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DR. HENRY D. MEYER (KNIPPELMEYER)
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GERMANY, 1925
AGE 11
PASSAGE ON "THE MUNCHEN"

APPEL: This is Willa Appel, I'm speaking with Henry Meyer on Monday, February 10th, 1986. We're beginning the interview at noon and we're going to talk about your experience about leaving Germany in 1925.

MEYER: I haven't had anything to drink for almost three days, I'm starting to--

APPEL: Do you want some water near you?

MEYER: Yeah, I think yeah.

APPEL: Why don't we begin by you telling me a little bit about where you grew up and the town, what the town was like.

MEYER: I grew up in a little town called Bassum, near Bremen which is in the northern part of Germany.

APPEL: How do you spell--

MEYER: B-A-S-S-U-M. I attended school there for about four years from the sixth years to the tenth years, uh, I remember something about going to school, I remember I was in a play, The Seven Dwarfs, Snow White and The Seven Dwarfs, and I was a dwarf and I also remember that I had an appendicitis attack at school and the children put me on the sled and took me to the hospital and the period in the hospital I quite, I remember quite well because I was in a ward with men. I was only maybe seven or eight years old and of course I was sick and I was waiting for my father and mother to come in and I was crying all night and I remember the menfolk shouting at me, "Be quiet, be quiet." But during the daytime, when I was, after a couple of days after I was well enough, I could see the railroad track, I was always interested in railroads and maybe a mile away I'd look out of the window and I knew every train that came by during the day and I was in the hospital probably ten days. And I knew exactly when express trains should come by and when the local train so that kept my interest.

APPEL: What, around how old were you at this time?

MEYER: I was perhaps seven or eight years old.

APPEL: So it was after World War One.

MEYER: Oh yes, it was after World War One. Yeah, this was in 1922, 1921, '23, right in through there, those were the years I remember well. I also remember playing cowboy and indians and when I later came to the United States I often wondered how we knew so much about the indians because there was a tinsmith that lived on the same street that I did and all the children coaxed him into making us tomahawks out of tin metal and he would, he finally did it after we insisted long enough then we'd take chicken feathers and make a head band and we'd go into the woods nearby and play cowboy and indians.

APPEL: Did you perhaps see movies of cowboys and indians?

MEYER: No, not at that time, no, no, I must have seen pictures I believe 'cause I probably, I remember it from. Of course, during this period I often visit my grandmother and grandfather who lived about twenty miles away from where we lived. Of course, that was a long distance in those years and I had to take a train. First I had to take what we called a fast train, goes on the main track, then I had to get off of that train and get onto another train which was real narrow track train and I remember it was always quite an experience. My parents often didn't know whether they should let me go alone or not but I was adventurous. And what I remember best about this is I could get off in two different places, uh, I could change trains again, I'd get to another little village, or stay on the same narrow track train and then I would get off, there was just a little shack there. There was no depot, no nothing except a shack and you waved when you wanted the train to stop, the conductor would know if somebody wanted to get off. Well anyway, I still had from that drop-off point I had yo walk about, oh, about three miles I would say to my grandmother's and in those years, in Germany, and summertime especially, there were a lot of gypsies travelling, in the covered wagon and horses and they also said in those years, something that the parents use to say, "If you're a naughty boy, the gypsies will get you." Or they would say, "We'll give you back to the gypsies." So I wasn't naughty, probably one time or another--anyway, in the woods before I'd get to the, I had to go through a little forest, quite dark and the road went through the middle, lot of trees inside and the sun didn't come through and I would watch after, before I got to the forest if I could see some smoke coming out of the forest somewhere, coming out of the chimney of the gypsies and if I saw smoke I'd say, "Uh-oh, I'm in trouble today," and I was afraid the gypsies would kidnap me so I would go off the road into the woods, opposite side where they were and then make a dash for it and then come out the other end past where they were billeted and then another half mile to go to my grandmother's. When I arrived there I was perspiring and you know, was all wet and she says, "Why did you run for?" and I says, "Well, the gypsies were there you know and they were going to kidnap me." "Ah, don't

believe those stories," she said. After that she, I know, didn't tease me anymore about being kidnapped by gypsies.

APPEL: And why did your family decide to come to the United States?

MEYER: Well, I'd say basically for economic reasons. Uh, we had relatives here in the United States. My great-grandfather came to Northwest Kansas in the 1890's. So my mother had, also had four uncles that immigrated with my great=grandfather. So, two of these uncles were bachelors and of course my family was communicating with them. He was ready to retire from farming and he needed someone to work on his farm, so he, this one uncle then, his name was Fred Wicky, he sponsored us to come to the United States so we had a definite point to go to when we arrived here.

