

EI-992
ALICE LUCENTE
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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.
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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: ALECIA BARBOUR
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VISITED HER FATHER, GUSTAVE HORSTCOTE (PH) DURING
HIS INTERNMENT AT ELLIS ISLAND, 1941-42.

LEVINE: Today is April 8, 1998 and I'm here in the Oral History Studio at Ellis Island with Alice Lucente who visited her father who was interned here at Ellis Island as an enemy alien around 1941-42. And at that time Alice, whose maiden name is Horstcote (ph)---

LUCENTE: Horstcote (ph)

LEVINE: ---Ho-Horst, I'm sorry, Horstcote (ph)---

LUCENTE: Right

LEVINE: --- was, ah, at about age nine, thereabouts, during the times when she came here to visit her father. Okay, well I'm delighted. This is a---this a really novel kind of interview for us to get and it'll be a perspective from a child's point of view coming from the outside looking in at this so I---I think it's very valuable and I'm delighted that we'll have the chance to have this.

LUCENTE: It brings back a lot of memories to come in here because, like I say, it was vague memories from sitting on a balcony looking down on the so-called war prisoners or internees that---that were over here and it was a frightening experience because you didn't know exactly what was taking place and why these people were here. And you know the periodic visits were short but---they were ---they were frightening.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. What---what did you see as a nine year old when you looked over from the third floor balcony down on the Great Hall there?

LUCENTE: I guess it was a mass confusion of people and not knowing why---why they were here ----- what they were doing and was there a reason behind all this. It was outside---outside on the street there's, you know, friends of myself that they were kind of nasty to us because of our parents being picked up. There were, you know, the children here also. And I guess all the kids felt the same way because they---they had kind of a stigma against them without knowing why. And it's something

that's lived in my memory very vividly but not knowing why or exactly what took place up until this time and I've tried researching this before and hopefully we've hit the bullhead. [Laughs]

LEVINE: Good. Good. Did you feel stigmatized? I mean, did you---did you feel that children were nasty to you

LUCENTE: Yes.

LEVINE: because ---

LUCENTE: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LUCENTE: Yes. It was a horrible experience. My mom went through a nervous breakdown due to what happened here and because, like I say, my father was picked up erroneously because of using someone else's name---

LEVINE: Maybe you could talk about that, then.

LUCENTE: Right. Well, he was a barber and a beautician and he had the name, his given name was Gustave (ph) and he never liked using it, so he did use his brother's name which was Carl (ph). He thought that was a lot easier to associate with his clients and all and unfortunately, his brother was a member of the Nazi party. Okay?

And, somehow or other, it was one of these things, where the brother disappeared with his family and wife and son. They left the United States. They went from -- what we understand now --- they went back through Canada or Russia into Germany and into the German army. And then my father had been using his name and I guess when the FBI was checking back to see what happened to his brother, they erroneously picked up my father. And again, going back to that time, I remember very, very vividly with the FBI coming into my home and again I was a little girl, and they went through all our drawers. They took away --- my dad had one of the, um, oh those radios?

LEVINE: Oh, short wave?

LUCENTE: Short-wave radio, I think it was a Grundig short-wave radio, and they took that away. And ah, we were from Germany, had a little letter opener with---which had a swastika on it, that was taken. I mean there were so many things that were taken and you know, removed from the house and my father was removed from the house also and ah, I guess in handcuffs. And you know and the neighbors, from that point on, had sort of a stigma against all of us. And it was---it was not a very pleasant thing to go through at the time. So and then, coming o-----over here to visit was another thing because now your father was someplace where you--where he didn't belong and it was a battle coming--- I think there was also like a cou--- court or some sort of a---setup where they had trials, mini trials or something and where they would hear what the problem was?

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LUCENTE: Because I remember coming to that and they had like rows of seats arranged where you could sit and listen to what was taking place.

LEVINE: So in other words it was---it was open to the public, or the people who were visiting---

LUCENTE: I don't know if it was open to the public or not. I think it was open to the people that were actually involved in the situation.

LEVINE: So would---so the trial you heard would have revolved around your father?

