

EI-928

LOUISE SABRSULA

BIRTHDATE: JULY 29, 1935

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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LEVINE: Today is August 26th, 1997 and I'm here in Putnam Valley at the home of Edward and Louise Sabrsula, who—and it was Louise, whose maiden name is Schmitz, who was interned at Ellis Island in the spring, for approximately three months, of 1943 with the rest of her family. And I've also interviewed John Schmitz, who is Louise's brother. Okay. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. If we could start, please, by saying your birth date and where you were born.

SABRSULA: Okay, my birth date is October 29th, 1935 and I was born in Manhattan, New York.

LEVINE: Okay. And did you—were you living in Manhattan up until the time you—the family went to Ellis Island?

SABRSULA: Yes, yes.

LEVINE: Now, I guess that—just to sort of get a background of what was happening before you went to Ellis Island, now, had your mother and father immigrated to this country? Or had rel—their mother or father or how—how far back was it that the family came here?

SABRSULA: Okay, no. They immigrated as young people to the U.S. And my mother worked as a waitress and my father was a waiter. And that's how they met and they moved to—I believe it was Manida Street in Manhattan or Upper Bronx. And that's where we lived until my father was taken to Ellis Island. I remember my father was always very patriotic and had different pictures of his homeland. And he used to play a lot of German records loudly many times. And I guess that perhaps offended some people. And I know one night, or one day some men came to the home and said they were FBI. And they searched the apartment and said they had to take my father down for questioning. And they did and he never came home.

LEVINE: Oh. Were you there when—when these FBI people came? Do you remember that?

SABRSULA: I remember my parents talking, or my mother telling us. Now, whether I was asleep—I don't really remember seeing, you know, the men. But, you know, our neighbors had all said that that's what had happened. And when my mother went to visit my father, you know, they came and they took care of us while my mother was down there trying to get him to come home. And he didn't.

LEVINE: Do you know where they took him? Did they take him to some sort of detention place?

SABRSULA: Probably either that or a police station, some place for, you know—to be spoken to and—

LEVINE: [unclear], uh-huh.

SABRSULA: —and whatever. But they had told us it would only be for a little while. You know, for a few hours that they had to, you know, interrogate him.

LEVINE: Question, uh-huh.

SABRSULA: And—but he never came back.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Well, were you in a German community where you lived? Do you remember?

SABRSULA: No, it was an apartment building and a mixed—a mixture of—of people.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SABRSULA: German and Irish and, you know—but most of our friends were, you know, German people.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Where—where again did you say you—you were living? What was the street?

SABRSULA: I believe it was Manida Street. For some reason, that—that rings a bell.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SABRSULA: But, no, we moved to different places so—

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, how about, like—were—were your mother and father part of, like, a social club or—or any kind of German activities?

SABRSULA: Yes. They belonged to a German—I guess it was just a German American club.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SABRSULA: You know, mostly—at that time, I think it was just called German. You know, Slasia Verein [PP]. And they'd have dances and Christmas time, they'd have parties, you know, for the children. And it was just a place for German people to meet, you know—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SABRSULA: —and talk about their lives on the other side and how they were making it here in America.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. How—how did you perceive, you know, yourself as a little girl? I mean, were you—were you thinking that you were Ger—I mean, was German part of who you thought you were?

SABRSULA: Oh, yes. We—we spoke German at home and that was our at-home language. And when we went to school, you know, naturally we had to speak the English. But my father and mother both wanted us to retain the German language, you know, writing it as well as speaking it. So we all had to go to a special German American school, which was down on 86th Street.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-hmm.

SABRSULA: And so for many years we went there, just so that we wouldn't forget.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Now, you—you said Manata?

SABRSULA: Manida.

LEVINE: Manida S—

SABRSULA: M-A-N-I-D-A—Manida Street.

LEVINE: Manida Street.

SABRSULA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Was that far from 86th Street? Do you remember? Like, when you had to go to that school, was it—was it a distance? Did you have to travel far?

SABRSULA: Well, when we went to the school was when—really when we came back.

LEVINE: Oh.

