather bus-. So they, they had a beautiful home, and they had to leave everything behind. But her younger brother decided to stay there. And this was against, you know, the, the law at the time. But he hid in this place. It was so big, you know. I never really knew all of it. So he hid up in the attic or something. And he was almost executed when they found him. But he did stay with the house, but we couldn't stay there. So Mom and I left there after we had worked our way through Germany, and went to Kyllburg.

Now my father's family -, my mother was not fond, very terribly fond, of his side of the family. And I was not either. I was just one of the grandchildren. And my grandfather was rather a rough type of a person, you know, he was very abrupt. And you know, I remember just being swatted around with one of his caps. You know, he would just scatter the grandchildren. He would just, [Laughs] you know, he was not a very patient man; and very authoritarian and this kind of thing. And so we had to go and stay with them and it was not a very happy situation. And my mother, as I said, had family in the same little town. And they finally gave us a room in, in their home. You know, when the situation had just gotten a little bit too, too tense with my grandparents. Because others were there as well, my father's sister and her family, and,

SIGRIST: Well, and the environment is tense, too..

NORUM: ...and etcetera. Right, right, right. And you know, of course the air raids. And well, not to get too confusing here, we went to stay with my mother's cousin. They gave us a room, their living room. That's where we lived. And I remember, we had their living room. And, and I think I slept on a sofa and my mother had like a pull out bed. And, and she kept the potatoes under the bed. And you know, it was just a very hard situation. But it was wonderful that they made room for us. You know, that we had somewhere to stay. And again, the war was coming closer, closer, the Battle of the Bulge. I remember all of this, because by this time, we're talking about '45.

SIGRIST: Eh-hmm. Well,

NORUM: I should,

SIGRIST: ...talk about what you remember about, about the actual war, sort of encroaching into your life.

NORUM: The war. See I, before that I was in Dasburg, because we went back to Dasburg. For some reason Mom and I, maybe we went back to Dasburg after Mother just couldn't really live with the situation in my grandparent's house; and -- because we did go back and stayed with her brother. And air raids, I remember horrible air raids. And we had to go to a bunker that was built into the mountain, under the fortress. And I remember that all the entrances into this bunker were bombed and destroyed but one. We were almost buried alive in this. And it left a frightening memory for me. I, even now when I'm in theaters; I always look for the exits first, first thing, because of what happened there.

And I remember bunk beds, three and four high, and no privacy at all. And soup lines, you know. It was all, very, very difficult. And once, now I don't know whether that occurred when the Battle of the Bulge went through. Because everything was bombed, including my grandparents' home. Most of it was destroyed, and just a little portion was rebuilt. But I definitely was in Dasburg during a period of time as well. And I would think it was before the end of the war, because we returned to Kyllburg after all this destruction. And my uncle went with us. Everything was bombed out. And we had a terrible time getting through.

And I think it might just have been thirty kilometers, so it was not a great distance. But when you're walking with a little child, you know, it was very difficult. I, we turned to Kyllburg and -- and I remember, we stayed in tunnels over there because --the railroad tunnels. They had cars in the tunnels for the people. And, and that to me was even worse than staying in this shelter, because at least you had beds and some comfort. Whereas the tunnels, you just kept running back and forth. And

sometimes we didn't even bother. We just stayed in, in their home because they had a very nice, substantial home, too. And it was all stone, and they had like a basement we could go into. And I remember sleeping on the potatoes. And because they had stocked up some food, you know, for, for the situation. And I recall the children -- we slept, my cousins and everyone, we all were sleeping on the potatoes and,

SIGRIST: Do you remember how you felt emotionally about being in this kind of environment? Or what, how does a little girl feel --

NORUM: Eh-hmm.

SIGRIST: ...when she's thrown into these rather extraordinary circumstances?

NORUM: Well, you, you have a great deal of fear, because you never know whether you will survive this. I remember, for example... and we're, we're jumping around. Unfortunately that's the way my memory is working right now. I remember going from one town, and working our way back to our hometown. Stopping at another town, Gerolstein, it was called. Stopping at a cousin's home before we got home. And my mother became very restless. You know, she just wanted to leave there. And had we not left there, we would have lost our life, because they had a major raid attack over there.

And the entire air raid shelter was blown to smithereens. And everyone lost their life. But leaving there, I remember being on a truck, a pick-up truck. And the back was open, and Mom and I got a ride. And the, it was an air attack, and they were dropping bombs all around us. And we had to quickly abandon this truck and run into this building. And one of the men said, 'We can't stay here. They're bombing this.' And he pulled me and carried me. We ran into near by woods and all of that was blown up, just

a couple of minutes later. And this is what, what this war was all about. you know, you could be with loved ones. And people were blown up, and you were all right.

You know, I mean, it was just horrible, horrible suffering, terrible, terrible. And of course these V-1s and 2s, you know, Hitler's. I-I never knew they had no one in them, these missiles that would just come, shoom, you know. And they would just skim above rooftops and, and all these horrible sounds. You know, it was just a real frightening, real frightening thing for a young person to go through. But I don't think I suffered as much as Mom did.

SIGRIST: We're gonna pause, just for a second.

NORUM: Okay.

SIGRIST: So Peter can flip the tapes over.

NORUM: Okay.

SIGRIST: And we'll keep talking about this.

NORUM: Okay.

SIGRIST: This is very interesting. This is the end of side one.

END SIDE A, TAPE 1 BEGIN SIDE B, TAPE 1

SIGRIST: Okay, we're now beginning side two.

NORUM: Okay.

SIGRIST: You've just been talking about what it was like to be a little girl,

NORUM: Eh-hmm, eh-hmm.

SIGRIST: ...in these rather dangerous circumstances. Can you talk a little bit about how the families kept together during all of this? Or maybe they didn't. But, but what was the family unit? And how did you manage to, to maintain a connection with your family members in all this?

NORUM: Well, the family unit seemed to be the women and children and the older people, because --

SIGRIST: So there are elderly men involved in,

NORUM: Oh yes, yes,

SIGRIST: ...all of this.