LUCENTE: Right. It was my father's and other people that were up at this---you know they probably heard a few trials at the same time. And ah, like I said, I came with my mom all the time and ah, we sat, you know, on certain benches and they had these---these ah, I guess like a jury set up or a trial set up with a judge and someone who heard the different cases and you know, and decided on what was to be done. And---and again, you know I don't know how long he was here or what the, you know, the final outcome was. I mean, I know he was released, but I---I do want to find out just exactly what history on his record there is you know, and possibly check to see how long he was here and find out more details.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember anything more about the sort of trial situation here?

LUCENTE: Not really---that was my---my mother made friends with this other man's wife you know, and we---I still speak to her now. She's quite old but ah, she does have a vivid memory of also what took place and probably she might even have some old pictures. And like, her husband learned to knit here and ah, he had never knitted before but learned how to make a couple sweaters so that was one of his things. My dad was a barber, so he probably cut somebody's hair while he was here. And her husband was a short order cook so he took over the kitchen. And---

LEVINE: Why don't you talk about that.

LUCENTE: That, actually Walter ah, like I say, was a short order cook and we came in here and naturally he---he tried to do what he could do and to, you know, keep himself busy besides the knitting. And he started working in the kitchen and started helping with the meals and spent his time over here like that and actually when he was released he went into the army and ah, became a cook in the army and very rapidly went up the line to become I guess a sergeant in less than a year because of his cooking abilities. So I don't know if it's back to Ellis Island or being a short order cook that he managed to do well that way.

My dad came out of here and ah, went back and never used the name Karl again [laughs]. Was known as Gus, opened up a beauty parlor in Jamaica and did---worked there then he also worked at the Roosevelt hotel. Actually I think it was the Republican Party that he worked for a lot of the people there and became a very macho American and became an Air Raid

Warden. But he was never able to go into the army because he had a problem with his heart valve so they wouldn't take him but ah, it left a very big dent on our family.

And my mom went through a lot of turmoil through what happened. She---she went into nervous breakdowns because of people, you know, kind of ostracizing us as---as being friends and didn't know why we were---why we were, you know, different, and why my father had been picked up because Nazis at the time were not the people that you wanted to know. And it took a long time to get over that. You know, going to public school, there were a lot of people that wouldn't talk to me as a kid and you know, called names and different things, and it hurt. And it's---it's been in my mind all these years and I---I do, like I said before, I do want to find out, you know, what happened and the result of ah, his---his innocence being proved and him being released.

LEVINE: Um-hmmm. Did you have ah, brothers or sisters?

LUCENTE: I'm an only child.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. And what was your father's full name?

LUCENTE Gustave A. Horstcote

LEVINE: And your mother?

LUCENTE: My mother's was Frieda Thielemann.

LEVINE: How do you---

LUCENTE: Thielemann. T-H-I-E-L-E-M-A-N-N.

LEVINE: And, ah, so you were an only child.

LUCENTE: Yes.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LUCENTE: Well both my grandparents came over on Ellis Island [laughs].

LEVINE: Really?

LUCENTE: Yes. And---

LEVINE: And did both sides come from Germany?

LUCENTE: Both my parents did. They're both German. My father came here. His parents stayed there but he came over here. It was him and his brother. One of his sisters went to South America. But the two of them came over here, and then the third brother came over later on. And the two of them were fine. The other one was, you know, into his own problems, but---

LEVINE: So---so now who is it who came through Ellis Island?

LUCENTE: My grandparents, my grandfather my mother's side and my grandmother on my mother's side.

LEVINE: Wow.

LUCENTE: So they were the---my grandfather came first and little by little sent over he-- for his children.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Did they--did you know your grandparents?

LUCENTE: Yes. I lived---we lived with them, fortunately, at the time because they were always, you know, strong point in our lives.

LEVINE: Um-hmmm. Did you---do you remember them ever speaking about Ellis Island or about immigrating?

LUCENTE: Yeah, well, they---they said it was came over here and that what struck them odd was because some people came over without names and the names were just picked up like that as they came through and they kept their own names and it was a question of being healthy and having, you know, substance to live on. And as I say, my grandfather came first and then sent for, you know, one after the other of his children. And my grandmother came lastly.

LEVINE: Um-hmmm.

LUCENTE: And one of my mother's brothers actually was a steward on a boat and traveled back and forth so I don't think he came through Ellis Island but ah, he actually came in later on and became a United States citizen also.

