

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

ELLIS ISLAND ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interviewee:           Johanna Gentsch Kusche

Interviewer:           Dana Gumb

Interview Number:    181

GUMB:                This is Dana Gumb and I'm speaking with Mrs. Johanna  
Gentsch            Kusche on the 30th day of May, 1986, we're           beginning this  
interview at five minutes to 11. We're                    about to interview

Mrs. Kusche about her emigration experience from Germany in the year 1924. Okay, Mrs. Kusche, if we could begin with where and when you were born.

KUSCHE: (She laughs) Twenty-second of July, 1990.

GUMB: And where?

KUSCHE: Dresden, Germany.

GUMB: Could you spell Dresden.

KUSCHE: D-R-E-S-D-E-N, most beautiful city, used to be.

GUMB: Oh, Dresden.

KUSCHE: Dresden, right, we say Dresden, yeah, Germany.

GUMB: What did your father do there?

KUSCHE: He was a bricklayer.

GUMB: What do you remember about your home?

KUSCHE: Oh, bad, very bad.

GUMB: Was it an apartment house or was it--

KUSCHE: No, no, was apartment house. We had a room, bedroom, living

room, bedroom, kitchen, that was all.

GUMB: What was bad about it?

KUSCHE: The toilet was outside, no hot water, one sink in the kitchen with one faucet, then six, well four children, six, well maybe I shouldn't, six people in one room slept, yeah. And once upon, grandmother slept in the living room, that's it. But the boys then, my little sister died when she was 17 years old, she had, she died all of a sudden. My two brothers, but that was then, no that was, a young child, and my oldest brother left. He ran away from home and went to Berlin. And he loved flying and then he was an aviator in the First World War. He shot down a couple of airplanes and he came home with the Iron Cross, First Class or Second Class. And the little one, he became, they were very smart, I have to say so., very smart from the lower class. And my oldest brother had a lot of trouble in Berlin because only officers could fly but they needed men, he flew then--my English is not kind of proper so--and he came home and he was flying mail over our city and he fell down and that finished him, he cracked up. And the oldest brother, the youngest, he worked for the government but that, I was gone already, yeah, he worked for the government. And then that awful man came, Hitler. Circumstances. He got shot by the Russians in 1945. So that's my family.

GUMB: Did you go to school in Dresden?

KUSCHE: Oh, yes. I made my eight years. I was very good in school.

GUMB: When did you finish school?

KUSCHE: Fifteen, 1915. That was the last day we could make , bake a

cake, the afterwards the hunger started, we're not allowed, you know, Germany went down, down, down, down.

GUMB: With the First World War?

KUSCHE: First World War. I wasn't home in the Second World War.

GUMB: So, were you still living at home after you finished school?

KUSCHE: Oh, yes. I was living till I left for America, because nobody was home but myself. Mama, Papa, Mama, and myself. But I was working in an office then.

GUMB: After school you were working in an office?

KUSCHE: No. First my father, he was funny, I had to be a maid, but I couldn't do it (she laughs) and then I had to go, a saleslady, and then I got in an office. So I had ideas, you know, and then in the office I don't know, a couple of girls they came to see me. I don't know, do you want to hear about them telling me to go to America?

GUMB: Yes, Yes.

KUSCHE: And (she laughs) a couple of girls, we went to hear a fortune teller, you know, young girls. I think four or five from the office. We went there and she had a little wagon and she rolled it around with a little eye on, it's funny and they all came. We giggled, you know how it is when your young. And she all of a sudden, I came in there, no idea about America, you know. Dresden is near Czechoslovakia and Austria, see, it's deep down, so I didn't know

anybody in, no idea about nothing, then all of sudden she says, "You're going to America." I said, "my God, me?" I was very shy, so, and she said, "Yes, you're going and you will be very rich." That's what I'd like to see, "You'll be very rich, will have two children, will get married." Okay, I went home. I laughed and giggled, you know and worked, before I worked in a lab, that was 192- something like that, yeah, on the laboratoreum, the girl I know the name, Miss (?) she said, "We're going all to America." That's about '21, around this you know. And then she said, "I'll write you a card."

GUMB: She said what?

KUSCHE: "I'll write you a card." and in the meantime I worked in an office, we went there, that card never came. And then we went again and she said, "no, you can't go to America, perhaps something happens." And the quota came in, in 1923, and I had to wait a year. Oh, yeah, in '20, I get, sure enough I get a letter from the girl, after two years, if I wanted to come to America. Too bad that letter disappeared. And I said to my father, "I'm going to America." He said, "When they see you they'll send you back." (She laughs) You know we had the German fathers. (?) different, so--

GUMB: Going back to the fortune teller, you were talking about a wagon?

KUSCHE: Yeah, yeah, a wagon. It was a wagon, and she had a table with an eye on, and she rolled that wagon back and forth, you know.

GUMB: And it was sort, it was kind of a way of telling your fortune?