NORUM: ...I, my grandfathers. But all the younger men were gone. You know, Hitler just pulled everyone in, as I said, including my father's younger brother at eighteen. And he lost his life several months later in Italy. And then the other brother ended up losing his life in Stalingrad, and he nearly died of homesickness. You know, you just, but it was just a horrible situation. And I, the grandparents, of course, I remember my grandfather was praying. My mother's father, who had been in this country; he was praying for the Americans to arrive. And when they did, of course, they were able to return to their hometown. And as I mentioned, most of his home was destroyed. His business was destroyed. Everything was gone. And my father's father was very pro-American as well. As a matter of fact,

he was almost executed for not putting out Hitler's flag. And you know, the SS stopped in and warned him, if he would not display it on his home, that he would be executed on the spot. And he was encouraged by the family to cooperate.

But he rescued an American who had been shot down. And brought him through the town, to a hospital. And again, you know, he risked his life for doing that, and, -- because that was an enemy. But the one thing I remember about the Americans, [Laughs] and this is not very nice. When they finally arrived in Kyllburg, I remember, of course, it was spring. And the river was very high, and it had swept one of the bridges away with it. And it was the major bridge to Kyllburg. And the Americans arrived, and we were told to assemble on the market place. Everyone in town had to assemble there. And it was not a large city. It was a city, but it was not very large. It just probably had several thousand inhabitants. And while we were assembled there --, and it was very difficult to get there because of the conditions. And we had to, you know, climb over very hilly terrain and over a railroad, you know, tunnel to get there.

And we were detained there for a good portion of the day. And we could all return after that. I don't really remember why we were assembled. But when we came back many of the people had their homes looted. And had a lot of the silver stolen, and it was just terrible. It was very, very disappointing. You know, that something like this could happen. But war makes people do terrible things. You know, if, if, I have always felt if people could communicate, we probably wouldn't have wars anymore. You know, usually you cannot communicate with each other, and one is the enemy and one is not. And, and, so, you know, the Germans did a lot of horrible, horrible things. But there were a lot of horrible things going on; you know, on, on every side, so.

SIGRIST: Tell me when you finally saw your father again.

NORUM: My father,

SIGRIST: Was that after, had the war ended by then?

NORUM: Oh yes, the war ended. Oh yes. The war ended in May of 1945, I believe. And I think Dad returned to Kyllburg, Kyllburg much later. I believe from Vienna, he returned to Rostock looking for us. And he had no idea what had happened to us. And, of course, we were no longer there. But my mother's sister and her husband, apparently, were still there. So my father, and my aunt and uncle, had two bicycles. And that's how they ended up getting back, because again, there was no, no transportation of - - everything was bombed. You know, at this point, nothing was working anymore. And there was no communication at all, nothing, nothing at all was functioning or working.

So they worked their way through Germany on bicycles. And my aunt was expecting at that point. And they worked their way back to Kyllburg, and this took quite a while. So I think my father returned to Kyllburg, the war ended in May. No, this must have been before the war ended because the Russians had not arrived. That's right, the Russians had not, because Rostock ended up being East Germany at this point. You know, it was just north of Berlin. And the Russians were coming, and my father said, 'We have to get out of here. We can no longer stay here. We'll be really in trouble.' So he, and my aunt and uncle got out of there on bicycles. And so by the time they, I think the Russians took over Rostock within a week after they left. And it took them a long time to get through Germany. I think he returned to Kyllburg in about July. So that was several months after the war ended. And he, of course, went to his home, to his parents, and found out that we were living with Mom's cousin. You know, so, and

that's when he returned. And I, I remember how difficult it all was, with three of us living in one room, so.

SIGRIST: Do you remember seeing your father for the first time when he returned?

NORUM: Um, yes. Yes.

SIGRIST: What do you remember?

NORUM: I felt very strange. I felt very strange around him. I'm not sure whether I even remembered who he was. I, I just remembered that it felt very strange to suddenly have my father back again. It was just, you know, most of my life I had just been surrounded by Mom, and a bunch of aunts, and cousins, and, and you know, and then the grandfathers. But my father, of course, no longer had a job at this point, because Heinkel and Rostock, that was the East. Both, both Heinkels were gone as far as Germany was concerned, because Vienna, if you recall, was a separated city as well, like Berlin. It had different sections, and Heinkel in both areas were in the Russian sector.

So he didn't have a job. He was without a job, and the first thing he had to do was find something to do. And he had a friend who had a business. And my father said, 'I'll do anything. You know, I have to earn some money and get an apartment. You know, for my wife and child.' and on and on. And this friend told him, asked my father whether he knew how to drive, and my father did. So he said, 'Well you can drive one our trucks. You know, that'll work, because we need supplies. You know, we need somebody to go around and gather this.' So this is what my father did. And --

SIGRIST: Supplies being what exactly?

NORUM: Oh, well, Heinkelvac. He worked for; it was I think, a metal...I don't know what they did. I, I, I think it was some type of a metal, um,

SIGRIST: Collecting pieces of metal?

NORUM: I don't know. But, no, they constructed things. I, you know, that's really so strange that I never asked my father what they did. I don't know whether they, that...no, that's what he did in this country. I really don't know whether it was metal for buildings, the structural-type metals. But it had something to do with – with metal. That's all I know. And it was not a very large business. But it was the largest one in the area. So, but my father got a job. So this was important. He earned money again, managed to get an apartment for us. And,

SIGRIST: And where were you living again? In...

NORUM: In Kyllburg.

SIGRIST: In Kyllburg.

NORUM: This is all Kyllburg now.

SIGRIST: This is all Kyllburg.

NORUM: All Kyllburg. That's where I grew up basically, in Kyllburg. And we lived in a very old building. Again, it was a part of the fortress on, on the hill. And it was, I believe a gatehouse to that fortress at one time. The walls were like two meters thick. And, and, oh, it was just the most exciting place to live in, because the basement was built on a cliff-like, and we had a natural waterfall. And you had a, a passageway, you know, a steps along

the wall. And it had a secret passageway to this fortress. So it was all very spooky and very exciting. And I'm sure, you know, boys would have loved exploring in there. It was all kind of frightening but, it was an interesting place to live. And, we, we lived there for a number of years.