SABRSULA: Yeah. Yeah, that was—

LEVINE: And did you go back to your old address? Or you didn't?

SABRSULA: No, no. When we came back from Texas, we moved up to the Bronx.

LEVINE: Oh, that's right because—

SABRSULA: Yeah.

LEVINE: —it was Crystal City after—

SABRSULA: Right.

LEVINE: —Ellis Island.

SABRSULA: Right.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SABRSULA: Right.

LEVINE: Okay. So—so did your mother and father speak English outside the home or did they—

SABRSULA: Oh, yes. They—they learned how to speak English. Yeah. And—but at home, you know, they—they just liked to speak their native tongue.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh. And could you say anything more about, like, your father's feeling of—of sort of patriotism to his homeland?

SABRSULA: Oh, well, I guess a lot of people perhaps hid those things during the war years and when things were starting to get to the war. But he was very proud of his—his homeland so—and he didn't think it was anything wrong. You know, having those items displayed. But when the FBI came and they saw all of these things and, you know, maybe they thought that he might be dangerous to America and the American people. So that's probably why they took him down for questioning.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So you—you think had—had that not been so, that this—a chance that they wouldn't have—they wouldn't have—

SABRSULA: Bothered?

LEVINE: —sought him out?

SABRSULA: Yeah. Well, we always thought, or my parents thought that somebody must have had a grudge against my father and alerted the FBI, or told them that this man is a, you know—a true German. And so they came and investigated.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SABRSULA: Because I'm sure a lot of German people—they did not all go to Ellis Island, or they did not all go to—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SABRSULA: —internment camps. Just those that, I guess, were suspicious, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SABRSULA: Somebody pointed the finger at my father and said that he might be dangerous or something.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SABRSULA: So that's how it happened.

LEVINE: Do—do you remember what your mother told you about, like, when your father didn't come back?

SABRSULA: No, she just said that he had to go away for awhile and then we were able to visit him. And I just remember her packing us all and going on the ferry and going over to Ellis Island and spending the day with him.

LEVINE: Oh.

SABRSULA: Yeah. And we did that for a few weeks. And then my mother said, "Well, I"—she was not working because she had us. And she didn't know where the money would come from to pay the rent and everything. So she told our neighbors that she was going to stay. So she had packed up a lot of things and the last visit that we made, she just flatly refused to return.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-hmm.

SABRSULA: So then they ended up keeping us also.

LEVINE: I see. So had it not been for your mother's stance in that regard, there's a good chance that—that she and—and—and you children would—wouldn't have been at Ellis Island.

SABRSULA: Yes, yes. Because perhaps they would have either deported my father or something. But my mother said, "No, we're a family. We're just going to"—you know.

LEVINE: W—on those visits to your father, can you recall, like—I mean, were you—was it—was it like it is now? I mean, could you sit outside and be together or—

SABRSULA: No, I think it was like in big halls that you were allowed to go in, and sitting at long tables and—and talking and—

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SABRSULA: Yeah, kids were running around, I guess. We didn't talk that much, you know. [laughter] But I just remember long tables and a big hall-like—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Did anything strike you about your father? I mean, having—having been interned like that when—when you visited?

SABRSULA: No. See, our father, being a waiter, he was gone most of the day and when he came home, we were asleep. So he was always kind of in the distance, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SABRSULA: Except for his days off, which was just once a week. And then we would get to know him. But we were always in awe of my father and if you did anything wrong, Mom used to say, "Wait till Papa's off." [laughter] But he was very strict with all of us.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. In what ways? Did he—I mean, what was—what were his [unclear]?

SABRSULA: Well, no back talk and sitting at the table. No talking. We had to eat. Elbows on the table. Heavens! Never.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SABRSULA: You know, sitting up straight. He was just very strict. Yeah.

LEVINE: Hmm. Wow. So do you remember—like, were you—did you don't know you were going to stay on that day that you visited your father when—when you did stay?

SABRSULA: Oh, I guess Mama must have told us because we had, like, some clothing with us. And we must have wondered, "Why are we taking this, you know, package?" I remember Mama took Papa some shirts and things, you know, every time we went to visit. But I guess the last day was more than usual.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SABRSULA: And she just said, "We're going to stay with Papa now."