APPEL: Was your family, was your father a farmer in Germany?

MEYER: Uh, no not really, no, he, uh, that was not his background. I really don't know what he really was. I don't know, maybe this is the time, I'd like to explain something, uh, I said, "My father," I came to this country with my stepfather, my mother and two sisters and this stepfather becomes real important, I don't know if you later on want to hear my total story, but he was my stepfather and his name was John Knippelmeyer, K-N-I-P-P-E-L-M-E-Y-E-R, and that would be on the manifest if you could check it, when we arrived. I came to this country with that name. Its only later years that I changed it, I will explain to you later because its a very interesting part of the total story. No, he wasn't a farmer, but he worked as a hired man on a farm at one time or another so he some acquaintance with farming. In fact, I guess it was in Germany, I remember that he was questioned about farming when we applied. I remember he had to go to Bremen and

some, uh, someone interviewed him, asking him questions about farm things.

APPEL: I was going to ask you about how your being able to come to the United States was arranged? What did you have to do?

MEYER: Well, of course, I was young. I don't know but somehow it wasn't too difficult as I remembered it, as long as we had a sponsor and we weren't going on welfare when we arrived here, I think that it was not that difficult as long as there, there was a quota naturally during those years too and I don't think that, if I remembered correctly, we waited too long, maybe we waited six months or a year, I don't remember that. But it was not difficult, to the best of my knowledge.

APPEL: And how did you leave your town, how did you go?

MEYER: Yeah, we left this village of Bassum and we actually left from another little town called Hoya on the Wasser which is another, this is where my grandfather and grandmother lived and I guess we left from there because the final goodbyes and the folks had to get rid of a lot of furniture. And so we didn't have a house anymore, so we temporarily stayed with my grandmother and grandfather before we finally departed and I again remember leaving this little town by train, another narrow track train too and of course, the emotion, kissing them goodbye and crying and--

APPEL: How did you feel about leaving?

MEYER: Oh, I, to me it was the greatest adventure, I didn't mind leaving at all, I was ten years old then. Well, almost eleven, see my birthday was December 7 and we left Germany November 15 or somewhere around there. So to me it didn't matter, I was looking forward, I was real, it was an adventure to me.

APPEL: Had you ever met anyone who had been to America, did you have expectations of what America was going to be like?

MEYER: Yes, in a way, these uncles had been over several times to visit and, of course, they would tell stories about the United States and this relationship we had, you know, they wrote letters and communicated. And in fact mt great-grandfather, he came back for a visit to the United States, no I mean to Germany in 1910 and when they went back to the States, they were so homesick for my, uh, my grandmother's children, that they took two teenagers with them, on of them was ten and the other was eleven. I guess my grandmother, she had twelve children and my mother was the oldest of 12 and I think by 1910 or, that Grandma must have had about seven or eight children already, so I guess, I don't know how they let them go but the greta-grandparents picked them up and took them back with them. So, we had quite an established community, we all went in the same place in northwest Kansas and southwest Nebraska, an area bout 60 miles there, all these relatives had come over to live there. It was a German settlement you might say, they had their own church and their own community and it was, it wasn't too hard.

APPEL: Did you have any idea or an image of what America was going to be like? You were a young boy.

MEYER: Yeah, I really, I really hadn't, no I don't think. I knew about the indians and that was basically it and, but otherwise, indians and cowboys that's what interested me at my age. I really didn't have anything else that I could relate to that I can remember at all.

APPEL: You were saying that you regarded it as a great adventure, when you got to your grandparent's town, you said goodbye to everyone, then what happened?

MEYER: Okay, then we went to the port of Bremen Hoffen which is actually about 25 miles north of the town of Bremen, its up the Wasser River, they usually say Bremehaven, which means Bremen port, is actually 20 miles down the river on the North Sea. So anyway, when we arrived there by train, t the port city of Bremen, the first thing I noticed, there was the ship, it was anchored along the dock and there was no water. In other words, they had such high tides that the, when the tide was out there was nothing but mud and sand. I wondered, how can this ship get out of here. Of course, by the dock it was deep enough, they hadn't dredged it naturally, but they did have a channel built that I didn't see but when I saw the ship and I saw supposedly the ocean behind that, there was nothing there, but no water. Well, anyway, we didn't leave then, we left later in the evening, the tide had come in and, of course, they follow a certain channel which was then deep enough, the tide in there was about six or eight or ten feet at its highest point. So that was my first experience and then of course we got aboard ship and we all got our billet. We were billeted in the front part of the ship, that was considered tourist class and then first class was in the middle part of the ship and second class was the aft part of the ship.