SIGRIST: Talk to me a little bit about life in post-war Germany. And, and just sort of the every day,

NORUM: Eh-hmm.

SIGRIST: ...existence. Because things, you know, you're coming from this chaos.

NORUM: Eh-hmm.

SIGRIST: And I can only imagine that things continued to be difficult.

NORUM: See? Yes, very chaotic. No food. I remember bread, you cut into it and, and all the, like, there was kind of a yellow grainy flour. It just, it wasn't even baked right. You know, I mean, it was just, it just fell apart. And a lot of herring. [Laughs] Herring, potatoes, and very little food. I remember, I was seven years old when I fir-, had my first banana. I never knew what that was. And,

SIGRIST: How did you get food at this time? Was there a procedure? Did the government provide it?

NORUM: I, I believe so. I believe the government provided, you know, basics, herring. And, you know, living in a small city, we had enough farming around us. So we managed to get potatoes. And the Germans and the potatoes of course -- very important. And milk, you know, I would go to grandpar-, my grandparent's house. They had several cows and, you

know, and so we managed to get our liter of milk every day. And, and eggs, you know. Mom would go to neighboring towns, as I said, those are my fondest memories for cake and coffee, and so on. And she would sometimes barter for eggs. And, but it was all very difficult. You know, but everyone went through the same thing. So I don't think you really knew how awful it all was, because everyone just simply went through all of this.

SIGRIST: Did you attend school at this time?

NORUM: Well, five. I, the war, I was five when the war ended. So yeah, I must have started kindergarten soon after that. And I remember having some temporary facilities for that. And for the kindergarten, but the school building itself had not been destroyed. So when I started school, you know, I attended the normal school facility. And,

SIGRIST: Does anything stick out in your mind about attending school at this time?

NORUM: Well, very much so. We attended school six days a week, including Saturdays. And we just attended school in the morning. I think we were out by twelve or one o'clock. Very strict, harsh discipline, and I remember the boys, you know, being punished with the switch on their hands 'til they opened, you know, bleeding. And third grade, since I was a very active and lively child, I had trouble sitting still. You had to sit like this at all, you know, very quiet, with you hands folded on your desk,

SIGRIST: You're folding your hands.

NORUM: ...when the teacher lectured. Yes, yes. You had to be very attentive. And I had difficulties. You know, I jiggled and moved around. And the teacher called me to the front. This was a, a male teacher, third grade.

And he was so angry. He didn't hit the girls on the hand, but he liked pulling our ears. And he pulled my ears so hard it actually separated, needed to go to the doctor and stitches.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you did to..?

NORUM: It was because I was jiggling around. I, I, I just had difficulty sitting still. You know, because I was a tomboy. I loved climbing trees, and the higher the better. And I was always swinging from something. So, but very harsh discipline in the schools. We had to learn French because Kyllburg was part of the French zone. And the French consulate was there, and so it was required that you to learn French in school. And I had a great deal of difficulty with the spelling of that, because the Germans, you pronounce every letter. And each word in the French you have so many silent letters, you know. I just had a great deal of trouble with the spelling. I remember that. And,

SIGRIST: What about religious life at that time?

NORUM: That,

SIGRIST: What religion were you?

NORUM: That area's very Catholic. I was brought up, now my family is, you know, Catholic and Lutheran. And religion, the Catholic religion in Germany was very festive. I think, coming to this country, the Catholic religion out there was more like the Lutheran religion. It was a lot of hymn singing. And, oh you just had all these holy days. And all these processions, you know, with the banners. And, and your entire life revolved around the church. You know, everything that occurred in the city had some type of a religious aspect. And for a young child to be caught up in all of these things, you

know, it was really wonderful. It was really a, a wonderful way to grow, to grow up because it was all such an inclusive thing. You know, the entire town was involved in all of this.

SIGRIST: So everyone went to the Catholic Church?

NORUM: Just about. We had not too many –, we had a synagogue in Kyllburg as well. And matter of fact, my parents had some Jewish friends who emigrated. You know, because, you know, Hitler gave, you know, told them, get out or there may be trouble. And all the Jews in Kyllburg got out. They all left. And my parents saw them when we came to this country. But the synagogue was all bombed, so. But the Jewish element, I don't recall at all, because that was all before I was born. And you know, and this and that. And one Catholic Church was bombed and the Lutheran Church was bombed. But the Lutheran, the Lutheran religion in that area was very minor. Even though Germany, the majority of the people are Lutheran. But in Kyllburg, the Rhineland and Bavaria, are the Catholic areas of Germany. But it was a very inclusive thing, and everybody was just part of it. You had a very strong identity of who you were in Kyllburg. Because everybody knew who you were, what family you belonged to. My father had such an extensive family. It seemed like every other person was related to me. And so, it, it was a very, it was a, just a wonderful feeling to have such a strong identity with all of this, and to be such a part of it all.

SIGRIST: Especially coming out of such a difficult,

NORUM: Yes.

SIGRIST: ...circumstance.

NORUM: Right.

SIGRIST: That sense of identity, I should think helped to keep everybody together.

NORUM: Yeah. And the church was on top of the hill. It was just absolutely beautiful. It was built like in the late 1100 -- hundreds. You know, so you had this magnificent cathedral-type church. And, and it, it was just part of your life. It was wonderful. Even though I am no longer a Catholic. When I came to this country I, I just, the Catholic religion just...I, I just was very unhappy in it, compared to what I grew up with. So I'm a very happy Presbyterian now [Laughs].

SIGRIST: That is a difference.

NORUM: Yeah. There is a difference. [Laughs] Yes.

SIGRIST: You're so wonderful. I mean...

NORUM: Eh-hmm.

SIGRIST: You've got a wonderful type of memory for this,

NORUM: Eh-hmm.

SIGRIST: ...type of an interview. But we do need to get you to America at some time.

NORUM: [Laughs] Yes, yes, yes.

SIGRIST: We will be going into a second tape, I think.

NORUM: Eh-hmm.

SIGRIST: But we've got fifteen minutes left on this tape.

NORUM: Okay.