LEVINE: Huh.

SABRSULA: Yeah.

LEVINE: And—and do you remember any of your feelings about—

SABRSULA: Oh—

LEVINE: —being there?

SABRSULA: No, not really. Probably that it was an adventure but I really don't recall any real feelings about that.

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you remember what the place looked like or how—how it struck you as—as a little eight-year-old girl? I mean, just physically, what the building was like and what kind of repair or disrepair it was in and anything like that.

SABRSULA: I just remember that it was big and kind of cold. You know, no flowers or—or trees or anything like that, just a lot of stone and, you know, there's just a big building.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. And where did you sleep? What—what kind of accommodations did you have?

SABRSULA: I don't even remember. I don't remember whether we were altogether or—or what. I don't think it was after that—maybe it was a month or so that we went to—to Texas. But I really don't remember where we slept.

LEVINE: Hmm. Were there a lot of other children there when you were there?

SABRSULA: I wouldn't say a lot. There were some.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SABRSULA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And did—were there any activities organized at that time for—for children?

SABRSULA: I just remember, you know, I had, like, my jacks. That was—ball and jacks and I'm sure that they had things there, like checkers and stuff. But I just remember that I had that. That always went with me.
[laughs] That was my toy.

LEVINE: But there—there were no school classes that you recall or anything?

SABRSULA: No, no. That I don't recall.

LEVINE: And how about food—did—how was the food? Do you recall anything about that?

SABRSULA: No, no. And I don't even remember if we ate, like, cafeteria style or what. That's—I just don't remember that at all.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

SABRSULA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Yeah. And do you remember—like, w—do you remember, like Coast Guards being stationed there or any other group of people besides the people who were being interned?

SABRSULA: Well, there must have been either Navy or Coast Guard that were on the out—you know, on the outside just patrolling. So they must have been Coast Guard because they were, like, the small ships there.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SABRSULA: Boats.

LEVINE: Yeah.

SABRSULA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, they were stationed there

SABRSULA: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

LEVINE: —at that point. So were you allowed to go outside?

SABRSULA: Oh, yes.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SABRSULA: Yeah, they had, like, outside grounds that you could walk out. But it was still within the, you know, enclosure. You couldn't, you know, get off that. But it was outside.

LEVINE: I see. So there was, like, a—a fence outside. But within the building and that area that was fenced in, you could come and go—

SABRSULA: Yes.

LEVINE: —all day long as—

SABRSULA: Yes.

LEVINE: —as ever you pleased?

SABRSULA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, yeah.

SABRSULA: Uh-hmm.

LEVINE: Well, so is there anything else that you can think of when you think of Ellis Island and the time you spent there, that sticks in your mind or—

SABRSULA: No, just other than, you know, as I said, the letter that I wrote trying to get my father—

LEVINE: Oh, why don't you—why don't you talk about that? Tell me what that is.

SABRSULA: Yeah. I wrote a letter to the president [chuckles] saying that I wanted my father back. And we got a letter back. I guess I didn't explain it clearly enough but they thought that my father was in the Coast Guard or the Navy, you know, patrolling the Ellis Island area. So they said—responded that his services were needed and so they couldn't grant him leave. [laughs] But we stayed there about three months before we went then to Crystal City, Texas.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SABRSULA: Yeah.

LEVINE: And can you tell about that, about leaving Ellis Island and—and going to Crystal City?

SABRSULA: Well, I know it was a—a long train ride.

LEVINE: What—how did—how did they handle that? How did—how was the transporting of people and then, particularly you and your family, handled? Do you have any sense of, you know—

SABRSULA: Well, by handled, we were all—

LEVINE: —who went with you and—

SABRSULA: Ah, I don't remember that too—too well. I know that we were treated well at Ellis Island, you know, the food and lodging and everything like that. There was no problem with that. And then when we left, I'm sure we must have left from Penn Station. I remember more when we

got to Crystal City that there was bus waiting for us. I remember getting on a bus going—

LEVINE: Were there a lot of—

SABRSULA: —from the station.