APPEL: What was the name of the ship?

MEYER: Munichen [sic, Munchen], uh, in English, it would be Munich, M-U-N-I-C-H-E-N [sic, Munchen] was theGerman spelling, Munchen, no S.S. Munchen. And, of course, we all got billeted. We had to, we got a cabin with five beds, there were five of us, so the two sisters, they slept end-to-end and, uh--

APPEL: They were younger?

MEYER: Yeah, they were both younger than I and one is four years younger and the other one is six years younger, so they were just small children. Well, aboard ship now, of course, as son as we got out of the port of Bremen, we immediately got into the

English Channel and choppy seas and of course everybody got seasick and I didn't. I believe my mother was in bed all of the ten days it took us to cross the ocean. But the menfolks, they played cards and there was a saloon on top part of the front part of the ship and they always got plenty of fresh air and the breeze, sea breeze came through there, those men never got sick one bit, you know, they just played their cards, went about their business and had their drinks, you know, they had a jolly good time, but of course, the women of the family, they had to take care of the kids, you know, and it wasn't easy for them, they got the worst part of the deal. And then of course, after we had been aboard a couple of days, I immediately made friends with two other boys my same age and we start roaming around in different places where we weren't supposed to be. For instance, we went way

down in the hold part of the ship and then we go forward and then while we were doing that we came across where the bakers were baking and of course we asked for handouts, they had cookies and things like that which we didn't get in the front part, in our dining menu and we often ended up in the back part of the ship and then once in a while somebody from the back would questions us, "Where are you boys from?" Of course, we said, they could tell, I don't know why they could tell, but they could tell we didn't belong there, of course we weren't too acquainted with what was going on. But anyway, that was quite an adventure to me that we made it a regular, daily journey to see the bakers, get some handouts and then one day we came into a place where we heard a lot of birds chirping, gosh just like hundreds of birds singing and what can that be so we opened a door and here there were thousands of canary birds. They were exported to the United States, Hart's Canary Birds, and they all had them in single cages and they had, they said, 3,000 canaries, and there were men that all they did was feed them and clean the cages and they let us stay a little while and we could just watch them clean the cage. But I mean it was fantastic. They would be all singing, you can imagine the noise. So that was quite an experience to come across that.

APPEL: Was the food different from what you were used to?

MEYER: No, I wouldn't say not because it was German ship, so they had a German menu, typical, what you would get at home, there was plenty of it and of course a lot of them were seasick, they couldn't get up there, (he laughs) to the dining room. We had our schedule, I think we had the second sitting, they ate in shifts. I do remember one day that the porthole was left open and a big wave came in through there, through the window and all the food and all the dishes down on the floor, especially those people who sat next to the boathead, they got thoroughly soaked, I remember that day. Well, basically that's about it, about the trip across, thaT I can remember.

APPEL: What about arriving New York Harbor?

MEYER: Well, we all looked forward to that, we, everybody when we first, oh yes, one thing more I would like to say about the trip, uh, in the place where there was a lot of traffic, they had a big chart and every morning when we, the first couple of days when we were aboard, I saw the firemen, I call them firemen, those were the men who shoveled coal into the boilers to make steam. And they would come running after their shift was over, they were (?) all black with soot, they would come running up there and looking at charts, now of course pretty soon, we found out what it was all about, the purser, or whoever charted the course, in other words, today, the last 24 hours or 12 hours we went so many miles and of course the firemen people shovelled coal and if they shovelled hard, they made more steam, the ship would go faster. But there seemed to be some kind of competition as to how fast they were going that particular day and those firemen, they would look at their chart and add the mileage together, you know, we did good on that second shift or whatever they worked, so I'd like to say that. So, then of course we knew by this chart, we knew just about when we would arrive, that was a great help to us, it wasn't all a total mystery, we knew exactly where we were on our journey across here. I don't remember too much, reading too much about the Statue of Liberty at home but, we, there was conversation about the Statue of Liberty when you see that you knew you were in

