

EI-961

BERTHA ARNOLD BURST

BIRTHDATE: DECEMBER 31, 1906

INTERVIEW DATE: SEPTEMBER 30, 1997

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW: 91

RUNNING TIME: 17:12

INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

RECORDING ENGINEER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

INTERVIEW LOCATION:

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:

GERMANY, CIRCA 1925

AGE: APPROXIMATELY 18

SHIP:

PORT:

RESIDENCES:

SIGRIST: Good afternoon.

BURST: Good afternoon.

SIGRIST: I'm Paul Sigrist.

BURST: Sigrists.

SIGRIST: Sigrist.

BURST: Right.

SIGRIST: And I work for the Ellis Island Museum.

BURST: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: The National Park Service.

BURST: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Today is Tuesday, September 30th, 1997 and I'm at the Kateri Residence—K-A-T-E-R-I. And we're in New York City.

BURST: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And I'm here with Bertha Burst.

BURST: That's right.

SIGRIST: Yes.

BURST: That's right.

SIGRIST: And Mrs. Burst came from Germany.

BURST: Yes.

SIGRIST: Yes. What year did you come?

BURST: Well, I don't quite remember but I think it was in 1925. I'm not sure.

SIGRIST: But maybe 1925.

BURST: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah. I'm going to just fix your microphone here.

BURST: Yeah.

SIGRIST: She thinks she came in 1925 and I also want to say for the sake of the tape that volunteer, Roger Herz, is here, and recreation person here at the Kateri, Jody Persowuth.

PARSOWITH: Parsowith [PH]. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Parsowith. Can you spell that? And—and speak loud.

PARSOWITH: P-A-R-S-O-W-I-T-H.

SIGRIST: Thank you. I'll be asking that every time we report.

PARSOWITH: [laughs]

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SIGRIST: We're in Mrs. Burst's room and we may hear one of the other residents through the wall, who sounds kind of unhappy. [laughter] Mrs. Burst, what was your maiden name?

BURST: Bertha Arnold.

SIGRIST: How do you spell Arnold?

BURST: Arnold, A-R-N-O-L-D.

SIGRIST: And where in Germany were you born?

BURST: Where? It was a little town. It's a little city now.

SIGRIST: What's the name?

BURST: Lauda.

SIGRIST: Lauda.

BURST: Lauda.

SIGRIST: Do you know how to spell Lauda?

BURST: L-A-U-D-A.

SIGRIST: Lauda.

BURST: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Oh, thank you. Do you know where in Germany that little town is? What part of Germany?

BURST: Baden [PH].

SIGRIST: It's in Baden.

BURST: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Baden's kind of—

BURST: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —down, I think, isn't it?

BURST: Yeah, yeah.

PARSOWITH: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Do you know what your birthday is?

BURST: Yes. The 31st of December.

SIGRIST: What year?

BURST: Was 1906.

SIGRIST: 1906. December 31st—

BURST: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —1906.

BURST: Right. That's right.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. What was your father's name?

BURST: I think it was Anton. Anton.

SIGRIST: Anton.

BURST: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Anton. And what did he do for a living in Lauda?

BURST: I don't know that. You see, it's been so long. I can't remember that anymore.

SIGRIST: Do you remember your mother?

BURST: Yes.

SIGRIST: What was her name?

BURST: Johanna. [PH]

SIGRIST: Johanna.

BURST: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what her maiden name was?

BURST: Schwartz.

SIGRIST: Schwartz?

BURST: Yeah.

SIGRIST: S—S-C-H—

BURST: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —W—

BURST: Yeah.

SIGRIST: —A-R-T—

BURST: T.

SIGRIST: —Z.

BURST: That's right.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. What are some of the memories you have of your mother when you were a child?

BURST: Well, I don't remember too much. You know, it's so long. I can't remember that.

SIGRIST: Well, what—what do you remember about when you were a little girl in Germany?

BURST: Well, I don't remember much.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the house that you lived in?

BURST: Yeah. I have it right there.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me what it looked like?

BURST: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Go ahead.

BURST: It had a living room and a dining room and two other rooms.

SIGRIST: And did you have animals when you were growing up?

BURST: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: What kind of animals?

BURST: Well, we had chickens and, I don't know. Did we have sheep or not? But we wanted to have them but I don't know if he got them or not.

SIGRIST: Did you have a special job in the house when you were a kid? A chore that was yours?

BURST: No, no, no.

SIGRIST: No?

BURST: No.

SIGRIST: Did you have brothers and sisters?

BURST: Yes, I have four sisters.

SIGRIST: Do you remember their names?

BURST: Yes, yes. One was Jo—one was Joanne, Jo. I have to think. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: That's okay. Take your time. Joanne was one.

BURST: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, and—[unclear] I forgot.

SIGRIST: Well, maybe as we're talking, you'll remember.

BURST: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Do you remember—you—you—you remember the house.

BURST: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what the town looked like?

BURST: Oh, yes. Yeah.

SIGRIST: What—what—what things stick out in your mind about the town?

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BURST: Well, it was a cute town. You know, it wasn't very large but they called it a city and it wasn't a city.