LEVINE: Were there a lot of people traveling at the same time going to Crystal City?

SABRSULA: Yeah, there were a few families, I would say. I don't exactly know, you know, the number.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

SABRSULA: But we were not the only ones.

LEVINE: Hmm. So just before we leave the Ellis Island part, as far as your treatment there, was there anything negative or very positive about it, that—that—

SABRSULA: No, no.

LEVINE: —you remember?

SABRSULA: No. I just remember, you know, being eight years old, I was playing and had enough to eat and place to sleep. So it—we were treated well.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. So then maybe you could just say a little bit about what it was like at Crystal City for you and your family.

SABRSULA: Well, that was a big—a bigger area. And again, behind a fence and barbed wire on the top. And there were four posts and we were—there were guards up there, you know, watching us and everything. But we lived in a little—first, it was like a—a big house. You know, a few families. And then when my mother became pregnant, we moved to our own little cottage. And we had a little general store and my father worked in a little cantina we had. And the people just formed their own little—we had a little band and we had a school. We had to go to school. And they built a swimming pool. So we had a nice life there, plenty to eat and everything.

LEVINE: Was the school—were—were the Japanese who were interned in the same school as—as you?

SABRSULA: No. No, because I have pictures and there were no Japanese children in with our school.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SABRSULA: Yeah.

LEVINE: So when—when you were—were you speaking German in—in—at Ellis Island and also at Crystal City? Do you remember?

SABRSULA: Oh, yeah. You mean as far as being taught? The teacher?

LEVINE: Well, no. I was thinking about just with your—with your mother and father and with other German people.

SABRSULA: Uh-hmm. Yes, we would speak in—in German. But, you know, I knew English going to school. So we would speak both languages really.

LEVINE: And—and the school in Crystal City, was that in English?

SABRSULA: That was in English, yeah.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SABRSULA: Uh-huh.

LEVINE: And was it—how did it compare with your school in Manhattan or the Bronx, wherever you had come from? Do you—

SABRSULA: Hmm, no, I don't have any comparison there. I just know that, you know, the teacher was very strict. When I think of teachers nowadays, you know, what they can't do with children. [laughs]

LEVINE: Yeah.

SABRSULA: We got a rap on the hand with a ruler when it was called for.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SABRSULA: And—but as a child, even being in—in a camp, our life was good. And I remember a friend of mine, we made friends with one of the guards. And we used to take him cake that my mother baked and we even made friends with, like, the camp administrator, if you will. And he had grandchildren, I guess, our age. And he would take us. We

were allowed to leave the camp and he would take us in his station wagon into town for ice cream.

LEVINE: You and your brothers?

SABRSULA: No. Me and my girlfriend.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-huh.

SABRSULA: And I don't remember his name but he was one of the officials that was allowed to—to take us out, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SABRSULA: And on some Sundays he would take us into town and buy us ice cream. Yeah.

LEVINE: Let's see. Do—do you know what sense you made of it at that time? Did you—did you—or, as a child, would you not even think that way?

SABRSULA: I don't think I even thought of that. But I'm sure I had questions, "Well, why did we have to go here? Papa never did anything wrong." So whether or not my mother tried to explain, you know, how it was after, you know, getting a little older, you know, we kind of understood that we weren't the only ones, you know. Unfair as it was. But it just kind of set the family back for those few years. You know, not being able to earn money and, you know. My father, when he worked in that little cantina, I think they paid him 10 cents an hour so we had a little bit of money. And we had, like, scrip money. That I remember.

LEVINE: Oh, for the store.

SABRSULA: Yes, yes. And you could buy certain things using the paper money. And then with your own money that you earned you could buy, you know, other things also, like ice cream or candy, things like that. But as far as like sugar, the staples, you would have to use that scrip money.

LEVINE: Hmm, [unclear]. Well, do you think—I mean, would you have any way of knowing if your father ever, like, wanted to go back to Germany?

SABRSULA: Oh, that I know. Yes, he did want to. But being there as a family, because his wife did not agree, they wouldn't separate the family.