KUSCHE: Yeah, yeah, yeah, you know, the other girls, I don't know, they went home, we laughed, we said, "Can you imagine that, we're going to America?" You know. Never dreamt in my life because there was nobody. My father, Gentsch family went out before 1900 in this, no, we never heard anything about America.

GUMB: In school had you ever heard anything about America?

KUSCHE: Yeah, that's a funny experience. I love to read, how, yeah, it comes back. I went to school when all of a sudden, teacher must have talked about him, because she said, "What is the main stream in America?" Honestly, I'm the type, I said, "The Hootson," she would say, "Hudson, no Hootson." I remember that.

GUMB The hot sun?

KUSCHE: Hudson, Hudson--

GUMB: Oh the Hudson, oh, oh--

KUSCHE: Hootson, we say in German the Hootson. We pronounced the words the way they're written, right? So that is, to me too. You see, I didn't know I was born nearsighted, very badly, and the teacher, God bless the old man, I don't know, I was the second in the class, you know. All of a sudden he said, "Come down and sit in front." And he gave me his glasses, you know, and I could see. That was, because you know, when we went to grammar as children, my little sister, she found everything, she did find everything, I came home empty, see

I didn't see it. They said I was lazy, I didn't want to do anything, and it was hanging on to you your whole life, you know. So i get mixed up, you know, some of the things coming back. So, Mama got glasses, then I worked and then America came in between this, started in '22.

GUMB: So you mentioned a little bit about hardships during the War, The First World War.

KUSCHE: Oh, the First World War, in Germany?

GUMB: Right, you were in Germany?

KUSCHE: Boy, I mean, there was nothing, absolutely nothing. Mama, she had to depend, we had nothing, a little wax, you know, smeared that with a little wax, we had the bag, potato chips, not like today. It was a big bag, lumps of stuff in there.

GUMB: Potato chips?

KUSCHE: Potato chips. But they were black and dark, not like we have here, I mean, we had nothing to eat.

GUMB: So how did your parents, were you working at all during the War, did you make any money?

KUSCHE: Not much. How old, wait a minute, I was 14, 15, 16, 17 years old. I didn't make no money, you don't make any money that time in Germany, different nowadays.

GUMB: How about your parents, like your father? Was he able to

make money during this?

KUSCHE: No. There was no welfare. There was nothing in Germany then. That came afterwards, when I was young woman. Father had no work from when the weather got bad to the spring. See he was home, nut Mommy, she sewed. She was for the military, she sewed the pants. She made the money. Mother made the money, because he couldn't. There was no welfare, there was nothing. You didn't get nothing, you know, nothing. We had a silver box, we had a couple of silver coins in it, that's all we had.

GUMB: Where did you get these potato chips?

KUSCHE: From the, you got them from the government, that I don't know, you know, you were glad to get something to eat.

GUMB: Was there any fighting close to where you were?

KUSCHE: No, but the Russians were on the way, you know, the Russians, it was the First World War. So you know, that was so. I don't remember, I was scared.

GUMB: Do remember seeing any military, any German military marching through?

KUSCHE: Oh yeah, oh yeah, sure. Well like the, when we were very young we went up there where they lived, you know. They had a little hill up and a big place where the soldiers lived, you know. And we liked to walk there. So we got a piece of bread once in awhile. They gave us a piece of bread, that big black bread we got from the soldiers. They gave us through the

windows. And that was all in the First World War right, that was in '18. The War stopped, 1918 correct? And 1920 I worked. I didn't make much money.

GUMB: That's when you were working in the office?

KUSCHE: Office, yeah. First in the lab where I got to know the girl, the I went, the lab closed and I worked in another office where I was about two years. And in the meantime all, I get the papers, I got the letter, and they sent me the ticket, and then the quota came in, in 1923.

GUMB: So when did you go to the fortune teller?

KUSCHE: Was about 1921, '20, that I don't know. I remember the when War was going. I remember this well, giggling, you know. And then I went, they were '21, did I go up there to see her in '20? The first time I went home, I didn't like it there, I tell you, you know, all by myself and no English and no money, you know. But I saved, oh boy. Twenty \seven I said, "I'm going home, I'm finished with America." This was in yeah, I saved up a little money, and I went home. I wasn't even home and I said, "I'm going back." My father picked me up in Bremen, and my mother said right away, "I know you wouldn't stay." And I went in '27, I went home in '32. It was very bad in Germany. Oh, bad, it was very bad, again in Germany. That's why Hitler came up, right? And then I went in '38 again in Germany. You know, it's funny, my youngest brother was against it, and he had a high position. They put him all the way down again because he didn't want to belong to the Party. Now I come, I haven't been living in Germany the, you know. I'm just visiting, but I saw the troops going to Czechoslovakia, the German troops, and oh I said, I came home, I said to my mom, "Mom, I was an American citizen already." "Everything is packed up, there is a war coming,

I'm going right back." But I could stay there, it was finished I could go home, I mean to America.