SIGRIST: So why don't you start setting up why your family came to the United States.

NORUM: Okay, okay. The reason we came to the United States is, you know, as I said, Gran-, Grandfather, mother's father and mother. They were all still alive at this point.

SIGRIST: And he was the, the grandfather who really loved the United States.

NORUM: Who was here, who was here. After the war, and everything was gone. As I said, his home and his business, and, and dad's job. Nothing was left. He said, 'It's time to go.' He said, 'It's time to leave.' [pause]

SIGRIST: [softly] It's alright take your time.

NORUM: And I don't know why I'm getting emotional about this but--. My grandfather was born in 1865. And, and this was 1950, or '49. He was very old. And he was very attached to my mother and me. And for him to say, 'Leave. It's time to go.' He said, 'There's nothing left over here. Go, join the rest of the family!' And, and we of course knew we'd never see him again. At his age, you know, my goodness! He was close to ninety at that point. And my father, you know, of course, applied to come to this country. My mother's family sponsored us. And my father had a job waiting. And so we had everything we needed to come to this country. I mean, we not only had brothers and sisters here, but great-aunts and

uncles, and some quite wealthy; and cousins, and on and on. In the Chicago area and St. Paul Minneapolis area.

And so my father, of course, when grandfather said, 'Okay time to go.' He went to Frankfurt. And he, how do you call that? Applied to come over here. And of course being German and the Nazi business, it took two years for my father to be processed. He was checked out thoroughly, completely to make sure he had no Nazi connections. Even though he was not in the war. You know, he was not a soldier or anything. He had served in the army before the war, because I think it was mandatory in Germany. Everyone had to do it. But he was not in the war himself. But still, you know, this country was being very, very careful about the Nazi business. And so it took two years, back and forth to Frankfurt, back and forth. You know for medical tests, because apparently TB was just, you know, raging in those years. And, and Mom and I had to go and, it was very lengthy. So in 1952, we finally got clearance to come over here.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how your father initially felt about leaving Germany?

NORUM: He,

SIGRIST: I mean what had transpired in those,

NORUM: Eh-hmm.

SIGRIST: ...in the late 1940s that would, that would help him make up his mind to do this?

NORUM: Well, my father was really anxious to go. He had of course no one in this country. His entire family was in the Kyllburg area.

SIGRIST: Was he close to his family particularly?

NORUM: I don't know.

SIGRIST: Emotionally close?

NORUM: I don't know. My father, as an adult, he has shared, you know, some of his feelings with me. As I said, his, his father was a very authoritarian figure. He was just, just a real harsh man. You know, it was very difficult to love him. And his mother was not a very caring or loving person either. They were just very, um, unlovable to me, as a grandchild. And, but I did not really know what kind of relationship my father had with his father. And as an adult he had shared some, some of his feelings with me. He was the first-born son. And, apparently, his father was really brutal with him as well. You know, he had a very, very hard young life. You know he, his father gave him a whole lot of responsibility. And he just, was never permitted to really have a lot of fun with the other youngsters. You know, like there was always something to do. As I said they did a little farming.

And, and, but Dad said his father was very, very hard on him. And so I don't think that there was a lot of love and tenderness going on over here. But after my father's career as a possible aeronautical engineer was over, he knew the only way he could really make something out of him self is by coming to this country. So he was very anxious to just get out of Germany. He felt that there was absolutely nothing left for him. He played soccer after the war, as I said. You know, I think that was the only really wonderful thing he did for himself. Because he was an athlete and he loved this. You know, he loved playing soccer before the war and, and you know, then after. My father's just a legend in Kyllburg. You know, when, when you go back.

SIGRIST: What did you know about America at that point? How did you..?

NORUM: Very, very little. I knew where Chicago was on the map. And that we had family -, well, family of course visited us. Um,

SIGRIST: When the family visited...

NORUM: The aunts, uncles, and they came out. And we got packages. Oh, I forgot to tell you this. How did we make it after the war? I was the best-dressed kid in Kyllburg because the family sent us packages. You know, beautiful clothes and food. And remember peanut butter, what is this? Because, you know, Germans and peanut butter. But they really, really pulled us through. So we were much better off, except food wise. You know, I mean, the herring and this kind of thing. But as far as clothes, you know, we just --. There were some children in school that wore the same outfit the entire school year, and never had anything else. They would put it on to go to school and then after school; you would put on a play outfit. And, you know, I was able to afford to put on something new every week. I mean you wore it a week and then, you know, so I was really very fortunate.

SIGRIST: How did that make you feel though, to be different, that way from the other children?

NORUM: Oh, I think I kind of enjoyed, I think I kept --. Being a girl, I think I liked having the pretty dresses. I, see, I don't know whether I felt that... the only thing I, I, I didn't like is, you know my grandpa, he had this leather tanning business. I always had my shoes custom made. And I hated it. I wanted to have shoes like everybody else. So that's the only thing that I connected with, with not liking. But having a new dress once a week, I

kind of like that. That wasn't too bad. So, I'm afraid I can't say that I felt terrible that the others couldn't do the same. But, it was kind of fun.

SIGRIST: You mentioned, you told one story about the Americans not being very kind to the citizens,

NORUM: Eh-hmm.

SIGRIST: ...of the town. I'm wondering, did, did those experiences color how you looked at America at that time?

NORUM: No. No, not at all. Because my family, you have to remember my mother and father had gone through two world wars. They were born in 1909 and 1911. So they were very young when the First World War, you know, occurred in Germany. I think most of my family realized that war is brutal, and people just don't act, behave normally in conditions like that. You know, everyone is just really concerned about surviving this. You know, because the Americans, who were in that war, didn't realize how many years they would be in this war. It was not like after one year or two years you go home. They were in for the duration. So this does terrible things to people, you know, you just. My father always said this to me, if people could communicate with each other, we wouldn't have wars because they would say, 'Why are we doing this? You know, let's forget this, you know.'  
[Laughs]

SIGRIST: Start telling me about what you had to do to get ready to leave. What you, you already mentioned, I think having to go to the,

NORUM: Frankfurt, right.

SIGRIST: ...doctor.