LEVINE: Oh.

SABRSULA: So they'd always put him down on the bottom of the list. And then when his name came up, if he had persuaded my mother [chuckles] by that time, then he prob—we probably would have. But she was adamant; she was not going back to Germany.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you—do you—do you know why she was so adamant?

SABRSULA: I don't know. I guess she just liked it here then and—I really don't know—don't know. But now that I'm thinking, I remember Mama saying that they asked Papa some questions. "Look, if you're in the war, like if—to serve your country here, being that you live in—in America, and if you were in the army and you were at war and your brother was on the other side, would you shoot your brother?" [crying]

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, yeah.

SABRSULA: They asked such hard questions.

LEVINE: Now, would—would—did your father tell you that? Because you probably wouldn't have been there, would you?

SABRSULA: No, I wasn't there but I guess Mama told us.

LEVINE: Uh-huh, uh-huh.

SABRSULA: Or, like, speaking to relatives and things, some of the things that they—they asked him about, you know.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

SABRSULA: Because Papa said, "You can love two places. You know, your homeland is always your homeland."

LEVINE: Yeah.

SABRSULA: But he liked it in America and found good work.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. Do—do you remember how that worked, about the—about, like, the lists of people? I mean, they were apparently trading, right, people who had been—

SABRSULA: Oh, like prisoners over there?

LEVINE: Right, prisoners in Germany with people who were being interned who wanted to go back. Do—do you—did you have any sense of what that—how that worked?

SABRSULA: No, no. That might sound like that's how it was but I—I really don't know for sure.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. But apparently—I mean, were you aware of people going from the camp—

SABRSULA: Oh, some—

LEVINE: —back to Germany?

SABRSULA: Yes, some families and want to go back. Uh-huh.

LEVINE: Oh.

SABRSULA: Yeah, so they went. I don't know how often, you know, that happened but some families did leave.

LEVINE: Oh. Do you think being in the camp—I mean, you—you and your brothers were children—but your mother and father, do you think that took a toll on them? I mean, do you think it was—it was a difficult situation for them?

SABRSULA: Well, I think, yes, when they came out. I guess applying for a job, my father—"Well, what happened to these years?" He must have had to—to say that, you know, and so perhaps put a stigma on him, you know.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm. How about you when you came out? I mean, did you—did you ever feel that you were sort of prejudiced against because you were German in this country?

SABRSULA: No, not really. I mean, we never bragged about that we were, you know, interned. But I remember when I was older and going to high school and I had to write a report of something interesting in my life. I wrote about—

LEVINE: Oh.

SABRSULA: —that, you know. And when I read it, the people were shocked. They had never heard of any internment camps here in the U.S. And they just couldn't believe that it—it had happened.

LEVINE: These were your classmates?

SABRSULA: My classmates.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SABRSULA: And even my—my teacher, you know. And so that was kind of—in a way, I felt proud, you know, that something exciting had happened to me like that. But I was just also amazed that nobody knew about it, you know.

LEVINE: Hmm, yeah.

SABRSULA: But other than that, you know, nobody pointed a finger or made fun of us because, really, nobody knew other than or friends and—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SABRSULA: We don't have much family here or, you know, even cousins and everybody. They were still in Germany. So we had, really, no blood relatives here, other than the one—my one aunt.

LEVINE: Oh.

SABRSULA: They used to live in Albany and she's deceased now also. So I just have one cousin.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Now, was she or any in her—of her family interned?

SABRSULA: Nope.

LEVINE: Oh, uh-hmm.

SABRSULA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Were—were you in—have you been or were you then, like, in close contact with—with your relatives—

SABRSULA: You mean—

LEVINE: —in Germany?

SABRSULA: —while—oh, we were always writing letters. Oh, yeah. Yeah.

LEVINE: And were they censored in any way, do you know?

SABRSULA: Yes, during the war my mother would get letters and—this was after we were back. She would—well, even before, really—she would get letters where they had things cut out.

LEVINE: Oh.

SABRSULA: Yeah, yeah. So they were being censored.