GUMB: What do you mean you could go--

KUSCHE: I mean, you see, I mean I finished my visit, so, nothing what I saw there. I told my parents, I said, "You will have bad times coming." And after awhile she wrote, they couldn't write, you know they weren't allowed to write, and she said, and then she wrote that everything that I told them came true. They didn't know, can you imagine that? Just like the Russians, they don't know anything either, right? So you put that all in there too? Oh yeah, is it against me? No.

GUMB: Okay going back, I'm interested in the gypsy, the fortune teller--

KUSCHE: Yeah, that is, then I went back in '38, no more, she wasn't there, was gone. But I heard she was very good, you know, it was around, they say she was an old lady, I'll never forget, kind of fattish, dark, you know, they all wear dark clothes at that time, you know, and I'll never forget her face. That meant so much in my life, right? How could she know everything? How did she? She didn't know me.

GUMB: Was she a gypsy?

KUSCHE: I don't think so, no, I don't think she was a gypsy. In '38 I was running, I said I wanted to know more but she wasn't there. (she laughs) So they I went in '32, she was there but she--oh that's right, she told me, "There's too much water in between, I can't tell you nothing," that's right I came

back. Every time I went to her because it was interesting. Me as a greenhorn, I mean German greenhorn. When I got that letter I nearly fell down.

GUMB: So before you'd gone to the fortune teller, you'd never really thought about coming to America?

KUSCHE: No, how could I? No money, no nothing, how could I go to America with nothing? I had no idea and the girl there told me, she said, "Okay I'll send you a card." It never came. After two years I got a letter, "You want to come to America?" You get twenty eight dollars a month to Rochester, in and some odd dollars, this was a lot of money at that time. I had to work that off, right?

GUMB: That was the ticket, the price of the ticket?

KUSCHE: Yeah, yeah, something like that. So I came to America. I owed two hundred and some odd dollars, and no money, no English. I had no English. I could say, "Thank you," that's about all (she laughs).

GUMB: This was a letter from a friend of yours in Rochester?

KUSCHE: Yes, in Rochester. She had a job for me, the people paid the ticket, they sent me the ticket, right, but I had to pay it back. I started right away working, but I didn't like Rochester. After a year, I had a friend here in New York, she said I could come. Then I start working in the, in New York, as fraulein. Do you remember, do you know that about fraulein? I worked ten years, you know, I raised a lot of little children. That was nice. And we started that rooming-house business, a girl friend of mine.

GUMB: So you went to the fortune teller in 1921?

KUSCHE: About, yeah I mean, not exactly.

GUMB: And it sort of got the idea started about America, coming to America?

KUSCHE: But I had no idea. I didn't believe it until I had the letter. A poor girl, green as green, how could I, with nothing, you understand what I mean? I must have been interested in school is something, because I knew where the Hudson was, that I don't, I was the only one who raised the hand in the whole class. They say I was a very smart girl in school, I mean I just tell you what my, you get the book, what do you, when you finish with school, you know, the only one, one, one, you know, I was very good even without seeing. Then I had glasses. The World opened up for me when I got my glasses, right, I mean--

GUMB: I can understand that.

KUSCHE: When did you? But it's different here. Because my son, he was ten year, my son was ten days old, I took him to a doctor, said, "Mrs. Kusche, please be careful, he has bad eyes." Well he got my inheritance, and he had two eye operations when he was a young little fellow. But here they look after you, no child goes, have to be looked over before they start school, right?

GUMB: Okay but I'm wondering, you were working in Germany and you got this letter from a friend of yours, offering you this job in America. Wasn't it kind of frightening idea, to pick up and leave?

KUSCHE: No, no, I was all, I had the letter to bed, and I said, "I'm going to America, I'm going to America." Everybody--you should see me with the little glasses, I was the cutest girl you ever saw in your life. I was going to America. But, I tell you, my whole family, they have so much respect for me because all by myself I left for America. I left Mom and Pop.

GUMB: What were your expectations?

KUSCHE: Nothing! What did I, I had no idea, no idea. I just left, can you imagine that? I had a, and I was not interested in men, no men. Oh yeah, wait a minute, nicest part, when I was in office I took, yeah, night school. You know, you had to go here it was. I took, you know, I had to study a little, I wanted, I don't know, different ideas. But instead of going to night school, I went to the movies, you see that gives me the idea. See I forgot. I went to the movies (she laughs) and there I saw the little houses and automobiles. You see that's the most part, and from America. I said, "Gee whiz, boy," and that was my dream. Nothing comes easy, you know, and I said, "Oh God," and that was, yeah, that's, the movies started the whole thing, you know.

GUMB: What movie was it?

KUSCHE: That I don't know anymore. They showed them, that was years ago. They had no piano player, no, a little screen, black and white, and I don't know what they put on. No, that must be the news that showed the forts and the little houses, and that was my dream, really.

GUMB: The little forts?

KUSCHE: The little Ford wagon, the automobiles.

GUMB: Oh Ford, Ford.

KUSCHE: Yeah, yeah.