LEVINE: Hmmm. So ah, do you---do you remember---when the war broke out? Do you have memories of World War II as a little girl?

LUCENTE: Well actually, when the war broke out in Europe, we were in Europe. We had---I was a very sickly child and we had gone back to Europe. My---they had told us that the climate would be better for whatever they---they felt I had, so we went back to Europe but then the war was starting and they told my father that if he wanted to get back to the United States he would have to leave on the next boat and unfortunately I got sick so my mother and myself we stayed till the next boat left. My father came back on his own. So we came back, I would say, about 1939 to the United States from Germany. We had spent a year over there.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

LUCENTE: So, there again, I have vague memories of seeing the marching in the streets and--and the different things and signs of what was to be but not---as a child not knowing what it was. And you know, until you---you have your---your thoughts you know --- go back to it later on.

LEVINE: Yeah. Do you remember why your family went back over there before?

LUCENTE: Yeah actually because the doctor suggested the change of climate. I have a blood condition and they didn't know what to do for it here and that they felt the treatment would be different over there that you know, a change of climate might help. So ah, so, you know, we went over there for a year to see and it didn't work anyway. So came back here and I'm, thank God, I'm healthy now.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. So then ah, where were you living then when you came back?

LUCENTE: We were living in Ridgewood.

LEVINE: New Jersey.

LUCENTE: No. Ridgewood, Queens.

LEVINE: Ridgewood, Queens.

LUCENTE: Which was basically a German area. Was---with mostly German and then infiltrated by, you know, some Italians at the time. But it was basically, I would say, a German area.

LEVINE: Um-hmmm. Could you describe the German community in any way when people started to get picked up and---and interned and (not understood)---

LUCENTE: [superimposed] It was, well I was---I remember growing up as a child in Ridgewood it was always clean, well-kept, and the stores were organized you know, and people were just helping each other. And then the change came --- [not understood] change in school and a change in your friends when people started getting picked up little by little. And it ---the atmosphere changed, you know, and people's attitudes, attitudes towards each other changed a lot too. And again I was a child, you know, so you don't realize and when you come home you're crying because someone called you a Nazi or something like that and, you know, it was a--- it was kind of a awful thing.

LEVINE: Uh-hmmm. Do you remember anything your mother or father said to you by way of explaining what was happening?

LUCENTE: Well my dad tried telling me that, you know, it wasn't his fault and he would never have done anything wrong because he was ---he lived by the law. I mean if---if there was anything to be done wrong, he was not the person to do it. And that's one of the things I think that---that greatly impressed him also that he could be picked up like this you know, in error, and then have---have to go through this kind of a trial to prove himself not guilty. And then to try, and you know, live the righteous life that he had been living before---that was ---- it was a very ah, very traumatic time in our lives in all of us. And, I say, it had a very bad effect on my mother also because she's, actually now she

has Alzheimer's she's ninety-one, but she went through many years of nervous breakdowns and would relate back to the time---would never talk about the time my father was picked up. That's why I don't know anything from her because she would never come out and say why and if you mentioned, you know, anything about Ellis Island, she just would clam up totally on it.

LEVINE: And what about your father? Would he speak about it with you?

LUCENTE: He just said he was not guilty and he was glad it was over and that part of my life is behind me so he just didn't want to have too m---too many things to ah, share.

LEVINE: So he really, so really neither one of them---

LUCENTE: No.

LEVINE: ---wanted to speak of---

LUCENTE: They---they just, I think it was just a point in their lives that they--they wanted to block out totally as much as they could.

LEVINE: And how about your grandparents. Were they around when your father was picked up?

LUCENTE: That's my mother's parents. Yeah. They were there. We were living with them, actually. We shared an apartment. At that time it was you know, share an apartment or have nothing to live. It was kind of, ah, end of the Depression era, I guess. So we all lived together in one apartment. And they were very ah, very supportive you know, with---with us and helpful to us. But again like ---my mother and father didn't want to say too much so, and then they both, my grandmother always spoke German. So they couldn't relate to---to many things that were taking place you know, to -- to pass it on for the, you know, later time.

LEVINE: Hmm. So now, do you remember like how often you would come and visit and how long you could stay or anything about the visitation?