LEVINE: This was, like, after Crystal City, you mean? Or—

SABRSULA: No, let's see. The war was in '43?

LEVINE: '5.

SABRSULA: In '45 it was—

LEVINE: [unclear]

SABRSULA: Yeah. But I don't know if they were still censored after the war. I don't think so. Hmm. But I—I remember seeing some of the letters and Mama said, "Boy, look at this. They really went over that," you know.

LEVINE: Oh, I bet they did that in Crystal City [unclear].

SABRSULA: Yeah, they—I guess. Huh. Huh.

LEVINE: Let's see. So when—do you remember when you were able to leave Crystal City?

SABRSULA: Oh, I can't remember when we finally got out. I just remember going back to Manhattan, you know.

LEVINE: And how did you feel about—

SABRSULA: On a train.

LEVINE: —about leaving there?

SABRSULA: Well, a little scary and especially then coming into Manhattan and all the big buildings. Out in Texas everything is flat. [laughs] A lot of land, not too many tall buildings. And I guess it was the Welfare Department met us and took us to a hotel and we lived there for quite a few months until we found something, you know. And that's when we moved up to the Bronx. And nobody would want us with four children so my mother had a hard time finding a place for us. My mother was always the one that—she's the go-getter in the family.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SABRSULA: So—but we were just a little terrified of the city, really, when we came back.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[BEGIN TAPE 1, SIDE B]

LEVINE: D—I mean, you must have had friends and everything too that you had formed, friendships and—

SABRSULA: Yeah, but didn't keep in—I—myself. But my parents—my mother—we had friends that were really good throughout all the time, you know, wrote to us and came to visit us when we were then all in Ellis Island. So, oh, yeah. Those we kept in touch with.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SABRSULA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, when you think back on it now, do you think being in—at Ellis Island and then later, Crystal City—I mean, do you think it had some kind of a—an impact on you as a person, or on your personality somehow, those—that period of time?

SABRSULA: Oh, I don't know. We got to know, you know, a lot of other people but they were all in the same predicament. So, you know—but as far as long-range things, I really don't know. I don't think so.

LEVINE: And how about the—being—being in sort of close quarters with—with a group of Japanese? Do—did—was there any kind of—

SABRSULA: No, there was really no intermingling. No, I just remember, you know, we were allowed to roam. You know, and I remember visiting some of the gardens. They were always wonderful gardeners, you know. And they would let us come and look and we could walk through their section and there were no problems. I don't remember any event of vandalism or—or any bad things about it at all.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SABRSULA: Everybody got along.

LEVINE: It must have been interesting because Germans and Japanese are so—are so different—

SABRSULA: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

LEVINE: —as groups as—as to how they sort of set up their little—

SABRSULA: Yeah.

LEVINE: —communities—

SABRSULA: Yeah, yeah.

LEVINE: —and how they differed from each other.

SABRSULA: Well, most of them also had, like, their little cottages and all of their little gardens. And we had a swimming pool. Now, I'm trying to remember if any of—if they were also in the pool with us. I don't remember. I don't think so. Maybe they had their own pool. That I don't know.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SABRSULA: But as far as the schools, we had separate schools.

LEVINE: Did you have a garden? I mean, did your family have a garden?

SABRSULA: No, we just had a few—

LEVINE: Did people have their own—

SABRSULA: —flowers. If they wanted to, they could. I guess was more or less just a hobby. But we didn't have to plant our own vegetables or anything like that.

LEVINE: Were—were there some work details that—that people—I mean—

SABRSULA: Yeah, to—

LEVINE: —were obligated to do?

SABRSULA: I'm sure garbage and then, as I say, my father worked in the cantina and my mother was just taking care of us so she had no outside job.

LEVINE: Uh-hmm. W—your—was your father being a waiter? Is that—that's what he did?

SABRSULA: No, he—behind the counter where—to sell sodas or, you know—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SABRSULA: —chips and things like that.

LEVINE: Oh. Is—let's see. Is there anything else you can think of—of that place that—that, when you think of it is something that you remember about it?