GUMB: Showing scenes from--

KUSCHE: Yeah, and I said, "Oh, my God," and we poor--living in one little, you know, that was really funny. I never get a house, I never had a car, never. (She laughs)

GUMB: So, you were still living with your parents?

KUSCHE: Yeah, of yes, I lived, I still lived with my parents. You couldn't live anywhere, that was not. I lived with the parents and I left.

GUMB: Were there friends that you had that you didn't want, that made you hesitate about leaving or--

KUSCHE: No. I left my mom and pop like that, today I'm sorry. Maybe I wouldn't be alive anymore today, might be lost in the War.

GUMB: What do you mean, sorry that you came so quickly?

KUSCHE: No, no, no, I left my mom and pop. That's only one you have, right? Afterwards, after I had a son, and this, you understand what I mean? Then you feel bad. But Mama, oh she cried, I think she cried many times, but, yeah that was the idea of it, and I wasn't interested in men, I wasn't, I

didn't like them. I went green to America (she laughs). I wasn't interested in them. I had that little--

GUMB: Not interested?

KUSCHE: No, never had a boyfriend in Germany, believe that? 'Til I was 24 years old, I never had a boyfriend. I wasn't interested in it, you know what I mean? And then came America. Oh, I'm so happy I'm here, boy, that it couldn't happen. Oh, I love it. The first two years, you know, it was tough.

GUMB: Did your parents try to convince you not to come?

KUSCHE: No, no, no, no, no. I think my father, he was you know, living in one little apartment with a young woman, and Mom and Pop. I think he was glad to get, kind of, you know, you didn't belong there anymore at that age. But nothing existed in Germany, a girl has her own apartment? No, I mean, it couldn't be done.

GUMB: So once you decided you wanted to come, what did you have to do? What were the--

KUSCHE: Oh yeah, I had to go to American Consular, we had one in Dresden at that time, get all the papers. Doctors, I had to go through different kind of doctors, you never, had to bring papers, papers, papers, you know. And I had to go again to the American Consulate, and they said, "You can go." They give me the, I don't know if I got the stuff, they said, "You can go, you got your ticket, you got your papers." And the boat sailed. I arrived here on the 14th. About ten days the boat goes, you know. I said goodbye to my parents and I

went to Bremen, and then just went.

GUMB: Do you have any of those papers?

KUSCHE: No, none, none, that's a crime. See, I had a big trunk with me, with all this, but then I said, I left it back in Germany, and somebody took care of it.

GUMB: Oh, you left the trunk?

KUSCHE: Yeah, I left the trunk with everything.

GUMB: You mentioned having to go to doctors. Were they American doctors or German doctors?

KUSCHE: No, I think they were German and American doctors. That I'm not sure, I cannot tell you details about that.

GUMB: Do you remember anything about what they were checking for?

KUSCHE: Everything, health, you know, the way you were. They asked you questions, (she laughs) I said, I gave them a funny answer, he said, "What?" you know, so you get kind of, then you know, in Germany, you have to have papers, even us, the police knows you, you know. You have to go, for everything, you have to go to police. When I go to Germany, you know, I have to go to Police Station, right. Have to go again to Police Station when I leave, that's German style, to have that. At that time, too, right?

GUMB: What was the funny answer?

KUSCHE: If I was a communist.

GUMB: Well how did you answer that?

KUSCHE: I don't know, that just jumped out of my mouth, you know, because when my, my father was Social Democrat, well young folks, when you're 18, you get different ideas, you know.

GUMB: So the official asked you if you were a communist?

KUSCHE: No, he asked me just a couple of questions, so I just jumped out of it, you know, that's why, because we were Social Democrats, because we were young folks, you know, don't put that in there, my God because it would be, we're far away from it, my brother, they shot him, an now--

GUMB: Okay as you were leaving, did you think you'd ever come back?

KUSCHE: Well, no I never thought about that, I didn't even go, I have to see what's cooking over here first. I had no idea, the slightest, I just went, you know, what you call it in German, "Wanderlust." You know, young girl had ideas. See I was working when I was nine years old. I was a baby sitter, you know, push the carriage up and down for a sandwich. Then I washed dishes in a teachers family, they had a young boy. They went out a lot so I, Frieda was his name, never forget the little guy, you know.

(Side one ends without tail slate)

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

GUMB: You were talking about your--

KUSCHE: Yeah, Frieda, and he, they took us a lot, there I got the touch, there is a different world, so, you understand? He was a teacher, and Frieda was an awfully nice boy, and they give us tickets to (?) the circus. Had a big circus in Dresden, right? And there I still, I got nice seats, you know, they got nice seats. I said, "My God, there must be something different in this world," then just what I had, right? All this give a little bit different ideas, right? That opened up for me that there is something different than the poor, than the poor, where we came from.

GUMB: and how did you get from Dresden to Bremen?

KUSCHE: By train.

GUMB: Did you travel alone?

KUSCHE: Oh, who should bring me? I went, who would bide me, nobody bides me.

GUMB: Nobody went?