New York Harbor, I remember that much and of course there was a lot of traffic in New York Harbor then, it was tremendous then. Ships coming and going and freighters and passenger liners, the harbor was just full of it, you know, of course, smoke belching out, I remember that, of course in those years we didn't have so much pollution as they have now. But anyway, we all went out, we arrived evidently about midnight, outside the harbor so we must have stayed outside the harbor for another four or five hours before we could come in, of course, they've got to find a place to berth and so forth and other ships have to leave and so of course everybody was out on the railing and the first thing of course you see was the Statue of Liberty. I really didn't know the meaning of it, the Statue of Liberty, what it really meant, I guess I had not read about it, I was too small, I just wasn't in my mind that a significance thing to me because like I say, I was young and we weren't actually fleeing Europe, we weren't being persecuted or anything, you see we left on our own free will, for economic reasons, so it might have been different for other people, you know, it makes a difference. Anyway we arrived, we docked at Hoboken, New Jersey, on the Jersey side we docked and then of course, we all got off the ship and of course we had to wait a while for the luggage to come out of the portholes and we waited quite a while there, two or three hours we stayed there on the dock in Hoboken. And I remember we were all lined up, all our baggage in front of us and we stood behind the baggage and when we left Germany, I was, we had some friends who already had friends here in America and I was supposed to deliver a mandolin that he'd left behind when we emigrated so they asked us whether we could take this with us and of course we weren't too happy about that but we couldn't say no, so anyway, I was assigned to carry this mandolin, it was boxed in and it was square-like and no handles on it, it was very awkward to carry. So anyway when we stood there for inspection on the dock here was that mandolin, the inspector came and says, "Open it up," you know, "Open it up." Well, how could I open it up? I didn't have a screwdriver, you know, I had no instruments to open up and so he motioned evidently that he would be back, so we stood there for about fifteen or twenty minutes, watched and started another line behind us and we figured, oh he's not going to come back so I remember my stepfather taking his fingers and rubbing the chalk off the suitcases that we had and put a

chalk mark with his hand on that box the mandolin was in but the inspector never did come back. So I remember that. Then we were rushed aboard a ferry boat to take us to Ellis Island and of course that was a lot of apprehension there, hope we get through there, we won't get sent back to Germany for one reason or another and that was a bit of a trauma. We arrived there just before noon or somewhere along there, 11 o'clock or so and of course the big thing was the physical examination, that I remember, of course, my mother had us three kids to take care of and dad took care of himself and the big thing there was that next day was Thanksgiving Day and it was rush, rush, rush. The government employees had the day off and if we didn't get finished at Ellis Island, you would probably have to stay until Monday and they were, didn't want these people on Ellis Island over those two or three days so they were anxious to get us through the physical inspection as fast as they could to get them back on the ferry and back to Hoboken. And so I remember we all got a physical and mother had these hightop shoes on with the shoe strings and she was there, you know, trying to tie her shoes and the inspectors I guess they were saying, "Hurry up, hurry up, get those shoes on," you know, "We got to move," you know, and it was push, push, push and we finally, then we re all finished and now we go back on the ferry boat.

APPEL: I just wanted to ask you a couple of things about Ellis Island. What language were you communicating in?

MEYER: Well, there must have been some inspectors that could speak German, but my folks couldn't speak English, none of us could speak English and to the best of my knowledge, how they did it, I am amazed myself but I'm quite sure there was a certain percentage of inspectors, government inspectors that they could speak German and Italian or almost any language, almost, especially the northern European languages, I'm pretty sure of that.

APPEL: Do you remember being questioned or being physically

examined and how you felt about that?

MEYER: Well, no, they just went with the stethoscopes and checked us out and looked at our eyes. Now the two main things they were looking for were those that had TB, tuberculosis, and glaucoma, eye disease. If you had either one of those you were going to be sent back, that was understood. So, of course, we felt we had none of these so we didn't have quite that fear. But no, as far as being inspected, I don't remember anything adverse there. The only thing I remember, like I said a couple of times, "Hurry up, hurry up, rush, rush." Maybe that was fortunate for us, I don't know (he laughs). Now the sad part came of course after we left the building, I can still see the two story building, that brick building and on the top floor was the detention hall. It had iron bars in front of the windows and as we walked to the ferry and we could, we had made some friends, not our personal friends but friends we had made aboard ship and they're waving goodbye and crying because they were held back. Now, sometimes they were held back for more extensive examination, but then some of them, no doubt, were sent back if they had TB and they could not come in. So, I mean, that's the, if there was any sad part about Ellis Island that I remember is that, seeing and waving, seeing those people, saying goodbye and their crying, rather emotional. So we left that, Ellis Island, then I think it was, everybody was relieved and everybody was happy and looking forward to what was coming next, it was, the pressure you might have had, it was gone and it was a happy crowd when you, when we were aboard the ferry going back to Hoboken, where, when we were aboard the ferry the first time, coming to Ellis Island, it was not that happy occasion. But that's what I remember the best about that.

APPEL: We're going to break here. This is the end of side one of the interview with Henry Meyer.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

APPEL: This is the beginning of the second side of the tape of the interview with Henry Meyer.