LUCENTE: It was - it was maybe once a week or so? Or once, ah, you know, when my mother could get away? It wasn't---I could not even tell you honestly if it was once a week or every two weeks or so and the time was limited that you'd be over here. But, again I---I remember seeing, you know, the whole bottom floor there from the balcony and the activities and things going on.

LEVINE: So what was going on down there?

LUCENTE: They were active and ah, they had, like I think they had like ping-pong tables and different things set up and different booths and tables. This is just what I feel is in my mind.

LEVINE: Um-hmmm.

LUCENTE: Maybe if I saw pictures, you know, it'd be a little more helpful.

LEVINE: Yeah. Yeah right.

LUCENTE: Just bring things back.

LEVINE: Well, what about---what about your father when you would visit? Wh---what kinds of things would he talk about?

LUCENTE: He was ashamed. He always felt so ashamed of---of being picked up and doing this to us as a family and kept saying that, you know, "I have nothing to hide. I did nothing wrong." And he felt very strongly that his brother did something wrong, you know, and hurt our family and ah, felt very ---very bad about it.

LEVINE: Was he--- was he the type who, um, wanted to keep on with the German traditions or was he the type who wanted to become all American?

LUCENTE: It was---he came over here, he was Mr. America. Total, total turnabout. Me ---- he liked---he liked the fact that he was born there and you know, that was his heritage but once he came to this country he was actually, a so-called American, in all sense of the word. And we have a few pictures in my basement and there's got to be an American flag hanging in the house, you know, he was one of those staunch, ah believers in what was free and easy He left a country where he---he was telling me when I was older that they would get paid three, four times a day because of inflation and they'd run out, like morning break, and buy something and then lunch time they'd buy something else 'cause money meant nothing. And this was the time when he decided it was time to leave, you know, Germany, and come over here and he met my mother because she had very long hair and he was a beautician and he cut her hair and made an enemy of my grandmother for a while because he cut her hair off and so, when she came over he kind of followed over after her and that's their romance. This --- that was what lasted for fifty some-odd years.

LEVINE: Hmmmm. And how about you personally, do you feel any ramifications from that exper---that your family---

LUCENTE: I just felt that it was---it was kind of rough and that, like---like I say I would really, really like to find out the history of why this happened and you know, where the blame actually came from and what the results were from the whole case. And I've been trying for years and I never knew where to, you know, to touch base and to find out which way to go. So maybe this can be a little bit of a help.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Um, is there anything else about Ellis Island that we maybe haven't discussed that you can recall from those visits?

LUCENTE: It was a big gloomy place. It very ---was a winter months, we'd come over in the boat and it was so cold and---and you just, you know, it was just such a big, scary place. You know, and, I don't know, I guess that's -that's- my---my vision of the time was it was scary.

LEVINE: And what about---what about the---what did you come over on? What kind of---

LUCENTE: I believe it was a ferryboat or something. 'Cause it was a kind of like hold. It was open.

LEVINE: Oh. Uh, huh.

LUCENTE: So I really --- I really don't remember too much. But -- probably was a f--- you know, some sort of a ferryboat or Circle Line --- probably wasn't in---in the existence at the time. Some sort of a launch.

LEVINE: Um-hmmm. Do you remember any Coast Guards being stationed here wh---when your father was interned?

LUCENTE: Probably not. Because I was more concerned, you know, with him and coming to see him with my mother. I remember carrying a doll over here with me all the time. It was the---a little plastic doll and its name was Peter [Laughs] He used to come to visit. So that's about the extent of my memories on that.

LEVINE: How about guards, do you remember any of the guards who were here?

LUCENTE: Not as---as a person, but I remember seeing people standing around watching, you know, that everybody was kept to their place and it was more like a real restricted, to me it was like a jail. And I thought that my father had been jailed and I guess that---that's the kind of memory that I have of this that he was actually in some sort of a prison type concentration camp, or whatever would you have.

LEVINE: Do you remember guns? That---that the guards --- were the guards---

LUCENTE: Truthfully I---I couldn't say that but then, you know, I don't know. They probably did have them. I'm sure, to keep some sort of control.

LEVINE: Do you remember, ah, Italians and Japanese being here, as well as Germans?