KUSCHE: But you know, I mean, they leave you alone, because, you know women in Germany at that time didn't amount to much. The German men was, but they are different now, really. I saw them last year, I mean they changed. Push the baby carriage, wash dishes, they are a little bit different. I like that (she laughs). They wanted, "Here, I'm coming and who are you?" And

women didn't mean so much at that time.

GUMB: Was it a little unusual for a woman to travel alone?

KUSCHE: I don't, yeah, I think so. I'm not quite sure, because I'd never been anywhere at that time. That was one of my big, first trips, from Dresden to Bremen, yeah.

GUMB: Okay, so, you mentioned the boat trip. The ticket was about \$200.

KUSCHE: Two hundred and eight dollars, something like that, you know.

GUMB: You bought it there in Bremen?

KUSCHE: No, no, the people sent it from Rochester to me. I got the ticket and everything they sent me.

GUMB: So you were traveling alone on the boat too?

KUSCHE: Yes.

GUMB: What was the voyage trip like?

KUSCHE: I was seasick. I was so seasick that I came, in the end, finally I came on deck, you know, the last couple of days, you know.

GUMB: What class were you traveling on.

KUSCHE: Boy, down on the bottom, third class, the lowest class you could get, boy.

GUMB: What was it like down there?

KUSCHE: Oh, hot (she laughs). But it was clean. I don't know how many, there were two or three or four, that I don't know anymore, there were more than one, right, more than one.

GUMB: More than one kind of class?

KUSCHE: No, I mean girls or whatever that was, I don't know, well, more than myself. There were two beds or three beds, that I don't know anymore.

GUMB: Oh, in the cabin?

KUSCHE: In the cabin, yes.

GUMB: What were the other people like on the boat? Do you remember anything about the other passengers?

KUSCHE: I didn't see very much of them because I was mostly down, right? And I had no pictures from that trip. But nobody had a camera. Later on I had a lot of pictures, you know, when I traveled again, that was different, but the first, that was August, that was pretty good, but I was very seasick, you know.

GUMB: There was an orchestra?

KUSCHE: Orchestra?

GUMB: Yeah, what was that--anyway never mind.

KUSCHE: No, August. It was not bad, you know, the weather was pretty even. Oh I seasick, oh boy, yeah.

GUMB: Do you remember how long it took?

KUSCHE: Oh, about ten days, right, the boat trip took about ten days, right.

GUMB: Did you, do you remember anything about the food on that trip?

KUSCHE: No, I couldn't eat (she laughs). I couldn't eat, I was seasick, you know, and there were no pills or anything, you just had to suffer. Today you get a couple of pills to even you out, right? Oh boy, they were bad, that I remember, you know.

GUMB: I was wondering though, what sort of things did you bring, what kind of possessions did you have?

KUSCHE: Nothing. I had nothing, absolutely nothing. My clothes, my little clothes what I had, I had nothing to bring. I owed two hundred and some odd dollars, right? I bring nothing, I didn't even, I didn't even have a ring, or anything like that, no, no. I was very plain. We had no money, children, what could we buy?

GUMB: Did you have some kind of suitcase or something?

KUSCHE: A suitcase, yes, I had a suitcase, and my big trunk.

Everybody said, "You'll get married right away over there," you know, so I had all ny linen, you know, in Germany, you start saving a little linen, and little presents what you get. I carried that to America, see, because they said, "You'll get married right away."

GUMB: This was in a trunk?

KUSCHE: Everything in a trunk, big wooden trunk. That I carried around in America, but then I took it home, I didn't bother anymore, then I just had suitcases. I didn't bring it back, that's for sure.

GUMB: Oh, on this first trip--

KUSCHE: Yeah, the first trip, I took the big trunk, with everything in it. It was a nuisance, and then I took it, in '27, I said, "You can have it, I don't want it."

GUMB: So it was filled with linen and--

KUSCHE: Yeah, linen and little odds and ends, you know, what you save up. Oh yeah, in the trunk, but otherwise, I had no gold, no jewelry, or anything. Oh God we didn't have that. Little dolls, and linen, little bit, and then I embroidered a lot when I was young. You see, I was not going out, I was sitting home with Mom, you know, embroidering, you know. So that was what there was in there, that was all.

GUMB: Do you remember your first impressions, as the vessel was

approaching land?

KUSCHE:     Marvelous, grand, but of course. I had no idea, when I was standing there, dreaming, you know. I didn't know anything about it, I was dreaming. I didn't expect, what could I expect, you know. But then on Ellis Island, after we were all settled, I never saw a black man in my life, and a black man took my suitcase. I said, "Goodbye." You know we had them through the First World War there, and the blacks there, abused the women so much, I mean--

GUMB:        Abused the women?

KUSCHE:     Yeah, in the Rhine, the Rhine section, you see, they were there, so we were afraid. But they didn't, the, the War stopped, when they came near to us, then they stopped. So I was scared stiff, I said, "Now it's finished." (She laughs) But he was awfully nice.

GUMB:        These were the American soldiers, black American soldiers?