MEYER: To backtrack just a little bit--(someone speaks off-mike).

APPEL: Go ahead.

MEYER: I'd like to backtrack just a little bit. When we were still in Germany, I remember those years right after World War One, that times were very hard and we often didn't have enough food in the house and I would go to school and my mother would bring me lunch at noontime and pass it through the fence, I remember because we didn't have any meat for sandwiches which she somehow got during the day and I also remember we going to a mill where they were grinding corn and I used to go up there and eat the corn that was ground because it was so sweet and I remember that, during that, it was corn that was sent in, no doubt from the United States and I used to go there quite often.

APPEL: So getting back to the ferry and the return trip to Hoboken.

MEYER: Okay, now we're back to Hoboken. At Hoboken we boarded an immigrant train to Chicago. I say immigrant because there were nothing but immigrants on this train. It was a very slow train so we were often sidetracked for the fast trains to pass us and we got aboard and all of us, each of us got a box lunch. I remember in this box lunch there were chicken legs, that's the first I remember about chicken legs, there was a chicken leg or if you were not so fortunate you got a wing, I guess. But we were aboard the train less than two or three hours and the train was a total, shall I say, mess, because they had trash cans on each end of the car and at first the people would dump the

trash in the trash cans but pretty soon they became very, they didn't pay no attention to that, they just took the boxes and threw them down in the aisles and before the day was over it was terrible. I remember my parents commenting on that but they didn't think that such a thing could happen in America, it would never happen in Germany and I should probably say we, there were many different ethnic groups, I would say maybe ten or twelve ethnic groups from all over Europe and some of the ethnic groups, I would say their sanitary habits weren't maybe as good as some of the others, let's put it that way. But anyway, the trip to Chicago. For me, I paid no attention to the mess, I had my eyes glued to the window and I saw America passing in front of me and the thing that I remember, most, we must have taken the southern route to Chicago because it did come through Kentucky and Tennessee. I don't know why we were that far south but I remember black children. I had never seen black children and they wore long pants, overalls. I thought they looked funny, I just couldn't get over it, you know. I still wore short pants. In wintertime we just wore long stockings but I was stili in my shorts and all these children, black or white, they all wore long pants and I thought, oh that's really something, I couldn't get over that. Now, of course, the steel mills we went, and the smoke coming out of the steel mills and we passed just thousands of coal cars, you know, mining coal, going to the steel factories and of course that was in November and there must have been a lot of rain there that year because we saw many flooded areas of just, all under water and I thought, "Gee, that's sad," you know, houses and roads, they were all under water. So, it must have been a wet year, it must have had a lot of rain so I remember that quite well. Okay, now we get to Chicago and there we got aboard the Burlington Railroad to take us to southwest Nebraska, to a little town called Trenton, Nebraska, T-R-E-N-T-O-N, Trenton, Nebraska. We got aboard this Burlington train and that was really what we thought a train should be like, we thought oh, there's another side to this too. So it was well furnished and we had our own seats and plenty of room and we thought this is--so, then of course, we rolled across the corn fields, it was just about harvest time through Iowa and then to Nebraska, wide open spaces and this is of course what we imagined America to be, wide open, big country, more than manufacturing in a way, that's what our idea was. So we arrived in

Trenton, Nebraska at midnight. The train stopped just for us and we got off and got all our luggage off and there was the station master, he was still there because he probably had to wait for us, he probably got a telegraph telling that people were getting off. So he was still there. Of course now we start having a communication problem, he couldn't speak German and we couldn't speak English and what we want to do is make a telephone call to mother's uncle in Kansas which is just about thirty miles from Trenton, Trenton is right on the borderline of Kansas. We wanted to make a telephone call telling them that we were here and someone pick us up. Well, somehow we got the message with a lot of hand waving and telephone position, we got the telephone call through and the uncle then sent one of his sons, he had a Model "T" touring car and he arrived there, well at least an hour, hour and a half later. But in the meantime, the station master, he stoked the oven, it was a big potbellied oven, he stoked it full of coal and he said goodbye and we stayed of course, I said it took about an hour and a half, two hours before someone arrived. So now of course the person who picked us up was a cousin of my mother's so he could speak German and those people all could speak German, so now we were relieved again, now we could talk with someone. So they all got into this Model "T" Ford, there was six of us plus, I don't think they took the luggage, I think they went back during the day and got the luggage. But that was the trip now to my mother's uncle and it was a beautiful night, November day, must have been around the 28th or so, quiet, the moon was shining about six inches of snow on the ground and thousands of jack rabbits. I just couldn't get over it, the headlights would go down the road and the jack rabbits would run in front of the headlights and the snow was just deep enough that they would sink down, they couldn't run fast enough, you see, there was no crust on the snow that they could just hop above without sinking in and I was so anxious to get out and grab some of these (he laughs), I thought I could catch them, you know. You probably could but, and they just struggled to keep ahead of the car. So I remember that. Now of course then we arrived at my mother's uncle, now by the way, that uncle was a brother to the one we were going to. He was married and he had I guess, six boys and three girls so here we were, five of us and there must have been thirteen of them and they had a hired man. Then you imagine the family, to fed all od these. Well, I was