NORUM: Okay. And, but on a personal level, my parents of course had to get rid of everything that they accu- accumulated again. They lost everything when they left Rostock. So everything was left behind, including their savings accounts and, and, and their furniture. My mother just brought some pictures out, and she had me in a baby buggy. So, in Kyllburg they had to start all over again, had to get furniture, and etcetera. Even though it was just for a seven-year period. You know, '45 to '52. You still had to, you know, get furniture for when we got the apartment. Everything had to be sold. And you could just bring a certain amount of baggage with you. You know, suitcases basically. And I, we didn't have trunk; we had suitcases, but everything else you had to get rid of. So, you had minimum -- minimum clothing because you wanted to bring some memories with you.

SIGRIST: What did you, what did you choose to bring with you to the United States?

NORUM: [Sighs] I think all my old schoolbooks. All my, I still have my, [Laugh] my, my schoolbooks. My ledgers and photographs, but there wasn't room enough for anything else. I mean, you couldn't bring any dolls or anything like that. There was just no room, very limited.

SIGRIST: How did you feel about having to leave?

NORUM: Terrible. I did not want to come. I was very happy in Kyllburg. And this of course, as a child. I don't know how I would have felt about living there as an adult. I don't think I would have enjoyed being there as an adult because it was very limiting, not being a large city. But it was just about as perfect a place for a child to grow up in, because of this identity you had over there. You never had to tell anyone who you were. Everyone just knew who you were.

SIGRIST: What was it that you didn't want to leave, specifically?

NORUM: My friends and of course, the beauty of the area. I am a, I love the outdoors, and I love being in the woods. And as I said, climbing trees. And I love walking through the meadows, and picking the wild flowers, and going, collecting mushrooms and, and berries and, and the wild strawberries. And, and, and it was just the wonderful, ideal existence. And leaving all of that, and I know going to a big city, you know, that all of this just wouldn't be there anymore. So I and, of course, being the age -- I had just turned thirteen. It's a very difficult time, to just leave. And, and leave all your friends behind. So, I, I didn't want to do this.

SIGRIST: Do you remember saying goodbye to your friends?

NORUM: Yes. I remember the school made quite a production, and I was very sad. We left and -- and from Kyllburg; we went to stay with my mother's sister (the one my father had left Rostock with) -- with my mother's sister and her husband and my cousin at that point. He had been born. And spending some time with them, and then we went over to Rotterdam in the Netherlands. And left from there.

SIGRIST: Okay, we're going to stop.

NORUM: Okay.

SIGRIST: And we're going to, we're going to take a little break. And we'll put in another tape, and we'll get you to America. [Laughs] This is Paul Sigrist signing off with tape one with Renate Norum, July 17, 1997.

END SIDE B, TAPE 1      BEGIN SIDE A, TAPE 2

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Thursday, July 17, 1997. We are beginning tape two with Renate Pelzer Norum, who came from Germany in 1952, and was detained for four days at Ellis Island. Mrs. Norum, we were just talking about what you all had to do before you got ready to leave Germany. You were telling me about how you really didn't want to come,

NORUM: Eh-hmm.

SIGRIST: ...at all. Can you explain to me, was there some kind of, of a dinner, or, or some kind of a, a send off party,

NORUM: Eh-hmm.

SIGRIST: ...given by friends of family, before you left.

NORUM: No, I don't -- I don't recall any of that because -- well, maybe my parents were involved in something like that. I, I think I do recall that the soccer group, I think, had a big party for my parents. But at my age, you know, there was absolutely nothing except the school, you know, made a big production of saying goodbye. And I had to promise that I would write a big, long letter,

SIGRIST: Did this..?

NORUM: ...a essay on my experiences over here.

SIGRIST: Did the school children present you with something, as a gift?

NORUM: You know, I don't remember that at all. No, I don't, I don't think so. I don't remember that, no.

SIGRIST: Where did you have to go to get on the ship?

NORUM: Rotterdam.

SIGRIST: And how did you get from, from the town where you were, to Rotterdam?

NORUM: I, I think we took the train. I really do. I don't remember getting there any other way. I believe we took the train and...

SIGRIST: And it's just the three of you, right, Mom, Dad, and you?

NORUM: Yes, just Mom, Dad, and me. Yes, yes. And,

SIGRIST: Does anything stick out in your mind about that, about that train trip?

NORUM: No, not at all. Except the, I was very unhappy. And I remember getting, I think, to Rotterdam the night before. Because I remember Dad, and Mom, and I going to the ship early, and we walked around the deck and looked at it. But I don't,

SIGRIST: What was the name of the ship?

NORUM: The *Ryndam*.

SIGRIST: And what did you think when you saw this ship that you were about the get on?

NORUM: It was very big. [Laugh] That's, you know, the only impression I had. It was very big and it was very frightening to me.

SIGRIST: Had you ever been on a ship of any sort before?

NORUM: No, no. I had not seen the ocean or anything. The largest body of water I had ever seen was a lake, but not, had not seen the ocean. And so all of this was a very frightening experience for me.

SIGRIST: You stayed over night in Rotterdam?

NORUM: Yes. But I, I don't remember details. I just remember getting there much too early. Now, I don't know, I would think it was the evening before because I think we boarded ship early. Very, you know, very foggy. I don't remember much.

SIGRIST: Well, do you know what time of year this is, that you're getting on the ship?

NORUM: This was October 31<sup>st</sup>.

SIGRIST: Of 1952.

NORUM: Of 1952. Yes.

SIGRIST: Okay.

NORUM: It's when we left.

SIGRIST: Tell me about what it was like to be on the ship.

NORUM: Mom and I were seasick eleven days out of the twelve it took to cross. And, of course, we went; I shouldn't say 'of course'...we went from Rotterdam to Le Havre, in France. And from Le Havre -- Le Havre to South Hampton, England and from there to Halifax, Canada and then on to New York.

SIGRIST: How long did all that take?

NORUM: I believe we were on the water twelve days, because Mom and I were near death for eleven. [Laughs] The minute we crossed the channel, that's when it started. You know, the channel of course is probably one of the roughest areas in the -- of any ocean in the world, mountainous waves. And we became sea sick. And that was just,

SIGRIST: What did it feel like to,

NORUM: ...horrible.