KUSCHE:     No, he was one of the helpers.

GUMB:        No but I mean in Germany?

KUSCHE:     Yeah, in Germany, the American Army. Oh it doesn't. it happens all the time, you know. My, no, it doesn't belong here, that's a different story. I wasn't there when the Russians came to Dresden and abused the women there, but that's war, and not good men do that.

GUMB:        Okay, do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

KUSCHE: Of course! The first thing you see. Big woman. But I remember, I was looking out for Ellis Island, because they told us bad things about Ellis Island. The fear, and all the people--

GUMB: Who told you?

KUSCHE: Well, people talk, you know. What's going to happen, what's going to happen on Ellis Island? Maybe we didn't see each other afterwards, maybe they sent some people back, that I don't know.

GUMB: What kind of stories, what sort of things?

KUSCHE: Oh, they wanted to stay in America, right? They had bad, you know, after the War, everybody had a story to tell, but I'm not sure. I know the fear was there, that I never forget. Myself, "What's going to happen to me on Ellis Island?" I didn't want to go back, right?

GUMB: What kind of visa did you have, in fact, we just kind of skipped over this. The, you took a year, you made an application at the Consulate?

KUSCHE: Yeah, no, then I had to wait. I had my papers ready. I had to wait till the quota, till my number came up. It took a year.

GUMB: And how did you get word that your number had come up?

KUSCHE: The come, the Consulate, and make a paper, just to let me know I'm going, this and this, and the boat sails, this and this, on the 14th of August. No, I mean, before, I landed here 14th of August.

GUMB: So it was, I'm wondering if it was a kind of visa or whether they were just permitting you to come and settle in the country.

KUSCHE: I had a lot of papers, but there must have been a visa because I remember the visa, you need a visa. I has so many papers you know. They gave me a lot of papers.

GUMB: So, as far as the vessel, coming into New York Harbor, do you know where it went, where the vessel went?

KUSCHE: To Ellis Island.

GUMB: The ship you were on went straight to Ellis Island?

KUSCHE: Yeah, yeah. Did we? Wait a minute--no, we went on a boat, they took us off and we went on a boat. That I have to think about it, that I don't know. The boat is laying in the water now, all pieces.

GUMB: The ferry boat?

KUSCHE: Yeah the ferry boat. Did they take--that I don't know. They must have let us off on the ferry boat somewhere, that I don't know anymore. I know how I got the first steps on Ellis Island, that I know.

GUMB: How did you do that?

KUSCHE: You know, when you go in there. I was scared stiff. I said, "What's going to happen to us now?" right. But everything went well. I

went to the cups, and the doctors looked me over, you know.

GUMB: Cups?

KUSCHE: Yeah, I mean those little rooms there on Ellis Island. You see the doors there? They go from the big hall, from the Great Hall, all those, those little doors there, and the doors are not there anymore, but the little rooms.

GUMB: Oh, up above?

KUSCHE: No, no. No, no, on the floor.

GUMB: Same floor?

KUSCHE: On the--yeah, yeah, I went on this and this. They called you single, they called me in single. I mean all by myself.

GUMB: Right.

KUSCHE: Yeah, yeah, and they asked me a lot of questions.

GUMB: What kind of questions?

KUSCHE: Oh, I don't know no more, you know. "What do you think about America." Oh, all those questions they give you.

GUMB: Of course this was with an interpreter?

KUSCHE: No, he spoke German. That time, you know, a lot of people, you know German was, I got along wonderful because a lot of people knew German. See, not anymore today, that's Spanish is now the language, right? So, but at that time they were German. Because alone with German, you could go all through New York.

GUMB: I'm wondering about your trunk. How did you. for example, on the ferry boat, how did you maneuver it?

KUSCHE: No, they took care of that. That went extra, that was given to me, see, I don't know, did I get that trunk back in Rochester? I forget about that trunk, because I shipped it back, I took it back in 1927, I took it back and left it in Germany. I didn't drag it around, you know.

GUMB: So, on Ellis Island, what about the medical exam?

KUSCHE: Oh they looked, you know how it is, you have a medical exam, and he said, "You will do, you will do, you are young." You see, I was worried about my eyes. Very much worried, and I said, "Uh oh," you know, so I was quite sure because I was pretty nearsighted, and they said they have to, to be perfect, to live in America, right? Yeah, I was worried about my eyes because I didn't think they would let me in with poor eyesight. But otherwise I was a healthy specimen, yeah I was very, still today.

GUMB: How much money did you have?

KUSCHE: Nothing! I owed \$200.

GUMB: Didn't you have any pocket money?

KUSCHE: I had none.

GUMB: Did they ask you how much money you had?

KUSCHE: That I don't know, that I really don't know if they asked me that. They asked me if I had any jewelry or something like that. Yeah, that. But poor me, jewelry.

GUMB: Did they ask you if you could read or write?