assigned to the boys bunk room, I slept with the boys and they were all older than I was and I slept with them in a bunk room, I thought that was great, I enjoyed that. So, that lasted only a couple of days and then we moved to my, now I should say my mother had two bachelor uncles, Uncle Fred and Uncle Bill. Now we didn't, we were supposed, Uncle Fred sponsored us, we were supposed to go to his farm, but he was then still, I think he was still in Germany when we arrived here, because he was over there at that time when we left so we stayed for a year with my mother's Uncle Bill and in the same town.

APPEL: That was also a farm?

MEYER: Also a farm, yes. So, we lived on the farm then.

APPEL: Was that the first time you lived on a farm?

MEYER: For me it was, yes. I always lived in a little village in a town so, (?) a farm. Now, of course, for me, I should go to school so, I, of course, we, I was fortunate in a way because our church school had a parochial school and all the children could speak German and the teacher. So, what I remember best about that first year, I rode with some neighbors and the older kids would drive the car, the older boy would drive the car to school and I would catch a ride with them and in school what I remember best about learning the English language was that the teacher would give me a picture of a knife and schoolhouse maybe and a horse or cow, then she gave me the words that were related to those pictures and I had to match them up, find the word knife and match it up with a knife. So, and I guess I must have picked it up quite rapidly. As far as the other subjects were concerned like arithmetic, in fact I was maybe ahead of them.

APPEL: You had been to school in Germany?

MEYER: Oh yeah, for four years, oh definitely. Yeah, what I remember about

that in Germany, in those years, children sat, there were thirty girls maybe and thirty boys, the teacher had maybe sixty kids, boys on one side and the girls on the other side and you were sat and the benches were long benches, there were four of us on a bench and the smartest ones sat in the back on the right side and you moved on down. And I remember I sat in the second row, I was always about sixth or seventh or so in the class. Of course that was sort of a social thing too I believe but it, that's what they did you know, ranked you, and that's where you sat. So everybody knew how smart you were or how dumb you were, I often felt sorry for those ones that were on the lower end though, they always got the worst part of it, but the teacher was in front so they always got a little extra attention. But I remember knowing the multiplication table inside and outside because I remember the teacher had a big wheel and he had numbers from one to twelve on the outside, then he put the number in the middle and he just pointed his stick to that and you immediately had to say what it was. We drilled this everyday, everyday till you knew the alpha, I mean the multiplication table.

APPEL: In Germany?

MEYER: In Germany, that's right--

APPEL: How--

MEYER: Go ahead.

APPEL: How was the school different in america?

MEYER: Well, to me it was more informal. They did not have the discipline that we had there. We didn't fool around with the teacher, we didn't speak back, its just, this is the way it is. There was no ifs and buts about it, I mean it was a lot more stricter, that's basically and when you took a course you had to pass it, I mean you

wouldn't, I don't know what they did if you didn't but there was no question of not passing it, it was very strict.

APPEL: Did you have any problems adjusting to America?

MEYER: Not really. It was very, you see, we lived in a German community and all my, the children I played with, all the farmer's children, we'd get together and play cards and we would converse in German or in English, I mean it was almost bilingual, equally well. Ah, I know we had church. When we first arrived in 1925, all the church services were in German and later on it was half and half and of course its all English now, not German at all. Now see, the parochial schools start discontinuing because there weren't enough children or it was too costly but when I arrived, I, I picked it up. I mean some of those children took a German Class while they were in school and while they were doing that, I was concentrating on my English. So I got double the time really, to learn and read the English language, so--so I went to a parochial school for two years then I, in our church we get confirmed when we're thirteen or fourteen, so I still had two years to go, I had lost about half a year because of our traveling, I was put in the fifth grade I think, when I, I was put in the fifth grade when I came here, I should have been in the sixth grade but I lost about six months. So, I went to parochial school for about two years and then I went two years to a public school which happened to be only less than half a mile from my uncle's, my mother's Uncle Fred's place where we were supposed to be going anyway. It was a one-room school house, surrounded by trees, ordinarily there weren't that many trees but that was required when they established a school district, that you have a plot of land, you

had to build some trees, that was way back in the 1860' or '70's. But anyway, we went to this one-room school house with one teacher and the first year we had a young lady who was actually a member of our church and she had just graduated from high school and she now was ready to teach us, she didn't have to go to college for four years, I kind of liked her and I did everything to keep up with everybody else and I remember my favorite subjects were geography and history, I loved geography and history and I loved to learn about the thirteen colonies and the Revolutionary War. I knew all the general and all the places where they fought and all that, I just ate all that up.