SIGRIST: Was there an industry in that town?

BURST: That I don't remember.

SIGRIST: A factory that you remember—

BURST: No, I don't remember that. It could be but I don't remember that.

SIGRIST: Did you go to school in Germany?

BURST: No—

SIGRIST: Didn't go to school.

BURST: [unclear] Germany.

SIGRIST: You didn't go to school in Germany?

BURST: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: You did?

BURST: Yeah. [unclear].

SIGRIST: Do you remember anything about going to school?

BURST: Oh, yes. Yes.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things do you remember about going to school?

BURST: Well, I couldn't tell you that. No. But it was a cute town.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh, yeah. Did you go to church when you—

BURST: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes?

BURST: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What—what religion were you?

BURST: Catholic.

SIGRIST: Catholics.

BURST: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Was there a Catholic church?

BURST: Well, there was more than one.

SIGRIST: More than one.

BURST: Yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Who was the most religious person in your family?

BURST: Well, my mother, I guess.

SIGRIST: Did your m—

BURST: And she brought us up that way.

SIGRIST: How did you practice your religion at home?

BURST: At home?

SIGRIST: Yes. What did you do at home—

BURST: Oh—

SIGRIST: —for—

BURST: We said our—do you know—prayer. And when it was finished, we said it again. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Do you remember that prayer?

BURST: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you say it for me in German?

BURST: I think I—I think I could.

SIGRIST: Try.

BURST: Yeah. Ah, let me see. No, I—

SIGRIST: Okay. [chuckles] Well, again, it might come to you as we're talking.

BURST: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: When—when—when you lived in Germany, what kinds of things did you enjoy doing?

BURST: Well, most anything.

SIGRIST: Was there a special activity that you particularly enjoyed?

BURST: Oh, no.

SIGRIST: No?

BURST: No.

SIGRIST: What were you like as a kid?

BURST: Well, I [unclear] like anything.

SIGRIST: Yeah. When you were growing up, what did you know about America?

BURST: I didn't know anything about America till I came here.

SIGRIST: You sa—you told me that you thought you came in 1925.

BURST: I think so.

SIGRIST: Yes.

BURST: But I'm not sure.

SIGRIST: Not exactly sure.

BURST: Yeah.

SIGRIST: But maybe 1925.

BURST: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Do you remember World War I?

BURST: Oh, yes.

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SIGRIST: Yes. What did—what do you remember about the First World War?

BURST: Well, that—I don't know what—what—see, I was too young.

SIGRIST: Yeah?

BURST: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did it affect your family in any way?

BURST: Oh, no.

SIGRIST: No.

BURST: No, no.

SIGRIST: Did you have a—a brother or a relative—

BURST: No.

SIGRIST: —who had to serve?

BURST: No, no.

SIGRIST: No.

BURST: No.

SIGRIST: Okay. Well, tell me why you came to America.

BURST: I came here because everybody went to America that time.

SIGRIST: Did you know someone who had gone to America?

BURST: No, no.

SIGRIST: No? Did any relative—

BURST: Oh, my aunt was here.

SIGRIST: Where did she live?

BURST: In New York.

SIGRIST: And whose—is that your father's sister or your mother's sister?

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BURST: My mother's sister.

SIGRIST: Your mother's sister. Did she write to you?

BURST: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes? Did—did you have any expectations about America before you came?

BURST: No, no. Nothing at all.

SIGRIST: When you came to America, did you come alone?

BURST: Oh, yes. Yes.

SIGRIST: Was anyone traveling with you?

BURST: No.

SIGRIST: No? Tell me what you had to do before you left Germany. What did you have to do to get ready to leave?

BURST: I forgot that.

SIGRIST: Okay. Do you remember what you packed to take to America?

BURST: No, I don't remember anything.

SIGRIST: Do you remember saying goodbye to your family?

BURST: No.

SIGRIST: No? Okay. [chuckles] Do you remember being on the ship, the boat that brought you to America?

BURST: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yes?

BURST: I remember that.

SIGRIST: Yes. Do you remember the name of the boat?

BURST: No.

SIGRIST: No.

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BURST: No.

SIGRIST: Do you remember where you had to go to get on the boat?

BURST: I know where it was.

SIGRIST: Yes?

BURST: But I couldn't tell you.

SIGRIST: Okay. [chuckles]

BURST: [laughs]

SIGRIST: That's fine. D—do you have any memories of being on the ship itself, the boat?

BURST: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: What do you remember?

BURST: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: What did you do on the boat?

BURST: I don't remember that anymore.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

BURST: Yeah. But I remember I was on the boat.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how long the trip took to get to America?

BURST: That I don't know. See, I think it was about 10 days, maybe more, maybe less.

SIGRIST: Did you get seasick?

BURST: I think so, what—what I remember.

SIGRIST: Do you—do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty when the ship—

BURST: No.

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SIGRIST: No?

BURST: No.

SIGRIST: Do you remember being at Ellis Island—

BURST: No.

SIGRIST: —when the ship came in?

BURST: No, no.

SIGRIST: No. Who met you in America?

BURST: My aunt.