SIGRIST: ...be seasick?

NORUM: You just want to die. And after a while you pray the ship will sink so you get out of your agony. You really do! And it's just the, the worst experience, especially for that length of time.

SIGRIST: Now where did you sleep on the ship?

NORUM: We had a stateroom, of, I think, three bunks. And, or maybe, yeah three. I think I was on the top one, or something. Maybe it was all three. No, I think there were one on one side, and two on the other. But we had three bunks in the room. And I do remember one -- one night, going up for -- for dinner, so I know we did make it one, one day. And mom and I were

basically in the stateroom the entire time. Very, very ill except for, for when you, what is that called? When you practiced, when you had the...

SIGRIST: Like a safety drill of some sort?

NORUM: The safety drills, right. You had to be up on deck whether you were near death or not, with your life jacket on. You know, you just had to because everyone had lifeboats assigned. And you had to know how to get to your lifeboat, and what to do in case, you know, you needed to evacuate the ship.

SIGRIST: Did they offer you any treatment for your seasickness?

NORUM: Ah, no. No treatment. And Dad finally said, 'I understand beer is really good for this.' And do you know something? It helped. And I was only thirteen years old. But that really helped me and I, I recall being able to go upstairs with Dad, you know, without Mom. But she never really felt better. She was very, very ill. And then, you know, of course, we had a horrible storm one night. And Mom and I were praying that the ship would sink. And it did not.

SIGRIST: What happened during the storm that you were,

NORUM: The, the storm crippled the ship, literally. The rudder or something was torn off. And the ship actually sailed into Halifax almost sideways, not completely. I don't know what angle you would call this, but you couldn't walk on the floors, and you couldn't walk on the walls. So we were at a very strange angle. And they had to tie ropes everywhere, so people could hang on to them so we could walk. And we were in Halifax; I think we had to stay there an additional day for some repairs to be made. And,

and then we -- I, I, the ship righted itself after that, you know, whatever they did. And,

SIGRIST: Do you know how you felt about being on this big ship? Being sick, and going through that?

NORUM: Well, as I said, that is the night Mom and I -- we prayed we would sink. You know, we decided we are so sick, and everything is going wrong. If we would sink, we would be out of this agony. You know, you just get so sick you don't care anymore. You really don't. And that's the night my father got sick as well, but it was the only time he got sick. Because we were literally thrown around, you know, it was jus-- I don't know if this was a hurricane or what we were in. It was terrible. It just --. And it would last quite a while, so I would suspect that it might have been something like a hurricane, or conditions like that. It's amazing we didn't sink.

SIGRIST: From Halifax, where did the ship go?

NORUM: To New York. From there we went on to New York, so.

SIGRIST: And what do you remember about the ship approaching New York?

NORUM: Thank God we'll get off the ship real soon. I really, that was my first impression. I did not, you know, the Statue of Liberty did not leave this impression of a free land. And you know, I was just too young for that. I was so sick. And I was just so happy to be finally off the ship because we thought we would go directly to Chicago. That you know, we would be on a train that day, and we would be on our way. And, of course, that didn't happen.

SIGRIST: Tell me what did happen.

NORUM: Well, everyone left the ship and we did not. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: So the ship docked.

NORUM: The ship docked, yes it did. And we, I think we must have been some place near Midtown Manhattan, because I remember going through Times Square. So we had to come from up there to come back to the Battery. Everyone was able to leave, but the people who were sent to the Island. You know we were all assembled,

SIGRIST: To Ellis Island.

NORUM: Ellis Island. To Ellis Island, and we were all assembled in, I think it was the main lounge or something. And this was very frightening to us. And it was frightening to me because my parents were very concerned, could not understand why we -- why we were being detained. And, finally, after I think it took almost the entire day to, you know, really get people off the ship. And -- and getting them off in various cabs or whatever you, you, you had to do when you got -- . No. You had to be processed, right? You had to go through int-- integration, or whatever. Customs. So it took a very long time. And when we finally -- I think it must have been late afternoon or evening -- when we finally got off. And we, of course, were very controlled. I think we were with guards or something, because most everyone who came here had a political reason to be here. And, you know, we were friends with a Danish mother and son. And they ended up being sent back to Denmark. He had a political problem. And he was put in one of the jail cells over here, and the mother just cried. And you know, while the four days we were here. And just as we left, she said, 'It looks like we will be sent back, because my son is not politically acceptable.'

But we, of course, were told why we had to come or my mother had to come.

SIGRIST: Who's, who's speaking to you? Like are you being spoken to in German or in English? I mean how,

NORUM: I, I...

SIGRIST: ...how is this information relayed to you?

NORUM: I think somebody must have spoken in German. They must have gotten interpreters for us while we were all assembled, you know, in this -- in this lounge area on -- on the ship. I, I really don't remember too much of this, but the wait. Because you have to remember that Mom and I were still very sick at this point. And, you know, I was -- I knew something was wrong, but I didn't know what. So I can't remember whether we were told on the ship in German what needed to be done, or whether we had to go through customs, and then were told what was going on, why we were all separated. I think we were told on the ship, why we were separated, and that we would have to go to Ellis Island. Dad and I were told we could go on to Chicago, that there was no reason for us to go to Ellis Island.

And Dad, of course, immediately said he said we wouldn't think of it. You know, we're all staying together. And of course we did. And I remember finally getting off and being taken (I think it was a small van or something; a group of us were put on this van) and going through Times Square. That was my first big impression of the United States because at that time, you had all these neon signs. And there was a bird on top of -- an eagle or something -- and the wings were flapping. And I thought, I couldn't understand how this was working. [Laugh] You know, it was jus the most awe-inspiring thing of my life. And so Times Square left a huge

impression. And got to the Battery, and you had a waiting room over there at one time, didn't you? There was a waiting room, I think,

SIGRIST: Could be.