APPEL: Did you miss Germany at all, do you recall being homesick?

MEYER: No, not at all, no. I guess I was young enough to, I didn't have the attachment that I might have had if I were older. No, I (?) here, the first time I went back to Germany, was it forty-six years, yeah, it was forty-six years. I didn't go back until 1971. We arrived in 1925, it was forty-six years. Of course, since then, we've been back a number of times. After we'd been there once again, then you kind of get the urge to go back just one more time, just one more time, but before that, it never bothered me, no.

APPEL: And how do you feel coming to America affected your life?

MEYER: I thought it was for the better, I really did, I mean, I think things, we didn't have much at home in Germany. We had to fight for our food, those were bad, bad years after World War One and I couldn't wait to leave, really, when I first heard the word we might be going to America, I thought it was the best thing that could have happened to me. Now, I'd like to continue my education--

APPEL: Well, I'd like to concentrate really on the focus of the interview

which is leaving and coming over here and passage over here and if there were any things that really struck you or impressions that America made on you or some ways that it changed your life, but that's really the focus of the interview.

MEYER: Well, like I say, to me, it was the best thing that happened and I never really had the urge to go back like you mentioned maybe because I was young. I just didn't, had no desire, to be honest.

APPEL: And the rest of the family, did they feel the same way?

MEYER: Oh yes, yes, we're all scattered now, one of my sisters lives in New Jersey, one in Colorado and I'm out here. Of course my mother and stepfather have passed away now.

APPEL: And they were also content?

MEYER: Oh yes, yeah, well I wouldn't say so much about my stepfather. He wasn't, he was very, very homesick and in the early '30's of course this had absolutely nothing to do with this but he lost, we lost, we started out farming by ourselves and it was in the early '30's we thought we had enough money so we rented a large wheat farm and cattle ranch and for about a year or so, everything went beautiful and then the dustbowl days came, the dust came in from the south, we lost everything, within two years my parents were bankrupt. And that just about killed my stepfather because everything was going wrong and so he didn't fare as well, he got homesick and he didn't have any money to go back to Germany. This was in the early '30's. So he didn't like it.

APPEL: And when did you change your name from your stepfather's name?

MEYER: Okay, I'll tell you now, its very interesting. I enlisted in the

Marine Corps, no, I just want to say this, the '30's the times were pretty hard in the United States too, we had the dustbowl days and dry years and all my relatives in the southwest Nebraska and northwest Kansas, most of them survived. Of course, after my parents lost their farm I went to work for them and I did that for a year or two, then eventually I went to New York and I lived in New York for about a year and a half. I had some relatives there. I worked in a delicatessen, I also worked in a flower shop, one of my uncles had a flower shop on Jerome Avenue near Woodlawn Cemetery. I remember going down to the wholesale market downtown in wintertime and riding the Jerome Avenue subway and then I worked as a clerk for another uncle. You must remember I had twelve uncles and aunts so have lots, so anyway I worked at the delicatessen store then I went, I did that for about a year, then finally went back to Nebraska. I stayed there about six months in all, then with another fellow, thought we'd go to Washington, State of Washington and pick pears and apples. So if that didn't work out, we were too green at it, we weren't making our board and room so then we went to Seattle. I was always interested in diesel, that's why today we're driving a diesel car I guess. So my idea was to get a job aboard a fishing boat going to Alaska, working for Libby MacNeil Libby and so I went to this school to get my diploma so that I could engineer or run a 350 horsepower diesel engine. I got through that program and graduated in February. Now, I want a job. ell, at that time they had a big maritime strike, up and down the coast and you had to belong to the Union to get a job, so nothing happened, I was discouraged, I says, "What am I going to do?" So, I always like to travel, I want to see the world, so I says, "I;m going to join the Navy and see the world." So I went to the Navy recruiting office but he says, "Sorry son, we have a three month waiting list." You see, people were joining the services to have something to eat, which is my reason for joining too I guess. So then I walked across the aisle, there was a Marine Corps recruiting officer and they were glad to have me but the only hitch was my proof of citizen paper, see I claimed derivative citizenship through my father, well here the crux comes in. He had to be my father but he was my stepfather but when I told the recruiting officers this, I says, "John, my stepfather, but he legally adopted me, I carry his name." So in order to verify my statement they sent a telegram to the county