LUCENTE: I remember the Italians but I know there was a much, much greater amount of Germans than Italians. I think it was mostly a Germans at the time.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. And, ah, as far as food, did you eat here?

LUCENTE: I couldn't say. Probably had a snack or something but ah, I mean, they---they seemed to be well fed. You know, I don't think there was a complaint as to what they ate. But I don't know about us, you know.

LEVINE: Hmmm. And, um, is there anything else, your father became friendly with a Walter ---

LUCENTE: Kuffner (ph)

LEVINE: Kuffner (ph), and how---what do you know about that? That friendship?

LUCENTE: Well that friendship lasted up until the time he died, in fact we---I still call his wife. His wife is now seventy-something years old and she's kind of invalid and I speak to her periodically just to see how she is and that left--- that was also a very bad memory of him being incarcerated here and, you know, not really knowing why he was a prisoner and then coming out and being a sergeant in the army within a short period of time.

LEVINE: Oh this was the short amount of---uh-huh. And they met here?

LUCENTE: Yeah. They met over here in ----in Ellis Island and became buddies. I'm sure there's a lot more people too. But, you know, those are the ones I basically remember the most.

LEVINE: Uh-huh. Do you remember anything that your father said about?

LUCENTE: [interposed] He never wanted

LEVINE: life here.

LUCENTE: to come over here on a visit. He never wanted to come back to see it because he said he left too many memories in his mind and he never, never, ever wanted to be kept captive in any place and I guess it's due to not being able to do what you want to do you know, being told what to do. So this was very strong thing in his head.

LEVINE: Hmmmm. Do you remember when he was released?

LUCENTE: No. Again, that's one of the things I'd like to find out.

LEVINE: Do you remember like when he came home?

LUCENTE: I remember when he came home we were all so happy and. Then again, it took a long time for people to accept him being out you know, until they actually were trustworthy enough of us to ah, accept us back as being normal people. So it was quite a long period of time until this whole thing blew over.

LEVINE: Um-hmmmm.

LUCENTE: And I guess it does still leave you with some sort of a little---little kind of stigma in your mind for---for a lifetime.

LEVINE: Do you think it shook your mother and or father's um, belief in American Democracy?

LUCENTE: Not, I don't think it did that. I think it just kind of really uprooted them as far as being safe you know, when having someone

barge into your house like that, 'cause that---that in itself when, you know, you get the FBI coming into your house and tearing your drawers apart and taking your belongings. That doesn't you know, sit too well with anybody. That---that was not a very pleasant thought or memory.

LEVINE: Um-hmmm. Were there children here? Do you recall children being here?

LUCENTE: No. But I---I know Barry was saying about children being sent to a camp and I know parents with children they had their children sent someplace else so that I didn't---I didn't see too many kids.

LEVINE: Uh-uh. Were there children like you visiting?

LUCENTE: Yes. I remember children coming with their parent you know, parent or family member to visit somebody else that was---yes --so-called stationed here or kept here.

LEVINE: Hmmm. So then, what happened to your father after he was released, what did he do?

LUCENTE: Well he came out and became an Air Raid Warden and he lived his life. He became a barber and a beautician.

LEVINE: And he hadn't done that prior?

LUCENTE: He was that before but he opened his own shop and worked and actually he retired and then he went back to work again up in Lake Placid until he actually died 1984. He was 83 years, I believe. But without ever telling us the actual story of facts and what took place here.

LEVINE: Uh-hmmm.

LUCENTE: So we're trying to unravel the mystery.

LEVINE: Okay. Hmmm. Well, is there anything else you can think of before we close and---

LUCENTE: No. I think this has about covered most of the territory.

LEVINE: Great. Well, it's been a real pleasure. I thank you so much---

LUCENTE: Thank you.

LEVINE: ---for doing this interview and for having it be part of our Ellis Island collection.

LUCENTE: Oh great. I hope that this helps a little bit to you and a little bit to me [Laughs]

LEVINE: Me too.

LUCENTE: Thank you very much.

LEVINE: You're very welcome.

LUCENTE: Bye-bye.

LEVINE: Okay. This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service and I've been speaking with Alice Lucente and ah, we've been talking about her visits to her father who was interned in 1941-42 and I'm signing off. Thanks.

END OF INTERVIEW