NORUM: ...the building was open or something. And, and there was a waiting room. And we were waiting for the ferry. And I remember a black person going to the water fountain and drinking. And I couldn't believe that nobody was looking at this man, because we had never seen a colored person. And I thought he was the most exotic looking person! And I thought, you know, nobody's paying any attention to this person. And here he is, he's so interesting looking! You know, so that was the second big impression I got of the United States. That, you know, this is nothing unusual. But then of course, the ferry ride over to the island and --

SIGRIST: Do you remember any details about being on the ferry, or getting on it, or..?

NORUM: Well just, you know, another boat. You know, let's hope it's not going to take too long. And this and that. And, and, remember, you know, arriving at the island. Of course, the Statue of Liberty and everything. But thinking how attractive it was. You know, because the buildings were so beautiful. And you know, of course, I think the entry is still all the same because I remember all of that, right? The steel structure, whatever...

SIGRIST: I'm not sure what it looked like in '52.

NORUM: I, I, because all that looks very familiar to me. And then, of course, the Great Room, and,

SIGRIST: Do you remember some of the other –, you mentioned this Danish mother and son. Do you remember nay of the other people who were rounded up and brought out here?

NORUM: No, eh-em. We did not know anybody else, just the Danish mother and her son. And because the other people we met on the ship, you know, no one else came to the island as we did. And I remember we did not need to go through all the processing, the way the political people were. And because the political problem seemed to be why people were coming over here -- if there was a question that wasn't really cleared up. But everything went very quickly, and we were shown to this beautiful room. You know, with the large windows and overlooking Manhattan. And, as I say, from the side or somewhere, we saw the side of the Statue of Liberty. And as I indicated on my form, that I felt I had arrived at heaven's gate. I was showered with presents and gifts.

SIGRIST: Who was giving you the presents?

NORUM: Somebody on staff here. We had this wonderful –, it looked just like the Great Hall over here. The unit we were in had, like a mini Great Hall, where you could watch television. They had, it was set up to be like, a recreation room. You had TVs in there. And our room was right above, you know, with the railing. And somebody was just in this recreation hall. You know, I was just given all these things. And some things were brought to the room, like paper dolls and puzzles. And oh, it was just wonderful. And, of course, the milk I had on Ellis Island was the first milk I ever enjoyed drinking, because it was cold. It was not, I always used to say 'cow warm', you know, so it was wonderful.

So, to me things started looking up. You know, on Ellis Island, I thought this is really wonderful. Mother, um, did not become involved with the

hospital facilities on the Island. She was sent back to Manhattan for her x-rays. So she had to wait. We arrived here on November 10<sup>th</sup> and the 11<sup>th</sup> was Veterans Day. Everything was closed. And then the following day, the 12<sup>th</sup>, she was taken back by ferry to New York, had her x-rays taken. And the next day, the results were in that she was fine. There was no problem there.

SIGRIST: What was it, what was wrong with the x-ray in the first place?

NORUM: They indicated she either exhaled or inhaled right through, I would assume exhaled, while they took the x-rays. And it was very blurry; they could not read them at all. So, I don't know why we were not asked to come back to Frankfurt to have this redone. Why all that happened? But, well, it turned out to be just fine because we became part of history. You know, we came to Ellis Island instead. So, it was kind of exciting, now, when you look back.

SIGRIST: Tell me about where you were fed on the island.

NORUM: Well, we had to go down the stairs to central eating hall. And I remember we had to pass some of these cells where, you know, that's how we found out that some people were put into cells when they came on the island. And that's all I recall about that, you know, going to a main eating hall. And we had to go down steps to go there.

SIGRIST: Do you remember being fed something that you had never eaten before?

NORUM: No.

SIGRIST: Or anything like that?

NORUM: No, I don't remember anything. All the wonderful things happened up in our room, you know, because we always had something nice given to us. And you know, that recreation hall, so.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about the staff that was there at the time? Does, does one of the staff members stick out in your mind somehow?

NORUM: No, except everyone was very, very nice to us. You know, this is very funny when you say something sticks out. [Laughs] I remember a man. We were --. You know. As I said, the central hall was like a 'rec' room, with the TV. And of course, TV sets were very rare in those days. But we had a TV set, and an ad for Lucky Strikes coming on. And this man was sitting there, he said, 'Oh, look it, I have them!' And he held up his pack of Lucky Strikes. And that's the only thing I remember about that, seeing the Lucky Strikes on TV and he... silly things. But that's the only other memory I have. You know, about, about what we did while we were here. That we watched TV in this, in this recreation room.

SIGRIST: Were there other children that you recall?

NORUM: No. I don't remember connecting with children here at all. No, eh-hmm.

SIGRIST: Did your mother every express to you in later years how she felt about, about, you know, being the cause of the family coming back out here? Coming out here and..?

NORUM: Well, she, she was afraid. That, you know, she was afraid of what is going to happen. You know, what if something is wrong\, and we can't stay in this country? See this, this was the fear they had. That, you know, maybe something is wrong with my x-ray, or my chest that is not acceptable. Maybe we will be sent back. And, of course, my parents were very

concerned about the family. And when we arrived over here, you know, that was one of the first things they requested; that they could contact their family. Because no one in Chicago knew what had happened to us when we, when we didn't arrive by train the next morning or when we were supposed to be there. So we were permitted a phone call to, to let them know what was going on. But I think with my parents, it was basically a fear that something might really be wrong. And if something isn't right with Mother, you know, we will just have to go back to what we just left and start all over again. And nothing is there, you know, to start over with.

SIGRIST: Do you remember being released from the island?

NORUM: I don't know why I cannot; I cannot remember the trip out by ferry. I really can't.

SIGRIST: What was the first thing your family did when you were released? Where did you go?

NORUM: We went, we were taken to the train station. We went right to the train station. And we didn't realize how much of a trip we had. You know, we, I, I don't think we had a lot of dollars and didn't realize that it would take so long that we would have to eat in the dining car and all of that. So I, I know there was a concern, will we have enough money? And how long is this going to take? [Laughs] Because you look on a map, and you don't realize what a great distance this is. So I don't know why all of this wasn't discussed before we got here, that this is going to be quite a journey. It's going to take you so many days before you're in Chicago. But I remember that as being part of the journey, that will we have enough dollars? And we did. We did have enough. But, will we be alright? And, of course, how different the landscape looked, looked. You know, I remember the farms -- how different all that looked over here than it did in Germany, so.