KUSCHE: Oh yes, that I had to do, oh yes. But they knew I couldn't speak English. I had to read some German words, you know, they had something there, that I can remember. They asked me, first I had to, they put it in the papers, your school, eight years of school, right?

GUMB: What was the test like?

KUSCHE: That I don't know, I don't know anymore.

GUMB: But they asked you to read something.

KUSCHE: Yes, I remember reading something.

GUMB: Did they ask you to write something?

KUSCHE: No, they did not, the reading.

GUMB: And what kind of, do you remember anything about the officials?

KUSCHE: They were very nice. See, I was young (she laughs). One guy said, "You won't be sing;e a long time." You know, that was always what I got, I don't know, I didn't. I didn't get married till I was 40 years old. (she laughs).

GUMB: Did they have uniforms?

KUSCHE: No, they had shirts on and pants, for sure.

GUMB: They didn't have a uniform?

KUSCHE: No, they had no uniforms at that time, maybe they took it, maybe they had a uniform but they interviewed me with a shirt on, with the pants on, you know. That I remember very well. They had no jacket on. They were very nice, oh, they were very, very nice, you know.

GUMB: How much time do you think you spent on Ellis Island?

KUSCHE: I came in the morning and I left about, they had the black man took me to the station, somehow. That is not clear. I been thinking about that the other day, and he took me, me there in the evening, four, five or six o'clock, and, you know, I can't remember the trip to Rochester, that I don't remember.

GUMB: You don't remember?

KUSCHE: No, it's funny. And in Rochester, my girlfriend, I mean the girlfriend picked me up. And the next day I started right away working. I went to, I didn't know at that time, what a well-known family that was. I would have stayed there, I didn't know who they were. But then, I left them already, then I know who they were. Very well, very well.

GUMB: Who were they?

KUSCHE: They were the, I know their name, wait a minute, I have to get to that. Oh they are still very well-off today.

GUMB: Were they the Kodaks?

KUSCHE: No, not the Kodak. Wait a minute, that word has to come to me. I know only their name, Halibush was their name, but I find out they had, oh, I know very well because I said, "You were foolish not to stay there," see, they were very kind to me.

GUMB: What train station did the black man take you to?

KUSCHE: That I don't know anymore, no, and I don't remember the trip to Rochester, can you imagine that?

GUMB: Well, how about New York City, do you remember anything, remember having impressions of New York City?

KUSCHE: New York? I wanted to be in New York. I left Rochester.

GUMB: But I mean that first time. You'd gone through Ellis Island

and you were--

KUSCHE: No, I didn't even see New York. I saw New York in '25.

GUMB: Oh,oh, so maybe you didn't go to Grand Central?

KUSCHE: No, no, I don't know how I got there. I don't know, I think maybe even the boat took me there, I don't know, that's very foggy.

GUMB: Maybe you went to a New Jersey station?

KUSCHE: That's what I believe. Yes, but that I don't know. That's too much, you know, too much came to you on that first day, landing. You know what it is, to land in America, you know. Maybe if you go in a strange country, maybe you had the feeling too, but that's something you know. I dreamt, after the movies, I dreamt about that, you know what I mean. See how you get old, you know.

GUMB: Did you have anything to eat on Ellis Island?

KUSCHE: Yeah, I told you, when they put us in the circle. And I loved baseball, the first time. I never forget that face and they have a basket and soda. And he pop,pop, pop, push, you know, get the sandwich.

GUMB: And this was a circle?

KUSCHE: Yeah, people in the circle in the Great Hall, out in the middle of the Great Hall there was, they put us there, a circle.

GUMB: Oh, people were line up--

KUSCHE: Yeah, but sitting around, you know.

GUMB: This was a man?

KUSCHE: A man, yeah, a young man, he had no uniform on, he must have come from the kitchen, you know.

GUMB: And he--

KUSCHE: Throw that.

GUMB: The sandwiches?

KUSCHE: The sandwiches. Baseball, right? It was baseball.

GUMB: Did they cost money, did you have to pay for them?

KUSCHE: No, we didn't have to pay for that, no, no, no. We had to have something to eat, you know.

GUMB: Was it an unusual kind of sandwich?

KUSCHE: That I don't know anymore, that I don't know.

GUMB: Something different from Germany?

KUSCHE: Oh, maybe was some sausage on it, or whatever it was. I know it was a sandwich wrapped up. What was in it I don't know, I ate it, I

was hungry.

GUMB: And how does this relate to baseball?

KUSCHE: Well. I mean for me, at that time, I didn't know baseball, but I mean today I see, I would say, I loved baseball the first time to catch a sandwich, like a ball.

GUMB: Oh I see. Okay, how about something to drink?

KUSCHE: That I don't know, I think we had something to drink, but what, I don't know what. I thought it was so interesting when we all got the sandwich, how he, and that face you know, how he phew, phew that went, oh, he didn't like us (she laughs).

GUMB: So you spent a whole day on Ellis Island--

KUSCHE: Yeah, nearly the whole day, yeah the whole day.

GUMB: And you were completely alone--

KUSCHE: Yeah, no, the people from the boat.