SABRSULA: No, other than just—as an eight-year-old, it was just a—just a different experience, just another place to live. You know, we had our friends. We had the school. We were always busy and treated well. So it was just like moving to another—another area.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SABRSULA: Very, very hot. That I—I know. When we were going out in the afternoon or the daytime we always used to wear a hat or, you know, a straw hat or bonnet or something because the heat was very intense.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SABRSULA: Yeah.

LEVINE: Well, then afterwards, do you think—do you think that the whole internment had any effects on your mother and father? You—you mentioned that your—

SABRSULA: Oh—

LEVINE: —father had to account for—

SABRSULA: Yeah.

LEVINE: —where he had been.

SABRSULA: Well, I think after that they would just try to be, I guess, a little bit more careful about, you know—maybe was playing the records too loud or just being boastful or just—they were careful in how they spoke, which before they weren't. You know?

LEVINE: Uh-hmm, uh-hmm.

SABRSULA: And as I say, they kind of suspected who might have, you know, said bad things about my father but could never prove anything. So they just had to put it behind them and—

LEVINE: Uh-hmm.

SABRSULA: —you know, they just got on with their lives.

LEVINE: Did your father ever go back [unclear]?

SABRSULA: To Germany?

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

SABRSULA: No.

LEVINE: No?

SABRSULA: No, no. My mother did, I think twice, but my father never went back.

LEVINE: Yeah. And—and you remained the only—the only, should I say, branch of your family that they came and settled here and stayed here? I mean, the rest of your relatives were really there?

SABRSULA: Yeah, most of them there except my mother's older sister, the one that moved up to Albany, or settled in Albany. And my cousin is the only one in that family left.

LEVINE: Hmm.

SABRSULA: And we have a cousin in Argentina. Her other sister had gone there and so it's him and his wife and his children. But as far as in the States, no. [chuckles] Just the one cousin.

LEVINE: And how about—how about you in your own life now? I mean, how—do you make some kind of a balance between your German side and your American side? Or how—how do you think about—

SABRSULA: Well—

LEVINE: —in those ways?

SABRSULA: A lot of my mother's friends that she used to speak German with are all dead also. So I still write to my cousins in Germany and I write in German, hoping that they still can understand. But I have a German-English dictionary so that helps me out a lot, you know, but—

LEVINE: Do you ever get to speak it now?

SABRSULA: Well, to my aunt. She's not even a blood aunt but one of the good friends from that time. She's 89. And so when we go to see her we kind of speak in German, more because I want to not forget, you know. But as far as other people around here, they're—they've been here in the States so long that now they speak more English, I think, than their native tongue. Because so many of their—their friends are—you know, are gone.

LEVINE: Yeah, yeah.

SABRSULA: So—

LEVINE: Did you have in mind that you would marry somebody German? Was that something that you thought you would do?

SABRSULA: My father always wanted me to. [laughs] But Czechoslovakian isn't too far away.

LEVINE: Right. [laughter] Why don't you say your—your husband's name and your children's names?

SABRSULA: Okay, the—my married name is Sabrsula. It's an old Czechoslovakian name. It's really pronounced in the Czech way Shabrashula.

LEVINE: Oh.

SABRSULA: So it's very different. And we have two sons. The oldest is Kenneth and the younger one is Donald. And Donald has a wonderful wife and now a brand new baby girl. She's just three months old.

LEVINE: Oh, yeah. Okay. Well, is there anything else that you can think of that you might want to add before we close?

SABRSULA: No, not that I can think of right now.

LEVINE: Okay. Well, I want to thank you very much. That was—

SABRSULA: Oh, you're welcome.

LEVINE: —interesting. It'll be part of our archive and I'm sure, you know [unclear]—

SABRSULA: I remembered more than I thought that I would. [laughs]

LEVINE: Yeah. Yeah, you did.

SABRSULA: Yeah.

LEVINE: But good. Okay, well, I—I've been speaking with Louise Sabrsula [chuckles] who was interned in the spring of 1943 at Ellis Island with the rest of her family. And this is Janet Levine for the National Park Service on August 26, 1997 signing off.

[END OF INTERVIEW]