SIGRIST: Different in what way?

NORUM: It just, the look of the farms. You know, the, the way they're... the structure, the structural difference. You know, the red barns and, and, well the, the, the wooden farm houses. The, you know, in Germany, you just didn't use wood for -- for constructing homes. You know, you either had the stucco or you had the stone. Even brick, you know, was very unusual out there. But you just didn't have wood for homes, so that all looked very unusual to me.

SIGRIST: How long was the trip to Chicago on the train?

NORUM: Oh, how many days? I don't know. I would say two,

SIGRIST: But a number.

NORUM: ...days, or something. Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: And who met you in Chicago?

NORUM: Mother's two sisters and their husbands.

SIGRIST: Had you, did you know these people? Had they ever visited Germany?

NORUM: I knew the two sisters. But the -- the one husband I, maybe I met the one. But I know the one husband I had never met. I had never met George. Conrad, and Anne, and Kätchen I did. Yes, eh-hmm. They had come to visit Germany in the late forties. After the war, they came out.

SIGRIST: Well we have about ten minutes or so, less, left. Tell me about those, that early, that first year in America. And, and adapting to the new country, learning English, um,

NORUM: Eh-hm.

SIGRIST: What you personally experienced at that time.

NORUM: If Mother and I could have walked back to Germany, we would have gone back the first year -- terribly homesick, terribly, terribly homesick. In Chicago, I kept saying, where are the trees? It was a concrete jungle. And I lived; we lived in a nice, nice neighborhood. It was, you know, we ended up living in an Italian neighborhood. And we didn't know about neighborhoods so -- but this is very funny. Momma saying, '*Mama mia.*' We thought this was English, right? [Laughs] So we found out, okay, there are neighborhoods were in Italian. We learned about pizza, spaghetti and, you know, a lot of interesting things. It was quite an affluent little neighborhood. You know, where you had the private clubs with the Italian men belong to. And many had their own businesses. And some of them moved out into the suburbs, were very unhappy, and came right back again. So they traveled extensively. And it was really very lucky for us, to have moved into a little area like that. The apartment shortage was quite severe in Chicago in those days. And we would have liked staying nearer to one of the sisters, but did not succeed in getting an apartment there. So this is where we ended up, between the two, more or less. One was south, the other north, and we were kind of in the middle.

SIGRIST: Did you go to school?

NORUM: Yes, went to school right away. And,

SIGRIST: How long, how long before they put you into school?

NORUM: Immediately.

SIGRIST: Immediately.

NORUM: Oh, yes. I, I was in before Christmas, because we got here in November. And I remember being in the Christmas pageant. You know, the, while the Christmas assembly, whatever it was called. And I -- we were still living with my aunt, who lived in a kind of a German neighborhood up north. And so, that was a little easier because they were able to, to give me a tutor who could teach me English. But then when we moved to this Italian neighborhood, and I went to school over there, I had to make another adjustment again. And it was a little harder, you know, to get someone, a German tutor. And, but they did find someone. So, I remember when the other children had English, for example, I was sent to a tutor.

And started reading "The Mouse's House", and you know, all these little kiddy books. And learn how to speak English, of course. But, remembered the first Valentine's Day, for example. And I had no idea what this was because Germans don't have Valentine's Day and all the cards, and the children giving me all these wonderful cards. And I went home and I said mother, 'Everybody loves me, look at this!' And one little boy sent me a card saying, it said, 'Happy Valentine's Day.' But he said, 'You're stupid.' [Laughs] I had to look up 'stupid' to find out what that was. So I decided well, he's stupid too. [Laughs] But that -- that's the earliest memories, you know, of -- so I was involved right away. But the first year was very difficult.

SIGRIST: How were you treated by the other students?

NORUM: Most of them very nicely – very, very patient and very understanding. But it was still difficult for me to make friends, and to learn English, and to communicate. But after the first year, once I learned English, I really began to love it. You know, this, this was just a country I enjoy. I left Germany when I was in eighth grade, and I was put in seventh grade over there. So,

SIGRIST: Over here.

NORUM: Over here, over here. And that was an acute embarrassment to me, because I had never been held behind in school. And grades, of course, you know, the German schools, you know they're so excellent. And you know, and that was always pushed: you must do well in school. And to be put back a year was terribly embarrassing to me. So at that point I started lying about my age. I made myself an a-- a year younger. The girls are listening to this! Mom is, you know, really fifty-seven. [Laughs] But I just started telling people I was a year, because I thought it was terrible that I was held behind. But the school explained to me, we cannot send you off to high school, you must --. But see, in my own little mind, you know, I, I, this bothered me. But after my first year here, and I started learning English, I just absolutely loved it.

SIGRIST: About two minutes left. How do you think of yourself in terms of nationality?

NORUM: American. Absolutely American.

SIGRIST: Did you become a citizen?

NORUM: Oh yes, oh yes. After five years, became citizens. And I'm an American. I, I, I'm a German by heritage but I have no special love for Germans at

all. I don't know why that is. I, you know, I feel the German has a tendency to be arrogant and a bit conceited. So, I, I don't, I think I identify with the Scandinavian. Norum is a Swedish name. And I, I am more comfortable identifying with the Scandinavian for some reason.

SIGRIST: That would be the man that you married?

NORUM: Right, right, right.

SIGRIST: What was his name?

NORUM: David. David Norum.

SIGRIST: David Norum.

NORUM: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: And we know, we have Carin and Kirsten.

NORUM: Kirsten, yes.

SIGRIST: Are there any other children too?

NORUM: No. We're expecting our first grandchild, so it's exciting.

SIGRIST: Great. Well I, this is probably a good place to end.

NORUM: Okay.

SIGRIST: We've been talking for a long time. [Laughs] But you've been doing a great job.

NORUM: [Laughs] Thank you.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Renate Norum, on Thursday July 17, 1997, at the Ellis Island recording studio. Thank you, very much.

NORUM: Eh-hmm.

END OF INTERVIEW