GUMB: Yeah, well, I'm wondering, did you talk to other people?

KUSCHE: I'm ashamed. Today I feel very bad I didn't talk, but, you know you're young and you don't. You have that one point in there, you don't care about other people, you understand? But I feel bad, I should have taken some addresses, you know what I mean? You should do that, but I did not. You

know, you are so full of it, the land, you don't what it is. It's a special feeling, for me it is. Some people can't understand that. But I mean, they come from different backgrounds, some of the.

GUMB: So, what were your first impressions of Rochester, this new place?

KUSCHE: Ah, I never did like Rochester, funny. Never seen it again, funny. I had no money and I remember I walked around a lot. It was so icy, it was so cold in Rochester, ooh. I never cared for it, you see, I come from a wonderful city we had in Germany. Oh the best of it, "Second Venice" they called, you know. Oh that's one beautiful city, and then I saw this Rochester. I never got warm there, and I asked my girlfriend if I could come to New York.

GUMB: Was it hard to learn English?

KUSCHE: Oh no. I was reading, (she laughs) I was working for some people and I started reading the news, and I learned English through the Daily News. See, it was easy to read, easy, and I had the dictionary, so I looked a little bit, after, you know, so, gradually you have to learn. It's not proper, I couldn't go to school because I had to stay home with the children, see? I worked very hard. Hard work I did in America, yes. Well, I don't mind that at all.

GUMB: You talked about going back to Germany in 1927, and thinking that you wanted to stay.

KUSCHE: Yeah, yeah, I was so homesick.

GUMB: Well, why didn't you stay?

KUSCHE: The minute I hit Germany, I felt something there, I can't tell you. I knew right away in Bremen, my brother picked me up and I knew right away in Bremen. I don't know, it was something hit me there. I didn't even go to Dresden, I knew already I would go back. Funny, I don't know what it was. Bremen is a small town, too.

GUMB: I wonder what it could have been?

KUSCHE: Yeah, that's one of the things. A lot of people talk about that, you know. When I was home and then they had a little house by that time, and I looked out of the window there, I said, "Oh God, no," ( she laughs). I had a pretty good time I was there. And even the people in America, here in New

York, they paid me the trip, I should for sure come back, you know. I told them, "I'm not coming back," you know. That was '27, yeah, yeah, that was '27.

GUMB: So when did you become a citizen?

KUSCHE: Thirty two, 1932.

GUMB: What did you have to do to become a citizen?

KUSCHE: You had to fill papers oh, you know, and you were sworn in, you had to have witness. That was not bad, that went very fast.

GUMB: Did it feel different being a citizen?

KUSCHE: I belonged to America, right? Then you were sure nobody could touch you.

GUMB: When did you really feel like an American?

KUSCHE: All the time, when I came in '27, I said, "Ah, that's my," I mean you like to go back once in awhile. The last time I was over there in '72, and then last year. I didn't go there for 13 years. I don't like it over there now.

GUMB: So how did your life in this country compare to your expectations?

KUSCHE: Rough. It was hard, you know, you start, and in Rochester I made \$28. In New York I start with \$45, you know I get \$45. I had very little babies, but people were very nice. I stayed over on the job. I left every job, you know. They were very nice to me, the people. And then in '32, '33, then the Hitler started, you know, the whole, and I came back, wait a minute, I was working, what is, no, '32 when I was home. I said, "There is something coming," I told the people. "It doesn't look good in Germany," you know. And then with Hitler, Hitler spoiled everything.

GUMB: Did you experience prejudice, during the War, as a German American?

KUSCHE: Yeah, oh yes, still today. I feel very bad about that, you know, it's just one of those things. The minute I open up my mouth because I got that accent, you know. They think everybody is a Nazi, it's just plain

awful--. My little guy, he was born in '41. the War just broke out in '41, and I remember I had him in the park, I came home, my husband was home, I said to Willy, "War is declared," I think it was '41. I know he, oh my God, and the little guy, he went to school, he started school, in '45. '46, '47, I think he started in '46, I'm not quite sure. One of them days he came home, he didn't know anything, we didn't not tell him anything about Germany, nothing. He was a little guy, you know, and then all of a sudden, he came home from school, he said, "Mommy, what's a Nazi?" I fell down from my high horses. So I said, "oh, gee whiz" you know. Of course, I understand that point, they got hit badly, I was with them. I worked for them for ten years, they were very good, I felt very bad because, you know, you have to love everybody, doesn't matter what it is. But we got it, even. soon I will wear a sign who I am (she laughs). It's sad, you know, it's really sad. Anti-this, and anti-this, and anti-this, we didn't know at that time. You were just, when I started in America, you were german, you know, and there were French. The Mademoiselles and the Frauleins, they were on top. Everybody wanted a Fraulein or wanted a Mademoiselle. I don't know if you know anything about that? See, it was really like that when I started out and that lousy Hitler.

GUMB: This is the end of the interview with Mrs. Kusche. The end of interview Number 181.