SIGRIST: Your aunt. And di—where did she take you?

BURST: I—that I don't know.

SIGRIST: Did you go to her house?

BURST: I guess so.

SIGRIST: Yeah, and she lived in New York, you say.

BURST: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

BURST: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you get any work when you first came to America?

BURST: No.

SIGRIST: You didn't get a job.

BURST: No.

SIGRIST: No. What did you do when you first got—

BURST: I did housework.

SIGRIST: You did housework. Well, that's a job.

BURST: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: [laughs]

BURST: Big job.

SIGRIST: Yes. [chuckles]

BURST: [laughs]

SIGRIST: Can you tell me what it was like to learn how to be a—a maid in somebody's house?

BURST: Well, I couldn't say that anymore. I forgot that. You know, there's a lot of things I forgot.

SIGRIST: Well, you're doing all right.

BURST: [chuckles]

SIGRIST: [chuckles] Tell me—tell me what—when—when you went to work in the house doing housework, what were some of the things that you had to do?

BURST: Well, we—I finished the—the homes. You know, we had to finish the home, [unclear] the house.

SIGRIST: Did you have to do any cooking when you worked?

BURST: Oh, no. After [unclear], I did.

SIGRIST: After—afterwards. How did you learn English?

BURST: I—I picked that up quick. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Do you remember a time where you made a mistake when you were trying to speak English?

BURST: No.

SIGRIST: No.

BURST: I don't remember.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. But you picked up English very quickly.

BURST: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. And when you first came to America, what—where did you live? Did you stay with your aunt?

BURST: I came to my aunt. But where she lived, I couldn't tell you.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how long you lived with your aunt?

BURST: No, I couldn't.

SIGRIST: No. Did any of your other family come over to America?

BURST: Yes, one y—one sister. She was two years older than I.

SIGRIST: And what did she do when she got here?

BURST: She did the same thing I did.

SIGRIST: She got housework?

BURST: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Did you miss your family when you were in America?

BURST: No, no.

SIGRIST: No.

BURST: Well, see, I lost my family very young.

SIGRIST: Oh.

BURST: Yeah, right.

SIGRIST: How old were you? Do you remember?

BURST: Oh, I don't know but I don't think much more than 10 or 12 years old.

SIGRIST: How did your father die?

BURST: A heart attack.

SIGRIST: Had a heart attack.

BURST: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And what about your mother?

BURST: Well, she didn't have a heart attack but I don't know what she had.

SIGRIST: But she died too.

BURST: Oh, she died after many years.

SIGRIST: Oh, I see. Was your mother still living when you came to America?

BURST: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Oh, she was? Okay.

BURST: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did your mother ever want to come over to America?

BURST: Well, I don't know. She never said it.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

BURST: I don't think she did.

SIGRIST: But your sister came over.

BURST: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did your sister live with you when she came?

BURST: She did.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh.

BURST: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you become an American citizen?

BURST: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Yes?

BURST: After five years.

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SIGRIST: Yes? How did you feel when it—when you became a citizen?

BURST: Oh, I was very proud. [laughs]

SIGRIST: Did—

BURST: I felt I was a real American. [chuckles]

SIGRIST: Did you get married in America?

BURST: Oh, yes.

SIGRIST: Yes?

BURST: Yeah.

SIGRIST: What was the name of the man that you married?

BURST: [chuckles] I forgot.

PARSOWITH: Mr. Burst.

BURST: Yeah. [laughter]

SIGRIST: Right, Mr. Burst. [chuckles] Was he—where—where was Mr. Burst born?

BURST: Mr. Burst was born in Lauda.

SIGRIST: In Lauda?

BURST: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you know Mr. Burst when you lived in Lauda?

BURST: No, no.

SIGRIST: No? How did you meet Mr. Burst?

BURST: Oh, I met him many years after that.

SIGRIST: Do—and tell me, how did you meet him?

BURST: I—I don't know—remember that anymore.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what year you got married?

BURST: I think it was in 1925. I'm not sure.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh, uh-huh. Right. Did you have any children?

BURST: Yes, I had one daughter.

SIGRIST: What was her name?

BURST: Joan.

SIGRIST: Joan. Did Joan learn how to speak English—I mean, speak German? Did you—

BURST: Very little.

SIGRIST: Little.

BURST: Very little.

SIGRIST: Little bit.

BURST: She understood when we talked to her. But otherwise, she wouldn't understand.

SIGRIST: Could Mr. Burst speak English?

BURST: No.

SIGRIST: No? He spoke German.

BURST: German.

SIGRIST: Uh-huh. Did you ever want to go back to Germany?

BURST: No, no.

SIGRIST: No? Why not?

BURST: Because I have no one there. See? I [several words unclear] that I could go to.

SIGRIST: How do you feel about America?

BURST: I love America.

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SIGRIST: Great. Well, that's a good place for—for us to end. Mrs. Burst, thank you very much.

BURST: You're very welcome.

SIGRIST: And this is Paul Sigrist signing off with Bertha Burst on September 30th, 1997 at the Kateri Residence. Thank you.

BURST: Yeah. [unclear].

[END OF INTERVIEW]