courthouse in Rollins County, Kansas, where my stepfather took out his papers in 1933. Then the telegram came back the next morning, yeah everything's in order and I signed up and I'm now in the marine Corps. I'm sent here to San Diego, that's how I came to San Diego the first time in March of 1937. I went to boot camp here and then I was sent aboard ship, the USS Tennessee, I served two and a half years aboard the USS Tennessee and about a year and a half left, I signed up for four years by the way, that was before World War Two now, March 1937 to March 1941, and then I was stationed here in San Diego in a motor transport, nowadays they have nothing but recruit training down there. Anyway I just about getting to the end of my enlistment, I wanted to say in San Diego and get a job. I want to get a job in the Defense industry, Conmear and all those industries there in San Diego, in order to, to work there though I had to show proof of citizenship paper. Well I never had a personal document showing that I was, I always referred back to John Knippelmeyer and that always got me through. So I went to the naturalization and Immigration Office here in San Diego and I told the man my story and he sat there at the table, I sat here in the chair and he said, "Son you are not a citizen of this country." "Oh my God," I said. How could he tell me that, my face got ashen white, my knees shook, to me this was the end of the world, for someone to tell me after I served four years in the Marine Corps, I was going to get an honorable discharge, I had a good conduct medal and a person tells me I'm not a citizen of this country. Boy, that was a blow and I guess it was a low point in my life, it was, it had been a low point in my life. So, I asked him what I had to do. "Well you have to go through the normal procedures like everyone else, go to the first papers and the second papers and all that." I didn't do anything, I walked out, I couldn't believe it, I couldn't believe it. The next morning, I called up my wife, by the way, she was my girlfriend then and I told her the story and she said, "Is that all?" so she kind of took the wind out of my sails, mad me feel a little bit better. I figured my courtship was over and all, finding out she courting an alien. Anyway I went to my Commanding Officer on the Marine Base and told him my story. He said, "As far as we're concerned, your a citizen, don't bother me." He had no empathy for me, nothing. So, then I get discharged in March of 1941, then December 7, 1941, the war breaks out, the Japanese bomb Pearl Harbor, coupled

by the way, December 7 is my birthday, now we were celebrating my birthday in Balboa Park in San Diego when we got the news. So a couple of days later, big announcements came in, all aliens register at the Post Office downtown here. Now I'm not only an alien, I'm an enemy alien. Here I go to the Post Office and there are about three hundred or four hundred people lined up and most of them were Portuguese and Italian fishermen, that fished and docked at San Diego for years and years and took the pains of taking out their papers. Here I was lined up with them and it hurt me deeply to think that I served four years loyally to my adopted country and now I have to stay in line and sign up as an enemy alien. So I did and then of course now I was restricted within a thirty mile radius of San Diego. If I wanted to leave more than thirty miles I had to get a permit from the Police Department. Of course Elizabeth was teaching school up in Los Angeles at that time and I wanted to occasionally go visit her so I had to get a permit and they used to have an immigration station in San Clemente where they have one now and I showed him my paper and everything was alright. I also had to be in my place of abode at 12:00 midnight and I know twice that the police checked up to see if I was home.

APPEL: I think we're running close to the end, so if you could--

MEYER: So anyway to make a long story short, eventually in November, in October of 1942 I went to the Commanding Officer who recruited people and once more told my tale and he was sympathetic with me and says, "I'll send a waiver to Washington at Marine Corps headquarters and see if we can't get you back without citizenship papers," so he did that and a week later I got a letter in the mail, "If you re-enlist within a certain date and you report to the recruit people in San Diego and you will also get your Sergeant's back that I had when I was discharged the first time." (Someone speaks off-mike). Oh yeah, now my name change, I almost forgot, when I came in, when I was back in the Marine Corps, immediately saw the Legal Officer and he immediately started processing my paperwork and in February of 1943, a couple of months later I had my papers and at that time I changed my name and up to 1943 I carried Knippelmeyer, but then they asked me if I wanted

to change my name, by the same process I could do so, so I thought well, Knippelmeyer was kind of a long name and I just shortened it.

APPEL: Well thank you very, very much, it's been very interesting.

MEYER: Yeah, I always think its quite a story, of course a lot of this doesn't pertain--

APPEL: This is the end of the interview with Henry Meyer.